

Unit Plan for The Nixon Administration and the Role of Secrecy in American Democracy by Darrell Morey, Falmouth High School

unit duration: approximately six days

level: US honors/AP

note: This unit is not intended to cover all aspects of the period 1968-1975. It is intended to follow a unit on social changes and trends in the 1960s.

Massachusetts State Frameworks addressed:

-USG.5.5 Identify and explain the meaning and importance of civic dispositions or virtues that contribute to the preservation and improvement of civil society and government.

-USG.3.13 Analyze and evaluate decisions by the United States Supreme Court about the constitutional principles of separation of powers and checks and balances in such landmark cases as Marbury v. Madison (1803), Baker v. Carr (1962), **United States v. Nixon (1974)**, City of Boerne, Texas v. Flores (1997), and Clinton v. City of New York (1998).

-USG.2.6 Define and provide examples of fundamental principles and values of American political and civic life, including liberty, the common good, justice, equality, tolerance, law and order, rights of individuals, diversity, civic unity, patriotism, constitutionalism, popular sovereignty, and representative democracy.

-USG.2.7 Identify and explain historical and contemporary efforts to narrow discrepancies between foundational ideas and values of American democracy and realities of American political and civic life.

-USII.28 Analyze the important domestic policies and events that took place during the presidencies of Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon. (H)

D. Nixon's appeal to "the silent majority"

E. the anti-war and counter-cultural movements

F. the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970

G. the Watergate scandal (including the Supreme Court case, U.S. v. Nixon)

-USII.20 Explain the causes, course, and consequences of the Vietnam War and summarize the diplomatic and military policies of Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon. (H)

Objectives:

Short-term:

-Students will be able to identify major events and individuals in US History connected with the period 1968-1975, especially in relation to politics and governmental issues of the time.

-Students will be able to contextualize President Nixon's election and re-election as well as his administrations foreign and domestic policies in light of the events and political and social currents of the time. They will then be able to analyze and express cause and effect relationships between the context and the decisions and actions by the Nixon Administration.

Long-term: Students will be able to identify, analyze and discuss the concepts of separation of powers, independent judiciary, a free press, national security vs. transparency/openness, etc. not just in relation to events during the late 1960s/early 1970s, but in contemporary America as well.

-Students will be better equipped as citizens to monitor and evaluate the actions of their government.

Background readings:

Chapter 16, "Watergate: The Last Battle," in America's Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era From Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon by Mark Hamilton Lytle.

Chapter 1, "'Down to the Nut-Cutting': The Nixon Presidency and American Public Life," in The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society and Politics by Bruce J. Schulman.

Pages 700-790 of Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974 by James T. Patterson.

Depending on the textbook treatment of the Nixon Administration and the events of the late Sixties and Early Seventies, the teacher may wish to have the students read one or more of the above sections for additional background. Lytle and Schulman focus especially on the social and cultural context while Patterson's is a more straight-forward overview of the events of the period.

Day One:

-some essential questions

-When is secrecy a good thing?

-What is the role of secrecy in a democracy?

-When is it o.k. for the President to not follow the law?

-Nixon's background review (1960s election, etc.)

-personality issues?

-as short powerpoint or smartboard lecture

-it may be helpful to have the students read one of the background readings the night before this and/or for homework this first night

-the 1968 election and the conservative backlash against the counter-culture

-why would some Americans have a problem with the anti-war movement? Who would be most likely to be upset with the counter-culture? How does Nixon try to take advantage of this backlash?

-the significance of the Vietnam War in Nixon's election and his policies of "Peace With Honor" and "Vietnamization"

-the "silent majority" speech:

http://nixon.archives.gov/forkids/speechesforkids/silentmajority/silentmajority_transcript.pdf

-have students read and mark up the speech if time in class (if, for example, you had a block schedule) or for homework

-diagramming the key players in the Nixon administration

Day Two: Nixon and the War

-release of the Pentagon Papers

-from the Miller Center for Public Affairs at the University of Virginia, this site has an overview of the chronology of the Pentagon Papers situation combined with

the relevant Nixon tapes on the matter and gives a good sense of Nixon's motivations (and those of other figures like Henry Kissinger):

<http://whitehousetapes.net/exhibit/first-domino-nixon-and-pentagon-papers>

-after reading this section, have the students relate this back to the essential questions for the unit

-compare with Afghan War Documents from Wikileaks

-possible articles for hmwk:

Washington Post: On Wikileaks

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/19/AR2010051905333.html)

[dyn/content/article/2010/05/19/AR2010051905333.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/19/AR2010051905333.html)

Washington Post on comparison of Wikileaks with Pentagon Papers

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/26/AR2010072605410.html)

[dyn/content/article/2010/07/26/AR2010072605410.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/26/AR2010072605410.html)

methods NY Times used on deciding whether to publish:

http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/26/world/26editors-note.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all#

-"secret" bombing, secret negotiations, why the secrecy?

-connection to other foreign policy goals? (China, USSR)

Day Three:

Watergate

-CREEP, plumbers

-Nixon and views of presidential power

-excerpts from Frost interview and some comprehension questions:

<http://www.streetlaw.org/en/Page.Landmark.Nixon.act.frost.aspx>

-concerns about national security?

-what the events of Watergate were

-timeline- in partners or maybe groups of three

-then do a full class one on the board to make sure all events are covered

-teachers may want to refer to:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/watergate/chronology.htm>

Day Four:

the Nixon tapes

-Dean's "cancer on the presidency" conversation:

[http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/watergate/trial/transcripts.p](http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/watergate/trial/transcripts.php)

[hp](http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/watergate/trial/transcripts.php)

-others are also on the Nixon library site

-why would Nixon make these tapes?

-what is Dean's position on Watergate? In retrospect, was his later testimony to Congress surprising?

US supreme court case

-executive privilege- what is it? how does it apply to this case?

<http://www.streetlaw.org/en/Page.Landmark.Nixon.act.execpriv.aspx>

-summary of the decision

<http://www.streetlaw.org/en/Page.Landmark.Nixon.decision.summary.aspx>

-excerpts from the opinion with questions

<http://www.streetlaw.org/en/Page.Landmark.Nixon.decision.opinion.aspx>

On whether or not to impeach Nixon and the constitutional roles played by different branches and organization of the government see also:

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/watergate-constitution/>

-homework: assign students roles for the Mock Impeachment (below), have them do some prep for their role

Day Five:

prep for Mock Impeachment

-Students need to be assigned various roles:

John Dean

H.R. Halderman

John Erlichman

Alexander Butterfield

Henry Kissinger

Richard Nixon

a Special Prosecutor

Congress members

-students should do some prep this first day- perhaps the prosecutor and Congress members could come up with questions for the witnesses and give an initial list to the witnesses so they can prepare some initial responses

-the prosecutor may want access on a laptop or otherwise (smartboard) to the Nixon tape transcripts

-must keep focus on "high crimes and misdemeanors"

Day Six: finish Mock Impeachment

- "call back" witnesses if necessary

-vote

-debrief

-relate back to essential questions

Assessment:

Imagine you are the new White House Chief of Staff. What advice and guidance would you give to the President about issues such as secrecy and taping of conversations?

What historical, legal and ethical issues do you think the President needs to be aware of. The President also wants to know what is your personal opinion on these issues?

-length: approx three pages, use standard essay format (needs intro, conclusion, etc.)

Other teaching resources:

Lesson plans for Nixon Presidency:

<http://www.ushistorysite.com/nixon.php>

Background on the Nixon tapes, how they were recorded, etc.:

<http://whitehousetapes.net/tapes/nixon/overview>