

Will you
come

up to

Limerick?

The
Crucible
of Nixon
1970



JFK

Reagan

Clinton

Obama



1963

1984

1996

2012

1970

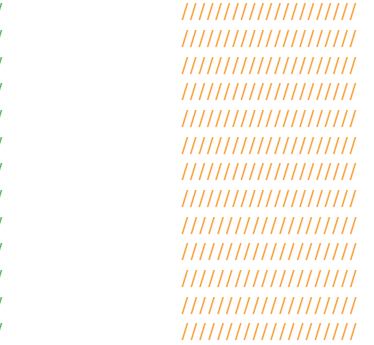
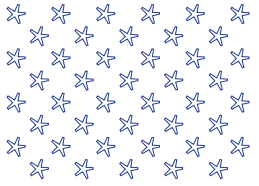
Limerick City has hosted five US presidents.
Kennedy in 1963, Nixon in 1970, Reagan in
1984, Clinton in 1996, and Obama in 2012.

[President Nixon in Shannon Airport, 1970 \(Display photograph installed in Shannon Airport in 2016\).](#)

The most overlooked, and contentious, of these visits remains the 1970 visit of the 37th US President, Richard Nixon.

Historically, in terms

of reception and significance, it is the antithesis
of what was accorded to the 1963 visit of
Kennedy in regards to how the legacy of the
occasion remains. A radio documentary on this
visit broadcast on October 2nd 2010 is titled
[The Forgotten Visit](#) (RTÉ, 2010).



The myth by which an American president seeks their roots and to bond with an ancient culture
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unfettered by the complexities of international politics is engrained with the modern Irish State.
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This simplistic narrative remains bound up with the economics of tourism and
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foreign investment. It is a narrative of control, one in which subservience to
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that agenda is expected and any deviation from the script is seen as un-Irish.



it is necessary to shoot the arrow at the target:

As President Nixon's motorcade made its way through Limerick City, 4000 of its citizens lined the route to see him. They included a group of leftist protestors whose placards attempted to draw attention to American foreign policy. The *Limerick Leader* reports that a young man lunged at the presidential motorcade on Sarsfield Bridge and another was spotted on William Street waving a suspicious object before running from the Gardaí. Near Arthurs Quay, another group unfurled the Starry Plough, the flag of Irish socialism. Again the Gardaí gave chase. As the protest gained momentum Alderman Stevie Coughlan weighed in. Coughlan was a well-known anti-Communist and was reported as tearing up a protestor's placards as well as struggling with a Councillor Quinn who declared that it was a democratic country and he was entitled to speak. Pat O'Mahoney, who was part of the protest, describes a youth hurling a copy of the Maoist *Red Book* at the open-topped motorcade and actually hitting President Nixon with it as he travelled over Sarsfield Bridge. Another version recounted by a member of the crowd that day has a youth breaking towards the motorcade before being rendered unconscious by a Garda 'who used a knuckle to the lad's head' (O'Connor and O'Shaughnessy, 2014).



What is not prominently featured in the legacy of this visit is the incident of protest by Limerick Youth.

This incident hosted by Limerick (and mirrored in Dublin) remains overshadowed in the collective narrative of a constructed tradition.



Councillor James D. Liddy: ~~On behalf of the citizens of Limerick, as well as on my own behalf, I want to extend to His Excellency, President Richard Nixon, a very warm and a very cordial welcome to the city of Limerick. I think he has, by dropping off here to say hello to us, paid a very great honour indeed and we are certainly very indebted to him and we hope he will have a very happy stay in this country. Thank you.~~

Nixon: ~~Mr Mayor, I want to say that it is a very great privilege for me to visit, on my trip to Ireland, and come first to Limerick. This is the first city in Ireland I am visiting. Having heard of Limerick all my life, and recalling in the 18th century when the famous Irish Brigade was fighting all over the world, the song was, Will You Come Up To Limerick? and here I am. I am glad to be here, and I am glad I came. Thank you very much.~~

Alexander C. Cook: **The Red Book was a potent anti-imperialist symbol for many European 1968 youth. In the introduction to Mao's Little Red Book, (2014) Alexander C. Cook described it as a 'spiritual atom bomb'. Almost a billion copies were produced in official and unofficial print runs between 1961 and 1971. For nervous western establishments the presence of a revolutionary tract in such numbers worldwide literally evoked a 'red tide.'** The book was originally produced for the Red Army and came in a distinctive red waterproof cover symbolically hinting at a functionality associated with combat. If such a physical incident of protest by a 'red' Limerick Youth had literally connected with a head of a Western State and the volatile metaphor had made the international news, it would have been highly symbolic worldwide in the context of Nixon and the Vietnam peace accord.