



The Nixon Pardon

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A HARRIED but stubborn Richard Nixon was headed in September 1974 for the trial of the century.

Sources inside the special prosecutor's office have told us that he definitely would have been indicted for obstruction of justice.

But this epic drama was aborted on Sept. 8, 1974, when President Ford granted his predecessor a pardon. Millions of Americans still wonder whether Mr. Ford in return for his vice presidential appointment had promised to keep Nixon out of prison.

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IN RESPONSE to literally thousands of requests, we have conducted an investigation into the circumstances that led to the Nixon pardon.

General Alexander Haig, then the White House staff chief, first raised the question of a pardon with Gerald Ford on August 5 — four days before Mr. Ford replaced Nixon in the White House.

Not until August 27, so far as we can learn, was the subject of the pardon raised with him again. Then aides Jerry Terhorst and Robert Hartmann alerted him to expect some questions about it at a press conference the following day.

Immediately after the press conference, the President instructed his general counsel, Philip Buchen, to explore the possibilities of a pardon.

Shortly after Labor Day, Buchen ^(2 SEP) approached Nixon's attorney, Herbert J. Miller, about the possibility of a pardon.

Buchen strongly suggested that Nixon should issue a statement of contrition. But this was not a condition, Buchen added carefully, to the pardon.

Privately, the White House wanted a statement that would keep Nixon from proclaiming his innocence once it was no longer possible for the courts to establish his guilt.

The President sent a close friend, Washington attorney Benton Becker, to San Clemente to make the arrangements. Benton and Miller flew to California together. They went immediately into a huddle with Nixon aide Ronald Ziegler. At one point, Ziegler received a call from Haig advising Ziegler that Nixon didn't have to sign any statement at all. An understanding was reached, nevertheless, that any pardon would be followed by a statement of contrition from San Clemente.

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BACK in Washington, President Ford had already made his decision to grant the pardon. He instructed Hartmann to draft an announcement. Hartmann warned that the decision would cause an uproar. The President said he had already made up his mind. He didn't want Hartmann's opinion; just the statement.

Sources close to both Mr. Ford and Nixon have assured us that the two men never spoke to one another about the pardon. The President told his subordinates emphatically, that there had been "no deal, period."