

America: From Johnson to Carter

From the mid-1960s until the 1980s, the United States experienced much political, economic, and social change. America's leadership consisted of four presidents between 1963 and 1981—Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and James Earl "Jimmy" Carter. Each man brought his own style of leadership to the Free World.

Vice President Lyndon Johnson became president after the tragic assassination of John F. Kennedy in November 1963. Johnson served the remainder of Kennedy's term through 1964, when he was elected in his own right. As president, Johnson pushed an ambitious plan to improve the standard of living for all Americans. Known as the Great Society, his programs fought racial prejudice, sought relief for the poor, and extended elderly care. Through his powerful political influence, Congress passed 50 new laws related to his domestic agenda.

The cornerstone of this agenda was Medicare, which helped pay the hospital bills of citizens over age 65, and Medicaid, a program which provided federal monies to states to help poor people with medical care.

Other Johnson programs extended welfare, created better housing for the poor, and gave loans to poor farmers.

Despite the success of his domestic agenda, although it carried a large price tag, which encouraged deficit spending and inflation, Johnson struggled politically with his expansion of the Vietnam War. By 1967, Johnson had committed a half million American servicemen to fight against communism in Southeast Asia.

As the war dragged on, the American public turned against the military effort, costing Johnson any chance of running for reelection in 1968. Instead, his vice president, Hubert Humphrey, ran against the Republican challenger, Richard Nixon, who served as Eisenhower's vice president.

Nixon won the election narrowly against Humphrey. He entered the White House during a time of turmoil. Protests—including riots and violent demonstrations against the Vietnam War—split the country. Nixon's main objective as president was ending the Vietnam War, which he accomplished in

1973 through peace talks in Paris. (By then, he had been reelected to a second term.)

During the Nixon years, America suffered a difficult recession which Nixon never brought under control. The poor economy was only one of Nixon's major problems during his second term. A political scandal known as Watergate erupted, which involved White House compliance in a break-in of Democratic Party Headquarters in the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C. during the summer of 1972. Nixon's efforts to cover up his own and his staff's culpability resulted in his resignation as president in the summer of 1974.

Nixon's second vice president (his first resigned during a separate scandal), Gerald Ford, finished out Nixon's second term, continuing to struggle with a poor economy, which ultimately cost him his bid for the presidency in 1976, which brought Jimmy Carter of Georgia to the White House.

During Carter's single term as president, he faced awesome problems. The economy worsened, as high oil prices drove inflation to ten percent. Carter's greatest troubles centered on the abduction of 53 U.S. embassy personnel by Iranian extremists in November 1979, with the Iranian government's support. Unable to negotiate or free the hostages militarily, the crisis destroyed Carter's presidency. Not until the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 were the hostages released after 444 days of captivity.

Review and Write

Describe the successes and failures of the following presidents.

Johnson:

Nixon:

Ford:

Carter: