

Consider:

1. Why it was thought that the pardon cost Ford many votes in the election of 1976;
2. Whether Richard Nixon's acceptance of the pardon constituted an admission of guilt.

THE PRESIDENTIAL PARDON

... The hearings of the [Judiciary] Committee and its deliberations, which received wide national publicity over television, radio, and in printed media, resulted in votes adverse to Richard Nixon on recommended Articles of Impeachment.

As a result of certain acts or omissions occurring before his resignation from the Office of President, Richard Nixon has become liable to possible indictment and trial for offenses against the United States. Whether or not he shall be so prosecuted depends on findings of the appropriate grand jury and on the discretion of the authorized prosecutor. Should an indictment ensue, the accused shall then be entitled to a fair trial by an impartial jury, as guaranteed to every individual by the Constitution.

It is believed that a trial of Richard Nixon, if it became necessary, could not fairly begin until a year or more has elapsed. In the meantime, the tranquility to which this nation has been restored by the events of recent weeks could be irreparably lost by the prospects of bringing to trial a former President of the United States. The prospects of such trial will cause prolonged and divisive debate over the propriety of exposing to further punishment and degradation a man who has already paid the unprecedented penalty of relinquishing the highest elective office of the United States.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GERALD R. FORD, President of the United States, pursuant to the pardon power conferred upon me by Article II, Section 2, of the Constitution, have granted and by these presents do grant a full, free, and absolute pardon unto Richard Nixon for all offenses against the United States which he, Richard Nixon, has committed or may have committed or taken part in during the period from January 20, 1969 through August 9, 1974. . . .

PRESIDENT FORD'S EXPLANATION

I agonized over the idea of a pardon, and eventually several key conclusions solidified in my mind. First of all, I simply was not convinced

SOURCE: "Proclamation 4311, Granting Pardon to Richard Nixon. September 8, 1974." Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Gerald R. Ford, 1974 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1974), 104. Gerald R. Ford, *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford*, 160-61. Copyright © 1979 by Gerald R. Ford. Reprinted by permission of Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.

... organize around them.

27.7 The End of Watergate: Pardoning Nixon

Gerald R. Ford

On August 9, 1974, after the House Judiciary Committee had approved articles of impeachment against him, Richard Nixon became the first President to resign from office. There were also indications that a grand jury would indict him for obstruction of justice. Although a public opinion poll revealed that 56 percent of those questioned believed Nixon should be brought to trial, many thoughtful Americans believed it would not be advisable. One alternative was for President Ford to issue an executive pardon and avoid the spectacle of a former President standing trial and perhaps being sent to jail. On September 9, 1974, Ford issued such a pardon, which is reprinted here. Also included here is an excerpt from Ford's autobiography in which he explains his reasons for granting Nixon's pardon.

that the country wanted to see an ex-President behind bars. We are not a vengeful people; forgiveness is one of the roots of the American tradition. And Nixon, in my opinion, had already suffered enormously. His resignation was an implicit admission of guilt, and he would have to carry forever the burden of his disgrace. But I wasn't motivated primarily by sympathy for his plight or by concern over the state of his health. It was the state of the *country's* health at home and around the world that worried me. . . .

. . . I was very sure of what would happen if I let the charges against Nixon run their legal course. Months were sure to elapse between an indictment and trial. The entire process would no doubt require years: a minimum of two, a maximum of six. And Nixon would not spend time quietly in San Clemente. He would be fighting for his freedom, taking his cause to the people, and his constant struggle would have dominated the news. The story would overshadow everything else. No other issue could compete with the drama of a former President trying to stay out of jail. It would be virtually impossible for me to direct public attention to anything else. Passions on both sides would be aroused. A period of such prolonged vituperation and recrimination would be disastrous for the nation. America needed recovery, not revenge. The hate had to be drained and the healing begun.

CHAPTER QUESTIONS

1. *Why did the war in Vietnam lose the support of the American people?*
2. *In drawing up a balance sheet on the 1960s and early 1970s, what were the positive developments and negative developments?*
3. *Did the Watergate episode and Richard Nixon's resignation from office seriously "wound the presidency" as an institution? Explain.*