

# What Nixon Didn't Say at the End

Lewis htk 404 A —

By Anthony Lewis  
New York News Inc.

Boston

① What was so sad about the final moments of Richard Nixon's public life was that he denied his country the empathy and the release it desired. For he made clear that he had not changed. He was still trying to escape reality.

The only reason he gave for his resignation from the presidency was that he had lost his "political base." The unwary might have thought that, as in a parliamentary system, the legislature had forced him out because of policy or partisan differences. That implication was surely intended.

He could not bring himself to mention that a vast majority of Congress and the country had decided he was guilty of high crimes and misdemeanors. Instead, he tried to devalue the great constitutional process through which the country has just so nobly passed.

A few days before, the Times of London had suggested that he would regain some "moral stature" in resigning by accepting responsibility for his wrongs and thus preventing any later claim of unfairness. He so pointedly failed to do this that Senator Edward Brooke, having heard the speech, disavowed his own proposal that Mr. Nixon be given immunity for criminal prosecution.

"I have always tried to do what was best for the nation," Mr. Nixon said, ex-

pressing his regret that he would not be in the Oval Office "working on your behalf." That from the man whose own taped transcripts show an overwhelming interest in power and no visible concern for the public good.

② He spoke of "justice." That from a man whose words have virtually confessed his breach of law. He spoke of his "sense of kinship with each and every American." That from a man who called his Secretary of the Treasury a "candy ass" because he would not join in using the tax system to punish citizens' labeled political enemies.

In his last remarks to the White House staff, he said again and again that no man or woman in his administration had profited from the public till. That from the man who the Internal Revenue Service found had used \$67,388 in government money for his private houses and in four years underpaid his taxes by \$419,229.

Pity for Richard Nixon: Yes. And charity. But it would be quite another thing to forget the cruelty he inflicted on so many individuals and the damage he did his country. He has not sought

expiation, and he is not a tragic hero. He left national political life doing violence to truth.

③ But change is at hand now. The process of impeachment achieved a political catharsis as genuine as any that a nation is likely to have. And in the person of Gerald Ford, the United States just may have proved itself once again to have the greatest of national assets: good luck.

When President Ford took the oath of office and said his few words of reassuring modesty, it was as if a cloud had lifted. Words once more had a simple, direct meaning. Mr. Ford rightly asked for kindness toward Mr. Nixon and his family. But his thoughts and his prayers could not more boldly have drawn the necessary line between past and future.

"Purge our hearts of suspicion and of hate," he said. "The Constitution works." "We are a government of laws, not men." And, not least: "Truth is the glue that holds governments together."

④ There is reason to hope that, in more than the personal sense, a new age has begun.

Analysis  
and  
Opinion

From same column, NYT 10 Aug 74, filed Nixon:

① - Boston, Aug. 9 -- In watching tragedy, the audience finds release - catharsis - for its own fear and pain. So the Greek dramatists taught us. But to meet their definition of tragedy, the hero had to change during the drama. Like Oedipus, he came to understand the destiny imbedded in his character. He accepted reality, and so he expiated the wrongs of the past.

What was so sad ....

② - That from a man who has virtually confessed himself a common criminal. He spoke of ....

③ - He left national political life as he entered it: debasing the language and doing violence to truth.

④ - There is reason to hope that, in more than the personal sense, the age of Nixon has ended.