



▲ Vice President Gerald Ford became President after Nixon's resignation.

## I Shall Resign the Presidency

"Because of the Watergate matter I might not have the support of the Congress that I would consider necessary to back the very difficult decisions and carry out the duties of this office in the way the interests of the Nation would require. . . . Therefore, I shall resign the Presidency at noon tomorrow."

—President Richard Nixon, August 1974

# A Time of Uncertainty

## Objectives

- Explain how President Nixon tried to ease Cold War tensions.
- Describe the impact of the Watergate scandal on the Nixon administration and the nation.
- Identify the challenges faced by President Gerald Ford.

## Reading Skill

### Ask Questions to Synthesize

**Information** History textbooks contain a great deal of information. Asking questions can help you to reflect on that information and put it into focus. Ask a question that explores the connection between pieces of information, including those from earlier chapters. Answering it will help ensure your understanding of the material.

### Key Terms and People

inflation

Jimmy Carter

Gerald Ford

**Why It Matters** President Nixon dealt with other challenging issues besides the Vietnam War. He eased Cold War tensions and improved relations with Communist China. However, a destructive scandal marred his presidency and changed the way Americans viewed their government.

**Section Focus Question:** What successes and failures marked Nixon's presidency?

## Richard Nixon in Office

In running for office, Richard Nixon had criticized the violence and unrest of the Johnson years. The "silent majority," he said, wanted "law and order" and an end to chaos in the streets. Yet, the Nixon years provided their own mix of successes and new troubles.

**Moon Landing** One success was space exploration. President Kennedy had pledged to land an American on the moon before 1970. That goal was achieved by the *Apollo 11* mission. On July 20, 1969, astronaut Neil A. Armstrong descended from the *Apollo's Eagle* landing craft and set foot on the surface of the moon.

**Economic Problems** The economy was in trouble when Nixon came into office. High military spending for the Vietnam War had fed **inflation**, or a steady rise in prices. At the same time, economic growth had stalled, producing an economic **recession** and high unemployment. Nixon, like most Republicans, asserted that government involvement in the economy should be limited. But when other methods failed to boost the economy, he shocked his fellow conservatives by ordering a temporary freeze on wages, prices, and rents. His policy, however, met little success, and the freeze was soon lifted.

**Easing Cold War Tensions** Nixon's greatest success was in foreign affairs. Through his policy of détente—or an easing of tensions with Communist powers—he helped to take the edge off the Cold War.

Nixon's most surprising foreign policy move was to open contacts between the United States and Communist China. In 1949, as you have read, Communists led by Mao Zedong won China's civil war by defeating the Nationalists of Chiang Kai-shek. The Nationalists retreated to Taiwan, and the Communists created the People's Republic of China on the mainland. Ever since, the United States had refused to recognize Mao and the Communists as the lawful rulers of China. Instead, the United States treated the Nationalists on Taiwan as China's legitimate rulers. Another reason for hostility between the United States and Communist China was that they had never reached an accommodation after fighting on opposite sides in the Korean War.

Thus, many people were shocked in February 1972 when Nixon announced that he would visit mainland China. Nixon made the trip later that month. He attended banquets with China's Communist leaders. He toured the Great Wall. He met with Chairman Mao Zedong. Nixon said:

“What we have done is simply opened the door, opened the door for travel, opened the door for trade.”

—Richard Nixon, July 6, 1972

Nixon also pursued détente with the other great Communist power, the Soviet Union. Several months after visiting China, Nixon went to Moscow. He and Soviet leaders signed the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT). SALT restricted the number and type of nuclear warheads and missiles that each nation could build. While it did not end the arms race, SALT showed that the Soviets and Americans were willing to work together to relax tensions.

**✓Checkpoint** Why was Nixon's goal to improve relations with China surprising to many Americans?

### Vocabulary Builder

**accommodation** (ak kom moh DAY shuhn) *n.* agreement or change in what is wanted in order to solve a problem

### Breakthrough to China

President Nixon gestures as he stands on the Great Wall of China with Mao Zedong. **Critical Thinking: Organize Information** Describe the issues that divided the United States and Communist China from 1949 to 1972.



## Watergate Entanglements



### Reading Political Cartoons Skills Activity

Court decisions forced the Nixon administration to turn over evidence of the President's role in the Watergate coverup.

**(a) Apply Information**

What is Richard Nixon caught in?

**(b) Make Predictions**

What might have happened to the President if he had decided not to resign?

The tapes

## Watergate Scandal

Nixon was reelected in 1972. But a political scandal would end in his downfall.

During the 1972 election campaign, police arrested five men who broke into Democratic Party offices in the Watergate complex in Washington, D.C. The men had been hired by Nixon's reelection committee to spy on the Democrats. White House officials paid the burglars "hush money" to keep quiet. But the story soon came out.

In May 1973, a Senate Committee opened nationally televised hearings into the Watergate affair, as the scandal became known. The star witness was John Dean, former White House counsel. He testified that Nixon himself had approved the coverup.

Another witness revealed that Nixon had secretly taped all conversations in his office. At first, Nixon refused to release the tapes. When a Supreme Court order finally forced him to submit the tapes, they largely confirmed Dean's account. The President had conspired to cover up the Watergate burglary and other misdeeds.

In July 1974, the House of Representatives took steps toward impeaching the President. Realizing that enough votes existed to remove him from office, Nixon resigned on August 9, 1974. Vice President Gerald Ford became President.

### Vocabulary Builder

**submit** (sahb MIHT) **v.** to give up power or control; to agree to do something



### Ask Questions to Synthesize Information

Ask a question connecting the Watergate burglary to the House preparations for impeaching the President.

**✓Checkpoint** Why did the Watergate affair bring Nixon down?

## The Ford Presidency

On taking office, President Ford tried to restore public confidence in the nation's leaders. But trust in him was badly eroded when he granted Richard Nixon a "full, free, and absolute pardon." Ford had acted, he said, to end the "long nightmare" of Watergate.

The nation faced severe economic problems. President Ford began a program of voluntary wage and price controls called Whip Inflation Now (WIN). They had little effect. In fact, the nation slipped into recession, with the highest unemployment rate in years. At Ford's urging, Congress approved a tax cut to stimulate the economy, but recovery was slow and uncertain.

In foreign affairs, Ford generally followed Nixon's policy of easing Cold War tensions with the Soviet Union and China. Though American involvement in the Vietnam War was over, events in Southeast Asia still demanded attention. The President arranged to airlift more than 50,000 South Vietnamese as Communists swept toward Saigon. In neighboring Cambodia, he sent U.S. marines to free the crew of the *Mayaguez*, an American merchant ship that had been seized by Cambodia's Communists.

In 1976, the Republicans nominated Ford to run for President in his own right. The Democrats nominated a little known candidate, Jimmy Carter, former governor of Georgia. Carter promised to restore integrity to Washington. In a close election, Carter won.

**✓Checkpoint** What economic problems did President Ford face?

★ **Looking Back and Ahead** In 1977, Jimmy Carter entered office with high hopes. However, he quickly faced a series of perplexing challenges. In the next chapter, you will see how Carter's troubled presidency helped pave the way for a new era in American politics.



Button promoting Ford's voluntary controls

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### Comprehension and Critical Thinking

- (a) List** What were President Nixon's three major actions in foreign affairs?  
**(b) Identify Benefits** How did each improve U.S. security in the world?
- (a) Recall** What was the Watergate break-in?  
**(b) Describe** What did President Nixon do about it?  
**(c) Apply Information** How did his actions in the Watergate affair cost him the presidency?

### Reading Skill

- Ask Questions to Synthesize Information** Reread the text following the subheading "Easing Cold War Tensions." Ask a question connecting the Vietnam War with Nixon's trips to China and the Soviet Union.

### Key Terms

Answer the following question in a complete sentence that shows your understanding of the key term.

- What happens to prices as a result of inflation?

### Writing

- Write a paragraph describing the viewpoint of one of the following: (a) astronaut Neil Armstrong as his flight to the moon is ready to take off in the summer of 1969 or (b) Richard Nixon during his struggles with the Watergate scandal in 1973.