

The Century: Peter Jennings Approaching the Apocalypse: 1971-1975

1. What did America accomplish in 1969 that JFK had promised at the beginning of the decade? Why were people around the world so interested?

In 1969 two American astronauts reached the moon and placed an American plaque within the sea of tranquility. The entire event was on film being broadcasted live so everyone could see it in fact the event was watched by one-fifth of the earth's population.

2. Who was elected in 1969? Describe the inauguration! Why were we so divided?

Richard Nixon was elected as the thirty-seventh President of the US it was the same as any other inauguration unless you count all the protestors. While half the population supported the war in Vietnam the other half was tired of a war that clearly was a losing battle.

3. What is the "Silent Majority"? Contrast that with the counter-culture!

The Silent Majority is the term used to refer to the group of Americans that did have opinions on the events but did not gather in demonstrations against the Vietnam War. The counter-culture was similar to the silent majority the only difference was that the counter culture believed in change of culture by embracing drugs, profanity, bad language, etc.

4. Why did the movie "Easy Rider" symbolize the divide in America?

The film was a way to promote the counter-culture lifestyle it based on two motor bike riders that traveled around getting rich by selling drugs. The film received much support and criticism. It turned a small spark of discontent into a roaring flame.

5. What sparked protests in May of 1970? What happened at Kent State? How did America respond to the demonstrations?

When US troops were sent into Cambodia to clean out Vietcong sanctuaries it sparked discontent in 350 colleges across America. The most renowned was Kent State University where the National Guard was sent in to deal with the protests. These demonstrations led to the government shutting down 74 colleges across the country for the rest of the year due to student unrest.

6. Why did the "hard hats" attack the protesters in NYC? How did the country respond?

The hard-hats as they were called were members of the American Labor Union which largely supported Nixon and his Vietnam war policies. When over one thousand high school and college protesters gathered in lower Manhattan 70 hard hat workers set out and attacked the students. The fighting lasted for two hours resulting with seventy injuries and six arrests. The hard hats were praised as heroes and the leaders of the Labor Union were invited to the White House where they gave President Nixon an honorary hard hat.

7. What were the reasons given for the prisoner revolt at Attica prison? Who came to the prisoners' defense?

The major reason for the revolt was the prisoners were demanding better conditions in the prison and they wanted this event to spark change throughout America. Reporters were sent in over the course of the four days the revolt took place and they were trying to bring down the tensions.

8. What was the result of the standoff? How was this symbolic of the divide in America?

On the fourth day the reporters were not allowed back in and state troopers with the assistance of helicopters with tear gas were sent in trooper sharpshooters starting picking off the prisoners. The chaos lasted nine minutes and in that time twenty-nine prisoners and 10 hostages were killed. At the time it was seen that if you stood against the government you would most likely end up dead.

9. What were the feelings of American soldiers in Vietnam by the 1970s? Contrast that with the enemy!

The Americans that served in Vietnam felt that they were just buying their time until they could finally get out of Vietnam. Many of them were constantly asking what they were fighting for. For the enemy soldiers they didn't have the ability to pull out of the war after one or two years they had to keep fighting from the beginning to the end and they often were able to keep up their morale since they believed they were fighting and dying for Vietnam. We were losing the war because we didn't understand it.

10. Why did many Vietnam veterans protest the war?

The veterans of the conflict were finally speaking out against the war by joining the counter-culture groups that opposed the conflict. The words of these veterans helped to discourage many young men from signing up for a war that couldn't be won. They didn't want any more of their brothers to die for a war that won't really affect us.

11. How did Nixon change diplomacy with China and the U.S.S.R? What impact does this have on the Vietnamese?

Nixon was able to ease tensions between the US and the Communist nations of Asia by traveling not only to Beijing but to Moscow as well. This brought forth some rather friendly accords between both sides. The North Vietnamese army could no longer depend on the Communist super powers for supplies so they began to agree that accepting America's terms was the best course of action.

12. Why did Nixon order the bombing of Hanoi? What was the impact on the city?

After the North Vietnamese left the negotiations about America's exit and the matter of POW's B-52's were sent in to drive North Vietnamese forces away. The railroads and bridges were all destroyed and the North Vietnamese had no means to stop the bombers all they could do was run and find cover.

13. How was the end of the Vietnam War treated in the U.S.? How did soldiers returning from the war feel?

When the end of there war was announced it was nothing like the end of WW2 in fact the day went by much like any other day had in the past and no one really cared anymore. Soldiers returning home felt like they had done all they had for nothing and that they represented a war that America wanted to forget. Very unlike WW2.

14. How were the POW's treated when they returned? Why was this a high point in the Nixon presidency?

There was a small victory with the end of the war with the return of the POW's and many families were reunited after so many years. Nixon invited the former POW's to a massive party at the White House. It was his working with the Soviets and the Chinese that helped bring Vietnam to a close and to bring the POW's home this made him very popular with the public for finally bringing it to an end.

15. What were some of the things the Nixon Administration was involved in that shocked the American people?

The administration was involved in supplying break-ins that would help Nixon, spying on anti-war demonstrators, and punishing political enemies. It was likely that previous presidents had done similar actions but it was not until Nixon that people found out.

16. What impact did Watergate have on the Nixon Administration? Spiro Agnew?

The Nixon Administration as well as the White House was starting to fall apart because of the constant charges and claims against Nixon. Vice-President, Spiro Agnew, soon resigned from his title after being charged with bribery and tax evasion.

17. What happened to South Vietnam in 1975?

Two years after US troops were withdrawn from Vietnam the North Vietnamese army was at the outskirts of Saigon, the South Vietnamese capital. There were still one thousand US personnel present that helped helicopter out over six thousand South Vietnamese citizens.

18. How did the fall of Vietnam symbolize the end of an era in the United States?

The fall of Vietnam brought forth an end to an era of confidence and unity in America. The time between WW2 up to Vietnam can be seen as an American Golden Age and that age had finally ended.