

The Ford Image



Robert J. Donovan

AFTER THE MESS Lyndon B. Johnson got into over Vietnam and the disgrace Richard M. Nixon brought on himself in Watergate, Gerald R. Ford for a long time had clear sailing in the White House with his wholesome and innocent image.

In the shadow of lies, crimes, deceit and arrogant misuse of power, Jerry Ford was what the doctor ordered. He was open, friendly, straightforward, athletic, dignified and low-keyed. He had a mixture of qualities that helped heal the lacerations of Watergate.

The image of such innocence and light in high office could not last, however, and has not.

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AS THE ABRASIONS of the presidential campaign grind upon the actors, President Ford's image is being scuffed increasingly. This does not mean that he may not be reelected, but it does mean he will have to go before the voters on different terms from those on which he burst, unelected, upon the White House scene 14 months ago.

In retrospect Mr. Ford dealt the first and perhaps worst blow to his own image by springing the pardon of Nixon on the American people on a Sunday morning without warning or advance explanation. Indeed he had previously indicated he would take the opposite course. That almost surreptitious act of favor to the man who had put him in line of succession to the

presidency raised for many people doubts about Mr. Ford that have never entirely disappeared.

In any case it was not quite in keeping with the veneer of innocence Mr. Ford had first displayed in the White House, and this veneer is now being scratched in other places as well.

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A RECENT ARTICLE in the October 16 issue of the New York Review of Books, accuses Mr. Ford of having lied at his confirmation hearings.

The issue was Mr. Ford's efforts in the House to have Associate Justice William O. Douglas of the Supreme Court impeached. The purport of the article, written by Garry Wills, is that Mr. Ford's move against the liberal Douglas was a case of Mr. Ford doing Nixon's "dirty work" in retribution for the Senate's rejection of the conservative Clement Haynesworth, Nixon's nominee for a seat on the Supreme Court.

Mr. Ford testified rather that his action was taken because Douglas was president of the Parvin Foundation, which had an interest in a mortgage on a hotel and gambling casino in Las Vegas. Mr. Ford acknowledged that Nixon's attorney general, John N. Mitchell, had provided him with FBI files on Douglas. Even so, nothing ever came of the impeachment effort.

Arthur Hoppe is on vacation