

That Post-Resignation Sigh of Relief

By Eleanor Brown

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Enormous relief — mixed with compassion and optimism — is likely to characterize the immediate mood of Americans following former President Nixon's resignation, various behavioral scientists agree.

But the psychiatrists and one sociologist interviewed also see some long-range effects of the Watergate scandal and resignation, sometimes differing widely:

- The resignation and its effects are yet another signal that the country's historic period of adolescence is ending.
- Americans will consider the scandal a "unique occasion," failing to consider whether it reflects a flaw in the national character.
- The country will absorb the shock with few reverberations because people have been adapting themselves to losing a president over a period of months.
- Last-minute events have been "rather salutary,"



Brad Johnson

New York Times sketch

'An ordinary mortal would have broken down'

in relieving what otherwise would have been "tremendous guilt feelings the people would have had."

All agreed that the hardest hit have been those supporting Nixon until the virtual end — the release of the June 23, 1972, tapes.

One analyst, who asked not to be identified, likened those feelings to those of a child whose parents have been very rigid and who, reaching adolescence, finds that his parents drink and carouse.

"It leads to a great deal of anger at the parents," he said.

"But at the same time, it's the end of the ability to divide people into 'good guys' and 'bad guys.'

"Essentially, it is the end of adolescence for the country. I think it will lead to a loss of innocence in the same way that Vietnam has done — it's a continuation of the same process."

Some Americans who believed most deeply in Nixon will be hit hard because it is difficult to accept they had "placed their faith in a person not worthy of it."

This assessment comes from Dr. Judd Marmor, president-elect of the American Psychiatric Association and professor of psychiatry at the University of Southern California.

Added Marmor: "It makes the person himself

feel he has been lacking in sufficient discernment."

Will there be much guilt or depression?

"There is some chagrin, I think," Marmor said, "People do feel embarrassment. But I think there won't be any major depressive reaction. That follows sudden loss."

On the whole, says Marmor, "the American people will absorb this without undue difficulty. The loss of Nixon is tempered by the rise in hopefulness in the thought and the hope that there is a new leader who can be trusted."

Commenting on President Ford's "aura of forthright-

ness and integrity," Marmor predicted a greater sense among Americans of relating to the President.

"People are able to relate to a person who is outgoing more easily than to someone who is not," he said.

Los Angeles psychoanalyst Leo Rangell is one who sees some "salutary" results for individual Americans in the recent political events.

As the scandal grew, people tried hard to rationalize and to justify Nixon's actions, Rangell said, but found this increasingly difficult as bits of evidence accumulated.

"Following (the release of the tapes), the need to justi-

ued, the pendulum would have swung toward greater feelings of identification with — and compassion and sorrow for — Nixon.

"As it was, his complete composure, characteristic of him all through the years, tends to make people feel his aloofness and isolation.

"His composure and apparent control go a long ways toward relieving the otherwise tremendous guilt feelings the people would have had (because) it's like killing a father, even a guilty one."

Sociologist Amitai Etzioni at Columbia University says he sees no sign that Americans will reflect upon Watergate as an outgrowth of the national character.

Etzioni thinks that the American ethic in part condones "getting away with it" and condemns "getting caught."

He agrees that this ethic is tempered somewhat by the simultaneous presence of "the British tradition: it is unimportant to win, but important to play fair."

But, says Etzioni, "if Nixon is not punished, that will only reinforce in the American mind that (anything) is all right so long as you don't get caught."

fy his actions could suddenly, with great relief, cease," he said.

Rangell, who is completing a book on integrity as it relates to Watergate and who is past president of the International Psychoanalytic Association, sees another mitigating event:

"Nixon didn't break down (in his resignation speech). He appeared to feel guiltless and to feel justified, still pointing to his accomplishments, hardly to anything of his own doing which caused this debacle.

"An ordinary mortal would have broken down."

But had the President done that, Rangell contin-