

When one finds himself in a storm of hurricane force, it is reassuring to hear a voice of calm, restraint and reason. Such is the voice of Vermont Royster, one of the most distinguished journalists of our time, in an article in *The Wall Street Journal* on September 18th. The editor of that newspaper until his recent retirement, Mr. Royster is now a Professor of Journalism and Public Information at the University of North Carolina.

His views merit careful reading and thought. Far from glossing over the injury done to our country by Mr. Nixon, he explains it with understanding and clarity. Nor does he excuse what he considers the bad judgment and inept timing of President Ford—on the contrary, he underscores them. At the same time he depicts and deplores the vengeful, near-hysterical spirit of some portions of the public and the press. His analysis seems to us not only perceptive but balanced.

Over and above the logic and language of his indictments, Mr. Royster provides an example of a civilized approach for our great nation, caught distressingly in a maelstrom of wrath, incredulity and confusion. How much more anguish and divisiveness can a nation, even a nation as strong as ours, take?

We therefore consider it a privilege to reprint the article in full in the public interest.

A. N. Spanel

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## *A Bitter Spirit That* **WON'T DIE**

WASHINGTON—It has been difficult these last 10 days to shake off a sense of sadness about the country.

For one blessed month—from the 9th of August to the 8th of September—you could believe that the country had awakened from that nightmare known as Watergate. All across the land there was a feeling of relief, and a visitor here at that time could hope that we were going to have a time of healing.

The new President had brought a breath of fresh air into the White House. With it had come a wave of good feeling that swept over the press galleries and into the halls of Congress. At long last, or so it seemed, we had a government not preoccupied with the scandals of the past and so ready to turn to the urgent problems of the day.

**Yet now, once again, the country and this city are caught up in acrimony. The country is angry, the press is bitter and the recriminations fly through the halls of Congress. Everywhere you turn the ghost of Richard Nixon walks the town.**

Especially at the White House. It was President Ford's press conference Monday night, but as question after question returned to Watergate, the tapes or the pardon, it was clear that the wraith of Mr. Nixon still haunts the East Room.

So the sadness is for a new President who in one ill-advised moment emptied his reservoir of good-will. It is also, though, for the revelation of how shallow it was, how ready many were to see it dissipated and how eager they were to leap upon his wounds.

**And not the least of the sadness is what these 10 days have revealed of the bitter and vengeful spirit abroad among the people, including some within the press, that will forget nothing and forgive nothing. That, too, has not been a pretty sight.**

Begin with President Ford. His blunder was not simply that he pardoned Richard Nixon. It is hardly to be expected that, if it came to that, he would see the former President led manacled to the dock nor, I should hope, that the people would wish him to.

It was not entirely, either, that the pardon was "premature," though that is a word frequently heard hereabouts. No matter what time he picked, there would be those to find it wrong.

### SHOCKING REVERSAL

The heart of the President's blunder was that he did what he seemed to have said he would not do. Only two weeks earlier Mr. Ford appeared to say that he would wait at least until some charges were brought against Mr. Nixon for which he could be pardoned. And until the eve of his decision he misled his own press secretary into misleading the press and the public that this was his intention.

Then he reversed himself abruptly, with no preparation of public opinion, and so casually of a Sunday morning that the people heard the deed before they heard any explanation for it. Shock was then inevitable, and no matter how well reasoned the President's decision the explanation could never catch up.

**The damage, then, was to the President's credibility and, not much less important in the real world, to his political skill. It was unbelievably clumsy, and this error was compounded by the bungling that followed over whether he would extend other pardons to those involved in Watergate.**

**One consequence is that now this President, like his two predecessors, will hereafter have a credibility problem. He lost both his press secretary and the confidence of the press. Moreover, as Dennis Farney reported in The Wall Street Journal, he raised in many people's minds fundamental questions about his judgment.**

**He showed himself gutsy but exceedingly inept, and in the milieu of Washington, ineptness in a President is almost a cardinal sin. Hereafter neither politicians nor journalists will draw back from criticizing him on anything.**

Every President, and Mr. Ford is no exception, comes to office with a store of political capital he can draw on with Congress and the public. But he must spend it sparingly and only upon the most important objectives. Mr. Ford has spent his needlessly and thoughtlessly. For that, he and the country must now pay a price.

### 'THE WHOLE TRUTH'

**But while that is sad, the violence of the reaction from both press and public is no less so. To read some of the press comments, to skim through the mail piling up on Congressmen's desks, is to detect not merely disapprobation of the President's decision but a touch of hysteria.**

**From many in the press, in the pulpit and among the public comes the accusation that Mr. Ford was not just misguided in his timing nor mistaken in his judgment but that he was immoral. It is his character and not his wisdom that is assailed.**

That President Ford might have had some compassion is sneered at. That he might truly have believed it was better for the country to have done with this, that in the long run it was better not to prolong the ordeal, is dismissed out of hand. In these comments on Gerald Ford there is a revelation of how deeply suspicion and distrust have cut into the body politic.

**And there is another undercurrent running through the outcries. Most of these people furious with President Ford say they do not want Mr. Nixon to go to jail, but that any act of mercy or compassion should have waited another time. Yet had the President waited until charges were brought, you wonder if they would not have said he should wait for an indictment. An indictment being brought, that he should wait perchance for a conviction. And then for at least "some" punishment.**

Many justify this by saying we shall never know "the whole truth" unless the ex-President himself is brought to trial, as if we did not know enough after all

those Senate hearings, all those tapes, all that impeachment inquiry. Yet the man who conducted that impeachment inquiry, House Judiciary Committee counsel John Doar, certainly does not think so. "The facts have been established," he says, and anything else would at most "just be cumulative."

Observing the outcry you cannot escape the feeling that accumulation is what many of these people really want, not just the accumulation of facts but the accumulation of punishment. Clearly much of the anger vented on President Ford is in reality a cry for vengeance on Richard Nixon.

Those who say there should be no pardon, ever, for Mr. Nixon are more straightforward, and their argument has the merit of righteousness. Yet few of them would go so far as to remove charity from the trilogy of virtues or argue there should never be pardons for anyone. So the anger of their righteousness seems to say that for this man alone punishment should have no end.

**The simple truth is that Richard Nixon has been punished for his transgressions, with a punishment no man can feel who has not been President of the United States. He did not merely lose an office. His life has been destroyed, his place in history sullied, his 40 years of public service smashed. He wears already the stigma of the outcast; the shame must haunt him forever. That he brought it on himself makes it no less a punishment.**

### A PUBLIC INFLAMED

Yet for some people this is not enough. They would have the last pound of flesh. Listening to them you can almost hear those who once would bury witches only with a stake through the heart.

**This, sadly, is what Watergate has brought us to. This is the true injury that Richard Nixon and those about him did to the country.**

**Their legal transgressions were corrected; their plots never succeeded. But they have left us a country inflamed with passions. So inflamed that sometimes neighbor cannot talk to neighbor. So inflamed that some impute wickedness to those who exposed the deeds. So inflamed that some think a President of the United States who speaks of mercy is immoral. It is a terrible legacy.**

Senator Ervin, who chaired those Watergate investigations, once remarked that he could recall no comparable division of bitterness since the Civil War and that he was not sure but what this might prove worse. We are close to giving shape to the Senator's fears.

**Altogether, a sad time indeed to visit the capital of a great nation. The two years of Watergate were bad enough but at least we thought we saw an end to it. For a month there was the hope that we had put it behind us. Now the pedestal has slipped from under another President and all those bitter passions come to life again. And this time you cannot help asking yourself when it will ever end.**

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