

## The Ford Presidency

### 1. Gerald R. Ford became the President of the United States August 9, 1974 upon the resignation of Nixon over Watergate Scandal (VIII; doc. 22)

- the only man to become president without being elected to high office -- Congressman from Michigan, appointed Vice-president after Spiro T. Agnew resigned accepting plea bargain for tax evasion -- ascended to the Presidency with Nixon's resignation
- elevation caused a Constitutional Crisis over the legitimacy of the Ford Presidency
- acceptance speech proclaimed that it was time for America to rebuild the trust between people and government
- first major act as president is to pardon Nixon (VIII, doc. 23) **What controversy arose due to the pardon and the attempt by Ford to win people's trust? 8 of Nixon's aids and advisors were sentenced to jail time for Watergate infraction -- should Nixon have faced trial for abuse of power? Do you think the pardon was successful in ending what Ford called "the long national nightmare?"**

### 2. Domestic issues of the Ford Presidency

1. During Watergate the economy had been largely ignored to pursue impeachment charges
2. Prior to Watergate the economy was in a post-war slowdown (VIII; doc. 21)
3. Under Ford, the economy slowed to a standstill -- STAGFLATION  
(unemployment up + inflation up + faltering dollar value = stagflation)

Ford's response is the Whip

Inflation

Now Program

} **W.I.N. = Restore confidence**

1. encourage private investment in economy
2. encourage individuals to save part of income
3. plant vegetable gardens -- conservation efforts

- government initiative to increase unemployment benefits
- budget plan to reduce taxes
- lifts the prohibition of private ownership of gold to encourage investment in hard currency to bolster dollar's strength

### 3. Foreign Policy Issues

- Ford essentially followed the pattern of Nixon in pursuing international diplomacy = much of foreign policy was overseen by Henry Kissinger (Sec. of State)
- Kissinger continued the policy of detente, or peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union -- thawing the Cold War. (Nixon had opened warmer relations with U.S.S.R. AND China (IX; doc. 9, 10))
- utilized the tactic of realpolitik to further American international interests -- the politics of reality
  - What advantage would Ford have in allowing Kissinger to essentially oversee foreign issues?**
  - What strategic edge would Kissinger enjoy by using realpolitik?**
- continued Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) -- SALT I had been signed by Nixon -- began negotiations on SALT II (concluded by Carter in 1979 but not ratified by Congress)
- negotiated Helsinki Accords which were designed to make Cold War nations dependent upon each other through trade so as to prevent the threat of war = peace through co-dependency (**dollar diplomacy? parallels to Taft? Eisenhower? Kennedy?**)
- Kissinger also managed to conclude an end to America's involvement in Vietnam -- final withdrawal in 1975
- did not manage to salve the wounds left by a decade of misinformation and the credibility gap -- lasting negative impression of Vietnam veterans = only troops associated with losing a war which never had popular support. Government did very little to create a favorable climate for these veterans **Why would many Americans want to disassociate themselves from Vietnam veterans? What does this say about "the long national nightmare?"**

**While Gerald Ford remained a popular figure with most Americans, he was never able to erase the distrust of government and politicians which had grown during the Johnson and Nixon administrations. His periodic falls down the stairs of Air force One didn't inspire confidence!!**

## The Carter Years

### 1. The Election of 1976: America's Bicentennial

- Bicentennial preparation allowed Americans to focus on their independence and traditions of freedom -- gave America a chance to celebrate and heal after 15 years of Civil Rights violence, Vietnam, and Watergate
- Ford garnered the Republican nomination after a hotly contested convention campaign over Ronald Reagan and Robert J. Dole -- Democrats nominated James Earl Carter, Governor of Georgia and Walter Mondale of Minnesota
- In accepting the Republican nomination Ford had broken an earlier pledge that he wouldn't seek election in 1976 -- split republican support -- alienated southern democrats who voted for one of their own
- campaign was close throughout with each candidate appearing to try to avoid the most mistakes made -- seemed to be a race between two candidates who didn't know when the next mistake was looming (Ford would slip on the stairs of Air Force One, Carter would admit to lusting in his heart in an interview with *Playboy* magazine)

|                  |                      |                      |
|------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>The Vote:</b> | <b>Carter: 49.9%</b> | <b>297 Electoral</b> |
|                  | <b>Ford: 47.9%</b>   | <b>240 Electoral</b> |

### 2. Who was James Earl Carter?

- former naval officer, nuclear physicist, multi-millionaire peanut farmer, Gov. of Georgia
- Carter was a folksy, approachable figure -- preferred to be addressed as Jimmy -- opened fireside chats as president wearing a cardigan sweater rather than the traditional suit and tie
- Carter ran his presidential campaign as a Washington outsider, not mired in the traditions of Beltway politics -- he fostered the image that he was simply a southern peanut farmer (**Would this be an advantage given the political climate of the day? What limitations would this present a political candidate?**)
- in campaign speeches he emphasized his honesty and integrity and stated that "if he ever lied to the American people he would not deserve to be President." (**How would this influence the Carter presidency?**)

### 3. Carter's Domestic Policy

- I. The early Carter years were characterized by the administrations difficulty working with Congress -- Carter's staff was composed of Washington outsiders who had little experience dealing with the entrenched political attitudes of the House and Senate
  - II. primary issue was the faltering economy -- stagflation had continued -- to spur economy the Federal Reserve Board inflated the economy -- Carter recommended increased government spending -- as inflation rose, unemployment reached double figures (1978 = 11% jobless rate) -- Carter shifted course and proposed spending cuts -- public got the impression that Carter had no plan to relieve economic pressures they felt **Was this a valid assessment?**
  - III. Civil Rights -- Allan Bakke case challenges quotas as the basis for Affirmative Action -- reverse discrimination -- Carter takes a human rights approach and supports Equal Opportunity program
  - IV. Deregulation of oil and gas industries -- lasting problem from the 1973 Oil Crisis -- Carter seen as favoring the interests of the leading petroleum firms by removing government restrictions in place since the Eisenhower years -- conservative backlash in what was seen as a return to New Deal and Great Society liberal activism -- resentment over Democrats treatment of Nixon? Ford?
  - V. After OPEC's oil embargo of 1973 Carter felt America had become too dependent on foreign oil -- advocated development of alternative energy sources (**Crisis of Confidence - VIII; doc. 24**) released federal funds to fund nuclear power research -- encouraged people to conserve oil by driving less and carpooling whenever possible -- wanted to increase domestic oil production but faced opposition from military -industrial complex concerned about maintaining a defense reserve of oil and gas -- Environmental groups proposed further expansion of oil research -- (**parallels to Modern Republicanism of Eisenhower? Compassionate Conservatism of G.W. Bush??**)
- Nuclear power becomes the focal point of the Carter administration -- **Problem:** nuclear power was perceived as part of the defense department and weapons research and had been protested by environmentalists since the early 1960s -- questions arose about safety of nuclear power and rising costs made nuclear investment by the federal government more controversial
  - In March of 1979 reactor assembly #3 at the Three Mile Island plant near Harrisburg, PA released radioactive steam into the atmosphere -- problem escalated as a faulty valve reading prompted engineers to lower water

levels in reactor core -- reactor superheated and caused a partial meltdown and steam build-up in reactor vessel -- contamination was contained and problem was fixed but American fear of nuclear power spiked and protests increased -- film: The China Syndrome was released three weeks after Three Mile Island incident crystallizing fear of nuclear accidents and radioactive contamination -- **shortly after** -- Love Canal in upstate New York emphasized toxic waste problem in America

#### 4. Foreign Issues

- Carter's personal convictions led him to an absolutist position on human rights, both foreign and domestic -- Bakke Case at home (Affirmative Action) -- vocal criticism of human rights abuses of the Soviet Union
1. Alienated the Soviet Union under Brezhnev by openly supporting political dissidents (Solzheitzyn, Sakharov)
  2. Promoted the processes of peace in the Middle East (Camp David) **(IX; doc. 11)**
  3. Encouraged developing nations to seek self-determination (Central America, Africa, Arab East) **Departure of Cold War policy? Peace Corps?**
  4. Supports deposed Shah of Iran Mohammed Reza Pahlavi after Islamic Revolution takes place led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

##### Soviet Union

support of dissidents alienates soviets  
detente ends -- SALT II fails - 1979  
Soviets invade Afghanistan in December of 79  
to stop revolution threatening their border  
Carter support of self-determination leads to international reaction -- U.S. boycott of Summer Olympics in Moscow -- soviets dominate competition

##### Middle East/Israel

Henry Kissinger began negotiation of peace agreement after Helsinki Accords  
Sec. of State Cyrus Vance undertakes a shuttle diplomacy approach to negotiate peace agreement  
Arab and Israeli leaders invited to Camp David retreat in 1977 - Sadat/Begin  
Egypt becomes the first Muslim Arab nation to diplomatically recognize Israel  
Question of Palestinians is ignored to broker the peace agreement

##### Iran and the Shah

U.S. had supported Shah since late 1950s -- Cold War  
Shah is deposed by Shi'ite extremists in 1976  
Ayatollah Khomeini places death edict on Shah and all who provide him with aid  
Carter allows Shah into United States to receive medical treatment -- cancer -- Shah's wife is American  
After successful Islamic Revolution in 1978/79 Iranian students take 63 American hostages at U.S. embassy  
11 women and ill hostages set free three days later  
Carter arranges a rescue attempt which fails due to sandstorm  
8 soldiers killed in helicopter crash **(IX; doc. 12)**  
52 hostages held 444 days -- released on Reagan's inauguration

Carter loses election of 1980 to Gov. Ronald Reagan of California -- people had lost faith in his ability to revive the economy, stabilize the energy crisis, and were convinced he could not compete effectively when dealing with international affairs -- particularly seen as weak on defense. Military enlistment was at lowest point since Korea -- Armed Forces were seen as untrained, unprepared, and underfunded. Urban problems had expanded due to high inflation and high unemployment -- recession became a focal point of election along with national defense, energy, and women's rights (Equal Rights Amendment) -- see **(VIII; doc. 25) Parallels to 1960 debates? 2000 debates?**