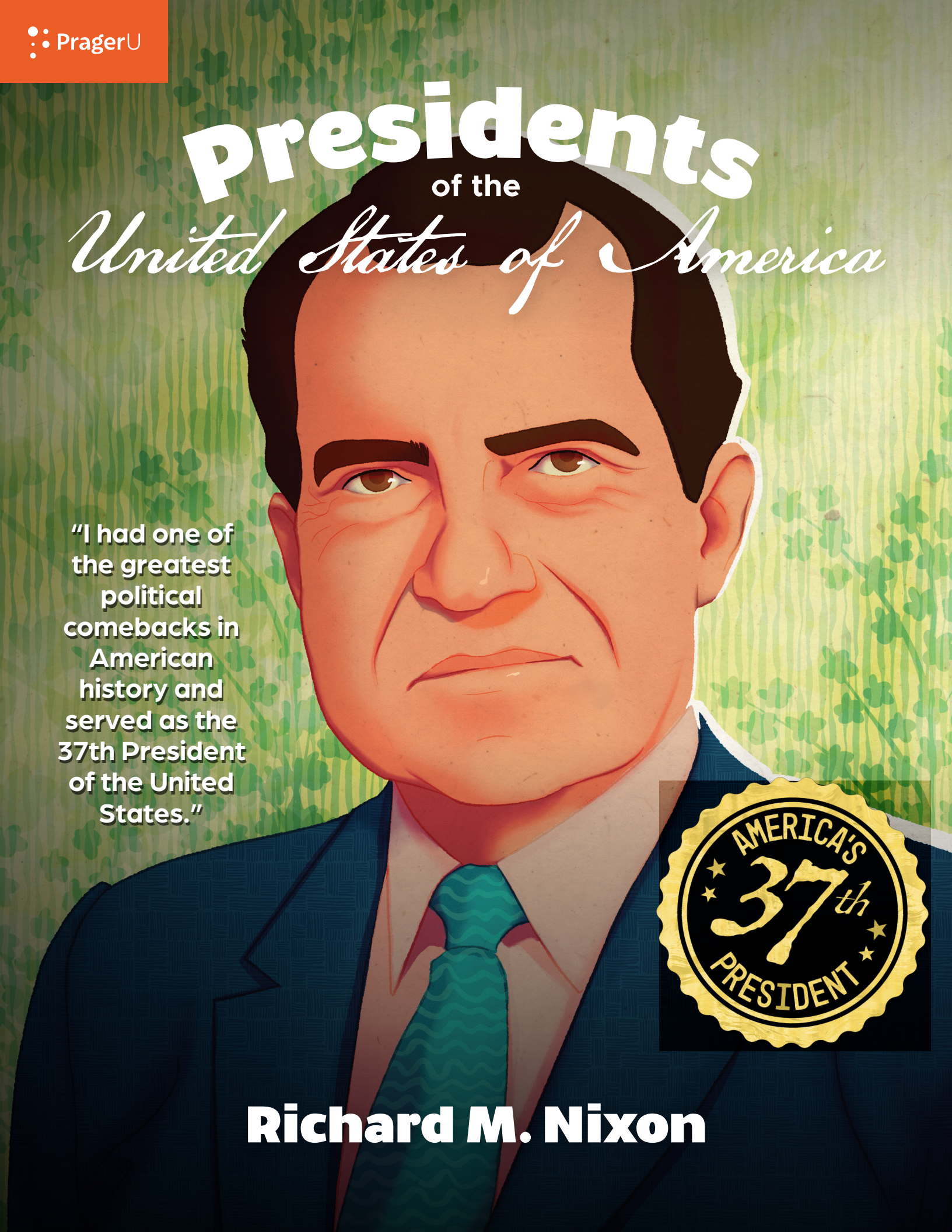
PragerU

Presidents of the United States of America



Richard M. Nixon



PragerU is redefining how people think about media and education. Watched millions of times every day, PragerU is the world's leading nonprofit with educational, entertaining, pro-American videos for every age. From intellectual, fact-based 5-Minute Videos and powerful personal storytelling to animated shows made just for kids—PragerU helps people of all ages think and live better.

PragerU Kids teaches history, civics, financial literacy, and American values to children across the K-12th grade spectrum. With kids shows, books, and educational resources for every grade, PragerU Kids offers content that parents and teachers trust and children love. Watch for free and learn more at PragerUkids.com.

All text and illustrations Copyright © 2026 Prager University Foundation.

All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.

PragerU is a registered trademark of Prager University Foundation.

Published by PragerU

PragerU.com

Become a Presidential Historian by Solving This Puzzle

In this book, you'll learn all sorts of facts about Richard M. Nixon's amazing life and accomplishments. But there's still one last thing we need to know about him.

The Secret Service had a codename for President Nixon. We need your help to find out what it was. Your task is to help us uncover the answer! Hidden in the text are bolded letters. Read this book carefully to find them, and fill the letters into the blanks below in the order they appear.

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

Once you've solved this puzzle, you'll be a true PragerU Kids presidential historian!

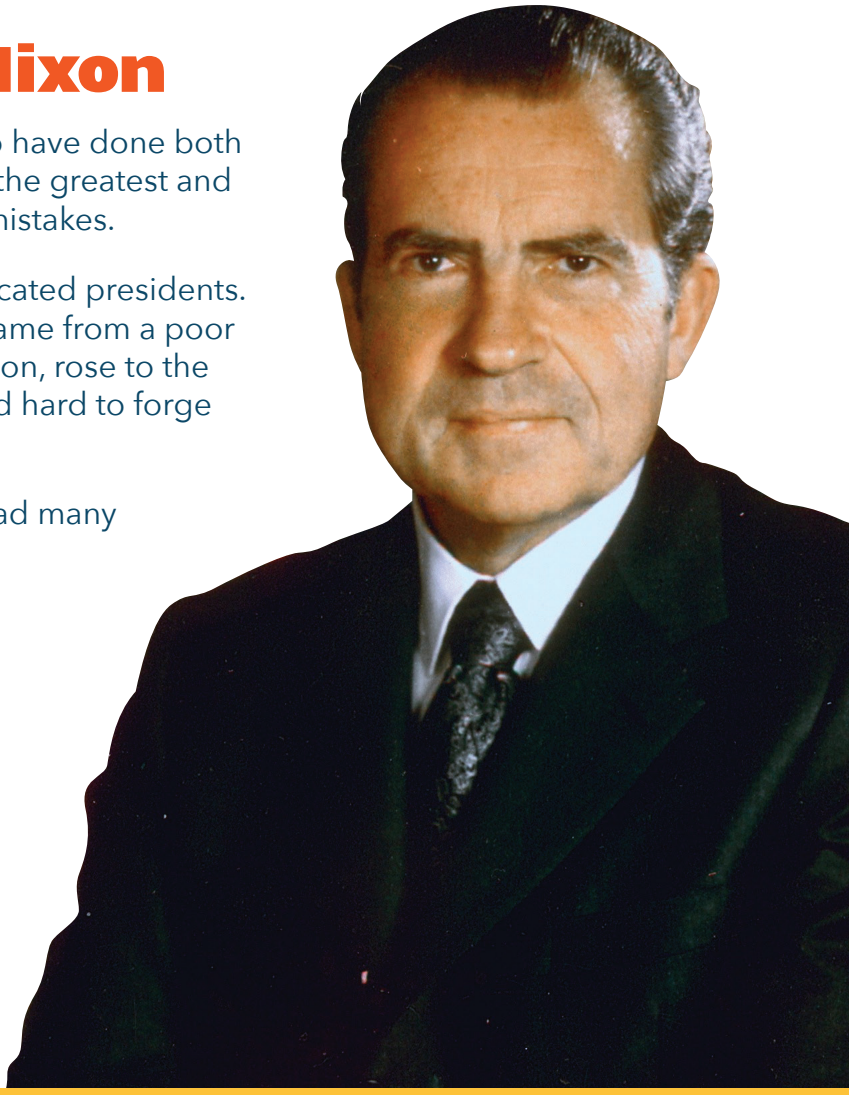
Meet Richard M. Nixon

People are complicated. There are people who have done both good and bad things. No one is perfect—even the greatest and most successful people in history have made mistakes.

Richard Nixon is one of America's most complicated presidents. He was a very intelligent, successful man. He came from a poor family and, through hard work and determination, rose to the presidency. During his time in office, he worked hard to forge peace with America's enemies.

Despite his impressive accomplishments, he had many flaws—flaws that eventually caught up with him and led to his downfall during the infamous Watergate **S**candal. They resulted in his resignation—the first and, so far, only presidential resignation in American history.

Nixon had a complicated life full of great achievements and tragic mistakes.

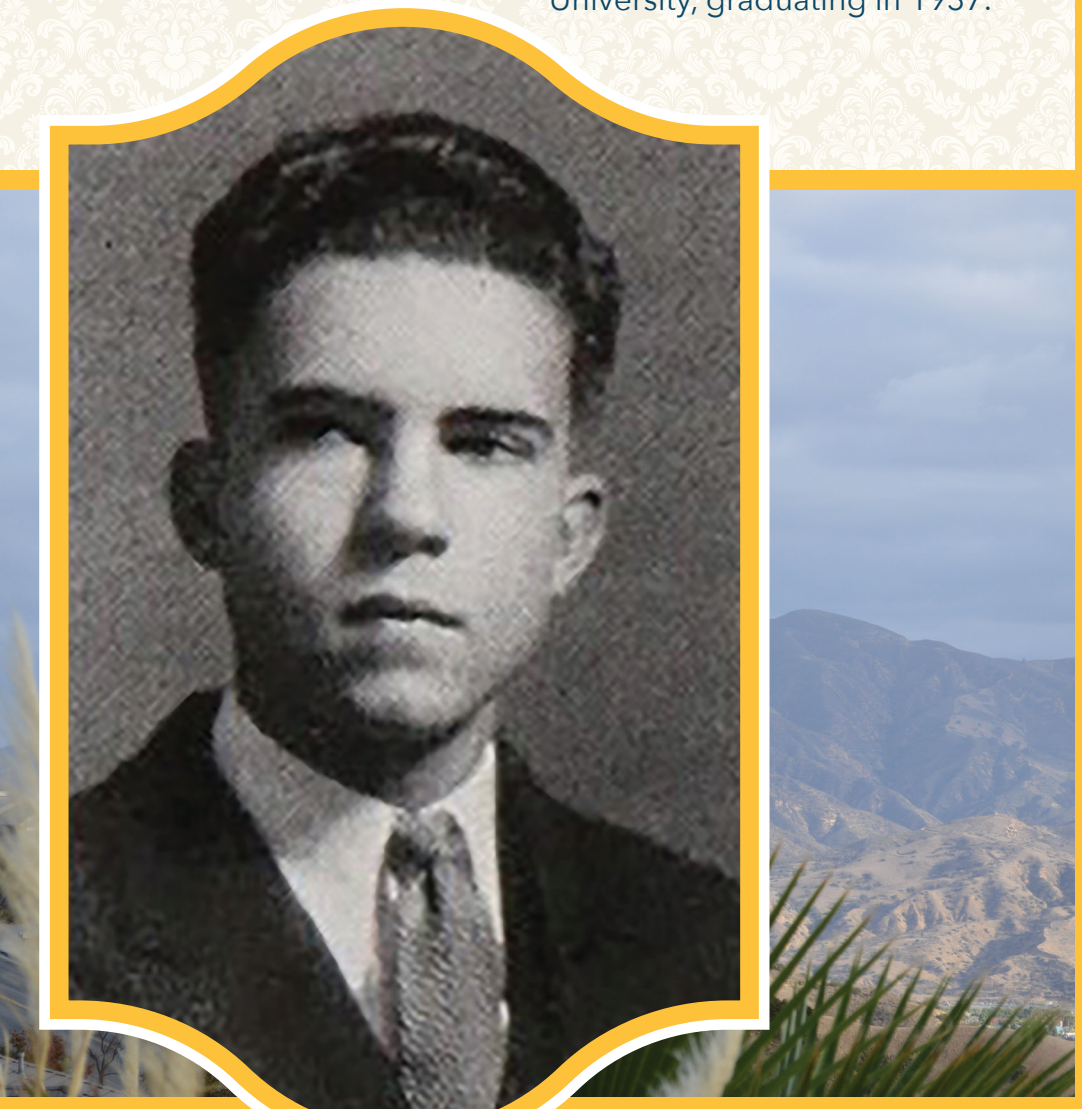


Young Richard

Richard Milhous Nixon was born on January 9, 1913, in Yorba Linda, California. He was the second of Frank and Hannah Nixon's five children—all boys. Frank supported his family by running a grocery store and a gas station. Hannah raised young Richard and his brothers, teaching them the values of her **Quaker** faith.

The Nixons knew hardship and tragedy. They were very poor, and two of the boys, Arthur and Harold, eventually died due to illness. Young Richard, however, was determined to make something of himself. He was a smart, hard-working student. As a student at Whittier College, he was very active, serving in student government, performing in theater plays, and playing on the football team.

After finishing college, Richard attended law school at Duke University, graduating in 1937.



Interesting Facts

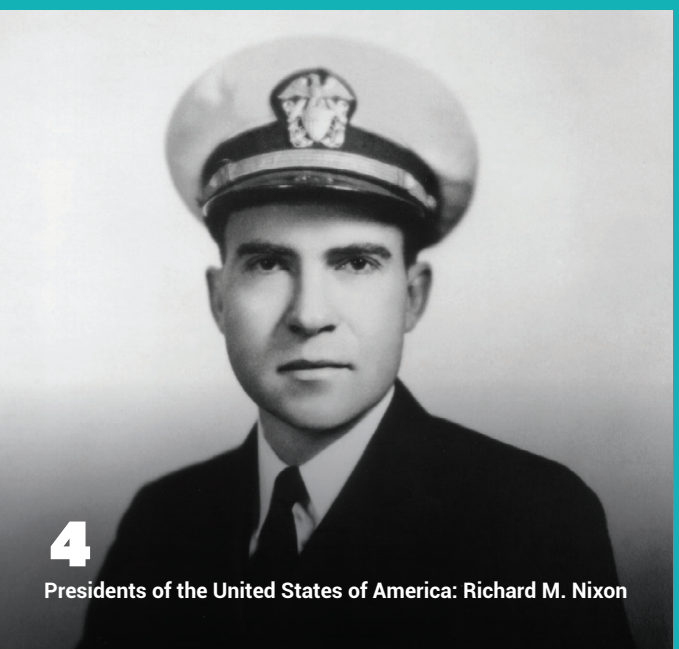
- He is the only president (as of 2023) born in California.
- He was a member of the Republican Party.
- He was the second Quaker to serve as president.
- He was the first president to visit all 50 states.
- He is tied with Franklin D. Roosevelt for the most appearances on a national ticket for a major political party (as of 2023)—five times (in 1952, 1956, 1960, 1968, and 1972).
- During his presidency, the United States landed six manned missions on the moon.
- He won 49 out of 50 states during his 1972 re-election campaign.
- He is the only president (as of 2023) to resign from office.

Early Career

Nixon returned to Whittier and began practicing law. In 1938, he fell in love with a school teacher named Thelma Ryan, who was nicknamed "Pat." He worked hard to win her over. They got married in 1940 and eventually had two daughters, Tricia and Julie.

After World War II broke out, Nixon joined the Navy and served in the Pacific. He was awarded several medals and a letter of commendation for his service.

When the war was over, Nixon caught the eye of a group of Republicans. They were impressed by his intelligence and suggested that he run for Congress. In November of 1946, Nixon won his first election at the youthful age of 33. At the same time, another young veteran of the war from Massachusetts—John F. Kennedy—won a seat as a congressman. As freshmen members of Congress, Kennedy and Nixon became friends. Eventually, they would be rivals.





Anti-Communist Leader

The late 1940s saw the start of the **Cold War**. At the time, the **Soviet Union** was aggressively spreading **communism** around the world. It posed a dangerous threat to freedom. The United States, led by President Harry S. Truman, began implementing a strategy to stop communism from spreading.

Congressman Nixon was an outspoken opponent of communism. He suspected that there were people in the United States who, as spies, were secretly supporting the Soviet Union and giving the communists information to help them win the Cold War. Nixon joined the House Un-American Activities Committee, where he worked hard to uncover spies in the federal government. He even exposed a State Department official, Alger Hiss, as a spy. This made Nixon famous and a hero for many Americans. Those who were sympathetic to communism, however, attacked him and his reputation. They claimed he was dishonest and nicknamed him "Tricky Dick."

The voters of California, however, were glad he was such a strong opponent of communism. They elected him as senator in 1950.

Vice President

In 1952, the Republican Party chose World War II General Dwight D. Eisenhower as its presidential nominee. Since Eisenhower was over 60 years old, the Republicans wanted to balance the ticket with a young leader as his running mate, so they nominated Nixon for the vice presidency.

Nixon's enemies, however, tried to sabotage his candidacy. They spread a story that a group of corrupt, wealthy California businessmen were inappropriately giving him money so he would vote for certain laws.

In September 1952, Nixon gave a speech on television where he defended himself. He said that he didn't receive any gifts or money improperly. He revealed that the only gift he did receive from supporters was a cute little dog his daughter named Checkers. Nixon insisted they were going to keep it. The speech, now known as the "Checkers speech," touched the American people—they felt he was a good family man who could be trusted.

Eisenhower and Nixon won the election in a landslide. At just 39 years old, Nixon was the second highest-ranking official in the country. He and Eisenhower were re-elected in 1956.

Throughout most of American history, vice presidents did not play major roles and had little to do. By contrast, Nixon was a very active vice president. Eisenhower gave Nixon many responsibilities and allowed him to travel around the world and meet with foreign leaders. He even met with and debated the dictator of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, face-to-face. When Eisenhower dealt with health issues, he allowed Nixon to perform some presidential duties.





Devastating Defeats

Nixon built up an impressive record as vice president. The mainstream media, however, disliked him and wrote negative stories about him. It also didn't help that many people felt he had an awkward and moody personality.

In 1960, the Republicans chose Nixon as their candidate for president. The Democrats chose his old colleague, John F. Kennedy, as their candidate. By then, Kennedy was a senator from Massachusetts. Like Nixon, Kennedy was a young leader, but unlike Nixon, he was very charismatic. The Massachusetts senator gave speeches that inspired people around the world.

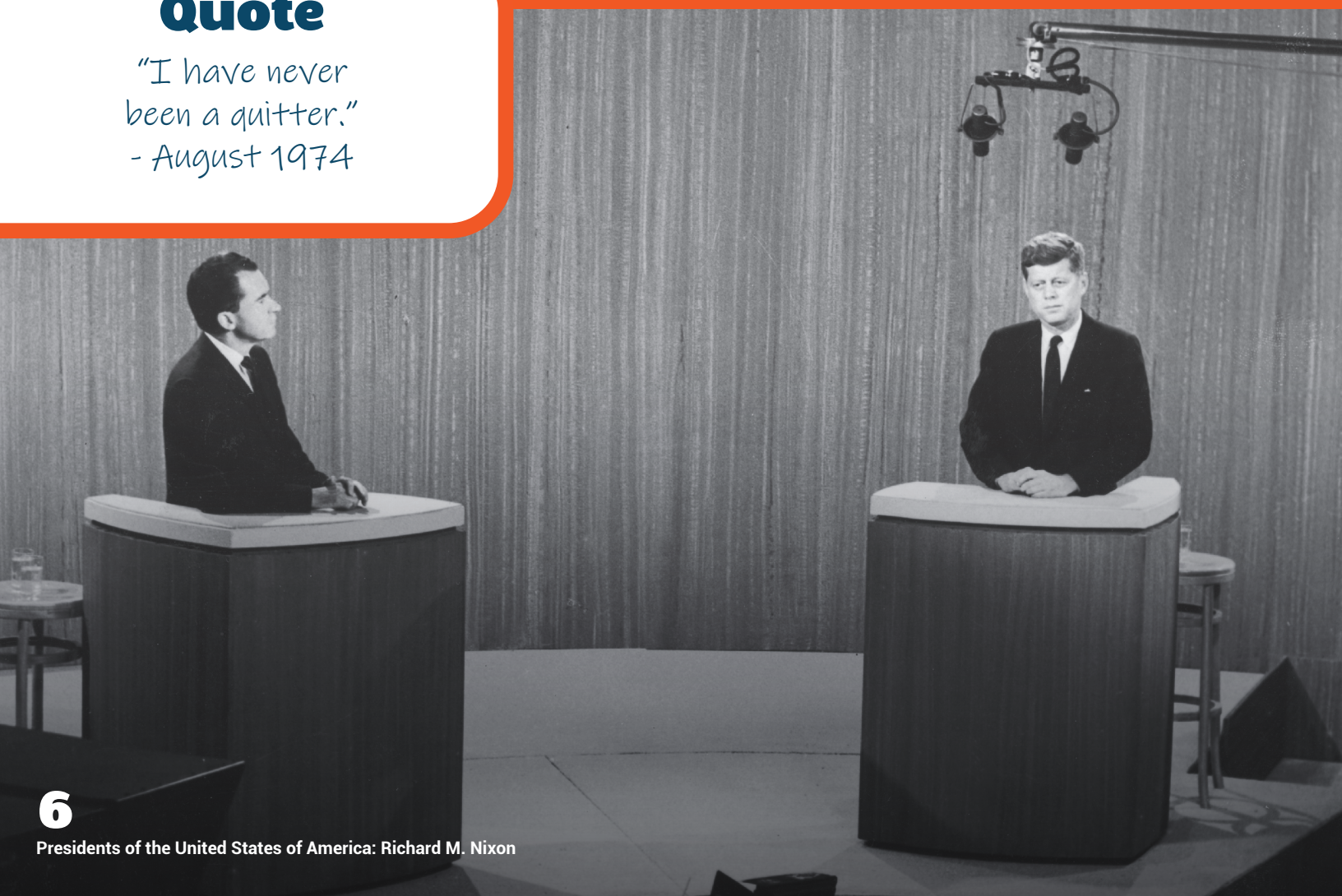
Kennedy and Nixon faced off in four **debates**. They were the first televised presidential debates in American history. The election was very close, but in the end, Kennedy won. In the popular vote, he only beat Nixon by less than one percent.

Nixon was devastated by his loss. Even worse, he heard rumors that the Democrats had cheated to win votes in Illinois. This left Nixon feeling embittered, and it may have convinced him that, to win elections, he had to be tougher on his opponents.

Two years later, he attempted a comeback by running for Governor of California, but he lost that election too. It was a major embarrassment—he had been rejected by the nation and by his own home state within two years. Nixon's career had once been so promising—now it appeared to be over.

Quote

"I have never been a quitter."
- August 1974



Epic Comeback



Quote

"The greatest honor history can bestow is the title of peacemaker."
- January 1969

After his failed campaigns, Nixon went back to his original profession: law. He joined a New York City law firm and earned a decent amount of money. He reminded everyone of his brilliant legal skills by arguing a case before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, things were not going well for the country. In November of 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. The nation was shocked and devastated. Then, the new President, Lyndon B. Johnson, led the country deeper into the **Vietnam War**. Thousands of Americans were dying in the fighting, and many began protesting against the conflict. The country became divided–young and old, black and white, men and women all disagreed strongly on many issues. Crime and violence ran rampant in the cities.

By 1968, the nation wanted someone who could find a solution to the Vietnam War and restore law and order. Nixon ran for president once again, promising to do just that. The voters remembered the peaceful years of the 1950s when Eisenhower and Nixon were in office. They hoped that, by finally electing Nixon, America would be at peace once again.

Nixon easily won the Republican nomination. He promised to find a solution to the war and, in November, won a close race against Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey.

President

President Nixon's first task was to end the Vietnam War. At the time, there were about 500,000 American soldiers fighting in Vietnam. Nixon had to act very carefully. For many years, the United States had promised to support its ally, South Vietnam, against the communist North Vietnamese. If Nixon pulled out of the war too quickly and abandoned South Vietnam, America's other allies might believe that the United States couldn't be counted on to keep its promises.

Nixon came up with a solution called **Vietnamization**. He would continue to support the South Vietnamese, but he would remove American soldiers from the war. Meanwhile, the U.S. military would help train the South Vietnamese so they could do more of the fighting themselves. By the end of his presidency, almost all U.S. soldiers were out of Vietnam. Americans were relieved that their servicemembers were no longer dying in Vietnam.

President Nixon and his brilliant advisor **Henry Kissinger** also worked hard to soothe tensions with America's enemies–specifically the Soviet Union and the **People's Republic of China**.

These policies were described as "**Détente**," which is the French word for "relaxing," as in a relaxing of tensions.

In 1972, he met with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev during the **Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT)** and signed a major agreement to limit the number of nuclear weapons. That same year, Nixon became the first president to visit the People's Republic of China. While he was there, he met with Chinese dictator **Mao Zedong.**

Many people were surprised Nixon was able to work with the two major communist countries, especially since he had been a strong opponent of communism. American voters were impressed by his diplomatic accomplishments. As a result, Nixon was re-elected in a landslide in 1972. In fact, he defeated the Democratic candidate George McGovern in 49 out of the 50 states!

In January 1973, Nixon and Kissinger achieved their goal in Vietnam. They had successfully negotiated the **Paris Peace Accords**–which meant that the war, for America, was basically over.

Quote

"Let us remember that America was built not by government, but by people—not by welfare, but by work—not by shirking responsibility, but by seeking responsibility."
- January 1973



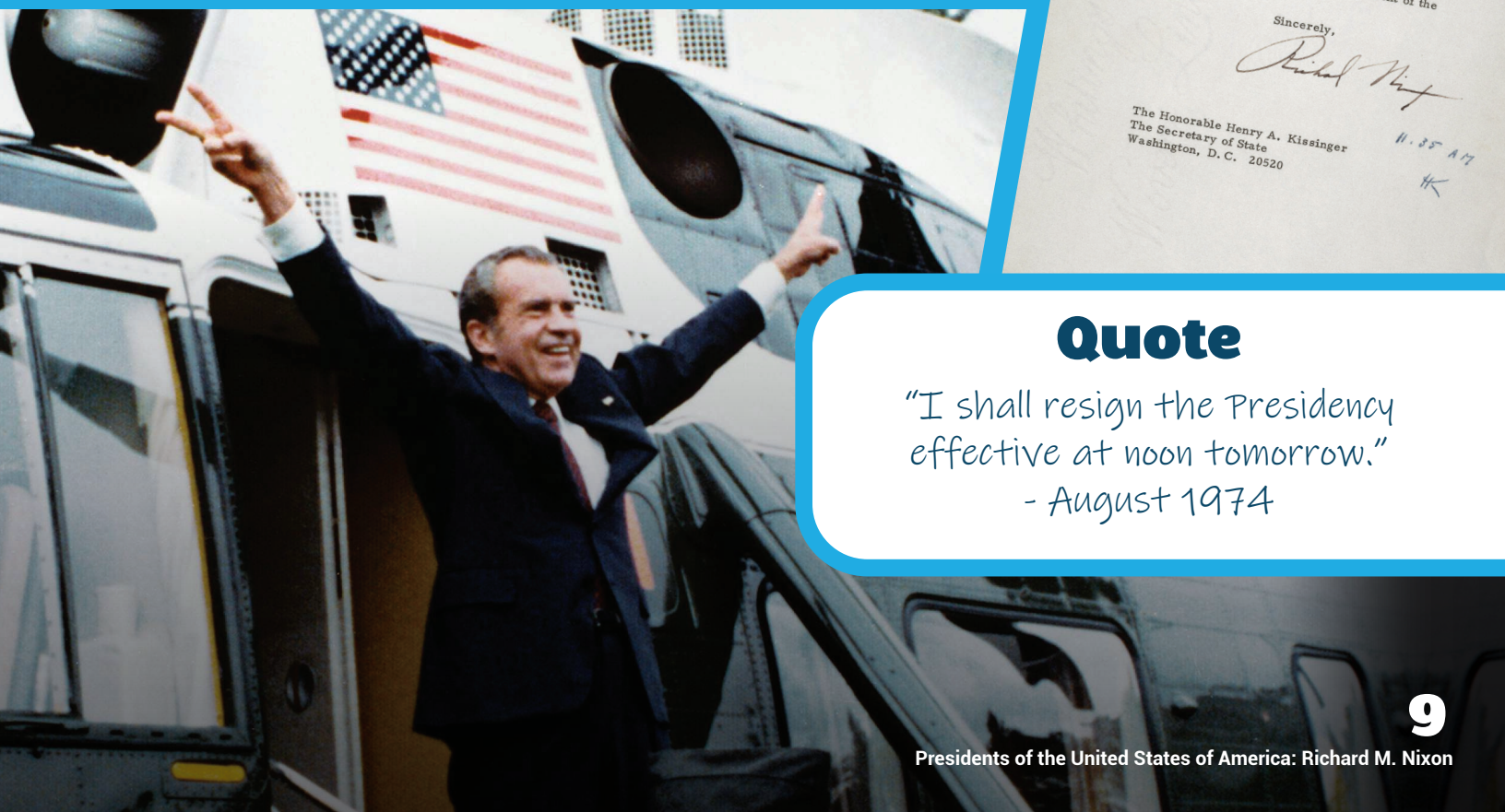
Tragic Downfall

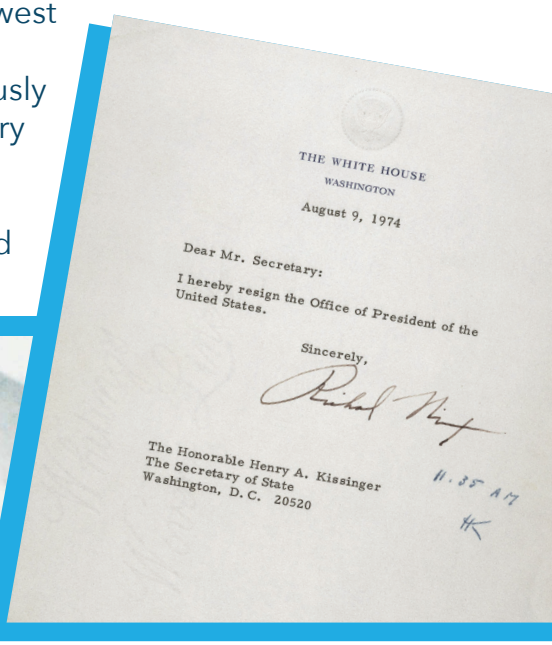
As Nixon started his second term, things seemed to be going well for him. Unfortunately, everything would unravel in a short period of time. All the years of political battles left him resentful of his enemies and suspicious of others. He never got over his loss to Kennedy in 1960, especially since he felt that the Democrats had cheated. He felt that to win, he sometimes had to break the rules and be rough with his opponents. Nixon and his aides created a secretive group called the Plumbers to find out bad things about his political enemies.

Back in June of 1972, some in the Plumbers team broke into the Democratic Party headquarters in the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C. The Plumbers, however, were caught and arrested for burglary.

The newspapers and Congress began investigating what happened. The controversy became known as the **Watergate Scandal**. Investigators learned that Nixon often recorded his conversations and meetings at the White House. The Supreme Court ordered that Nixon release the tapes of those recordings. One of those tapes revealed that Nixon had tried to cover up his administration's connection with the Plumbers team. Essentially, Nixon lied that his administration wasn't involved at all in the break-in.

Members of the House of Representatives believed this was a crime and voted to impeach him. The country had lost faith in Nixon, and Congress was ready to remove him from office. On August 8, 1974, Nixon announced that he would **resign** from the presidency. The following day, he officially left office, and his Vice President, Gerald Ford, became the 38th President of the United States. As Nixon got onto the helicopter to leave the White House—at the lowest point of his career—he famously flashed the victory sign. It was a moment that Americans would never forget.





THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

August 9, 1974

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I hereby resign the Office of President of the United States.

Sincerely,

Richard Nixon

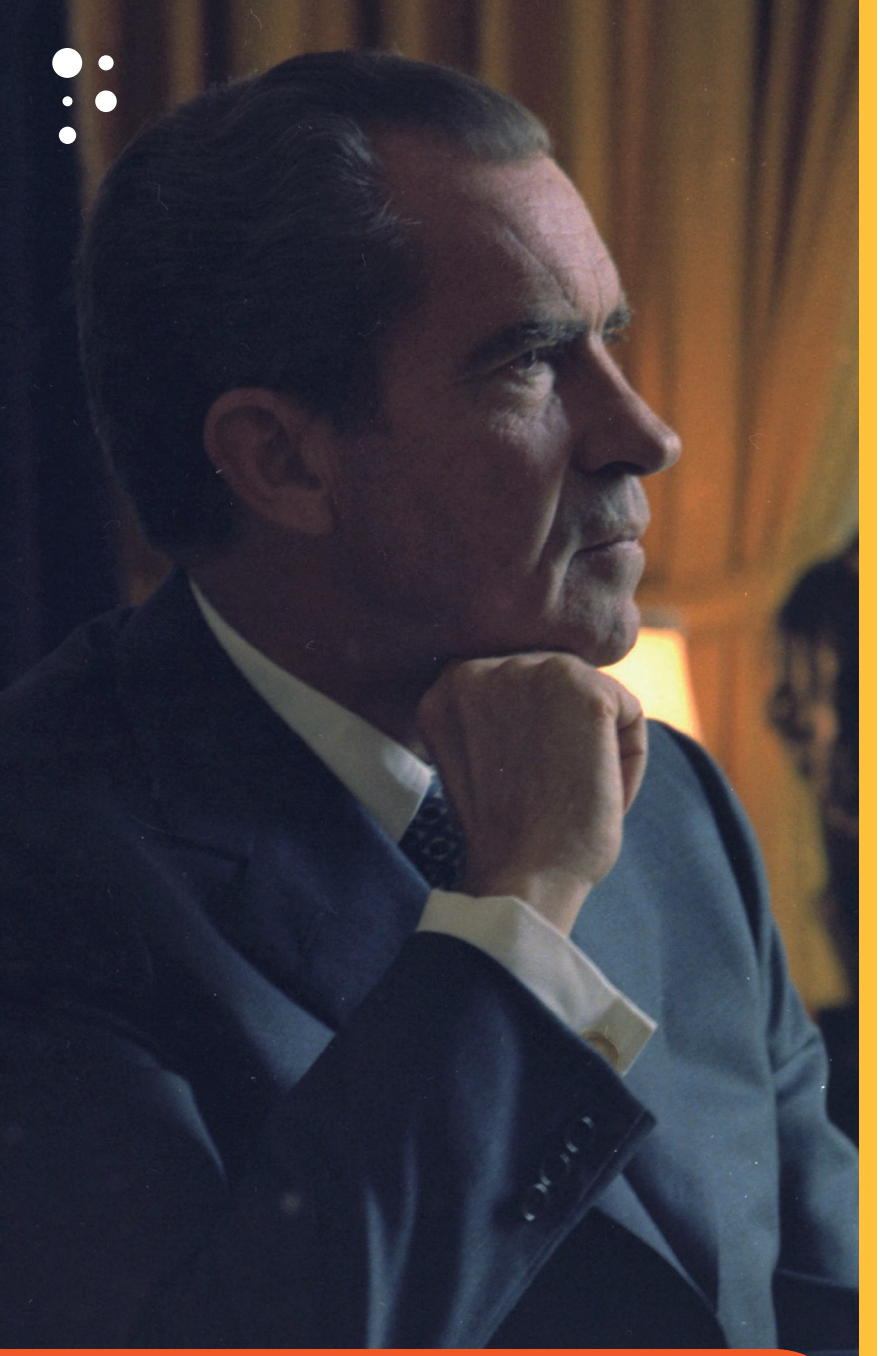
The Honorable Henry A. Kissinger
The Secretary of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

11:35 AM

HK

Quote

"I shall resign the Presidency effective at noon tomorrow."
- August 1974



Writing Activity

Everyone makes mistakes, but it's important to take responsibility for our decisions. On a separate piece of paper, write about a recent mistake you made and how you took responsibility for your decisions.

Retirement

Many Americans felt that Nixon had betrayed them. Even though he had won re-election in a landslide just two years earlier, he was now very unpopular. Many now believed he had dishonored the presidency.

Nixon might have been tried and sent to jail for the scandal, but President Ford officially **pardoned** him, which meant he was forgiven for whatever crimes he may have committed. This angered many Americans, who wanted him to be punished. Over the years, however, people's opinions have changed. Most Americans now believe it was the right thing to do. Historians believe that had Nixon been tried in a court of law, the nation would have been divided further. By pardoning Nixon, Ford helped America move on from the scandal.

Nixon spent much of his retirement cleaning up his image. He wrote many books and gave interviews defending his career. Americans began to remember that, despite his mistakes, he was very intelligent and was an expert on foreign policy. Many subsequent presidents reached out to him for advice. Some Americans began to respect him once again, especially when he acknowledged his mistakes. In 1978, he admitted that, when it came to Watergate, "I screwed it up, and I paid the price."

Nixon spent his retirement in California and New Jersey. He enjoyed spending time with his family, especially his grandchildren. In 1993, he suffered a terrible loss when his beloved wife Pat died. On April 22, 1994, Nixon died of a stroke at the age of 81.

Legacy

When Richard Nixon took office, America was at a low point. Thanks in large part to his predecessor Lyndon Johnson, the nation was stuck in an unpopular and unwinnable war, divided along racial and generational lines, and ravaged by violence in its cities. Nixon was able to restore order and end America's involvement in the Vietnam War, as well as establish new relationships with other countries. For these reasons, the American people re-elected him in one of the greatest landslides in history.

In many ways, Nixon lived the American dream. He rose from poverty to reach the nation's highest office. He suffered devastating defeats, including heartbreaking election losses, but he always seemed to overcome them. His 1968 election to the presidency is considered one of the greatest political comebacks of all time.

Nixon, however, remains a controversial leader. Many people believe the relationships he formed with communist countries were great diplomatic achievements and made the world more peaceful. Others, however, say that America should have nothing to do with them because they were led by evil governments.

Americans remember Nixon as the first, and thus far, only president to resign. It is true that Nixon's enemies unfairly attacked him and took advantage of the situation. At the same time, he did try to conceal wrongdoing, which many believe was an act of dishonesty.

With all of that said, it is important to remember Nixon for more than the Watergate Scandal. As Democrat President Bill Clinton once said, "May the day of judging President Nixon on anything less than his entire life and career come to a close."

Quote

"I know America. I know the heart of America is good."
- January 1969



Sources

Gaddis, John Lewis. *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security.* Oxford University Press, 1982.

Hughes, Ken. "Richard Nixon." *Miller Center, University of Virginia,* https://millercenter.org/president/nixon/. Accessed 8 February 2023.

MacMillan, Margaret. *Nixon and Mao: The Week That Changed the World.* Random House, 2007.

"President Nixon: The Life." *Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum,* https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/index.php/president-nixon/. Accessed 8 February 2023.

"Richard M. Nixon." *Encyclopedia Britannica,* https://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-Nixon/. Accessed 8 February 2023.

Small, Melvin. *The Presidency of Richard Nixon.* University Press of Kansas, 1999.

Images: Wikicommons, FreePik, Nandaro (pg. 3)

Answers

NIXON'S CODE NAME:
SEARCHLIGHT

Glossary

Quaker: A member of the Religious Society of Friends, a Christian denomination that is known for valuing direct experience with God, silent worship and meditation, commitment to social works, and non-violence (including not participating in war).

Cold War: The conflict between America, which was free, and the Soviet Union, which was a communist dictatorship, that lasted from the 1940s to the 1980s.

Soviet Union: A country that existed from 1922 to 1991 which oppressed its people and tried to spread its communist system around the world.

Communism: A political and economic system where all property and resources are owned and controlled by the government. The result of this system is often dictatorship and government control of every aspect of people's lives.

Debate: A discussion of the issues in public between candidates for political office.

Vietnam War: A military conflict from 1955 until 1975 that began when communists in North Vietnam tried to impose a dictatorship over the entire country. The United States sent about 2.7 million soldiers to support the South Vietnamese against the communists, but this decision became unpopular among Americans.

Vietnamization: President Richard Nixon's policy during the Vietnam War, in which the U.S. military trained the South Vietnamese to fight the North Vietnamese communists. This policy allowed the United States to bear less of the burden of the war and to pull out its troops from Vietnam.

Henry Kissinger: An American diplomat who served as President Nixon's National Security Advisor and Secretary of State. Dr. Kissinger, a professor from Harvard University, was Nixon's most influential foreign policy advisor. He played a critical role in all of Nixon's major diplomatic accomplishments.

People's Republic of China: The name of the ancient country of China while being ruled by the Communist Party of China. The communist government of the People's Republic of China took over the country in 1949 and has killed millions of Chinese citizens and, as of 2023, continues to oppress its people.

Détente: The French word for "relaxing." It refers to President Richard Nixon's policies towards the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. During the Cold War, the United States had tense relations with both nations. Nixon's Détente policies, however, aimed to "relax," or ease, those tensions and make the world more peaceful.

Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT): Negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union during Richard Nixon's presidency. The talks, a major part of Nixon's Détente policies, resulted in a treaty in 1972 that limited how many nuclear missiles the two nations could have.

Mao Zedong: The communist founder of the oppressive People's Republic of China, whose policies caused immense suffering and economic devastation for millions of Chinese people. His "Great Leap Forward" resulted in the deaths and imprisonment of tens of millions of people.

Paris Peace Accords: A peace agreement signed in January 1973 between the United States, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam. The agreement allowed the United States to end its involvement in the war.

Watergate Scandal: A political controversy from 1972 to 1974 that resulted in Richard Nixon's resignation from the presidency. The scandal began when members of a group called the Plumbers were arrested for burglarizing the Democratic Party headquarters in the Watergate Hotel. President Nixon tried to cover up the fact that his administration had ties to the Plumbers. When a tape recording was released revealing Nixon's cover-up, Congress prepared to impeach him. Nixon resigned on August 9, 1974.

Resign: To give up, or leave, a position.

Pardon: When a president or other government figure decides someone who is accused of or has been found guilty of a crime is forgiven and no longer has to be punished for that crime.

READY FOR MORE?

Experience all the **FREE CONTENT** PragerU Kids has to offer!



STREAM FREE SHOWS ON YOUR TV OR TABLET

Download our FREE mobile or TV app to stream every PragerU Kids show! Or, watch any time at PragerUkids.com.



ENJOY HOURS OF FREE SHOWS

Browse over 300 educational videos for K-12, including game shows, cartoons, and inspiring reality shows.



EXPLORE WHOLESOME STORIES & AMAZING HISTORY

Download free e-books at PragerUkids.com or purchase printed copies on Amazon.



FREE RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS & PARENTS

Supplement your child's viewing experience with lesson plans & worksheets that meet educational standards.

PragerU Kids

Experience Fun, Interactive, and Educational Content at
PRAGERUKIDS.COM

GUESS OR MESS

A PragerU Kids Game Show

WATCH NOW!



Test Your Knowledge of Our **PragerU Kids Biography Books** with This Fun and Messy **Trivia Game Show** for Kids!

PragerU KIDS

Experience Fun, Interactive, and Educational Content at

PRAGERUKIDS.COM