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Nixon Signs Pardon For Harry Golden

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Harry Golden, the Jewish humorist, essayist and author of the best-seller, "Only in America," received fresh evidence Wednesday that miracles can still happen in this country.

Since Oct. 17, 1929, the day he was convicted for using the mails to defraud, he has had to live with the knowledge that any of his favorite targets, even the Southern recists he has fought, could call him an ex-criminal and get away with it.

But that all ended Wednesday when President Nixon signed a pardon that wipes the slate clean.

"Thank you and may you live to be 120, like Moses," said Golden to White House acting general counsel Leonard Garment, who had called with the news.

The decision moved the 71-year-old Golden deeply, and even resulted yesterday in a self-imposed moratorium on criticism of one of his frequent targets, Richard M. Nixon.

"I wouldn't criticize him today after what he has done for me," said Golden in a telephone interview at his house in Charlotte, N.C.

Asked if he would characterize the Nixon presidency, if not Mr. Nixon, he said in a whisper, "A disaster!"

The presidential decision frees Golden to enter politics as an active candidate for the first time in his life. He plans

to run for a seat on the Charlotte city council.

Golden had applied for a presidential pardon during the time in office of Lyndon B. Johnson, but to no avail. Several months ago, he visited Garment in his office and raised the subject again.

The announcement, he said, came as a surprise.

"My first thought was a sense of relief," he said. "They can't call you an ex-convict any more."

In the heat of the civil rights struggles of the late 1960s, he said, a representative of the School Board had leveled the charge against him. During the '60s, as editor of the now discontinued newspaper, The Carolina Israelite, Golden campaigned for civil rights and received many letters threatening him for being a Jew and a friend of Negroes.

Golden, who used the name Goldhurst in the 1930s was convicted of using the mails to defraud in connection with stock purchases on margin. He pleaded guilty and served most of a five-year term in federal prisons.

He made a fresh start, living, as he said, "in constant fear of success." Success came in 1958 with his collection of essays "Only in America," and the story of his past came out. Golden faced it squarely by meeting the press and answering questions frankly.