

Justice for Mr. Nixon

President Ford struck just the right balance yesterday in responding to questions about his views on future litigation affecting former President Nixon. Mr. Ford recognized Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski's obligations as a law-enforcement officer of the United States to explore all aspects of the Watergate cases, including Mr. Nixon's involvement. The President also noted his own pardoning power, but refused to make an untimely commitment as to how he would use that power.

Mr. Ford correctly assessed the mood of the nation, we think, when he spoke of the former President with compassion. There is neither desire—nor intention—on anyone's part to see Mr. Nixon persecuted. The President, however, wisely avoided echoing Senator Hugh Scott's simplistic notion that subjecting Mr. Nixon to the law governing other Watergate conspirators would be tantamount to drawing and quartering him after he had been hung.

The President made it clear that he does not intend to interfere with the proper functioning of the judicial process. Mr. Ford's personal involvement, if any, will come only after the facts have been established and a judgment made.

This is as judicious a stance as the President could have taken, given the current state of Mr. Jaworski's investigations and court cases. It leaves the prosecutors and the courts free to pursue their duties under the law and to stamp certainty into the historical record of this dismal episode. And it leaves to some more appropriate future day any Presidential decision on whatever mitigating considerations and feelings of compassion ought finally be brought to bear.