The Legacy of Richard Nixon

How can we evaluate Richard Nixon’s presidency?

THE VIETNAM WAR ENDS

With the Vietnam War going badly in 1968, Lyndon Johnson did not seek another term as president. Richard Nixon – who promised an end to the fighting in Vietnam – won the election that year. At first, Nixon escalated the war, causing more protest. Negotiations to end American involvement went on for years, but neither side was willing to budge until the end of 1972. Finally, on January 27, 1973 representatives from the United States and North Vietnam signed a peace treaty. All U.S. soldiers and many U.S. prisoners of war (POW’s) returned home.

In the spring of 1975, North Vietnam launched an invasion of South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese leaders called the United States for help. The U.S. continued to send billions of dollars in aid to South Vietnam, but the Americans had no desire to re-enter the war. In April 1975, communist forces captured Saigon in South Vietnam. Vietnam was united as one country, under rule of the communist party. Communist revolutions also occurred in the neighboring countries of Cambodia and Laos, but communism did not spread further. The domino theory had been proven wrong.

The Vietnam War was very costly for the American people. In the war 57,605 American soldiers were killed, and more than 300,000 were seriously wounded. Only the Civil War and World War II resulted in more American casualties. It took a huge financial toll as well, costing the United States about $200 billion.

COLD WAR TENSIONS EASE

As American involvement in Vietnam was winding down, President Nixon became the first President to visit the Soviet Union and China in 1972. This helped to ease Cold War tensions, which was known as détente. Détente led to more contact and trade between the superpowers as well as an agreement to reduce weapons on both sides. The arms reduction treaty, written in 1972, was called the SALT Agreement (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks).

After Nixon left office in 1974, his Vice President – Gerald Ford – continued the policy of détente. Trade between the United States and Soviet Union increased. Jimmy Carter, elected in 1976, also continued détente and worked out a new arms reduction agreement with the Soviet Union known as SALT II. Tensions would increase again, however, entering the 1980s.
THE WATERGATE AFFAIR (1972-1974)

Scenario: In June 1972, Richard Nixon was campaigning for reelection as the Republican nominee for the presidency. On June 17, 1972, Washington D.C. police caught five men breaking into the Democratic Party headquarters in the Watergate Hotel. Evidence linked the burglars to Nixon’s reelection committee. The President assured the American people that no one in the White House was involved.

Despite Nixon’s denials, a Senate committee began public hearings in May 1973. The hearings revealed secret tape recordings that Nixon created. These tapes showed that the President and several close advisors had tried to cover up the truth about the Watergate break-in. This was later called “The Watergate Scandal.”

Solution/Outcome: By 1974, cries for Nixon to be ________________ and then ________________ from office grew loud. Nixon rapidly lost ________________ and ________________ on August 9, 1974 to avoid ________________. He is the only U.S. president to ________________ from office. On September 8, 1974, Gerald Ford pardoned Richard Nixon for his participation in Watergate to help the country heal from the scandal.

How would you solve this problem?

WATERGATE SCANDAL (1972-1973):
How would you solve this problem?

As a member of the House of Representatives, would you vote for the impeachment of President Nixon?

A. Strongly Agree_____ B. Agree_____ C. Disagree_____ D. Strongly Disagree_____

Explain your reasoning:
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How would you evaluate Nixon’s legacy as president? Use specific details from your notes.
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