Richard M. Nixon Essay, Research Paper

Early Life

Richard Milhous Nixon grew up in Yorba, California the son of Quakers Frank and Hannah Nixon. During Nixon?s childhood in Yorba, the family was always on the edge of poverty. The lemon grove was unfruitful, and there was little money for anything beyond food and clothing for the growing family. The Nixons never ate in a restaurant or took even a brief vacation.

Nixon?s early life was one of boyish stubbornness. He swam in the dangerous Anaheim Canal in spite of repeated warnings from his father, and he insisted upon standing up to ride in the family wagon, although once a fall gave him a serious head injury. He displayed a competitive streak at an early age and would never turn down a challenge or a dare. He also loved to be read to, and after age five he could read on his own. National Geographic was his favorite magazine.

Education

Nixon graduated form high school in 1930. He possessed extraordinary intelligence and ambition, but his ambitious nature received a serious setback that year. He graduated first in his class and won his high school?s Harvard Club award as ?best all-around student.? The award was a scholarship to Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In addition, he seemed likely to win a scholarship to Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. Nixon had dreamed for years of going to a famous college in the East, but his dreams were shattered when he had to turn down both opportunities. Because his older brother Harold?s long battle with tuberculous had drained the family?s funds there was no money to pay for the cost of traveling to the East Coast and living there. Nixon swallowed his disappointment and enrolled at nearby Whittier College.

Nixon majored in history, and one of his history professors had a profound influence on his career. This was Dr. Paul Smith, whom Nixon called ?the greatest intellectual inspiration of my early years.? Smith was a Republican who urged his students to think about the importance of leadership in government. He encouraged them to consider entering public office, and he certainly helped turn Nixon?s thoughts in that direction.

In 1934 Nixon graduated from Whittier College after four years on the honor roll. He applied for a scholarship to a new law school, at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, and asked several of his professors to write to Duke, recommending him for a scholarship. Thanks to one convincing letter from the president of Whittier College saying that Richard Nixon would become a great American leader someday, Nixon was given a scholarship to Duke Law School.

After his third year at Duke, Nixon graduated from Duke Law School in 1937. Nixon was ranked third in his class of 25 students. Immediately after graduating, he passed the California Bar Exam which every lawyer wishing to practice law in California must pass.

Positions held before the Presidency

After passing the bar exam, he practiced law in Whittier, California, and briefly served with the Office of Price Administration before enlisting in the U.S. Navy during World War II.

In 1947, Nixon won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in a campaign noted for his accusation that his Democratic opponent was supported by Communists. As a member of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, he gained fame for his part in the Alger Hiss spy case. He went on to the U.S. Senate in 1951, again after suggesting that his Democratic opponent was tainted by Communist associations.

Nixon became Eisenhower’s vice-president in 1952 and was unusually visible and active in that role. In 1958, he faced down hostile demonstrations in Peru and Venezuela, and in 1959 he had his famous “kitchen debate” with Khrushchev at an American exhibit in Moscow. After narrowly losing the presidency to Kennedy in 1960, Nixon lost a bid for governor of California in 1962, a loss which appeared to be the end of his political career.

Accomplishments of his Presidency

Some of Nixon?s most acclaimed achievements came in his quest for world stability. During visits in 1972 to Beijing and Moscow, he reduced tensions with China and the U.S.S.R. His summit meetings with Russian leader Leonid I. Brezhnev produced a treaty to limit strategic nuclear weapons. In January 1973, he announced an accord with North Viet Nam to end American involvement in Indochina. In 1974, his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, negotiated disengagement agreements between Israel and its opponents, Egypt and Syria.

In his 1972 bid for office, Nixon defeated Democratic candidate George McGovern by one of the widest margins on record.

Within a few months, his administration was embattled over the so-called “Watergate” scandal, stemming from a break-in at the offices of the Democratic National Committee during the 1972 campaign. The break-in was traced to officials of the Committee to Re-elect the President. A number of administration officials resigned; some were later convicted of offenses connected with efforts to cover up the affair. Nixon denied any personal involvement, but the courts forced him to yield tape recordings which indicated that he had, in fact, tried to divert the investigation.

As a result of unrelated scandals in Maryland, Vice President Spiro T. Agnew resigned in 1973. Nixon nominated, and Congress approved, House Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford as Vice President.

Faced with what seemed almost certain impeachment, Nixon announced on August 8, 1974, that he would resign the next day to begin “that process of healing which is so desperately needed in America.”

Nixon retired from public life for some years and concentrated on writing a series of books on political affairs. Nixon eventually began to make public appearances at home and abroad, in person and in the media, and near the end of his life he attained something of the status of an “elder statesman.” He died in 1994 at the age of 81.

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