

# **Biography of Richard Milhous Nixon**

## *Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum*

### ***Childhood***

Richard Milhous Nixon was born on January 9, 1913, on the lemon ranch of his parents, Francis Anthony Nixon (1878–1956) and Hannah Milhous Nixon (1885–1967), in a house his father built in Yorba Linda, California. Richard was the second of five brothers: Harold (1909–1933), Donald (1914–1987), Arthur (1918–1925), and Edward (1930–).

His early life was marked by financial hardship and by the deaths of his brothers Harold and Arthur. In 1922, after the failure of the Nixons' ranch (today the site of the Nixon Presidential Library and Museum), the family moved to be nearer Hannah's relatives in Whittier, California. There, Frank Nixon opened a combination grocery store and gas station, in which the entire Nixon family worked in order to make ends meet.

### ***Student, Attorney, and Sailor***

Nixon enrolled at nearby Whittier College in September 1930. He was an active student there, pursuing his interests in student government, drama, and football while living at home and helping to run the family's store. Nixon won a scholarship to attend Duke University's law school in May 1934, where he was president of the Student Bar Association and a member of the law review. He graduated in June 1937.

Nixon returned to Whittier and joined the law firm Wingert and Bewley. On January 16, 1938, he met Thelma Catherine Ryan, a schoolteacher universally known as "Pat," at a rehearsal for a community play in which they were both acting. Smitten, Nixon pursued Ryan, and they were married on June 21, 1940, in the Presidential Suite of the Mission Inn in Riverside, California, and honeymooned in Mexico.

In January 1942, the Nixons moved to Washington, D.C., where Nixon joined the Office of Price Administration. He soon left the bureaucracy and entered the Navy on August 17, 1942. Originally assigned to a naval station in Ottumwa, Iowa, Nixon requested and received a transfer to the South Pacific theater, where he served with the Combat Air Transport Command on the island of New Caledonia and, later, Bougainville in the Solomon Islands and Green Island.

### ***Early Political Career***

#### ***Congressman***

Following the end of the war, prominent Republicans in Whittier approached Nixon about running for Congress in 1946. Nixon accepted their offer, and, on November 6, 1946, defeated Democratic Congressman Jerry Voorhis by more than fifteen thousand votes. He moved to Washington with his wife Pat and their young daughter, Patricia (known as "Tricia"), who had been born on February 21, 1946. (Their second daughter, Julie, was born on July 5, 1948.)

As a congressman, he served on the Education and Labor Committee and supported the enactment of the Taft-Hartley Act, which greatly restricted the powers of labor unions.

Nixon also served on the Herter Committee, which traveled to Europe to prepare a preliminary report on the Marshall Plan.

In 1948, as a member of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), he took the lead in investigating charges against former State Department official Alger Hiss of spying for the Soviet Union before and during World War II. The case turned the young congressman into a national figure—and a controversial one, because many prominent figures asserted Hiss’s innocence. Not until decades later, after the end of the Cold War, would intelligence information released both by the U.S. government and the Russian government confirm Hiss’ guilt.

Nixon was easily re-elected in 1948.

### **Senator**

In 1950, he defeated Democratic Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas to win California’s vacant Senate seat by more than half a million votes. The campaign was fierce: Nixon, who thought the former actress was too sympathetic to left-wing causes, said Douglas was “pink right down to her underwear;” in response, Douglas labeled Nixon “Tricky Dick.” As senator, Nixon criticized President Harry S Truman’s handling of the Korean War and gave speeches across the nation warning of the threat of global Communism.

### **Vice President**

Nixon’s prominence as an anti-Communist soon brought him to greater national attention. General Dwight Eisenhower, the Republican candidate for president in 1952, selected Nixon as his running mate at the Republican convention in Chicago on July 11, 1952.

Two months later, the New York *Post* ran an article claiming that campaign donors were buying influence with Nixon by providing him with a secret cash fund for his personal expenses. Nixon defended himself against the accusations, noting that the fund was neither secret nor unusual and produced an independent audit showing that the funds had been used only for political purposes. To rebut his critics, Nixon appeared on television to the largest audience in history to date. In the live, nationwide broadcast, Nixon detailed his personal financial history and then outflanked his detractors by saying that his family had accepted one campaign gift for themselves: a beloved black-and-white cocker spaniel named Checkers whom they intended to keep. The speech was a great success, shoring up his support with the Republican Party’s base, demonstrating his appeal to the wider public, and thus keeping him on the Republican ticket—and proving the importance of television as a political medium.

In November 1952, Eisenhower and Nixon defeated the candidates on the Democratic ticket, presidential nominee Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson and running mate Alabama Senator John Sparkman, by seven million votes.

Under Eisenhower, Nixon made the vice presidency a visible and important office. Nixon chaired National Security Council meetings in the president's absence and undertook many goodwill tours of foreign countries in an effort to shore up support for American policies during the Cold War. On one such trip to Caracas, Venezuela, on May 13, 1958, protesters first spat on the vice president and Mrs. Nixon at the airport. Later that day, rioters assaulted Nixon's motorcade, injuring Venezuela's foreign minister and threatening Nixon and Pat with death. Nixon attracted international notice for his coolness in the face of anti-American demonstrations.

In July 1959, Eisenhower sent Nixon to the Soviet Union to represent the United States at the opening of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, the Soviet capital. While touring the exhibit with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, the pair stopped at a model of an American kitchen. There they engaged in an impromptu discussion about the American standard of living that quickly escalated into an exchange over the two countries' ideological and military strength. Nixon's performance in the "kitchen debate" further raised his stature back in the United States.

In 1960, facing little competition, Nixon won the Republican nomination for president and chose former Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., then U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, to be his running mate. The election of 1960 was a hard-fought contest between Nixon and the Democratic nominee, Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy, who had also been elected to Congress in 1946. Many observers then and later concluded that the turning point came during the first-ever televised debates. Nixon, wearing little make-up, looked wan and uncomfortable, while Kennedy appeared to be cool, composed, and confident. In November, Nixon lost to Kennedy by less than 120,000 votes, or 0.2 percent of the popular vote. Rumors of electoral improprieties by Senator Kennedy's supporters made the contest seem even closer.

### ***Wilderness Years***

Following the defeat, the Nixon family left Washington in January 1961 and returned to southern California, where Nixon practiced law and wrote a bestselling memoir, *Six Crises*. Throughout 1961, local and national Republican leaders encouraged Nixon to run for governor in 1962 against Democratic incumbent Edmund G. "Pat" Brown, Sr., arguing that staying on the sidelines would mean the end of Nixon's political life. Despite initial reluctance, Nixon entered the race. His campaign was hobbled by a combination of the public's suspicion that Nixon viewed the office as a stepping-stone, opposition from the far right of his own party, and his own lack of interest in being governor. He lost to Brown by nearly 300,000 votes. At the time, even Nixon viewed the defeat as the end of his career in politics, telling reporters on election night that "You won't have Nixon to kick around anymore because, gentlemen, this is my last press conference."

Following his defeat, the Nixon family moved to New York City, where Nixon resumed his practice as a lawyer. Later, after he had become president, Nixon called this period his "wilderness years," comparing his time out of office to similar interludes in the lives of leaders such as Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle. Although largely out of the public eye, Nixon remained active in politics, commenting on the policies of the Kennedy

and Johnson administrations and campaigning for Republican candidates. Nixon retained the support of many Republicans across the country who respected his knowledge of politics and international affairs, a reputation enhanced in 1967 by Nixon's article "Asia After Vietnam" in the eminent journal *Foreign Affairs*. Nixon's strenuous efforts on behalf of Republican congressional candidates around the country in 1966 further solidified his support among members of the party.

## ***President***

### **1968 Campaign**

In January 1968, Nixon decided to once again seek the nomination of the Republican Party for president. Portraying himself as a figure of stability in a time of national upheaval, Nixon promised a return to traditional values and "law and order." He fended off challenges from other candidates such as California Governor Ronald Reagan, New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, and Michigan Governor George Romney to secure the nomination at the Republican convention in Miami. Nixon unexpectedly chose Governor Spiro Agnew of Maryland as his running mate.

Nixon's campaign was helped by the tumult within the Democratic Party in 1968. Consumed by the war in Vietnam, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced on March 31 that he would not seek re-election. On June 5, immediately after winning the California primaries, former attorney general and then-U.S. Senator Robert F. Kennedy (brother of the late president John F. Kennedy) was assassinated in Los Angeles. The campaign of Vice President Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic nominee for president, went into a tailspin after the Democratic national convention in Chicago was marred by mass protests and violence. By contrast, Nixon appeared to represent a calmer society, and his campaign promised peace at home and abroad. Despite a late surge by Humphrey, Nixon won by nearly 500,000 popular votes. Third-party candidate George Wallace, the once and future governor of Alabama, won nearly ten million popular votes and 46 electoral votes, principally in the Deep South.

### **First Term**

Once in office, Nixon and his staff faced the problem of how to end the Vietnam War, which had broken his predecessor's administration and threatened to cause major unrest at home. As protesters in America's cities called for an immediate withdrawal from Southeast Asia, Nixon made a nationally televised address on November 3, 1969, calling on the "silent majority" of Americans to renew their confidence in the American government and back his policy of seeking a negotiated peace in Vietnam. Earlier that year, Nixon and his Defense Secretary Melvin Laird had unveiled the policy of "Vietnamization," which entailed reducing American troop levels in Vietnam and transferring the burden of fighting to South Vietnam; accordingly, U.S. troop strength in Vietnam fell from 543,000 in April 1969 to zero on March 29, 1973. Nevertheless, the Nixon administration was harshly criticized for its use of American military force in Cambodia and its stepped-up bombing raids during the later years of the first term.

Nixon's foreign policy aimed to reduce international tensions by forging new links with old rivals. In February 1972, Nixon traveled to Beijing, Hangzhou, and Shanghai in

China for talks with Chinese leaders Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai. Nixon's trip was the first high-level contact between the United States and the People's Republic of China in more than twenty years, and it ushered in a new era of relations between Washington and Beijing. Several weeks later, in May 1972, Nixon visited Moscow for a summit meeting with Leonid Brezhnev, general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and other Soviet leaders. Their talks led to the signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, the first comprehensive and detailed nuclear weapons limitation pact between the two superpowers.

Foreign policy initiatives represented only one aspect of Nixon's presidency during his first term. In August 1969, Nixon proposed the Family Assistance Plan, a welfare reform that would have guaranteed an income to all Americans. The plan, however, did not receive congressional approval. In August 1971, spurred by high inflation rates, Nixon imposed wage and price controls in an effort to gain control of price levels in the U.S. economy; at the same time, prompted by worries over the soundness of U.S. currency, Nixon took the dollar off the gold standard and let it float against other countries' currencies.

On July 19, 1969, astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first humans to walk on the Earth's moon, while fellow astronaut Michael Collins orbited in the Apollo 11 command module. Nixon made what has been termed the longest-distance telephone call ever made to speak with the astronauts from the Oval Office. And on September 28, 1971, Nixon signed legislation abolishing the military draft.

In addition to such weighty affairs of state, Nixon's first term was also full of lighter-hearted moments. On April 29, 1969, Nixon awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, to Duke Ellington—and then led hundreds of guests in singing “Happy Birthday” to the famed band leader. On June 12, 1971, Tricia became the sixteenth White House bride when she and Edward Finch Cox of New York married in the Rose Garden. (Julie had wed Dwight David Eisenhower II, grandson of President Eisenhower, on December 22, 1968, in New York's Marble Collegiate Church, while her father was President-elect.) Perhaps most famous was Nixon's meeting with Elvis Presley on December 21, 1970, when the president and the king discussed the drug problem facing American youth.

### **Re-election, Second Term, and Watergate**

In his 1972 bid for re-election, Nixon defeated South Dakota Senator George McGovern, the Democratic candidate for president, by one of the widest electoral margins ever, winning 520 electoral college votes to McGovern's 17 and nearly 61 percent of the popular vote. Just a few months later, investigations and public controversy over the Watergate scandal had sapped Nixon's popularity. The Watergate scandal began with the June 1972 discovery of a break-in at the Democratic National Committee offices in the Watergate office complex in Washington, D.C., but media and official investigations soon revealed a broader pattern of abuse of power by the Nixon administration, leading to his resignation.

The Watergate burglars were soon linked to officials of the Committee to Re-elect the President, the group that had run Nixon's 1972 re-election campaign. Soon thereafter, several administration officials resigned; some, including former attorney general John Mitchell, were later convicted of offenses connected with the break-in and other crimes and went to jail. Nixon denied any personal involvement with the Watergate burglary, but the courts forced him to yield tape recordings of conversations between the president and his advisers indicating that the president had, in fact, participated in the cover-up, including an attempt to use the Central Intelligence Agency to divert the FBI's investigation into the break-in.

Investigations into Watergate also revealed other abuses of power, including numerous warrantless wiretaps on reporters and others, campaign "dirty tricks," and the creation of a "Plumbers" unit within the White House. The Plumbers, formed in response to the leaking of the Pentagon Papers to news organizations by former Pentagon official Daniel Ellsberg, broke into the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

Adding to Nixon's worries was an investigation into Vice President Agnew's ties to several campaign contributors. The Department of Justice found that Agnew had taken bribes from Maryland construction firms, leading to Agnew's resignation in October 1973 and his entering a plea of no contest to income tax evasion. Nixon nominated Gerald Ford, Republican leader in the House of Representatives, to succeed Agnew. Ford was confirmed by both houses of Congress and took office on December 6, 1973.

Such controversies all but overshadowed Nixon's other initiatives in his second term, such as the signing of the Paris peace accords ending American involvement in the Vietnam war in January 1973; two summit meetings with Brezhnev, in June 1973 in Washington and in June and July 1974 in Moscow; and the administration's efforts to secure a general peace in the Middle East following the Yom Kippur War of 1973.

The revelations from the Watergate tapes, combined with actions such as Nixon's firing of Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox, badly eroded the president's standing with the public and Congress. Facing certain impeachment and removal from office, Nixon announced his decision to resign in a national televised address on the evening of August 8, 1974. He resigned effective at noon the next day, August 9, 1974. Vice President Ford then became president of the United States. On September 8, 1974, Ford pardoned Nixon for "all offenses against the United States" which Nixon "has committed or may have committed or taken part in" during his presidency. In response, Nixon issued a statement in which he said that he regretted "not acting more decisively and forthrightly in dealing with Watergate."

### ***After Public Office***

Following his resignation, Nixon and his wife returned to their home in San Clemente, California, where they lived until moving to New York City in 1980. In 1981, they moved to northern Bergen County, New Jersey.

In retirement, Nixon traveled throughout the United States and dozens of countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Mideast. In 1981, Nixon joined former presidents Ford and Jimmy Carter as an official representative of the United States to the state funeral of Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat. On other trips, although formally a private citizen, Nixon's reputation as an elder statesman won him audiences with world leaders, including Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, and Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. In 1986, on one such private visit to Moscow, Nixon met with Communist Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, the leader of the Soviet Union. On his return, Nixon sent President Ronald Reagan a lengthy memorandum that contained Nixon's impressions of Gorbachev and suggestions for future diplomatic interactions with the Soviets.

In addition to his travels, Nixon kept up a full schedule of speaking and writing, completing ten books during his post-presidential lifetime. He also helped plan and build his presidential library and birthplace memorial in Yorba Linda.

Pat Nixon died of lung cancer in the early morning of June 22, 1993, in Park Ridge, New Jersey, with her husband and two daughters at her side. Funeral services were held at the Nixon Library and Birthplace in Yorba Linda, California. Many notables, including California Governor Pete Wilson, Senator Robert Dole, and Rev. Billy Graham, spoke at her funeral.

Nixon died on April 22, 1994, in New York City and was buried in Yorba Linda, California on April 27, 1994. The eulogists at his state funeral were President William J. Clinton, Senator Dole, Governor Wilson, and Nixon's national security adviser and second secretary of state, Dr. Henry Kissinger.

## *The Nixon Family*

### **Richard Milhous Nixon**

- Birth Date:** January 9, 1913, in Yorba Linda California
- Death Date:** April 22, 1994, in New York City
- Father:** Francis Anthony Nixon (1878-1956)  
Born: Dec. 3, 1878, Elk, Ohio  
Married: Hannah Milhous - June 25, 1908, Whittier, California  
Died: Sept. 4, 1956, La Habra, California  
Religion - Quaker
- Mother:** Hannah Milhous Nixon (1885-1967)  
Born: March 7, 1885, near Butlerville, Indiana  
Married: Frank Nixon on June 25, 1908, Whittier, California  
Died: September 30, 1967, Whittier, California  
Father: Franklin Milhous, 1848-1919  
Mother: Almira Park Burdg Milhous, 1849-1943  
Grandfather: Joshua Vickers Milhous, 1820-1883  
Grandmother: Elizabeth Price Griffith, 1827-1923  
Religion: Quaker
- Paternal Grandparents:** Samuel Brady Nixon (1847-1914) and Sarah Ann Wadsworth (1852-1886)
- Maternal Grandparents:** Franklin Milhous (1848-1919) Almira Park Burdg (1849-1943)
- Brothers:**
- Harold Samuel Nixon - Born June 1, 1909 and died March 7, 1933 at age 23 from Tuberculosis
- Francis Donald Nixon - Born November 23, 1914 and died June 27, 1987 at age 73 from cancer; m. Clara Jane Lemke, August 9, 1942
- Arthur Burdg Nixon - Born May 26, 1918 and died August 10, 1925 at the age of 7 of tubercular encephalitis.
- Edward Calvert Nixon - Born May 3, 1930; m. Gay Lynne Woods, June 1, 1957

## **Thelma Catherine (Patricia) Ryan**

**Birth Date:** March 16, 1912, in Ely, Nevada  
**Death Date:** June 22, 1993, in New Jersey  
**Father:** William Ryan, Sr. (1866-1930)  
**Mother:** Kate Halberstadt (1879-1926)  
**Siblings:** Children of William Ryan, Sr. and Kate Halberstadt:  
William Ryan, Jr., 1910-1997  
Thomas Ryan, 1911-1992  
Thelma Catherine "Pat" Ryan, 1912-1993  
  
Children of Kate Halberstadt by her first marriage:  
Mathew Bender, 1907-  
Neva Bender (Renter), 1909-

## **The Nixons**

**Wedding:** Thelma Catherine (Pat) Ryan and Richard Milhous Nixon married on June 21, 1940, in the Presidential Suite of the Mission Inn in Riverside, California, and honeymooned in Mexico.

**Daughters:** Patricia (known as Tricia) born on February 21, 1946 in Whittier, California. On June 12, 1971, Tricia became the sixteenth White House bride when she and Edward Finch Cox of New York married in the Rose Garden. They have one son: Christopher Nixon Cox (1979-).

Julie born on July 5, 1948 in Washington, D.C. Julie wed Dwight David Eisenhower II, grandson of President Eisenhower, on December 22, 1968, in New York's Marble Collegiate Church, while her father was President-elect. They have three children: Jennie Elizabeth Eisenhower (1978-); Alex Richard Eisenhower (1980-); and Melanie Catherine Eisenhower (1984-).

**Pets:** Checkers - Cocker Spaniel - Given to Nixon Family in 1952, died circa 1964

### *White House Pets*

King Timahoe - Irish Setter - given to President Nixon by staff in January, 1969 - died circa 1979

Vicky - Poodle - Julie Nixon Eisenhower's pet - died circa 1976

Pasha - Terrier - Trisha Nixon Cox's pet

Brownie - found by President Nixon in New Jersey in 1985