

...And in Opposition

An American Tragedy

At his swearing-in ceremony, President Ford declared that, "Our long national nightmare is over." But the Watergate matter was not a mere nightmare, which is imaginary and evanescent, even if terrifying. Watergate, a set of decisions, orders and actions, in fact happened. Hardly the stuff of phantasized bogeymen, it was as real and tangible as a red wig, burglars' tools and gaps on magnetic tape.

What we have in the progress of Richard Nixon's presidency, resignation and exile, is tragedy, not nightmare. The drama has lacked the classic lines of Greek or Shakespearean tragedy and is, instead, a peculiarly American tragedy, as sorry and unexemplary as "Death of a Salesman." Following his initial failure of perception and error of metaphor, President Ford has now mistakenly attempted to deprive the American people, and indeed Mr. Nixon himself, of this tragedy's necessary recognition scene.

With the legal process of investigation, indictment and trial foreclosed by President Ford's peremptory pardon, the crimes — if any — of Richard Nixon can only be supposed, implied and imputed, but never will be proven, confessed or rebutted. We have no formal charges, no plea, no evidence established on record, no verdict. Vague reference to "mistakes," "errors in judgment" and offenses which "may have been committed" does not illumine or resolve this political and all-too-human tragedy. We shall not experience the purge and catharsis we so clearly need.

As a Christian statesman who publically acknowledges his search for divine guidance, President Ford should remember that it is the truth, and nothing else, which makes us free.

Robert and Susan Ervin.

McLean.

Rewriting the Pledge

With one sweeping gesture, President Ford rewrote the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

"I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for some."

Gloria Nagan.

Potomac, Md.

Another Deal

Does not one in the White House think it improper for a vice-presidential appointee to grant unconditional pardon, before trials, to the man who appointed him? I should have thought, just to avoid the appearance of collusion, Gerald Ford would have had the political sagacity to declare himself a neutral party in Richard Nixon's plea bargaining. Instead, we have another deal—this time, in the name of national unity (Republican "national security" smells just as bad by any name).

Did God speak to Ford before or after morning prayers? Or was it just after the press went to print? Certainly, it was providential that this mercy droppeth from heaven before the November elections. Maybe, by then, it will all have been swept under the peace and harmony rug and our great nation will not be torn asunder by the need to split its vote.

I am so tired of being manipulated by the Oval Office. This latest "respite" has been so brief and so cynically staged I don't really care much any more. I resign.

Elizabeth Callahan.

Vienna.



An August 14 photo of Mr. Nixon on the beach near Ventura, Calif., where he posed at the request of an amateur photographer.

"The Pardon Is Premature"

President Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon is premature. It reminds me of the corny story about the awkward spectator who stumbled upon the governor's platform and instinctively muttered "pardon me." "Sure," replied the governor, "what was your crime?"

So far, Nixon has not been brought to trial; he has not been judged guilty or not guilty. Isn't Nixon entitled to due process? President Ford's pardon in advance implies guilt, at least, to my mind. And what are we to say of President Ford's statement that he believes Nixon could not receive a fair trial? Is that the sort of confidence our chief executive has in our judicial system?

Whether or not Nixon and his family have suffered enough is irrelevant. What has become of that image, so zealously fostered by the man himself that he, Nixon, was a strong man. This image of our Presidents as "fighters" is credible unless we assume that the fierce battles in the political arena are mere sparring exhibitions. In any case, President Ford, whether intended or not, has presented us with an image of Nixon as a "softy."

I believe that the American public has been denied its right to know when, how, and if its former chief executive has violated our laws, and this shows contempt for the electorate, which is certainly old enough to be trusted with the facts of life Mr. Nixon should have been brought to trial. Then, if found guilty, President Ford would be justified in exercising his prerogative of granting or withholding pardon. This premature act serves neither justice nor Nixon and, certainly not, the American public.

Philip Sharnoff.

Washington.

A Teacher's Plight

Having spent 45 years of my life as an educator in the field of the social studies, I am distressed and sickened by the unconditional pardon given to Richard M. Nixon. Omitting my deep personal revulsion for the act, I am more concerned for the teachers, both social studies and otherwise, who put forth such effort to instill in their students that the law of our country are equally for all. If President Ford thinks the young will accept his excuse that Mr. Nixon has "suffered enough," he lacks understanding of the students' ability to cut through sham. I wonder how he in a classroom would meet the justifiable cynicism of these young people?

Nelda Davis.

West Hyattsville.

'A Sacred Mystique'

In his rationale for pardoning Mr. Nixon, President Ford has added another aspect to the sacred mystique that surrounds the presidency. This is the notion that the office of the presidency bestows upon the occupant a capacity for suffering greater than that of any ordinary individual or collective group of citizens, and that this greater suffering wipes out the necessity for a President accused of wrongdoing to be subject to the processes of law.

Never mind that, in Mr. Nixon's case, the President's involvement in criminal acts were compounded by an intense campaign involving lies, character assassination and the sacrificing of others. Never mind that John Dean, hardly a moral giant, but who told the truth, and was slandered by the White House because he did. Never mind that that truth will never be vindicated through a court decision. Never mind the suffering of others whose careers were shattered, whose reputations were ruined and whose spirits were broken in the service of Mr. Nixon. Never mind those who are now in prison or are awaiting trial while their boss is excused from prosecution because of his "higher" quality of suffering.

And lastly, never mind the country—the ultimate victim of the broken link between truth and justice; of the biased, uneven, partisan application of justice; and of the new precedent for presidential unaccountability to law and immunity from the legal process.

Carol Pardon.

Arlington.

Inequality

President Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon before the legal processes needed to find him guilty have even begun is a clear obstruction of justice as well as an absurdity.

Furthermore, as a criminologist, I venture to say that this action today will do more to perpetuate our excessive crime rate than would a pardon for every prisoner in the penitentiaries at Atlanta and Leavenworth. They have been found guilty, but in the finding many of them have not had justice. They are technically eligible for a pardon, and in many cases, deserve it.

Here again we find the inequality that characterizes our whole system of criminal justice. The poor, the black and other citizens of the second class see this inequality as well as do the rich and powerful who benefit from it. They question why they, alone, should observe law and order. I wonder, too, although I am white and middle class.

Now we know. When we see "The All American Boy" beaming at us from the television, he is not smiling. He is laughing at us for being taken in by a Nixon in Ford's clothing.

F. Lovell Bixby.

Arlington.

Act of Patriotism

Elliott Richardson, William Ruckelshaus and Jerald terHorst are three people who held positions of service to their country who resigned because they could not in good conscience carry out the policies of the President. Did the American people call these men shirkers or cowards? No, they recognized that these resignations were in themselves acts of service to the country—acts of patriotism.

Hundreds of thousands of soldiers and draft-eligible young men did not have the option of legally resigning. So they refused to carry out orders of the President and lower officials which they could not follow in good conscience in whatever ways they could. But unlike the cases above, many Americans do call these men shirkers and cowards. Many Americans do not consider their acts to be acts of patriotism.

I have a question for those who favor some sort of punishment and/or a requirement of an act of contrition for draft resisters and military deserters. Do you think Richardson, Ruckelshaus and terHorst should be punished or required to say they're sorry?

I join with Jerald terHorst in urging that both our justice and our mercy be evenhanded.

Bill Samuel.

Washington.