



# Ford's Struggle With Suspicion

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**Joseph Kraft**

**P**RESIDENT FORD has rightly made the building of confidence a prime objective of his administration. Still a wide range of events, heading up in an outburst by press secretary Ron Nessen last week, shows that mistrust does not abate easily.

The mom's-apple-pie personal morality evinced by the President is not sufficient therapy. To dispel automatic disbelief, Mr. Ford will have to manage the whole bureaucratic system far more effectively than he has done so far.

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**A** GOOD starting point is Nessen's explosion. After a fortnight of particularly heavy going with the regulars of the White House press corps, he raised a question of honesty and integrity directly.

"This President has been in office for ten months now," Nessen said at his Thursday briefing. "I think that is more than enough time for this blind, mindless, irrational suspicion and cynicism and distrust to evaporate. This President is an honest man . . . A man of integrity."

Undoubtedly Nessen has a strong point. The President has been accessible to a high degree and unusually candid. He has maintained a dialogue with the Congress and shown special respect for the universities so scorned by his predecessors. Nessen himself, I think, has tried to be helpful and straightforward.

Millions and millions of mature Americans feel that they have been systematically fooled over a long period of time. Not only by Richard Nixon and the pack of liars he brought into office, but by other Presidents.

The fact is that almost all of us come away from our daily encounters with large institutions — whether the telephone company or the airlines or government — pounding our ears and rolling our eyes. Such encounters are the stuff of life for reporters in Washington.

But Mr. Ford is not full of guile and deception. On the contrary I think he has made genuine progress in making government more honest and the White House more open.

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**B**UT THE national mistrust is deeply rooted. Vivid daily experience has taught almost all of us not to take appearances at face value. A residue of suspicion is inevitable.

So it is naive for anyone to believe a rebirth of faith can be engendered by the example of a President who acts like an Eagle Scout. The true requirement is something Mr. Ford has not begun to do. It is to make sure the whole government apparatus performs in ways that do not excite our basest suspicion every day.

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