

Ford Reports on The Nixon Pardon

FOR TWO HOURS YESTERDAY, President Ford, on television in view of the American people and with reporters noting every word and inflection, discussed with the subcommittee on criminal justice of the House Judiciary Committee exactly why and how he pardoned Richard M. Nixon. When he had finished, no question remained unanswered or evaded; there had been no equivocation, ambiguity or hedging.

Mr. Ford said that in driving over to Capitol Hill to talk to the Congressional panel he had come to report history, not to make it. While it was the first documented appearance of a President before a Congressional committee, the significance of his visit really lies in another direction. It was history of the highest order; he was trying with candor and courage to heal the deep lacerations of Watergate.

Except for those intransigent Nixon-haters who would have the former President drawn and quartered, Mr. Ford's declarations should dispel all mystery about the pardon — if indeed there was a mystery. Mr. Ford stated simply that he was motivated by the welfare of the country and the urgent necessity of getting a wounded nation back to the business of the day.

WITHOUT DWELLING ON the national tragedy of a President being forced to resign in ignominy, Mr. Ford said that Americans "are not a revengeful people" and that his only aim was to do all he could to "shift our attentions from the pursuit of a fallen President to the pursuit of the urgent needs of a rising nation." Mr. Nixon, he said, was already "condemned to suffer long and deeply in the shame and disgrace brought upon the office he held."

When a Congresswoman spoke of "very dark suspicions" about the circumstances of the pardon, Mr. Ford replied calmly: "I want to assure you, the members of Congress and the American people there was no deal, period . . . under no circumstances."

"Don't you feel that acceptance of a pardon is tantamount to an admission of guilt?" he was asked. "I do, sir," he responded instantly. On this point, his views coincide exactly with those of Leon Jaworski, the Watergate special prosecutor whose persistence was largely responsible for driving Mr. Nixon from office. Jaworski said in a recent interview that "a pardon isn't just a beautiful document to hang on the wall."

MR. FORD NEED NOT HAVE APPEARED before the committee yesterday. The fact that he did so — and voluntarily — is its own evidence of his commitment. Representative William Hungate (Dem-Mo.), the committee chairman, said in opening the session that the issue of the pardon "will not be behind us until the record is complete."

If there are any left who question that the record is now complete, let them again review the events of the past three months in the light of Mr. Ford's forthright testimony yesterday.