



President Ford's New Nightmare

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THE SAD THING about President Ford's mishandling of the Nixon pardon is that he has blown a big opportunity to end what he called the long, national nightmare. We are now in for a new orgy of moralistic recrimination and corrosive suspicion.

But the goal of exorcising the Watergate demon remains. Only now it will be a slower process, requiring much greater care and a thorough purge of all those associated with Watergate who remain in posts of high authority.

The long national nightmare finds its basic expression in the spirit of hostility to all authority which has dominated public discussion for nearly a decade. The active agents of this hostility are drawn from the cohort which emerged from the colleges and universities in the decade of the '60s.

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INTELLECTUALLY, the emphasis during that time was on idealism. The compromises made in the immediate post-war years were held up to the light and found to be full of blemish.

Suburban living was seen to have been achieved at the cost of subordinating racial justice. Economic growth was discovered to be the plundering of the planet. It came to be understood that national security had a dark side — represented by overwhelming military force and manipulation by secret intelligence services.

Normally, the ideals connected with these discoveries would have been tempered by life in the real world. But the '60s was a period of unprecedented boom. There was a dizzy demand for trained

professionals. So no one of even moderate brainpower had to worry about making a living.

Then there was Watergate. In a worse, and far more deliberate, way, the public trust was again violated by the highest officials. There was systematic misrepresentation. Those who tried to find a middle road were again routed. As the President's supporters in the Congress discovered during the impeachment hearings there was no room for moderation. There was no "other side."

The national temper which has emerged from this experience is understandably short on sweetness and light and tolerance and easygoing good nature. It is understandably high in indignation, outrage and suspicion. Among many educated persons under 40, at least, there is an automatic disposition to doubt anybody in authority.

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PRESIDENT FORD'S great task is to wind down these acrid feelings, to foster trust and exorcise the demons of suspicion. His early emphasis on straight talk and some of his first appointments seemed promising.

But the Nixon pardon — especially the way it was sprung and its unconditional terms — inevitably revived the worst suspicions of the bad old days. Even for those of us who share President Ford's belief that it would be wrong to put Mr. Nixon on trial, it is hard not to suspect that there was some kind of a deal between the former President and the man now in the White House.