

Well, Back to the Old Drawing Board



Arthur Hoppe

ALL OF US ace newsmen are busy these days composing our penetrating analyses of what kind of a President Mr. Ford will turn out to be.

I was hard at work at this sacred task when an old friend with, unfortunately, a long memory dropped in.

"Instead," he suggested helpfully, "why don't you just re-run that column you wrote when Nixon was first inaugurated back in 1969?"

I'd be more or less glad to. The text follows.

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Washington, Jan. 20, 1969

PRESIDENT NIXON stood there under the creamy portico on the Capitol steps, his white breath whipped away by the chill, grey wind.

He spoke with obvious sincerity about peace and brotherhood and individual dignity and of how we are all adrift on a small blue planet lost in the darkneses of space.

I was moved. Inaugural addresses move me more than most. Perhaps this one was filled with more than its share of platitudes, but they were lovely platitudes and ones in which I deeply believe.

And I thought as I stood there that Mr. Nixon had changed. In the few short months since his victory, he seemed to have grown in depth and purpose.

And when the newsman next to me turned afterward with a smile to say, "Maybe there's hope," I replied, "I think there is." And I felt it.

After following Mr. Nixon on his campaigns for years, I have always felt his

basic problem was insecurity.

He was always, to me, the small-town boy in the suit that didn't quite fit, struggling for approval in a world he never made.

In private, he was charming, bright and at ease. In public, beneath the politician's confident facade, he always seemed uneasy — his gestures oddly awkward, his eyes darting this way and that, his speeches larded with mawkish sentiment and trite pedantry that did his obvious intelligence discredit.

He seemed, in a word, insecure.

And as I walked down Pennsylvania avenue past the solid granite buildings of our enduring government, I thought that maybe winning the supreme prize of the presidency had given him the security he so badly needed.

Maybe now that he had won all there was to win, he would no longer be so totally concerned with winning. Maybe at last there was truly a New Nixon.

So I stood at the curb with the other thousands in the canyon of bunting-bedecked buildings, waiting for the parade to come by.

There was more hope in me than there had been in a long time as . . .

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WELL, in the interests of tempering justice with mercy, that's enough of that.

Those who would now like my ace newsman's penetrating analysis of what kind of President Mr. Ford will turn out to be are kindly requested to enclose ten cents in a stamped, self-addressed envelope and mail it to themselves.