

WHERE AMERICA GOES NOW

Watergate and its climax last week may have been America's most traumatic political experience of this century. Such a shock to the political system can affect the nation for years—perhaps adversely, perhaps beneficially. To measure the probable impact of those events, TIME asked leading scholars and observers of the national scene to analyze the legacy of Watergate. Historian Henry Steele Commager's essay on the lessons of crisis appears at the end of this issue. Other assessments follow.

"Hour and Man May Have Met"

HENRY GRAFF
*Professor of history at
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The most significant events in history are not always immediately recognized for what they are. In school, we learned that the linchpin of the 1920s was the Sacco-Vanzetti case. Today we realize that Robert Goddard's experiments in rocket propulsion during that period were much more important for the distant future. When you look at the Nixon resignation from the perspective of drama, there are few parallels. But as to its cataclysmic properties

—well, let's wait and see.

I do see a clearing of the air. We will have a honeymoon period with the new President. Even the press will lay off, and that will be good for America. It will be good for our critical faculties; we must rest them. We need to rest our nay-saying instincts and the belief that we can all put ourselves in the positions of the high and mighty and tell them how to run things.

We will quickly discover that Gerald Ford's limitations, which seem pretty clear, are not going to seem so horrendous. To be sure, it is a handicap that Ford was not elected to the presidency. He is unprepared for the office with respect to administrative experience; that certainly is a handicap. But he will triumph because he has not lusted after the office of President. Ford is an honest man. He gets on well with the people. He is an open man, and what our society needs now is openness. Artfulness got Lyndon Johnson in trouble abroad; artfulness got Nixon in trouble at home. Thus the new President may surprise us. The need of the hour and the man may have met.

Having a less regal type in the White House, the American public will perhaps become less dependent on the ukase of the President, not through cynicism but through the recognition of the reality that was always there. This would be a glorious thing. The new Administration's promised partnership with

Congress, sorely needed and long overdue, could be an exalting experience for all Americans.

As a starting approach to one of the major problems he faces, Ford could call a world economic conference to deal with the interlocked issues of raw materials, food supplies, the banking structure and currency. It would demonstrate to the world that there is a man in charge in America.

"A Yearning for Simple Symbols"

GEORGE E. REEDY JR.

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President Lyndon Johnson,
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The damage is considerable, and it's not just Watergate. A feeling has been growing for a long time—even before Viet Nam—that the presidency was somehow out of hand. The White House has been building up to some kind of smash. When it turns out to be a second-story school for pickpockets, the disillusionment is fierce. Yet there is a bright side. If it hadn't been Watergate, it would have been something else. If it hadn't been the Nixon Administration, it would have been the next.

People personalize the country in terms of the presidency. This is why Mr. Ford's immediate conduct and person-

ality can help so tremendously if he can convey an image of honesty and integrity. He is one of the very few men in public life whose absolute honesty I do not question.

For the time being, he will be heading the closest approximation of a government of national unity since George Washington. Everybody wants him to succeed. But he can't be a caretaker President. Unfortunately, he has a number of problems that require action, such as inflation and the Middle East. I still think we have problems in Southeast Asia. But action on an issue always divides people. I hope that this man has tremendous skill, because he's going to have to conduct himself as if he were a combination of Jim Farley, Aristotle and St. Francis of Assisi.

His worst problem is the aftermath of Watergate. The unfortunate part about the resignation is that it did not pull down a curtain. A final Senate vote would have really drawn a curtain, and a lot of people are under the illusion that the resignation did, simply because Nixon is out and Ford is in. But we have all these prosecutions under way. There will probably be more indictments. Those cases are going to have to be tried, and it is quite likely that Nixon will be called to testify. His name is bound to be dragged into every one of these trials. This is going to revive a lot of bitterness. Every time the issue is raised as to whether the past President did or did not do something, there will be heat on Ford to say something. No matter what he says, he's in trouble.

Still, I doubt if ever before in history so many people wanted a politician to make it. [In his first speech] Ford did something that few politicians can do well, and that was to evoke some basic symbols. He called for prayer and he called for God's help. Most politicians doing that would sound like the choirmaster who had just finished a tumble in the hay with one of the choir-girls. Ford is believable when he says such things. There is in this country today a yearning for simple, natural symbols that people can turn to. That is one of the main reasons why Ford could be so very good.

"God Is the Supreme Ironist"

WILLIAM A. RUSHER

Publisher of the National Review, columnist and board member of the American Conservative Union

We may now go through a spell of euphoria, we are so glad to have this Nixon business behind us. But bear in mind that no amount of mood can change problems, particularly economic problems. It may be that Gerald Ford will have such an enormous reserve of popular confidence upon which to draw that he can do things unpopular and un-

bearable if done by anyone else. After all, what people want at the moment is good, straightforward, simple, believable government. They think they are going to get it, and they are happy about it.

Congress has reasserted itself to some extent. The entire impeachment process had that effect. Thus Congress has an opportunity to institutionalize its rediscovered power. There have been some proposals for requiring Cabinet members and other members of the Executive to answer questions before congressional committees. There are proposals to create congressional staffs parallel to the operations of certain Executive departments. Now, I merely say that we should look into these ideas. There are dangers in all directions. If presidential tyranny is possible, legislative tyranny has also been known to history—and there is a subtle type of judicial tyranny. I think a little more responsiveness, required responsiveness, on the part of the Executive to questions by Congress would be a very healthy thing.

Although the prestige of the Government as a whole has declined, I do not think that this is by any means exclusively or even primarily due to Watergate. We had Viet Nam as a prior problem, and we had the general—and very wise—distrust by the American people of a lot of things that were happening in Government.

God is the supreme ironist. For him to have the power of the presidency reduced, at last, by a liberal drive to overturn the Administration of a hated Republican President merely shows what life's possibilities are. Having Nixon replaced by Ford may turn out to be the maraschino cherry on the sundae in terms of irony. Ford may become far more conservative and far more popular than Nixon.

"A Guy Who Knows Who He Is"

RICHARDE E. NEUSTADT

Political scientist, author of Presidential Power, associate dean of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government

Nixon and L.B.J. each in his own way tried to push his autonomy in office beyond the bounds of tolerance, and each was destroyed by that event. I can only hope that future Presidents and their staffs will have been sufficiently sobered to avoid abuses of their own.

As far as healing goes, I expect a rather widespread movement to put Nixon out of mind about as quickly as Agnew was relegated to the obscurity in which he now finds himself. Nixon has spoken publicly as if he intends to resume a public role. If he is serious, it will interfere with the so-called healing process, but if he just disappears, large numbers of people will be glad.

We will soon be back to normal relations between a Republican President and a Democratic Congress. It does not appear that Nixon's psychological difficulties are to be found in Ford's character. He may be conservative, but he appears to be the kind of guy who knows who he is and is not worried about it. We have had recent experiences with two men who were enormously worried about their own insecurities. [Those wounds] should be healed somewhat by the Ford presidency.

But it should not be assumed that conduct of government will now be easy. Since 1963, we have suffered from too many presidential transitions too quickly. The first year or so of an Administration is terribly difficult. The President is feeling his way, his staff is feeling its way. Now we have a new central character again, and he and his staff will have to start learning. Ford is going to be pressed in the economic sphere; we should not underestimate the difficulties thrust upon the man. There is a very real chance that new troubles will be upon us.

One is never certain if a man will perform in the presidency as he has in other roles, but it does not seem likely that Ford will pursue policies that will divide the country along sharp ideological lines. Most sitting Presidents with an eye to re-election tend to lean toward the middle, the sort of thing that Nixon attempted in his first term. I see no reason why Ford would do otherwise.

"The Nightmare Should Not End"

ROBERT JAY LIFTON

Yale University professor of psychiatry and "psychohistorian" who writes on public affairs in psychological terms

I have been interested for some time in the removal of the President from office, whether by impeachment or resignation, as part of a national cleansing ritual—a ritual of atonement. But I am not sure we have achieved it with last week's events.

When you survive some kind of atrocity or death immersion, you can try to cover over the experience, feel as little as possible, and undergo no genuine ritual of mourning followed by renewal. We did this in Viet Nam when we subscribed to the illusion of "peace with honor," and there is a tremendous tendency to do this with Watergate. The more desirable alternative is to confront the symbolic death image or atrocity and confront one's own involvement in it as a way of gaining some sort of insight or illumination about it.

What offended me about Nixon's speech was that there was not the slightest sign of confronting what really happened, nor was there anything like genuine atonement. Thus it contained nothing to suggest renewal. The mes-

THE NATION

sage it carried was that "America is great. Nothing of importance has really happened. I've just lost my political base." Therefore, the message also seemed to be that we do not have to do anything. Everything is fine. Nixon did not connect his person with the events. Nor can we be sure the American people have been able to confront Watergate and what is behind it.

To my sorrow, although Gerald Ford emphasized honor and truth in his talk, he too shied away from examining the atrocity we have experienced. What I fear is that in announcing that our "national nightmare" is behind us, Ford was encouraging the tremendous desire we all have to take a deep breath and say "Thank God that's over!" However, the nightmare should not be over. This should be the beginning, not the end of the insight derived from the experience. The people who have some influence must speak out and express some of the principles involved and some of the possibilities for renewal rather than let it be covered over. It means extensive education as well as exercise of the political process.

If we gloss over Watergate and the resignation, we will learn nothing from it. There are all kinds of possible repercussions from this in terms of international events: more Viet Nams or other atrocities that stem from that same combination of numbing and unlearned lessons. In terms of domestic policy, we will have conveyed the message that if we go too far, the Constitution will catch up with us, but that we can do almost anything up to that point.

"The Healing Will Be Strong"

ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER JR.
Professor of humanities at City University of New York, author of The Imperial Presidency and former aide to John F. Kennedy

If Congress and the courts complete the documentation of Watergate so that no one can ever doubt Nixon's guilt, the former President, I believe, will disappear from public consciousness. The healing process will be spontaneous and strong. The republic, with its basic institutions tested and strengthened, will rarely have been in better shape to deal with pressing issues.

This experience has certainly not injured the presidency. It has saved that invaluable institution from the man who did more to discredit and endanger it than any other President in our history. Gerald Ford has a great opportunity to restore confidence. We will all be surprised how easy it will be and how far a little openness, candor and decency in the White House will go. The danger will be not disbelief in Presidents after Nixon, but too headlong a return to the bad old habits of awe and reverence. Let

us never forget that the President is no closer to divinity than anyone else. Gerald Ford will help here. The press can help too by abandoning such pernicious and quasi-monarchical phrases as "First Family," the "First Lady" and the like.

This experience has also saved our politics. How bitter the cynicism of the young, the poor and the minorities would have been if Congress had decided that Nixon had done nothing to warrant impeachment. I hope we do not take undue comfort, however. The system took a damned long time to work, and it is all too easy to see how, if they had avoided a few dangerous corners, Nixon, Haldeman, Ehrlichman and all the rest would still be riding high.

Doubtless the Nixon experience will dissuade future Presidents from placing themselves above the Constitution for a long time to come. I hope it will also persuade future Congresses that they have both a right and a duty to insist on full partnership in the American Government. For the delusions of the imperial presidency, which prompted Nixon to think that he could get away with everything, were historically as much the product of congressional abdication as of presidential usurpation.

"The Plausible Dream of Zealots"

EMMET JOHN HUGHES
White House aide under Dwight Eisenhower, author of The Living Presidency and now professor of politics at Rutgers

In the life of the presidency, the awful spell of political smut has ended. Has the grand office survived? Of course. But will it go on to revive lost luster and past power? This seems not so sure, for there are two threats.

The first is the plausible dream of zealots who would remake the office because Richard Nixon came so close to ruining it. The second is the possible illusion on Gerald Ford's part that his highest duty might be a sustained atonement for his predecessor's sins—atonement by abdicating his own powers. Either of these fantasies could turn the late nightmare into lasting history.

As for the first threat, I find both reckless and ironic the zest of so many scholars and so many liberals suddenly to shackle the same presidential powers that they have sought to unleash for the past generation. What sense does it make for the most passionate critics of Richard Nixon to strive to reshape the presidential office to fit *his* image or conform to *his* menace?

As for the second question—the mind and mood of the 38th President—there seem two obvious ways in which he might honestly but gravely blunder. By both temper and experience, he might choose to focus almost wholly on national rather than world affairs. This

would leave him as little more than half a President. And all his background could also conspire to encourage a careless belief that ours is essentially a congressional rather than a presidential system of Government.

We have just watched our balance of federal powers work with almost wondrous rectitude and effect. We have seen the Judiciary act with impressive art and force. We have observed the Congress perform with patience and poise. It remains only for us now to glimpse again a presidency not punished but cleansed, not cowed but renewed, and not diminished but inspired.

"We Must Have Information"

JAMES MacGREGOR BURNS
Woodrow Wilson Professor of Government at Williams College

The changing of the White House guard could be one of the most significant points in the political history of America in the past few decades. The thing to watch is Gerald Ford's choice of a Vice President, for that will be more crucial than his emerging policies. That selection will not only set the tone for the future but could determine what will happen to both political parties. If Ford chooses a conservative, it could establish a dynasty of conservative party leadership over the next two or three G.O.P. presidential conventions. If the Republicans become a confirmed conservative party during the next decade, it would be easier for the Democrats to again emerge as a clearly liberal party. For now, we have a man as President who may be an honest conservative giving conservative leadership in the best sense. This is what the country voted for in 1972, after all.

In assessing recent events, I find it hard to say that the presidency has been weakened. So much now depends on whether there is an overreaction and a subsequent crippling of the office in an effort to block presidential control of Executive agencies. That is dangerous, because the President is the only elected national Executive, and his strength is needed to keep bureaucrats from abusing power. If the presidency does emerge weakened over the long run, it would be one of the great ironies of Nixon, for he thought that he was strengthening the office.

We have got to have a much simpler procedure for impeachment and removal from office—a more expeditious way that does not, for example, have to depend on tapes. Obviously, they will not be made any more. We need a system that would operate when only one or two or three charges have been made against the President. The sheer range of misbehavior, the totality of it, simply overwhelmed everybody this time. What if there had been only one clear-cut im-

peachable offense? Perhaps what we need is a permanent independent prosecutor, related in some way to or appointed by Congress.

Another good step would be increasing the availability of information from the Government. When Ford talks about an open Administration I hope he has this in mind. If we are ever to learn from our mistakes, we have got to have information.

"The Watergate in Us All"

ANDREW HACKER

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The End of the American Era*

Let us not create a drama or tragedy where one does not really exist. This was the experience when Franklin Roosevelt died, and people said it was the end of the presidency. In fact it was not. Truman created his own presidency, his own methods, his own policies very quickly.

As far as the nation as a whole is concerned, I am rather worried. In all the talk that there has been about Watergate, I do not think people have thought very seriously about what really happened. Richard Nixon, in his farewell address, certainly showed that he had no notion of what he had done. I am really persuaded that Democrats who have had a habit of attacking Nixon for a generation have not really asked themselves what mode of behavior, what approach to government was really flawed here. Take, for example, these very same Democrats who do not seem anxious to look into the Chappaquiddick experience of Senator Edward Kennedy. I think that the only people who reflected seriously on the Watergate affair were those few Republicans on the Judiciary Committee who first shifted and voted against Nixon. They were beginning to see a pattern of lawlessness that bothered them down to their moral marrow. I am not sure that message got across to most Americans.

There will be a large spurt of self-congratulation: how we came out of the crisis, how resilient our system proved itself to be, how Congress rose to the challenge, how the transition was carried out so orderly. We are going to be engaging in a good deal of ego boosting about what fine people we are. At the same time, beneath the surface, there is a bit of Watergate in all of us. Postwar America has been an era of "get where you can as fast as you can." While it is not corruption in the financial sense, it is an excessive personal ambition. Thus I think that the whole Watergate experience has been good in that we are troubled, especially if it means that we will not be cocky and self-confident. Yet there remains the question: Are we willing to think through to the source of our troubles? I am not sure.