

A PRESIDENT OF THE United States has resigned from office. It is a profoundly sad and profoundly heartening occasion. The sadness all but speaks for itself. Richard Nixon, a man whose entire adult professional life was dedicated to the quest for and exercise of the powers of the office of the presidency, leaves that office under a cloud of wrongdoing and shame. To respond to the tragedy that has now befallen him and his family is not to dismiss or minimize the terrible danger in which his wrongdoing put the nation for as long as it remained undiscovered and uncorrected. Nor is it to say that the wrongdoing was undistinctive or run-of-the-mill, even though some of the worst impulses to which he and his lieutenants yielded on such a massive scale may be impulses that are familiar both in certain presidential patterns of performance and as individual personal failings.

So the general sadness of the occasion can be said to transcend all partisan political feeling—and so, we would emphatically add, should be the sense of pride and reassurance to be gained from what has happened. For Mr. Nixon's particular constituency must know that it required the courage and ultimate decency and good sense of many of those who speak for them in public life to reaffirm those standards of public conduct against which he was judged and found wanting. Indeed, the role of these people—Southern Democrats as well as conservative Republicans in all branches of government and all walks of life—proved decisive.

Maybe too much has already been written—and written too sentimentally—about the marvels of the system and how it “worked.” But it did. And it is important to be precise about *how* it worked. We do not, for example, subscribe to the Fluke Theory, although chance played its part. For in the end and most importantly, it was the conscience and pride and responsibility of innumerable people and numerous institutions that combined to assert that 1) there was (and is) a norm of official behavior that is recognized and respected by all Americans and 2) the President's

departure from this norm was sufficiently gross and calculated to require an extraordinary and unprecedented remedy.

Cataclysmic as it is, this denouement and the events which led to it, can in no way be said to comprise the whole story of the Nixon presidency. There are many positive achievements to be noted and analyzed and there were also many substantive failures that have little to do with the particular failures that brought Mr. Nixon down. But there will be plenty of time to seek to balance the books on the Nixon administration and to assess the terms and manner of his leaving office. For the moment our thoughts, like those of most others, turn to the challenge now facing Gerald Ford and the transfer not just of authority but also of public attention to him.

In an important and wholly legitimate way, Mr. Ford is entitled to take as his mandate the continuation of that part of Mr. Nixon's policy and program which has not been discredited by the events and disclosures which led to Mr. Nixon's departure from office. That there has been an overwhelming public judgment against Richard Nixon is indisputable, even without the formal test of impeachment and Senate trial. His party leaders in Congress told him as much two days ago. But it will be important in the weeks and months ahead not to confuse Mr. Nixon's repudiation with a repudiation of the electoral will he could have fulfilled had he been as faithful to the rule of law as he professed himself to be. Gerald Ford, of course, is free to be his own man and to make of his presidency what he will. But we would suggest that abruptly as he comes to the office, he also comes to it with a valuable legacy: At no time in the country's history has the standard of acceptable conduct of the presidency been so clearly defined or so widely subscribed to. This standard will now be Mr. Ford's to uphold and enforce. In this particular duty he will have unparalleled and unprecedented public support.