

President Richard M. Nixon

Chronological Order 37

Life Span 1913-1994

Home State California

Elected 1968, 1972

Political Party Republican

Vice President Spiro Agnew (resigned during second term),  
Gerald R. Ford (appointed)

First Lady Thelma ("Pat") Ryan Nixon

Children 2 daughters

Physical Attributes 5'11.5" tall, brown hair, brown eyes

Undergraduate Education Whittier College (History). He also graduated from the Duke University School of Law.

Military Service Navy Lieutenant during World War II

Profession Attorney

Other Political Offices U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, Vice President

Nickname Tricky Dick

Family Lineage Scots-Irish, English, German, Irish

Religious Affiliation Quaker

Biographical Notes  
1. Nixon was extremely intelligent, had a phenomenal memory, and was a gifted foreign policy president. He was socially awkward and a loner who harbored grudges against "elites," especially East Coast intellectuals and persons of privilege. He was politically ruthless and kept a list of enemies. His cover-up of illegal activities that occurred during his re-election campaign forced him to resign the presidency in 1974.

2. Nixon grew up a Quaker in Whittier, California, a Quaker community 15 miles southeast of Los Angeles. His mother, Hannah, was a typical Quaker – quiet, restrained, and unemotional. His father, Frank, a former Methodist who converted to Quakerism, was not; he was loud, boisterous, and argumentative. Richard's older brother, Harold, and younger brother, Donald, were like their father and argued with him vehemently. Richard was more like his mother and tended to avoid arguments with his father.

Frank Nixon owned a small grocery store, and the whole family worked in it. Richard was in charge of the produce section. For six years during high school and college, he would rise every day at 4 a.m., drive to the farmers' market in Los Angeles, select the produce, return home, and set it up before starting his school day.

The grocery store was reasonably successful, but money was always tight because two of Richard's four brothers had serious health problems. Arthur died of meningitis at age seven, when Richard was twelve. Harold suffered from tuberculosis for six years and died at the age of twenty-four when Richard was twenty.

3. In high school, despite working in the family store, Richard was a whirlwind of activity: he was the star of the debate team, played on the football team, acted in school plays, and served in student government. His studying was done late at night, and he typically slept very little.

He won a locally sponsored scholarship to Harvard, but his parents could not afford to pay room and board. Instead, he stayed home and attended Whittier College, a small school of about 400 students, on a scholarship. The college began as a Quaker academy in 1887, and although it had become nonsectarian by 1930, it was "devoted to higher education with a constant overtone of Quaker responsibility in the social order." Most of the faculty were Quakers.

At Whittier, Nixon was the star of the debate team, an actor in every school play, and a third-string guard



on the football team.

Being on the football team was a formative experience for Nixon. He very rarely got to play in games, but he scrimmaged against the first-string in practice every day. He showed great determination and physical courage – at 155 pounds, the man across the line from him often outweighed him by fifty pounds, but he never backed down. And for the rest of his life, he remembered the words of his coach, "Chief" Newman: "I don't believe in this business about being a good loser. You've got to hate to lose." In his memoirs, Nixon stated, "There is no way I can adequately describe Chief Newman's influence on me."

4. Nixon won a full tuition scholarship to the new Duke University Law School. He borrowed money from his father and worked in the school library to cover his room and board expenses. He was president of the law school bar association, wrote an article for the law review, and finished third in his class. However, when he interviewed at several prestigious New York City law firms, he did not receive any job offers. (Nixon attributed this to the fact that he did not come from an Ivy League law school.) He returned home to Whittier and joined a small law firm there.

5. In 1941, Nixon took a position with the Office of Price Administration (OPA) in Washington, D.C. His job was to enforce tire rationing, and much of the work entailed writing letters explaining why people could not receive the exemptions they were seeking.

Nixon referred to his OPA days often during his career. He said, "I became more conservative. ... I also became disillusioned about bureaucracy and about what the government could do because I saw the terrible paperwork that people had to go through. I also saw the mediocrity of so many civil servants."

6. Bored and dissatisfied at the OPA, Nixon decided to join the Navy in June 1942. His job at the OPA granted him a draft exemption, and, as a Quaker, he could have also received an exemption as a conscientious objector, but he chose to serve. At this point, he knew that he wanted to go into politics and that this would require a good war record.

The Navy changed Nixon's life. Before he entered, he did not play cards, drink, smoke cigars, swear, gamble, or have much exposure to people from other walks of life. In the Navy, all of that changed. Nixon was assigned to the South Pacific Combat Air Transport Command on the island of Caledonia, which is near Australia. He supervised the loading and unloading of the big C-47 cargo planes that brought in supplies and took out the wounded.

Nixon did an outstanding job in what was essentially a quartermaster's role. As the commanding officer of his little group, Nixon showed a surprising ability to run the show with just the right touch. He kept his enlisted men happy and won their loyalty; he did his job without fanfare and with excellent efficiency. This was a new Nixon. For the first (and only) time in his life, he was laid back and popular with his co-workers. He even picked up a nickname – Nick – and developed a new area of expertise: playing poker. A fellow officer said, "Nixon was as good a poker player as, if not better than, anyone we had ever seen. He played a quiet game, but was not afraid of taking chances. ... Sometimes the stakes were pretty big, but Nick had daring and a flair for knowing what to do." The men played often, and by the time he got out of the Navy, Nixon had won somewhere between \$6,800 and \$8,000. He used this money to help finance his first political campaign. (N.B. In 2025 dollars, Nixon's poker winnings were somewhere between \$122,400 and \$144,000.)

7. In 1946, the Committee of 100, a group of small-business men, professional men, ranchers, and bankers, was looking for a Republican to run for Congress in California's Twelfth District, which included Whittier. These were successful men who felt hampered by the New Deal, restricted in their opportunities by its regulations and punished by its taxes and pro-union policies. They hated FDR and Truman and were desperate to defeat the Democratic incumbent, Jerry Voorhis, who had served ten years in Congress. Nixon was suggested to them by a family friend, earned their support, and then won the Republican nomination.

Nixon's campaign centered around his charge that Voorhis was a Communist sympathizer who had Communist support. The allegation was untrue, and Nixon knew this perfectly well, but he and the Committee of 100 were willing to do anything to win, so they repeated these charges over and over again. In particular, one committee member put out a statement that Voorhis was supported by a political action committee run by a Socialist (Sidney Hillman) when in fact the PAC had made it clear that it did not support Voorhis because he had denounced Soviet aggression in Eastern Europe. In addition, anonymous phone calls were made to voters, stating that the Democrat was a Communist sympathizer. Voorhis was not adept at fending off Nixon's attacks and lost the election.

This campaign set the tone for Nixon's later campaigns; his strategy was always to attack, attack, attack.

His tactics, while not unique or even original with him, were unusually ruthless for his time.

8. Shortly after arriving in Washington, Nixon made a good impression upon Christian Herter, an influential Republican congressman, when they discussed foreign policy at a dinner party. Subsequently, Nixon was chosen to be a member of the Herter Committee, a group of 19 congressmen who traveled to Europe to study the feasibility of the Marshall Plan, the Truman administration's program to aid the war-ravaged countries of Western Europe. Nixon was the youngest member of the committee and the only Westerner.

Service on the Herter Committee affected Nixon in two ways. First, the scenes of postwar devastation convinced him that the financial aid proposed in the Marshall Plan was greatly needed. Second, Nixon was shaken and impressed by the fierceness and ubiquity of Communist insurgents in Greece and Yugoslavia. In Trieste, he witnessed an organized mob of men marching by his hotel, with fists clenched, carrying red flags and singing "The Internationale." "Suddenly, there was an explosion at the end of the block," Nixon wrote. "The crowd cleared, and I saw the body of a young man whose head had been blown off by a grenade. I was sure what was happening in Trieste would soon be re-enacted throughout Europe unless America helped restore stability and prosperity."

Before Nixon left for Europe, Herman Perry, the Whittier banker who had recruited him to run for Congress, warned him not to be swayed by State Department "propaganda" into wasting taxpayers' money abroad. Perry accurately reflected the opinion back home in Nixon's congressional district. However, when Nixon returned to the U.S., he voted for the Marshall Plan, based on what he had seen in Europe.

9. Nixon was a member of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) during both his terms in the House. The committee's primary function was to investigate possible Communist activities in the United States. In 1948, Whittaker Chambers, a former Soviet spy, testified to the HUAC that Alger Hiss, a former high-ranking State Department official in the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, had passed state secrets to him. Hiss testified before the HUAC and vehemently denied Chambers' claims. Since Chambers was a disheveled, disgraced, former spy, and Hiss was an East Coast elite who had served as an American representative at the Yalta Conference and Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on International Organization (the conference that created the United Nations Charter), almost all the HUAC members believed Hiss. However, Nixon did not and kept pursuing the issue.

Hiss sued Chambers for slander, and in response, Chambers turned over to House investigators paper and microfilm copies of information Hiss had passed to him while serving in the State Department during the run-up to World War II. Hiss could not be prosecuted for espionage because the statute of limitations had expired, but he was convicted of perjury in 1950 based on the evidence provided by Chambers. Hiss was sentenced to five years in prison and served three years and eight months. The case garnered considerable attention and earned Nixon a national reputation as an effective, anti-Communist congressman.

10. In 1947, Nixon became good friends with another freshman congressman who was a Navy veteran, John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts. The two men enjoyed talking about politics and baseball, and served together on the House Education and Labor Committee. Nixon noticed that Kennedy, despite his apparent ease of manner, was not unlike him. Both men had lost "golden boy" older brothers; both felt the heavy burden of parental expectations. "We shared one quality which distinguished us from most of our fellow congressmen," Nixon recalled. "Neither of us was a backslapper, and we were uncomfortable with boisterous displays of superficial camaraderie. He was shy, and that sometimes made him appear aloof. But it was a shyness born of an instinct that guarded privacy and concealed emotions. I understood these qualities because I shared them."

Kennedy's father donated \$1,000 to Nixon's 1950 Senate campaign, and Jack sent warm letters of congratulations to Dick when he was elected to the Senate in 1950 and vice president in 1952. In 1954, Kennedy had back surgery, and an infection set in that made him gravely ill; he was given the Last Rites of the Catholic Church. Nixon went to Bethesda Naval Hospital to see him. He emerged from Kennedy's room in tears, saying, "Oh God, don't let him die."

11. In 1950, California's Democratic senator, Sheridan Downey, was up for re-election but decided not to run due to illness. Nixon then decided to run because he felt the notoriety from the Hiss case would help him win the election. He hired political consultant Murray Chotiner as his campaign manager. Nixon knew Chotiner was tough, amoral, and ruthless, and that he would run a slashing, anything-to-win campaign, which matched Nixon's style perfectly.

Nixon's opponent in the general election was Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas, a former Broadway

star and wife of movie actor Melvyn Douglas. Helen Douglas was a liberal New Deal Democrat, but by no means was she a Socialist or Communist sympathizer. But on foreign affairs, her record was mixed. Although she had been critical of the Soviet Union and Communist China, she voted against the Truman Doctrine program of aid to Turkey and Greece because she wanted the effort to be linked to the U.N. She voted against HUAC appropriations and had been one of its most severe critics.

Nixon believed that "People react to fear, not love." Therefore, he and Chotiner ran a campaign based on fear: fear of Communism; fear of Hiss and his kind; fear of Stalin; and fear of getting behind in the arms race. They went to great lengths to paint Helen Douglas as "pink," i.e., a Communist sympathizer. They put out half a million pamphlets printed on pink paper that distorted her voting record to make it look similar to that of the one known Communist sympathizer in Congress. One of Nixon's favorite lines was that Helen Douglas was "pink right down to her underwear." The campaign also made veiled references to the fact that her husband was Jewish. The knowingly false slurs, the outright lies, and the outrageous innuendos used against Helen Douglas were similar to the tactics Nixon had used against Voorhis in 1946 and earned him the nickname "Tricky Dick," which followed him for the rest of his life.

Nixon's tactics worked. He won by approximately 681,000 votes (out of 3.69 million cast), the largest margin for any senator elected or re-elected in 1950.

12. In 1951, Nixon, age thirty-eight, arrived in the Senate with a national reputation from the Hiss case and his overwhelming victory in the 1950 election. In his two short years in the Senate, developments in the domestic and international scenes proved ideal for Nixon's purposes. The American setback in Korea at the hands of the Chinese Communists, Truman's firing of MacArthur, Hiss's going to prison, corruption in the IRS, and McCarthy's anti-Communist crusade gave Nixon unmatched opportunities to attack the Democrats.

Nixon was the Republican Party's most sought-after speaker in 1951; he flew all over the country, averaging three speeches a week. He loved blasting Truman and the Democrats, and he became the most successful Republican fundraiser in the nation. Nixon never took any money for his speeches; instead, he built up substantial political capital within the party. By the end of the year, he had appeared in twenty-five states.

There were two distinct wings of the Republican Party in 1951. The Old Guard, led by Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, was ardently anti-Communist, adamantly opposed to Truman's foreign aid to Western Europe and his support of NATO, and was in favor of attacking Communist China to win the Korean War. The East Coast (or Moderate) wing, led by Dewey and then Eisenhower, favored aid to Western Europe and support of NATO and was opposed to provocative action in Korea because it might draw in the Soviet Union.

Nixon adeptly straddled the two wings. The Old Guard liked him because he was staunchly anti-Communist and favored aggressive action in Korea. The East Coast wing approved of him because he supported aid to Western Europe and a strong NATO.

13. At the 1952 Republican National Convention, the two leading candidates for the presidential nomination were Eisenhower, an East Coast moderate, and Taft, an Old Guard conservative. A fundamental problem arose before the first ballot. Texas and some other southern states had produced two sets of delegates: one loyal to Ike and one loyal to Taft. In the ensuing fight over credentials, Nixon supported Eisenhower. Ike prevailed and went on to win the nomination on the first ballot.

Eisenhower's first important decision was the selection of a running mate. The criteria were that the man should be acceptable to both the Old Guard and East Coast wings of the party; a prominent anti-communist; an energetic and vigorous campaigner; relatively young to offset Ike's age; from the West to balance Ike's association with the East; and a contributor to Ike's winning the nomination. Only one man satisfied all these criteria — Senator Richard Nixon of California.

14. It is a long-standing American tradition that in general elections, presidential candidates "take the high road," i.e., emphasize the positive things that their administration will do, and vice-presidential candidates "take the low road" by attacking the other party. This tradition suited Nixon perfectly. He began ripping into the Democrats, especially members of the Truman administration who had received gifts from outside benefactors, in particular one whose wife received an expensive mink coat in exchange for favorable loans from the government.

The criticism came back to bite Nixon in September 1952, when it was revealed that since his Senate victory in 1950, some California Republicans had maintained a "slush fund" to help cover his political expenses. The fund, which at one point contained \$18,000, was neither illegal nor unique, but its exposure caused an uproar and put his place on the Republican ticket in jeopardy. (N.B. The \$18,000 is equivalent to \$324,000 in 2025 dollars.)

When Eisenhower did not come to his defense, Nixon decided to go on national television to explain things. He began by making two points. First, "not one cent of the \$18,000 ... ever went to me. ... Every penny was used to pay for political expenses that I did not think should be charged to the taxpayers." Second, "no contributor ... has ever received any [special] considerations." He then gave a detailed account of his finances, even noting that his wife Pat did not have a mink coat, but that "she does have a respectable Republican cloth coat."

Then he admitted that he had accepted one gift from a political supporter. "You know what it was?" he asked. "It was a little cocker spaniel dog in a crate that he sent all the way from Texas. Black and white spotted. And our little girl – Tricia, the six-year-old – named it Checkers. And you know the kids love that dog, and I want to say this right now, that regardless of what they say about it, we're going to keep it." Finally, he told the audience, "Wire and write [the Republican National Committee] whether you think I should stay or whether I should get off; and I will abide by it." The audience's responses to the RNC were overwhelmingly positive, and Nixon stayed on the ticket. Eisenhower trounced Stevenson in the general election, 442 to 89 electoral votes. Nixon was 40 years old at the inauguration, the youngest vice president of the twentieth century. (N.B. Nixon's television address is often referred to as his Checkers speech.)

15. With regard to Nixon as vice president, Ike was of two minds. On the one hand, Eisenhower and his closest political advisors – Lucius Clay, Herb Brownell, and Bill Robinson – were not comfortable with Nixon's slashing attacks on the Democrats, especially since they often needed the votes of conservative Democrats in Congress. Nixon acknowledged this and did his best to confine his criticisms to the left wing of the Democratic Party. On the other hand, Ike was very critical of the fact that FDR had not prepared Truman to take over as president and did not want to repeat this mistake. Ike helped prepare Nixon to be president by having him travel to foreign countries and keeping him abreast of the administration's policies. For example, in the fall of 1953, Ike sent Nixon to Asia to deliver difficult messages to Syngman Rhee of South Korea and Chiang Kai-shek of Taiwan, who were both threatening attacks on their Communist neighbors that risked dragging America into World War III. Nixon skillfully handled both men and, at the same time, managed to get along well with them, or at least tolerate their orneriness. Such assignments built up Nixon's confidence in the foreign policy arena.

However, Nixon was not among Ike's core group of advisors and did not play a significant role in decision-making during the Eisenhower administration. Personally, Nixon and Ike were not close; the president never invited Dick and Pat up to the family quarters on the second floor of the White House or to his farm at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

16. Eisenhower had a heart attack in 1955, but recovered quickly and decided to stand for re-election in 1956.

Given Ike's heart history, a significant issue for the campaign was whether or not Richard Nixon would again be his running mate. Ike's initial feeling was that Nixon needed executive experience and would not get it if he were Vice President for four more years. He offered Nixon any Cabinet post he wanted in the new administration (except for secretary of state or attorney general), but Nixon declined; he viewed a Cabinet post as a step down and preferred to remain on the ticket. In the end, the one person Eisenhower truly wanted as a running mate – Earl Warren – was unavailable because he could not, in good conscience, be asked to step down from his position as chief justice to run for vice president. Nixon remained on the ticket, and Eisenhower defeated Adlai Stevenson, for a second time, in a landslide, 457 to 73 electoral votes.

17. In April 1958, Eisenhower sent Richard and Pat Nixon on a goodwill tour of South America. Many countries on the continent were experiencing difficult economic times, and anti-Americanism was running high. The trip was uneventful until the Nixon party arrived at the National University of San Marcos in Lima, Peru, where they were met by student demonstrations. Nixon got out of his car to confront the students, but was forced back into it by a barrage of thrown objects. At his hotel, Nixon faced another mob, and one demonstrator spat on him. In Caracas, Venezuela, Richard and Pat were spat on by anti-American demonstrators, and a pipe-wielding mob attacked their limousine. According to Nixon biographer Stephen Ambrose, Nixon's courageous conduct "caused even some of his bitterest enemies to give him some grudging respect." Reporting to the cabinet after the trip, Nixon claimed there was "absolute proof that [the protestors] were directed and controlled by a central Communist conspiracy."

18. Nixon won the Republican nomination for president easily in 1960 and faced Senator John F. Kennedy in the general election.

The campaign featured, for the first time, nationally televised debates between the two candidates. Eisenhower had counseled Nixon not to accept the proposal for debates because he felt that the lesser-known Kennedy needed the national exposure more than Nixon. But Nixon – a star debater in college and a wily courtroom litigator before going into politics – could not resist the opportunity to spar with JFK.

What Kennedy understood thoroughly – and Nixon did not – was that television is a *visual* medium. Consequently, how the candidate looked would be almost as important as what he said. With this in mind, Kennedy spent the week before the first debate campaigning in California and sunning himself in the afternoons on the roof of his hotel to maintain his tan. Nixon, on the other hand, kept giving speeches and shaking hands at such a frenetic pace that he was ten pounds underweight at the time of the first debate. Additionally, Nixon refused to use professional makeup on the night of the debate. Instead, he used "Lazy Shave," a pasty powder typically used to hide a five o'clock shadow.

So, when the audience – a record 80 million viewers – watched the first debate, Kennedy looked great – cool, calm, and composed – and Nixon looked ill – hollow-eyed, shirt collar too big for his neck, with sweat dripping down his face. *New York Herald Tribune* columnist Joe Alsop wrote that Nixon "looked like a suspect who was being questioned ... in connection with a statutory rape case." At the end of the debate, Nixon's running mate, Henry Cabot Lodge, who was watching from Texas, said: "That son-of-a-bitch just cost us the election."

19. Late in the 1960 campaign, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested at a sit-in in Atlanta and then taken from his cell in the middle of the night in handcuffs and leg irons to the Georgia State Prison in Reidsville, two hundred miles away. His sentence was four months of hard labor on a chain gang, and the prison was infamous for having cruel guards and violent prisoners. King's wife, Coretta, who was pregnant at the time, feared for his life and told a Kennedy aide about the situation.

The aide told Sargent Shriver, Kennedy's brother-in-law, about King's predicament. Shriver suggested to Kennedy that he call Coretta King, and the senator did so immediately. He said to her, "I want to express my concern about your husband. I know this must be very hard on you. I understand that you are expecting a baby, and I just wanted you to know that I was thinking about you and Dr. King. If there is anything I can do to help, please feel free to call me." Then Bobby Kennedy called the judge who had imprisoned King and convinced him to release the minister on bail. The Kennedy brothers did these things even though they knew it might hurt them in the South.

Meanwhile, Nixon remained silent about King's predicament. He told his press secretary, Herb Klein, "I think Dr. King is getting a bum rap. But despite my feelings in this respect, it would be completely improper for me or any other lawyer to call the judge." So, when reporters asked Klein about Dr. King's situation, he replied, "No comment." Jackie Robinson, the civil rights pioneer who had integrated major league baseball, then spoke directly to Nixon and tried to convince him to say something. Nixon refused, and, after the meeting, Robinson muttered, "Nixon doesn't deserve to win."

Nixon's silence cost him dearly. Martin Luther King Sr., a prominent Atlanta minister, now decided to endorse Kennedy publicly despite their religious differences. At the joyous welcome-home service for his rescued son, the elder King told his congregation, "I had expected to vote against Senator Kennedy because of his religion. But now, he can be my president, Catholic, or whatever he is. It took courage to call my daughter-in-law at a time like this. He has the moral courage to stand up for what he knows is right. I've got my votes, and I've got a suitcase, and I'm going to take them up there and dump them in his lap."

Kennedy headquarters put together a pamphlet entitled "The Case of Martin Luther King," which consisted of extended comments on the incident previously made to the press by Coretta King, Martin Luther King Sr., Reverend Ralph Abernathy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Dr. Garner Taylor. The comments were appreciative of Kennedy's efforts and critical of Nixon's behavior. In the pamphlet, Abernathy said that "it is time for all of us to take off our Nixon buttons. ... Since Mr. Nixon has been silent through all of this, I am going to return his silence when I go to the voting booth."

Two million copies of the pamphlet were printed on light blue paper and delivered to Black churches the Sunday before Election Day. This "Blue Bomb" helped Kennedy win sixty-eight percent of the African American vote in 1960, up from Stevenson's sixty-one percent in 1956. In eleven states, Black voters gave Kennedy the margin of support he needed to win.

20. Kennedy defeated Nixon 303 to 209 electoral votes, but the race was much closer than this tally indicates. The margin of victory was two percent or less in ten states. In particular, Kennedy won Illinois (27 electoral votes) 50.0 percent to 49.8 percent and Texas (24 electoral votes) 50.5 percent to 48.5 percent. Nixon won California (32 electoral votes) 50.1 percent to 49.6 percent.

For the rest of his life, Nixon believed that voter fraud in Illinois and Lyndon Johnson's home state of Texas had robbed him of a victory. (There were irregularities in Cook County, Illinois, where Chicago Mayor Richard Daley produced an overwhelming Kennedy vote.) Nixon was bitter about losing this way, but he chose not to demand a recount because a recount in Cook County would have taken many months, and Texas had no provisions for a recount. Hence, an orderly transfer of power would have been impossible. With this in mind, Nixon said, "I could think of no worse example for nations abroad, who for the first time were trying to put free election procedures into effect, than that of the United States wrangling over the results of our own presidential election, and even suggesting that the presidency itself could be stolen by thievery at the ballot box." And he vowed to himself that if there were a "next time," he would do whatever was necessary to win.

21. In 1962, Nixon ran unsuccessfully for governor of California. At his final press conference, he indicated that he was through with politics and told reporters, "You don't have Nixon to kick around anymore."

He moved to New York City in the summer of 1963 and began work for a prominent law firm with international ties. The new job not only helped him earn money – he brought Pepsi in as a new client – but also gave him time to travel both domestically and internationally. The travel allowed him to stay politically active by holding press conferences and criticizing the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Nixon was not a candidate for office in 1964, but he campaigned hard for the Republican ticket (33 days, 36 states, more than 150 appearances). During this campaign, he made sure to mention and compliment the state and local Republican candidates and officials, knowing they could be helpful to him in 1968.

In 1964, Johnson and the Democrats won an unprecedented victory. In the presidential contest, Johnson defeated Goldwater 486 to 52 electoral votes. The Democrats picked up two seats in the Senate, to give them a 68 to 32 majority. In the House, the Republicans lost 38 seats, leaving the Democrats with a huge 295 to 140 majority. A week after the election, Nixon gave an interview and said that the GOP must choose centrist leadership that "will make a place for all responsible points of view," from conservative to liberal while rejecting right-wing extremism. He then described himself as "dead center" and declared that he would devote all his "spare time to the political area."

In 1965 and 1966, Nixon appeared all across the country, the only Republican campaigning on a national basis. He spoke before more than 400 GOP groups in 40 states, raising money for local candidates. These speeches put many Republican politicians in the country in his debt, without him risking being up for election himself. In particular, he went out of his way to help congressmen in reliably Republican districts who had lost due to Goldwater's drag on the ticket in 1964. This work put him in a position to claim the credit for the GOP victory in the 1966 congressional elections (47 House seats gained and 3 Senate seats).

Nixon did one other thing that cemented his role as the leader of the GOP. He repeatedly criticized President Johnson for not being hawkish enough on Vietnam. Nixon wanted total victory and advocated using air power and sea power against North Vietnam. Whatever move Johnson made in the direction of escalation, Nixon always wanted more. This endeared him to the right-wing of the party, who also had nowhere else to go since Goldwater had dropped out of national politics, and Reagan had not yet emerged as a national figure.

22. At the Republican National Convention in 1968, Nixon easily won the nomination for president on the first ballot. He initially offered the vice president slot to his friend, Lieutenant Governor Bob Finch of California, but Finch declined because he felt that the jump to vice president was too big and the Reagan supporters in California would object. Nixon then asked Governor Spiro Agnew of Maryland to be his running mate, and Agnew accepted the offer. The choice was an odd one – only one of Nixon's advisors agreed with it. Agnew was relatively unknown nationally, had never held a federal post, had less than two years of experience as governor, came from a small state, and was not considered to be particularly intelligent. But Nixon liked Agnew because he was a strong law-and-order Republican, which might be attractive to the South. Astonishingly, in view of Nixon's troubles with his "secret fund" as a VP candidate in 1952, he did not ask Agnew any questions about his finances or whether he had any skeletons in his closet. Nor did Nixon make any attempt to conduct a private investigation of Agnew's actions as governor, where he had been taking bribes regularly.

23. The general election of 1968 was fought against the backdrop of the most turbulent years of the 1960s – marked by urban riots, apparent setbacks of U.S. forces in Vietnam, the rise of the largest antiwar movement in the nation's history, increasingly angry protests by civil rights groups, campus uproar, and social upheaval. Hippies abandoned middle-class values and rejected authority. Blacks were turning away from their more moderate leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. The enactments of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the

Voting Rights Act of 1965 had stirred deep resentment among southern whites.

Nixon appealed to the large number of Americans who resented and feared the cultural and social upheavals of the time. He stood with them against liberals, East Coast intellectuals, big government, and racial minorities. He felt that he spoke for "the silent majority."

By October, the race between Nixon and Hubert Humphrey was close. And, at that time, President Johnson had a deal in the works whereby all four parties involved in the Vietnam War (the U.S., South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and the Viet Cong) would meet in Paris and begin peace negotiations. Nixon feared that the peace talks would help Humphrey and "steal" the election at the last minute, just like voter fraud (in his mind) had stolen the election of 1960 from him.

To avoid this, Nixon decided to sabotage the peace talks by convincing South Vietnam not to attend. He contacted the government of South Vietnam privately and told them that they would get a better peace deal from a Nixon administration than from the Johnson administration. In particular, Nixon's campaign manager, John Mitchell, told Anna Chennault, a friend of South Vietnam President Thieu, "Anna, I'm speaking on behalf of Mr. Nixon. It's very important that our Vietnamese friends understand our Republican position, and I hope you have made it clear to them." He said if Mrs. Chennault could persuade Thieu to refuse to go to the peace table, Johnson's bombing halt would backfire on the Democrats. Subsequently, Thieu declined to attend the peace talks, any chance for peace vanished, and Nixon (301 electoral votes) defeated Humphrey (191 electoral votes) and third-party candidate George Wallace (46 electoral votes). And the Vietnam War went on for seven more years.

24. The seeds for Watergate were planted early in the Nixon presidency, and the Watergate break-in was almost a natural progression from some extraordinary steps Nixon took at the start of his first term. In February 1969, he told his staff that he wanted private political funds to be used to carry out secret White House intelligence operations, and the next month he approved a plan for around-the-clock surveillance of Senator Edward Kennedy, a presumed opponent in 1972. Nixon thus set into motion the use of private funds for political purposes (which had gotten him into trouble before) and an off-the-books operation to gather information on enemies and take action against them. These two things would prove to be a lethal combination.

25. When Nixon took office in 1969, the U.S. had more than 530,000 troops in Vietnam, and the country was turning against the war. Nixon wanted to get out, but he was reluctant to be the first president to lose a war – he wanted "peace with honor."

He tried negotiating with the North Vietnamese, then bombing them, and then destroying their safe havens in Cambodia, but they would not yield. Finally, after an American offensive that gained significant territory, North Vietnam and the Viet Cong agreed to terms with the U.S. and South Vietnam in the spring of 1973. According to the Paris Peace Accords, North Vietnam would cease offensives against South Vietnam, and the U.S. would withdraw all its forces from Vietnam.

However, the North Vietnamese had no intention of abiding by these accords. They had correctly calculated that once the Americans were out of Vietnam, they would have no stomach for returning. The North attacked the South in January 1975, and the South fell three months later.

26. In the spring of 1970, Nixon invaded Cambodia and resumed bombing North Vietnam. When protesters demonstrated on college campuses, Nixon divided the country by contrasting the "bums" doing the protesting with the heroes serving in Vietnam. He said:

You see these bums, you know, blowing up the college campuses. Listen, the boys that are on the college campuses today are the luckiest people in the world, going to the greatest universities, and here they are burning up the books. ... Out there [in Vietnam] we've got kids who are just doing their duty. I've seen them. They stand tall, and they are proud.

On May 4, four students at Kent State University – two men and two women – were shot to death by a volley of National Guard gunfire, and eight students were wounded. The shocking event was made more surprising by the revelations that while some of the Kent State students had been involved in an antiwar rally, others were merely changing classes. During the investigation that followed, members of the National Guard testified that they felt the need to fire their weapons because they feared for their lives. However, disagreements remain as to whether they were, in fact, under sufficient threat to use deadly force. Nixon's press secretary responded with a tone-deaf statement that did not express any sympathy for the dead

students, the wounded students, or their families. The mother of one of the dead girls told a reporter, "My child was not a bum."

Demonstrations broke out on more than a thousand college campuses, and millions of students went on strike. Antiwar rallies that had been sparsely attended and addressed by bearded young professors were now pulling in almost the entire student body, and the principal speakers were the older professors and the administrators. Violence occurred on some campuses; the National Guard was called out by sixteen governors for twenty-one campuses.

27. In the 1950s, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the desegregation of public schools should proceed "with all deliberate speed." Many school boards in the South had used this vague phrase as an excuse for postponing desegregation indefinitely. In late October 1969, in the case of *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruled that the desegregation must be "immediate."

To address the situation, Nixon established a State Advisory Board for each of the seven Southern states that were still resisting desegregation. The committees were comprised of local leaders, Black and white, with a broad spectrum of views on the topic. Each committee came to the White House to discuss the issue. The groups were assured that federal aid was available to help with desegregation. Attorney General John Mitchell told each group, "I am the attorney general, and I will enforce the law." Nixon then told each group the same thing and stated that it was up to each committee to make their own decisions. By September 1970, less than ten percent of Black children were attending segregated schools.

By 1971, however, angry protests over the busing of children to schools outside their neighborhood to achieve racial balance occurred in the North, as well as the South. Nixon opposed busing personally but enforced court orders requiring its use. White parents employed two methods to fight desegregation. First, many white families living in urban areas moved to predominantly suburban areas to take advantage of the whiter schools there, a phenomenon known as "white flight." For example, in the Houston Independent School District, the percentage of white students dropped from 50% to 25% between 1970 and 1980. Second, in Southern states, cities and towns reacted to the desegregation of their public schools by creating private Christian "academies" so that white parents could send their children to schools that did not accept Black students. In some Southern states, almost every city or town had at least one Christian academy. The academies still exist today, and where they do, there are two different sports leagues: one for public schools and one for the academies.

28. Nixon supported the burgeoning environmental movement. Environmental policy had not been a significant issue in the 1968 election, and the candidates were rarely asked for their views on the subject. Nixon broke new ground by discussing environmental policy in his 1970 State of the Union address when he said: "Clean air, clean water, open spaces – these should once again be the birthright of every American. If we act now, they can be. ... The program I shall propose to Congress will be the most comprehensive and costly program in this field in American history."

Nixon was as good as his word. In July 1970, he proposed the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which began operating in December. His top domestic advisor, John Ehrlichman, who was from the Pacific Northwest, served as the administration's point man on environmental issues. Environmental initiatives supported by Nixon included the Clean Air Act of 1970, the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the establishment of the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA), and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which requires environmental impact statements for many federal projects. More than 100 nations worldwide have enacted national environmental policies modeled after NEPA.

29. In June 1971, Daniel Ellsberg, a former National Security Council consultant who had become disenchanted with the Vietnam War, leaked classified documents (which became known as the "Pentagon Papers") about the war to the *New York Times*. In reaction, John Ehrlichman, following Nixon's orders, formed the Special Investigations Unit (a.k.a. the Plumbers) to deal with such leaks. The Plumbers unit, which included former FBI agent G. Gordon Liddy and former CIA agent E. Howard Hunt, was housed in the Executive Office Building next to the White House. The first task Ehrlichman assigned the Plumbers was to break into the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist to get information that would discredit Ellsberg. On Labor Day weekend, Liddy and Hunt performed the break-in with the aid of three Cuban-American burglars, but they found no discrediting information.

30. Right from the start, Nixon wanted to be a foreign policy president. He had studied Europe with the Herter Committee, and, as vice president, traveled extensively around the world and negotiated with South Korean President Syngman Rhee and Nationalist Chinese Chairman Chiang Kai-shek. As president, he had

three clear foreign policy goals: the establishment of diplomatic relations with Communist China, the establishment of detente (a relaxation of tensions) with the Soviet Union, and bringing an end to the Vietnam War. He believed that these goals were the keys to global stability and security for the United States.

To achieve these goals, he chose to conduct foreign policy himself from the White House (with the help of his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger), instead of through the State Department. In most instances, Nixon and Kissinger made foreign policy decisions without consulting Secretary of State William Rogers.

31. Nixon's signature foreign policy achievement was the opening of diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. This opening was Nixon's vision (not Kissinger's), and he felt – correctly – that, as someone with a staunch anti-Communist past, he was the person best suited to open relations with China and get away with it politically.

The opening began in 1969 when Nixon asked De Gaulle to inform the Chinese that he was interested in improving relations. Later that year, he took some steps to improve ties: easing trade and travel restrictions, ending the Seventh Fleet's patrol of the Taiwan Strait, and removing nuclear weapons from Okinawa. After some on-and-off informal contacts, something that seemed like a small gesture turned out to be a big thing. In April 1971, the American table tennis team was playing in Japan, and the Chinese government invited it to visit China. The resulting worldwide press coverage was overwhelmingly positive, and shortly after, the Chinese informed Nixon that they were ready to receive a high-level American official.

In February 1972, Nixon went to China, staying there for six days. He met with Mao Zedong, and they got along well since each had studied the other. Nixon, quoting Mao himself, said, "I know that you are one who sees when an opportunity comes, and then knows that you must seize the hour and seize the day." Mao told Nixon, jokingly, "I voted for you. ... I am comparatively happy when these people on the right come to power." Press coverage of the trip was extensive and overwhelmingly positive. Its success made the Soviet Union more open to a better relationship with the U.S.

32. Nixon's facilitation of détente with the Soviet Union was a significant foreign policy achievement. In May 1972, he traveled to Moscow for a summit with Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev. The meeting not only eased relations between the countries but also produced the final version of the Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty (SALT), as well as a series of other agreements concerning cooperation on science and technology and a joint space mission. Nixon worked hard to sell the SALT agreement to the Democratic-controlled Senate, and the Senate ratified the treaty. He and Brezhnev also held summit meetings in 1973 and 1974.

Nixon's opening of diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China and achieving détente with the Soviet Union were substantial accomplishments. He had, after all, inherited the Cold War, a period more dangerous and alarming than it seems decades later. In changing the order of things, Nixon demonstrated imagination and suppleness. He moved the world away from Cold War confrontation, with all its dangers; it would take more time and a later president to end it.

33. The Soviet Union supplied North Vietnam with vast supplies of weapons, ammunition, and military equipment during the Vietnam War. Nixon had hoped that improved relations with the Soviet Union would persuade Soviet Premier Brezhnev to apply pressure on North Vietnam to end the war promptly and on reasonable terms. Brezhnev did not comply because he considered a possible North Vietnam victory a win for communism and an opportunity to expand the Soviet Union's influence in Asia.

When the Paris Peace Accords, which ended the war, were finally signed in January 1973, the terms were favorable to the U.S. and North Vietnam, but not to South Vietnam. All the American POWs would come home, and South Vietnam's President Thieu would remain in power, but North Vietnam's invading army would remain inside South Vietnam. Thieu had finally, grudgingly, bitterly signed the deal when Nixon gave him a secret guarantee that the U.S. would "react strongly in the event the agreement is violated." When North Vietnam attacked South Vietnam in January 1975, Congress refused to respond, and South Vietnam fell three months later.

34. As First Lady, Thelma ("Pat") Ryan Nixon promoted several charitable causes, including volunteerism. She oversaw the collection of more than 600 pieces of historic art and furnishings for the White House, an acquisition larger than any other administration's. Mrs. Nixon took several steps to improve the public tours of the White House. She ordered pamphlets describing the house's rooms for tourists so they could understand everything, and had them translated into Spanish, French, Italian, and Russian for visitors from foreign countries. She had ramps installed for people with disabilities. The tour guides were instructed to speak slowly to deaf groups, to help those who lip-read, and Pat ordered that the blind be able to touch the antiques. As First Lady, Pat Nixon traveled more than any of her predecessors. She was the first First Lady to

visit China and the Soviet Union. (N.B. Mrs. Nixon was given the nickname "Pat" by her Irish American father because she was born on the day before St. Patrick's Day.)

35. The Nixon White House's first priority in the 1972 re-election effort was to undermine the Democratic Party's nominating process to ensure that the weakest candidate, Senator George McGovern, won the nomination. They succeeded. In particular, Senator Edmund Muskie was singled out for special treatment, since he was leading Nixon in the polls. The Committee to Re-Elect the President (CREEP) hired Donald Segretti to subvert Democratic presidential candidates. He used a team of 28 agents in 17 states to disrupt Democratic Party events, forge documents, cancel Democratic candidates' events, and leak false and libelous documents. Once McGovern got the nomination, Nixon's operatives spied upon his campaign, and White House counsel John Dean demanded Internal Revenue Service investigations of 490 McGovern staff members and contributors. Nixon defeated McGovern, 520 to 17 electoral votes.

36. In the spring of 1972, Nixon feared that Lawrence O'Brien, chairman of the Democratic National Committee (DNC), had information about Howard Hughes' past secret donations to Nixon and Donald Nixon's financial dealings with Hughes. Nixon also thought that O'Brien – who had worked for Hughes at one point – might have similar skeletons in his closet. Nixon's desire to find out what O'Brien knew and to obtain compromising information on O'Brien was well known among Nixon's inner circle. Consequently, John Mitchell, the head of CREEP, okayed a plan for the Plumbers to break into O'Brien's office at the DNC headquarters, located in the Watergate office/apartment building in Washington, to obtain such information.

The Plumbers, supervised by Liddy and Hunt, broke into the Watergate building twice. The first time, they photographed some documents and put wiretaps on O'Brien's phone and the phone of another DNC member. But the tap on O'Brien's phone did not work, and Mitchell complained to Liddy that what they had gathered was "junk." So, the Plumbers enlisted the services of James McCord, an electronics expert who was handling security for CREEP, and broke in a second time. A security guard discovered their presence, and a squad of plainclothes police detectives arrested them.

The Watergate break-in was, in the words of one contemporary, a "third-rate burglary," but its connection to the White House made it significant. Moreover, when the burglars requested hush money to incentivise them to remain silent about the involvement of higher-level members of the Nixon administration, Bob Haldeman, Nixon's chief of staff, ensured that the payments were made. The White House repeatedly denied that the break-in had anything to do with the president. However, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the *Washington Post* doggedly pursued the investigation and established the connection to the Nixon administration by using the mantra "follow the money." Various other dirty tricks perpetrated by the Nixon administration were exposed along the way.

37. In August 1973, news broke that Vice President Spiro Agnew was under investigation for bribery, conspiracy, and tax evasion, and in October, he resigned. According to the Twenty-fifth Amendment, Nixon had the power to choose a new vice president, but the choice had to be confirmed by both the House of Representatives and the Senate. In practice, he had three options: Nelson Rockefeller, Ronald Reagan, or House Minority Leader Gerald Ford. Either Rockefeller, a liberal, or Reagan, a staunch conservative, would have been a polarizing choice. Instead, Nixon chose Ford because: (a) he shared Nixon's views on foreign policy and defense, (b) he was well-liked by members of the House and Senate and, therefore, sure to be confirmed, and (c) he was an old friend whose loyalty could be trusted.

As vice president, Ford spent most of his time stumping across the country for the Republican cause, which at that point was the survival of Nixon's presidency.

38. On October 6, 1973, an Arab coalition led by Egypt and Syria, supported with arms and materiel by the Soviet Union, attacked Israel on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish religion, a day of fasting and prayer. Caught by surprise, Israel suffered heavy losses. Nixon ordered an airlift to resupply Israel, cutting through interdepartmental squabbles and bureaucracy and taking personal responsibility for any response by Arab nations.

The next morning, anxious residents of Tel Aviv were awakened by a loud droning sound in the sky. One after another, giant American air force transport planes rumbled overhead as they descended to nearby airports and airfields. Cars stopped in the streets and people began to shout, "God bless America!" Relieved and grateful, Golda Meir, Israel's tough-minded prime minister, wept.

More than a week later, by the time the U.S. and Soviet Union began negotiating a truce, Israel had penetrated deep into enemy territory. The truce negotiations rapidly escalated into a superpower crisis;

when Israel gained the upper hand, Egyptian President Sadat requested a joint U.S.-U.S.S.R. peacekeeping mission, which the U.S. refused to agree to. When Soviet Premier Brezhnev threatened to unilaterally enforce any peacekeeping mission militarily, Nixon ordered the U.S. military to DEFCON 3, placing all U.S. military personnel and bases on alert for nuclear war. This incident was the closest the world had come to nuclear war since the Cuban Missile Crisis. Brezhnev backed down because of Nixon's actions.

Because Israel's victory was primarily due to U.S. support, the Arab OPEC nations retaliated by refusing to sell crude oil to the U.S., resulting in the 1973 oil crisis. The embargo led to gasoline shortages and rationing in the United States in late 1973. However, it was eventually lifted by the oil-producing nations as peace in the Middle East began to take hold.

39. Nixon did not directly order the Plumbers to break into the Watergate, but he did direct the cover-up of the crime, and it was the cover-up that was his downfall. In July 1974, a House committee approved three articles of impeachment. Article I charged that he tried to cover up the illegal break-in and that he made false statements to the public and investigators and caused his subordinates to do likewise. Article II listed various acts through which Nixon had violated his constitutional duty to "take care that the laws will be faithfully executed": his use of the IRS against citizens; wiretapping; maintaining a secret investigative force in the White House, partially paid for by campaign contributions; and the misuse of government agencies to interfere with investigations. Article III stated that he failed to cooperate with the inquiry into his impeachment.

On August 1, 1974, Nixon's chief of staff, Alexander Haig, apprised Vice President Ford and his chief of staff of the "smoking gun" Watergate tape that proved Nixon's guilt. Haig met alone with Ford later that day and outlined six possible scenarios that could unfold. Two involved Nixon pardoning himself, and the sixth was that Nixon would resign, and Ford would pardon him. Haig even gave Ford a legal brief that justified Ford's possible pardon of Nixon. Ford said he would think over the possibilities. The next day, Ford called Haig to clarify that he wanted no part in formulating Nixon's course of action, especially regarding the president's resignation, and that no assumption should be made about a pardon from Ford.

A House vote to impeach was a foregone conclusion, so on August 8, 1974, Nixon resigned the presidency before the House could impeach him. One month later, he was later granted a "full, free and absolute pardon" by President Ford. The pardon played a significant role in Ford's defeat in the 1976 presidential election.

40. It would have been natural for Nixon to retire from public life at this point, but – Nixon being Nixon – he refused to go away and made a comeback as a foreign policy sage. He wrote books and articles on foreign policy and, for awhile, used his New York City brownstone as a salon for the discussion of foreign affairs.

And eventually, one president came to depend on him for foreign policy advice, especially concerning Russia. Given Nixon's partisan history, it is ironic that the president who came to rely on him – who, in a sense, rehabilitated him – was not one of his Republican successors (Ford, Reagan, or Bush 41), but rather Democrat Bill Clinton. Clinton truly admired Nixon's ability to cut to the heart of foreign policy problems, write about them cogently, and come up with solutions. A week after Nixon's death in April 1994, Clinton told CNN's Larry King: "Just today I had a problem, and I said to the person working with me, 'I wish I could pick up the phone and call Richard Nixon and ask him what he thinks we ought to do about this.'" President Bill Clinton gave one of the eulogies at Nixon's funeral.

See the next page for a list of references.

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