EDITORIAL REACTION TO GERALD R. FORD:
"THE EFFECTS OF WATERGATE"

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Mass Communication

by

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To

Louise E. Light, M.D.
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ABSTRACT

EDITORIAL REACTION TO GERALD R. FORD:

THE EFFECTS OF WATERGATE

by

Marsha Dunsay

Master of Arts in Mass Communication

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Editorial reaction to Gerald R. Ford--from his nomination as Vice President to the pardon of Richard Nixon--was examined to determine how major newspapers perceived Ford and whether their perceptions were affected by the Watergate scandals and related events.


Watergate and the plight of the Nixon administration profoundly affected some newspapers' perceptions of Gerald Ford. As Nixon's moral stock diminished, Ford's editorial image improved until the man who was initially received as a "bland mediocrity" came to be seen as a
viable alternative to the embattled President. By the time Ford was confirmed, five of the eight newspapers sampled had moved from an essentially negative to an essentially positive position and were praising his strengths and excusing or ignoring his weaknesses.

A liberal-conservative split emerged in the study. The more liberal newspapers were more deeply and emotionally involved in the issues and problems of Watergate, were most severe in their criticism of Nixon, exhibited the greatest overall change in attitude toward Ford and were most outraged by the Nixon pardon. The more conservative newspapers were less emotionally involved in Watergate, were less distressed by Nixon's actions, exhibited little or no change in attitude toward Ford and were not as upset by the Nixon pardon (while disapproving of it).
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1974 the country was in political chaos. The crimes exposed by Watergate had created a government crisis of unparalleled dimensions. What began as a "third rate" burglary of Democratic National Headquarters in June, 1972 threatened to bring down an entire administration.

Watergate--the Washington housing complex in which the break-in occurred--had become the generic term for an entangled web of corruption that included "enemy lists," conspiracy to obstruct justice, wire tapping, espionage, destruction of evidence, bribery, perjury, illegal use of government agencies, tax fraud, forgery, illegal campaign contributions, campaign "dirty tricks" and more.

By August, 1974 more than two dozen of the nation's top government officials had been ensnared in the Watergate net. Among those indicted or convicted were Vice President Spiro T. Agnew; Attorney General John N. Mitchell, chairman of the Committee for the Re-election of the President; Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst; Secretary of Commerce Maurice H. Stans, chairman of the Finance Committee of the Committee for the Re-election of the President;
Secretary of the Treasury John B. Connally Jr., chairman of Democrats for Nixon in 1972; H. R. Haldeman, White House chief of staff; John D. Erlichman, chief domestic adviser; John W. Dean III, counsel to the President; Charles W. Colson, special counsel and key political adviser.¹

Within a year after the initial burglary, there were six grand juries across the country, four Senate and two House hearings investigating separate aspects of the Watergate conspiracy.² Most prominent were the televised hearings of the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities, chaired by Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.), which came to be known as the Watergate Hearings.

It was before this Senate committee in the spring of 1973 that John Dean testified Nixon had known of and participated in the Watergate coverup and Alexander P. Butterfield, former presidential appointments secretary, revealed the existence of the White House taping system.

The system was dismantled two days later, but it was too late. "The battle of the tapes was on," as Associated Press writer Saul Pett put it. It was a battle that was to severely test our democratic system of government in the ensuing months. Pett's description of that conflict conveys the sense of inevitability in the descent of Richard Nixon:

Pushed and pressed, Richard Nixon resisted and yielded, argued and fell silent, fought and retreated, slowly, at a maximum cost to his pursuers, one backward step at a time, behind a dazzling array of banners: national
security, executive privilege, separation of powers, the sanctity of the grand jury, the protection of due process, the confidentiality of his exalted office. As each was shot down, another took its place.

Nothing seemed to work. He fired the special prosecutor for going to court for the tapes and three days later after a national uproar, yielded the tapes. He "abolished" the office of special prosecutor and a short time later had to tolerate the appointment of a new one. He promised him cooperation and fought him in the courts. He gave up the tapes and then had to explain [two missing reels and] an 18-minute gap. He denounced the press repeatedly but could not escape it. He ordered a [worldwide] military alert because of a crisis in the Mideast and . . . was widely disbelieved. He told the world, "I am not a crook," and a few months later was told he owed the government $465,787 in back taxes and penalties.3

Calls for Nixon's resignation or impeachment remained muted so long as Spiro Agnew stood next in line of succession. When Agnew resigned on October 10, 1973, pleading no contest to a charge of federal income tax evasion, the picture was altered dramatically. Nixon's nominee to succeed Agnew, under the untested 25th Amendment to the Constitution, was House Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford—a clearly undistinguished choice but one certain to receive congressional approval.

Three weeks later the influential New York Times spoke out for Nixon's resignation:

The visible disintegration of President Nixon's moral and political authority, of his capacity to act as Chief Executive, of his claim to leadership and to credibility leads us to the reluctant conclusion that Mr. Nixon would be performing his ultimate service to the American people--and to himself--by resigning his office before this nation is forced to go through the traumatic and divisive process of impeachment.4
On December 6, 1973 Gerald Ford was confirmed as Vice President by the Congress, clearing the way, many thought, for Nixon's resignation and a swift transfer of power. But Ford's tenure as the nation's 40th Vice President was to last eight turbulent months as he criss-crossed the continent, alternately defending and criticizing the President.

Meanwhile, criticism mounted in the press, a constitutional crisis loomed, cries for resignation or impeachment grew shrill and the beleaguered President continued to "tough it out."

On Wednesday, July 24, 1974 the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the President must surrender tapes and documents of 64 conversations subpoenaed by the special prosecutor. Among them were the tapes of June 23, 1972, containing conversations between Nixon and H. R. Haldeman which confirmed Nixon's participation in the Watergate coverup.

On Friday, July 26, Nixon fell to a new low in the Gallup poll, with only 24 percent of the country approving of his performance in office. "Most of the nation was now watching the impeachment hearings of the House Judiciary Committee on television," writes Saul Pett, "but in San Clemente, we were told, the President was not. He was reading a biography of Napoleon." 5

On Saturday, July 27, for the first time in 106 years, the House Judiciary Committee voted an article of
impeachment against a President. By a vote of 27 to 11, the committee charged Nixon with obstruction of justice. The second and third articles of impeachment followed in quick succession. On Monday, July 29, by a vote of 28 to 10, the Judiciary Committee voted the second article for abuse of presidential power, and the following day, the third article based on the President's refusal to turn over tapes subpoenaed by the committee. The hearings ended and the full House of Representatives prepared to vote.

Release of the incriminating June 23 transcripts on Monday, August 5, was to precipitate the downfall of Richard Nixon. In an accompanying statement, Nixon admitted listening to the tapes in May, recognizing "potential problems" but telling no one.

The final denouement came quickly. By Wednesday, August 7, Nixon's support had dissolved in the Senate. There was bitter irony in the situation the President faced that day, as Saul Pett has pointed out:

If he did not resign, Richard Nixon would become the first president in history to be impeached, convicted and removed from office. If he left of his own choice, he would be the first to resign. For a man who prized his "historic firsts," this was the ultimate choking irony.

Richard Nixon announced his resignation over national television at 9 p.m. on Thursday, August 8, effective noon the following day. At 9:30 on the morning of August 9, Nixon bade a nostalgic farewell to his Cabinet
and staff, assembled in the East Room, and departed for his San Clemente estate. Gerald Rudolph Ford was sworn in as the nation's 38th President in the East Room as Richard Nixon and his family headed west in Air Force One for the last time.

Until his nomination as Vice President in October, 1973, Gerald Ford had been largely unknown outside of Washington D.C. and his home state of Michigan. He stepped into the national spotlight during an extraordinary time in this country's history, a time when everything political, it seemed, had been touched—and tainted—by Watergate.

This thesis will examine editorial reaction to Gerald Ford—from his nomination as Vice President to the pardon of Richard Nixon—to determine how major newspapers perceived Ford and whether their perceptions were affected by the Watergate scandals and related events.

The study sample includes the New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Christian Science Monitor and Chicago Tribune—considered among the more informed and sophisticated observers of politics today by general consensus of journalism historians. The sample also reflects the geographical and political differences important to achieve balance in the study.

Two ex-officio members of the sample, the Detroit News and the Grand Rapids Press, were added to learn what
was being said about Ford in the state that knew him best—his home state of Michigan.

Only unsigned editorials were reviewed in all eight newspapers, looking specifically for indications of the newspapers' attitudes toward Ford. Also examined were editorial reactions to Watergate and related events which occurred during the period under study. A detailed analysis was made to assess the effect of these events on each newspaper's image of Gerald Ford.

The Sample

The *New York Times*, recognized as the country's leading daily newspaper, has maintained its position as the "newspaper of record" for nearly a century.\(^9\) It ranked first in four major polls in the past 15 years and continues "... to hold its place in the forefront of American journalism by maintaining the tradition of telling the news with completeness and integrity." Editorially the paper has been "staunchly internationalist in world outlook and progressive-conservative in domestic affairs." In recent years the *Times* has supported Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower and Democrats John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and Hubert H. Humphrey.\(^10\) *Time* magazine's 1974 appraisal of the "Ten Best American Dailies" had this to say of the venerable *New York Times*: "There is no other U.S. daily quite like the *Times*. Its total news staff is by far the
largest (about 650), its scope and coverage the most exhaustive, its influence on national and world leaders daunting. . . ."11 By 1971 the Times had amassed a record number of 38 Pulitzer Prizes.12

*   *   *

Outstanding investigative reporting by the Washington Post on "the nation's worst political scandal" has earned numerous awards for its staff but largely obscured the paper's "broader challenge to the New York Times for national pre-eminence."13 Considered the "most influential of the country's liberal-intellectual newspapers,"14 the Post has avoided direct editorial endorsements but favored the candidacies of Eisenhower, Kennedy and Humphrey. The paper was an early and outspoken critic of Senator Joseph McCarthy and Vice President Richard Nixon, whom it continued to oppose in later years.15 Time magazine describes the Post's editorial staff as "perhaps the most knowledgeable in the country," producing "wise, reasoned, dispassionate commentary."16

*   *   *

Under the dynamic leadership of publisher Otis Chandler, the Los Angeles Times surged ahead in the 1960s to become "a major force in national and international journalism by 1970." It also led the nation's dailies in
total advertising lineage and in space allotted to editorial material. From an early conservative heritage, the paper adopted a middle-of-the-road position during Norman Chandler's stewardship, 1944-1960. When son Otis became publisher, the L.A. Times joined with the Washington Post to form the Los Angeles Times-Washington Post News Service, now one of the most important news services in the world. Within a decade the paper had doubled its news gathering staff, expanded its domestic and foreign bureaus, won several Pulitzer Prizes and moved to "an independent-minded editorial position." A long-time Nixon supporter, the L.A. Times backed Nelson Rockefeller for the Republican nomination in 1964 and later endorsed Barry Goldwater for election. 17

* * *

Founded in 1878 by Joseph Pulitzer, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch has consistently been in "the foremost rank of American newspapers." Continuity, both of family ownership and editorial policies, has sustained its level of quality and national reputation. 18 Media historians Emery, Ault and Agee list the Post-Dispatch among the few newspapers "... which have won top recognition for their editorial leadership and for their aggressiveness in defense of basic liberal principles of a progressive democracy." 19 Published today by a third generation of the
Pulitzer family, the paper continues "... to win recognition for its crusading zeal and its outstanding Washington Bureau." 20 Politically, Post-Dispatch support has usually been given to Democratic candidates, although it opposed Harry Truman in 1948. "Its devotion to liberal principles led to unrelenting attacks upon McCarthyism and other right-wing movements. It found no favor with Richard Nixon or Barry Goldwater, opposing their candidacies of the 1960s." 21

* * *

The Christian Science Monitor is one of two U.S. dailies without "home communities" (the other being the Wall Street Journal). Both have won widespread respect and are circulated nationally by means of regionally edited editions. 22 The Monitor was begun in 1908 by Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the Church of Christ, Scientist, in protest against the sensationalist newspapers of the day. Under its Christian Science tenets, the Monitor minimized or avoided news of crimes, death or disasters, thus leaving more space to develop Washington and foreign correspondence, regional stories and features on art, music and literature. Eventually the paper became noted for "... its ability to sit back ... and take a long-view look at major news developments, thereby contributing interpretative analyses of problems and trends in government, world affairs,
economics, and social development." The Monitor supported Richard Nixon and has been described as a conservative newspaper with a "noncrusading but thoughtful editorial page." Press historian Edwin Emery rates the Chicago Tribune as "the single most often criticised American newspaper," largely due to the policies of flamboyant long-time publisher Colonel Robert McCormick. Since McCormick's death in 1955, the Tribune has undergone considerable change. "Its raucous eccentricities have given way to a calmer tone and a less polemical approach to events," Time magazine noted as it named the Tribune one of the country's ten best dailies in 1974. For many years the Tribune was the principal spokesman for the ultraconservative right-wing in American politics, and it rejected a President Eisenhower as readily as it had rejected a President Truman. The paper is still "highly conservative," although efforts have been made, according to Time, to tone down "the Trib's Republican war cries . . . and balance them with other viewpoints." The paper continues to excel in local investigative reporting for which it won a Pulitzer Prize in 1972.

The two Michigan papers, an adjunct to the official sample, will provide a benchmark for comparison of
newspapers from areas in which Ford was not widely known. The *Detroit News*, "renowned for its conservatism,"\(^{30}\) is the largest daily in the state and the employer of J. F. terHorst, who was to become Ford's first presidential press secretary. The *Grand Rapids Press*, also a daily, reflects the views of the conservative district which Ford represented in Congress for over 25 years.

**Organization**

Excepting the introduction and the conclusion, the body of the thesis is divided into three chapters (II, III, IV) covering the three time frames in which editorial reaction to Ford is examined. Organization of these chapters is described below.

Chapter II, entitled "Nomination of Gerald R. Ford as Vice President," begins with the resignation of Vice President Spiro Agnew on October 10, 1973 and the editorial comments regarding the nomination of a successor. A description of the announcement follows, along with a biography of the nominee. Editorial reaction to the nomination by each newspaper is examined in detail and comparisons made between papers.

The study next considers the Watergate-related events which occurred during the two-month period between Ford's nomination and confirmation. Some general observations are made on the relationship between these events
and the newspapers' editorial response to Ford. A detailed analysis then traces each paper's image of Ford during this period—as affected by Watergate—and compares each paper's initial editorial stance to the position taken after Ford's confirmation.

Chapter III, entitled "Resignation of Richard Nixon and Ascension of Gerald Ford to the Presidency," begins with a brief description of the national mood during the eight months Ford served as Vice President and moves quickly to the release of the final, damaging transcripts on August 5, 1974. Editorial reaction during Nixon's last few days in office is examined in light of each newspaper's response to Ford and Watergate the previous fall. A description follows of Nixon's departure from the White House and the subsequent swearing in of President Gerald R. Ford. Patterns of editorial reaction to the transfer of power are then related to earlier findings. The chapter concludes with a detailed analysis comparing each newspaper's editorial position at the time of Ford's vice presidential nomination, confirmation and ascension to the presidency.

Chapter IV, "The Pardon of Richard Nixon," opens with a description of Ford's first month in office, focusing on national mood and general press coverage. Circumstances and conditions of the pardon are discussed, along with initial reactions from government and the populace.
Editorial reactions are summarized and comparisons drawn among the newspapers. Reoccurring patterns are also noted. A detailed analysis follows of each newspaper's reactions for at least a week after the pardon.
FOOTNOTES—CHAPTER I

1 "Score to Date: 26 Convictions or Guilty Pleas," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, August 4, 1974, p. 1C.


5 Los Angeles Times, op. cit., p. 5.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ray E. Hiebert, Donald F. Ungurait and Thomas W. Bohn, Mass Media—An Introduction to Modern Communication, p. 212.


12 Emery, loc. cit.

13 Time, op. cit., p. 61.

14 Emery, op. cit., p. 660.


16 Time, op. cit., p. 61.


18 Emery, op. cit., p. 660.


20 Ibid.
21 Emery, op. cit., p. 661.

22 Emery, Ault and Agee, op. cit., p. 76.

23 Emery, op. cit., p. 567.


26 Time, op. cit., p. 58.


28 Peter Sandman, David M. Rubin and David B. Sachsman, Media--An Introductory Analysis of American Mass Communications, p. 394.

29 Time, op. cit., p. 58.

CHAPTER II

NOMINATION OF GERALD R. FORD
AS VICE PRESIDENT

Gerald R. Ford was to become the nation's 38th President by a series of ironic and highly improbable events which began with the resignation of Vice President Spiro T. Agnew on October 10, 1973. In an agreement with the Department of Justice to avoid indictment on other charges, Agnew pleaded no contest in Baltimore Federal Court to a single charge of income tax evasion in 1967. He was fined $10,000 and placed on unsupervised probation for three years.

The next day the lead editorial in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch summed up the situation: "The resignation of Vice President Agnew is a shattering blow to an Administration already paralyzed by scandal, and it is imperative that Richard Nixon, in cooperation with Congress, nominate a successor who can command the confidence of the country." ¹

Under the as yet untested 25th Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1967, Agnew's successor would be nominated by the President and confirmed by a majority vote of both houses of Congress.

¹
The American people were on "uncharted ground," as the Post-Dispatch put it. The Washington Post expressed its concern the morning of October 12:

...the circumstances in which the vacancy must be filled could hardly be more momentous or more mischief prone. A lame duck President, with his administration under several clouds, must nominate a new Vice President to be confirmed by a Congress run by the opposition party. It is a situation which will test the maturity and statesmanship of everyone involved -- the President, the Congress and the eventual nominee.

Most of the newspapers sampled agreed that the responsibility -- for the President and the Congress -- was no greater than the opportunity presented by this unexpected turn of events.

On the morning of October 11 the Los Angeles Times declared:

The country now has the opportunity to acquire a new leadership at the top, the kind of leadership all Americans can respect. It is up to the President. He is obligated to nominate for Vice President the kind of person who can bring that sense of fresh leadership to a government rather badly battered by recent events.

On the same day the New York Times offered this assessment:

By choosing a man of national stature and unquestioned integrity, Mr. Nixon could do much to restore public confidence in the political institutions of a nation badly shaken by the series of sordid events from Watergate, which so tarnished his own reputation, to the sentencing of his Vice President for a felony. The President now has the providential chance to lift his own sagging political stock by rising above partisanship to appoint a statesman to the second highest office in the land.

At least two newspapers found reassurance in Nixon's
initial reactions to this "providential" challenge.

Noted the Los Angeles Times:

The President has let it be known that he will consult the country's leaders before he makes his decision. That is good. The greatest benefit the United States can gain from the Vice President's resignation would be the nomination of a new Vice President who commands the broadest possible support. 6

The Washington Post, the acknowledged crusader in Watergate reporting, conceded that the President had begun the selection of a new Vice President in a "sensible, reassuring way by soliciting recommendations from his fellow Republicans. Mr. Nixon's penchant for deliberating over large decisions has seldom been more appropriate," the Post said. 7

The eight newspapers sampled concurred that the nominee should be a Republican. The Christian Science Monitor reasoned:

The voters of 1972 elected a Republican to be Vice-President. Their preference of less than a year ago should be respected. The Democrats would not seriously expect otherwise. They will confirm a Republican nominated by the President, if the nominee is acceptable to them. 8

Looking ahead to the 1976 presidential election, the political ramifications of the vice presidential nomination were considerable. With the exception of the Los Angeles Times, the papers all spoke out strongly against the concept of a "caretaker" Vice President -- one who would perform the duties of the office but agree not to seek the Presidency in 1976.
According to the Grand Rapids Press, there had been much talk among Democrats of a caretaker Vice President even before Agnew's departure.

"Politically," the Press acknowledged, "the appeal to Democrats of such an arrangement is understandable. They are most reluctant to approve today any Republican who could use the Vice Presidency to gain the nation's highest office three years from now."

Such reasoning, the Press concluded, "...subordinates the nation's interests which clearly require that the best qualified individual be selected for the Vice Presidency." 9

The suggestion that Nixon minimize the political consequences of his choice by nominating a caretaker evidently appealed to factions in both parties. The Detroit News offered this less partisan view:

...Democratic and Republican politicians with their eyes on the 1976 presidential nomination would naturally prefer Mr. Nixon to pick an innocuous nonentity who would act as a mere caretaker vice-president and offer them no political competition.

In fact, some of the partisans in Congress have already demanded publicly that the President pick that kind of a person; they have threatened to reject any nominee who seems to possess presidential ambitions and abilities.

With the country staggering through a governmental crisis, such narrow, petty thinking should be shelved. President Nixon should pick the best man he can find -- not a mere caretaker but a man capable in his own right of leading the nation. Congress should judge the Presidential choice solely on merit, not with one eye cocked on 1976... 10
The Los Angeles Times, though not unconcerned about this controversial issue, chose to de-emphasize the politics and concentrate on the qualifications:

Whether caretaker or probable presidential candidate though, the nominee has to be the kind of person whose experience and probity no one can seriously question, and whose nomination would bring broad support from Republicans and Democrats alike. Congress would willingly approve this kind of nominee.  

Scarcely two days after the Agnew resignation, the Washington Post was the first to openly challenge an idea that was fast gaining favor in some circles -- holding the nomination "hostage" until the Nixon crises are resolved:

A notion which raises even more objections [than the caretaker concept] is that which suggests the nomination not be made, or if made should not be dealt with by the Congress, until the issue of the tapes have been resolved or the uncertainties about the future of the Nixon administration have been removed by some other climatic event. But even the remote possibility of impeachment proceedings against Mr. Nixon at some future date increases the importance of naming a new Vice President now, so that at least that one troublesome question will have been resolved.

... The nomination should be made by Mr. Nixon and considered by the Congress with dispatch, though not with haste...

A common strain in the editorial descriptions of the potential nominee was the repetition of the words "honesty," "integrity," and "character." The implication -- Give us someone we can trust.

Speculation regarding the nominee was rife for two days after the Agnew resignation. Dozens of suggested nominations poured into the White House, largely at Nixon's
request. The President had asked for three names each, in order of preference, from all Republican senators, congressmen, national committeemen and governors.13

Among the many names bandied about were former Texas Governor John Connally, New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, California Governor Ronald Reagan, House Minority Leader Gerald Ford, Tennessee Senator Howard Baker, Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott and Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger.14

On Thursday evening, October 11, President Nixon slipped away to Camp David, the presidential retreat, presumably to ponder the suggestions he had received. Decision made, he returned to the White House Friday morning, announcing that he would name his nominee on prime time television that night.

Philip Shabecoff of the New York Times described the mood in Washington during that long day:

The city, always a hotbed of political rumor, went nearly apoplectic with speculation, suspense and surmise while waiting for President Nixon to announce his choice for a new Vice President. By the time the President disclosed his selection of Gerald R. Ford, the House minority leader, virtually every conceivable name -- and some inconceivable ones -- had been run through Washington's high-powered rumor mill.15

The President's secret was apparently well kept. Although Ford's name had been mentioned as a possibility, chief attention centered on Connally, Rockefeller, Reagan and Goldwater.16
The announcement was made from the East Room of the White House. On hand for the occasion were senators, congressmen, cabinet members and their wives, Supreme Court justices and other high government officials.

In his opening remarks, which almost resembled a political campaign speech, Nixon listed three criteria that guided him in his choice. First, the nominee "must be qualified to be President." Second, he must be one "who shares the views of the President on the critical issues of foreign policy and national defense." Third, he must be an individual "who can work with members of both parties in Congress." 17

Ford's nomination was met with sustained and exuberant applause from the East Room audience that twice rose to its feet in his honor.

Ford's unofficial biographer (and former press secretary) Jerald F. terHorst observed:

To many political observers, indeed, to the men around Richard Nixon, Jerry Ford was a natural for the Vice Presidency. He had known Nixon politically and socially for a quarter of a century. They had rarely disagreed on the great issues before America; both were staunch partisans, standing up for the Republican Party and Republican causes almost automatically, never hesitating to buck Democratic positions and personalities. Ford, moreover, was loyal to his political superiors, fair to those under him, and had established a reputation for honest dealing with Speaker Albert in the House and with Senator Mike Mansfield, the Democratic Majority Leader in the other chamber. Among the one hundred members of the Senate and the 435 members of the House, there were many who disagreed with Jerry Ford on domestic legislation and foreign policy. But very few disliked him and even fewer distrusted him.
At a time when Richard Nixon's Presidency needed all the help it could get on Capitol Hill, Jerry Ford looked like the right choice to a substantial number of those to whom the President had turned for advice. 18

Gerald Rudolph Ford, 60, had served as Representative from Michigan's Fifth Congressional District since 1948 and as House Minority Leader since 1965. The broad-shouldered six-footer from Grand Rapids was a star center on the University of Michigan football teams of 1932-34. He later worked his way through Yale Law School as an assistant football coach. Ford served four years in the Navy as an aviation operations officer, including two years aboard the aircraft carrier Monterey in the South Pacific, and was discharged in 1945 as a lieutenant commander. He practiced law in Grand Rapids before running for office in 1947. 19

Of Ford's long-time friendship with Richard Nixon, Richard D. Lyons of the New York Times wrote:

When Mr. Nixon was nominated for the Presidency during the 1960 Republican National Convention, there was a boomlet for Mr. Ford as the Vice-Presidential nominee, but he lost out to Henry Cabot Lodge. Mr. Ford remained in close touch with Mr. Nixon during his eight years out of political office.

When Mr. Nixon staged his comeback in 1968, Mr. Ford turned up in Miami Beach as the permanent chairman of the Republican National Convention, where he could help his old friend wrest the Presidential nomination from Nelson A. Rockefeller and Ronald Reagan. 20

Ford has backed the President down the line on even the most controversial issues, such as the nominations of Clement F. Haynsworth Jr. and G. Harrold Carswell to the
Supreme Court, pushing ahead with construction of the supersonic transport, refusing to cut defense spending and prohibiting the bussing of schoolchildren.\textsuperscript{21} His only recent defection as a Nixon loyalist was to oppose opening the Highway Trust Fund for mass transit needs, an action understandable from an auto state congressman.\textsuperscript{22}

Over the years, the conservative Americans for Constitutional Action have given Ford a 78 per cent approval rating. The liberal Americans for Democratic Action rated him at 25 per cent.\textsuperscript{23}

In the nine years since Ford had become party leader, reported the \textit{Washington Post}, "...Ford has been on the road constantly for any Republican who needed him, making 200 speeches a year. Most Republicans in the House are in his debt for a campaign speech."\textsuperscript{24}

It was widely known that Ford's great ambition was to be Speaker of the House.\textsuperscript{25} What fame he has, Ford earned in 1966 when he and the late Senate Republican Leader Everett Dirksen appeared jointly in weekly televised press conferences known as the "Ev and Jerry Show," and in 1968 from his "...highly publicized and ill-fated attempt to impeach Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas."\textsuperscript{26}

Although the White House East Room audience had been warmly receptive to Ford's nomination, considerably less enthusiasm was expressed by the newspapers sampled.
Reactions ranged from outright cynicism to subdued criticism through varying degrees of acquiescence and rationalization. Only one paper, the Chicago Tribune, was wholly supportive in its editorial stance.

By far the most impassioned response came from the Washington Post. In a lengthy and articulate piece, the Post was extremely critical of, by turn, the nomination process, the nominee himself, the manner in which the announcement was made, politics in general and the Nixon Administration in particular. A hard edge of cynicism is blunted only by an undercurrent of sadness in the last two paragraphs.

The Post's October 14 editorial is excerpted below:

For a man who spends so much time instructing the American public about what is and is not "appropriate" -- Mr. Nixon's favorite word -- the President has demonstrated an abysmal failure to comprehend the true nature of the occasion to which he addressed himself Friday night. You would not have known from the festive glitter and spirit of "fun" in the East Room that the President was announcing his choice for the 40th Vice President of the United States because the man he had twice chosen to be the 39th Vice President had two days earlier left the office in disgrace...You would not have known that this was only the latest evidence of corruption in high places and of a cynical breach of public trust to which a benumbed electorate had been treated over many months. Again, you would not have known that the somber duty of the President, confronted with a crisis of confidence in government, was to offer a candidate for consideration of both houses of Congress -- not to preside over a ceremony combining the more synthetic elements of a political convention with the trappings of a state occasion at least worthy of the ruling house of Ruritania. And finally, you would not have guessed from the quick and automatic effusions of legislators...that the 25th Amendment to the Constitution, which authorizes the President to fill vice-presidential vacancies, also imposes upon Congress...
a heavy responsibility for subjecting his choice to serious, sustained scrutiny by way of introducing some measure of public participation in a decision of such enormous potential consequence.

We are not suggesting that the President needed to be lugubrious -- only serious. And we are not suggesting that the members of Congress should have been obstructive -- only restrained. We are suggesting only that there was an opportunity to embark upon precisely the "new beginning" that the President proclaimed. But for such a "new beginning" to have meant anything, it would have had to mean a marked departure from the cynicism, contrivance, hypocrisy and politics-as-usual which have got us into so much trouble in the recent past and which were so dishearteningly in evidence in Friday night's ceremony, in the so-called selection process, and in the legislators' reflexive response. The President and his congressional claque (on both sides of both aisles) would have us believe that Mr. Nixon seriously solicited suggestions from a broad cross-section of his party; that he took a crammed suggestion box off to Camp David; that he deliberated long and hard overnight to determine who was the one man in the nation best fit to assume the office of the presidency on a moment's notice; and that all led ineluctably to the name of -- Gerald Ford.

Will no one be straightforward about what has been done? It is true that traditionally our Vice Presidents are selected in a reckless and haphazard manner, under heavy pressure of time and perceived political needs not necessarily related to fitness for the job. And it is equally true that by this tradition, Mr. Ford is no less qualified than many who have been chosen. But that is just the point. Both the process established by constitutional amendment for replacement of a Vice President in mid-term and the dismal circumstances that culminated in Mr. Agnew's resignation conferred upon the President an opportunity -- indeed an obligation -- to break free of that sorry tradition and to choose a man for no other reason than his genuine fitness and distinction. And if one is to be straightforward, it must be said that Gerald Ford is not such a man. For over 25 years he has pursued a congressional career of modest ambition and modest achievement. At no point has he shown a keen or impressive grasp of the complexities of hard questions. Pedestrian, partisan, dogged -- he has been the very model of a second-level party man. It is no accident that
over his quarter century of unremarkable service in the House, he has never been put forward seriously as a candidate for the presidency -- or laid serious claim to the office on his own behalf.

The interesting thing about this characterization of Mr. Ford is that it is shared privately by many of those legislators who publicly hailed his nomination in the most extravagant terms the other night. Partly this is because the old congressional back-scratching machine works round the clock, and partly because the Democrats -- and some Republican aspirants to higher office -- found enormous comfort in the nomination of a man who...represents so minimal a threat to their chances in 1976.

There is nothing laudable or uplifting about this congressional response. What makes it the more dispiriting is the near certainty that it was precisely in anticipation of such a self-serving, conventional and narrowly political response that the President made his choice. So cynicism is compounded. We are back where we began.27

Though also clearly distressed by the Ford nomination, the New York Times, as befitting that venerable institution, was far more restrained in its response. Willing to concede that Ford may yet grow into the job, the paper nonetheless found little to reassure even itself on this account. And, like the Post, the Times, too, was critical of the "euphoria" with which congressmen greeted Nixon's announcement in the East Room. The Times' editorial, dated October 13, is reproduced, in part, below:

Heavily beset by the exposure of Spiro Agnew's criminality, by fresh rumors of scandal concerning his own financial affairs, and by the still unresolved Watergate issues, Mr. Nixon has taken the easy way out of his Vice Presidential problem. In choosing Representative Gerald Ford of Michigan,... Mr. Nixon settled for a nominee whom he has good reason to believe will gain easy confirmation and cause him no serious political problems.
Notwithstanding Mr. Nixon's self-serving rhetoric last evening, however, Mr. Ford has few visible qualifications as a potential President. He is a routine partisan of narrow views and long but limited experience. He has no executive experience. His expertise in foreign affairs is confined to unswerving adherence to Administration policy...If he were ever to become President, he would be a totally unknown quantity.

Since previous Presidents and Vice Presidents have also started with inadequacies in various fields yet risen handsomely to their new responsibilities, the country will have to hope for a similar expansion of Mr. Ford's capacities and horizons. Regrettably, despite the popularity he enjoys among his Congressional colleagues of both parties, his record gives few signs of imagination, social compassion or broad understanding.

For the Vice Presidency as for the Presidency itself, the controlling considerations are character and competence. From the euphoria with which it greeted the Ford nomination last night, Congress evidently needs a reminder that it is not engaged in conferring an honor on an amiable member of a private club. The Twenty-fifth Amendment calls for a sharing of responsibility between the President and Congress in making this designation.

There is no place for partisan politics by Congress in discharging its half of the constitutional mandate, but it does have an obligation for a careful examination of...the fitness and personal background of a man who will, upon confirmation, be next in line of succession to the Presidency -- a man whose long representation of a safe district in Michigan has kept him from ever being subjected to serious scrutiny in a Presidential context.28

On October 14, the New York Times had second thoughts and turned again to the Ford nomination and its attendant circumstances. It was President Nixon's comment about "obsessions of the past" during the East Room ceremony that apparently triggered this second editorial. Nixon is quoted as saying it was "vital that we turn away from the obsessions of the past and turn to the great
challenges of the future." 29

To this the Times replied:

...The Nixon Administration lies in shambles, not because of its critics' obsessions but because of its own ubiquitous embroilment in scandal, deception and usurpation of power. The self-styled proponents of law and order have presented the American people with an unparalleled record of lawlessness and political immorality in a high place. Even now in the wake of Mr. Agnew's departure and the mounting list of indictments of men formerly in the President's innermost circle, there seems no awareness within the White House of the fundamental damage inflicted on American tradition and political process by the long catalogue of Watergate horrors.

These wounds of a stricken Administration cannot be healed by the festive air that suffused the White House throughout the President's televised announcement that he had nominated Mr. Ford, the House Minority Leader, to fill the three years of Mr. Agnew's unexpired term. The President's choice is the most distinguished for his lack of distinction. A run-of-the-mill Congressman popular with his colleagues of both parties, Mr. Ford has been a supremely loyal rounder-up of Republican votes for Administration measures. If confirmed, there is scant risk that he will seek to outshine the President, much less that he will set himself as an independent power center.

For a Congress brimming over with prospective 1976 Presidential candidates, his shortage of discernible qualifications for possible succession to the Presidency is, perversely, likely to enhance his chances of almost automatic confirmation... 30

Perhaps the physical proximity of the Washington Post to the actual events affected the intensity of its reaction. Three thousand miles away, the Los Angeles Times responded with what might be described as mild disaffection:

The nomination of Gerald R. Ford as Vice President is, in many ways, a disappointment.
Ford is, of course, a man with broad experience in Washington, a member of Congress for a quarter-century, leader of his party in the House of Representatives for almost a decade, a man popular with his colleagues on Capitol Hill, a politician whose integrity has not been questioned.

But he has not achieved in his career great distinction.

It is clear that President Nixon could have done worse. He could have unleashed an extraordinary confrontation with Congress had he put forward a more controversial name.

But what really matters is that he could have done better, that he could easily have found men who fit closer the requirements of the Presidency....

Like the Post, the L.A. Times viewed the Ford nomination as an opportunity lost:

This was a unique opportunity for Mr. Nixon. It was, in the first place, an opportunity to elevate leadership in the nation, to bring to the Vice Presidency a figure of respected greatness to help wipe away the ugliness of the Spiro Agnew scandal. That opportunity has been missed.

Unlike the Post, the L.A. Times perceived yet another opportunity which may not go unheeded:

It was also an opportunity to conciliate the divisions of government, to break down the hostility that has separated the Nixon Presidency from Congress. In that he [Nixon] may have succeeded. For he at least has a man who will bring to the White House a commitment to cooperation with Congress. A restoration of the balance between the arms of government is needed.

Editorial reaction of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, subdued and reasoned in its tone, falls somewhere in that nether land of acquiescence and rationalization -- a surprising position for this extremely liberal newspaper.

The Post-Dispatch editorial of October 14 is excerpted below:
...On the face of his known political record and position as House minority leader, Mr. Ford would seem an acceptable vice president. Yet the manner in which the office was vacated by Spiro Agnew, in the midst of corruption charges, and the growing account of abuses of power by this Administration are enough to justify thorough hearings by both houses of Congress before they vote, under the Twenty-fifth Amendment, on confirmation.

There is another reason for deliberation also. Mr. Ford, despite his House office, is not well-known nationally. He has not faced a national electorate. He was not chosen by the people, but by Mr. Nixon. Congressional hearings should provide him with the national exposure that both he and the people deserve.

In making his choice, however, Mr. Nixon demonstrated a good deal of political logic. Simply because Mr. Ford represents selection rather than election, it was advisable to select someone who at least had met a recent election test, even on a narrow basis, and who represented something close to the mainstream of the President's party.

Mr. Nixon did that; he reached down into the normal ranks of presidential succession within the limits of his party. That is, Mr. Ford as a House member did face an electorate as recently as Mr. Nixon himself, and as House minority leader was in a position to become speaker of the House if the GOP won control. Speaker Carl Albert, a Democrat, is presently next in line of succession to the President. Since Mr. Nixon could not be expected to go outside his party in choosing a vice president, Mr. Ford was as close to the line of succession as the President could get.

Many other considerations were of course involved in the choice. No doubt the first one was to find a man whose integrity could not be easily challenged; both the Watergate and Agnew scandals made that condition essential.

Some other considerations almost seem contradictory. Nixon has a right to have a political partisan for a post so close to him, yet if the nominee were too partisan he could not win confirmation from a Democratic Congress. Finally, the nominee would have to appear capable of handling the presidency, if necessary, but not too capable of winning it in a national election. Again a Democratic Congress would
not be likely to give a leg up to the White House to a Republican of attractive national stature.

Mr. Ford, as we have indicated, appears to meet these tests, politically ironical as they may be...

The Post-Dispatch appeared to read more into what the Los Angeles Times called "the commitment to cooperation with Congress."

As vice president, would Ford represent "an ameliorative influence on the relations between his President and the Congress and the people," the Post-Dispatch wondered, then speculated: "Does the Ford nomination reflect a new willingness by Mr. Nixon to place limits on his claims of authority and to restrain himself to traditional democratic and constitutional processes?"

The Post-Dispatch answered its own rhetorical question: "Gerald Ford must think it does. He speaks of working with Congress for a united America."

As though awakening from a fanciful reverie, the paper abruptly changed its tone (or tune) in the last two sentences: "But Richard Nixon once also spoke that way. The congressional hearings can help to determine who is speaking for whom."

The Christian Science Monitor, which does not publish on Sundays, responded on Monday, October 15, to the Friday nomination.

The Monitor was not at all offended by the East Room presentation or the legislators' effusive response. It accepted the nomination with equanimity and viewed it
as Nixon's opportunity to build conciliatory bridges to the third branch of government, the judiciary:

...The President festively introduced his vice-presidential nominee, Rep. Gerald Ford, a man who has not been thought of as presidential timber but whose nomination could be seen as a politically acceptable compliment to the Congress he has long served.

Most congressional reaction, though not foregoing close scrutiny of the nominee, seemed favorable, often warmly, responsive to the President's choice.

...Mr. Nixon's immediate opportunity is to reflect toward the courts the same conciliatory attitude he has shown toward Congress in the Ford nomination.

...It is a good time for Mr. Nixon not only to continue building bridges but to start across those bridges extended toward him [by the appeals court].37

The most supportive response to the nomination came not from Ford's home state, as might be expected, but rather from the staunchly conservative, long-time Nixon supporter, the Chicago Tribune.

What the New York Times described as "...scandal, deception and usurpation of power...an unparalleled record of lawlessness and political immorality..."38 -- meaning the Watergate scandals -- the Chicago Tribune politely referred to as "...upsetting surprises in its [our] political life..."39

The Tribune's "case" for Gerald Ford went something like this: if Ford wasn't qualified to be vice president, then the President wouldn't have nominated him. And, besides, everybody likes him.

Ford's undistinguished legislative record was
explained away by reasoning that the House is so big that no individual member can have that much impact anyway.

The paper eschewed the more typical descriptions of Ford, such as "mediocre," "dogged," "partisan," "narrow," in favor of such expressions as "leader among his peers," "poised personality," "consistent character," "steady performer." Ford's notable lack of that precious political commodity -- charisma -- was even turned into a plus.

The Tribune editorial of October 14 is reprinted, in part, below:

Rep. Gerald Ford of Michigan, President Nixon's nominee for Vice President, enjoys almost unanimous support for confirmation. Congress knows, respects, and likes him. The executive branch can rely on the cooperation of a man of proven loyalty to the President. Republicans calculating their changes for the 1976 Presidential nomination do not have to view him as particularly threatening, tho elevation to the Vice Presidency makes any man more of a potential contender than he was before.

The national public knows this much about Rep. Ford, and not very much else. But there can be no better basis for public approval than the evident confidence of both the President and a bipartisan consensus in Congress. That consensus is illustrated by Illinois congressmen: "a tremendously wonderful choice" (Rep. Leslie Arends), "almost universally admired by the members of both parties" (Rep. John Anderson), "the smartest move the President could have made" (Rep. Edward Derwinski), "Gerry has gained the respect of all members; I'm as happy for him and [sic] I would be for my own brother" (Democratic Rep. Dan Rostenkowski). Even Rep. Bella S. Abzug (D., N.Y.), one of a handful who may vote against confirmation, based her sour comments on distrust of President Nixon rather than on disapproval of Rep. Ford. Speaker Carl Albert (D., Okla.) said "a splendid nomination."
Tho Rep. Ford, like practically all other members of the relatively large House of Representatives, has not made much impact on the national consciousness, the theoretical possibility of his succeeding to the Presidency is not alarming. President Nixon rightly cited qualification for the Presidency as the prime criterion in his selection of a nominee. Rep. Ford is a leader among his peers, a poised personality of consistent character, a steady performer. Any deficiency in charisma he may have would hurt him less as a holder of national office than as a candidate for election -- which by his own account he is unlikely to be. He is a man whose presence "one heart beat away from the Presidency" will not worry many of his colleagues in government or many other citizens.

President Nixon's choice was carefully and successfully planned to reassure a country sated with upsetting surprises in its political life...40

The two Michigan papers reviewed here, the Detroit News and the Grand Rapids Press, both agreed on one main point -- that Ford's nomination was dictated primarily by Nixon's desire to avoid a fight with Congress.

"To say this," the News explained, "is not to be little Rep. Ford. However, in the speculation which preceded the President's decision, Ford was...recognized as one of those who would be generally acceptable to Congress .... [H]e seemed to lack any burning ambition or marked qualifications to be President and therefore, the reasoning went, would not constitute a threat to anybody else's ambition in 1976."41

If Nixon had selected Connally, Reagan or Rockefeller -- all of whom have "strong political track records" -- congressional Democrats and Republicans with their sights set on the '76 presidential election would have fought him "tooth and toenail," the News reasoned.
Once again, the President had taken the politically expedient course in his own self-interest, and though not condoning Nixon's actions, the News at first appeared sympathetic to his motives: "After months of struggle with Congress, after months of the Watergate scandal, Mr. Nixon obviously didn't have the stomach for another knock-down-drag-out fight. One can understand..."42

The largest daily in the only state in which Gerald Ford was widely known then does an abrupt aboutface and offers these incisive observations: "...But should such considerations decide what kind of a man shall fill the office one heart beat away from the presidency? There has to be some apprehension as to the kind of president Gerald Ford would make if something happened to Mr. Nixon."43

Considering the source, these comments are all the more riveting. Yet overall, the News appeared to be hopeful and willing to stand by the nominee:

Politically, Ford has been a strong supporter of Mr. Nixon and could be expected to continue the mandate given to this administration by the American people in the elections of 1968 and 1972. As for Ford's character and personality, he has a reputation for honesty, he is a hard worker, and he enjoys the respect and friendship of his congressional colleagues.

All this does not necessarily mean he would make a good president. Indeed, there is about Ford an air of ordinariness which causes some misgivings. Yet, these same misgivings were felt with regard to a senator named Harry Truman when he was selected as a running mate by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

It is a trite thing to say, but nevertheless true, that the presidency has a way of causing men to rise above themselves. Harry Truman succeeded to
the presidency under the most difficult of circum­
stances and became one of the great presidents of
our history.

If a Harry Truman could rise to the occasion, a
Gerald Ford might do so, too...44

For two days after Ford's nomination, the New York
Times, Los Angeles Times and Christian Science Monitor
continued to remind Congress, in general terms, of its
"...constitutional duty to examine fully Mr. Ford's com­
petence not only for the nominal responsibilities of the
Vice-Presidency but for the fateful ones he would have to
assume if the Presidency became vacant."45

It remained for the outspoken St. Louis Post­
Dispatch to forego the generalities and exhort Congress in
very explicit language to investigate what loomed as a
genuine black mark on Ford's 25-year political record --
his attempt to impeach Supreme Court Justice Douglas in
1970. The Post-Dispatch editorial of October 17
reads in part:

While congressional committees are inquiring into
House Republican leader Gerald Ford's fitness to be
Vice President, they should not overlook Mr. Ford's
1970 efforts to impeach Supreme Court Justice
William O. Douglas. Was the move...founded on a
genuine concern over alleged improprieties on the
part of the justice? Or was it part of a Nixon
Administration effort to gain more vacancies on the
Supreme Court, whose decisions it did not like?

At the time of the impeachment campaign against
Justice Douglas, the Administration already
engineered the resignation of Justice Abe Fortas and
was enraged by the Senate's rejection of the
President's first two nominees to succeed him --
although Senators had proper grounds for refusing
to confirm the appointees, Judges Clement Haynsworth
and Harrold Carswell.
As early as 1969, while the Haynsworth debate was on, Representative Ford had let it be known that he was looking into the possibility of impeaching the liberal Justice Douglas. After the Carswell defeat, he acted. Significantly, then-Vice-President Agnew, who was leading the Administration's verbal assaults on what he called the liberal establishment, joined the attack on Douglas, distorting his position to make it appear that Justice Douglas favored violent rebellion.

Although Mr. Ford denied it, Justice Douglas's friends were convinced that the impeachment move, which ultimately failed, was an Administration effort to stifle dissent and create an issue for the fall election. This episode should be investigated because it appears that Mr. Ford lent his support to a crude effort on the part of the executive to undermine the independence of the judiciary.46

The only newspaper that took exception to the searching and thorough investigation of nominee Ford, which preceded the congressional hearings, was the Detroit News.

Railing about the FBI agents "snooping around" Detroit and Grand Rapids preparing dossiers on Ford's personal affairs, the News made its case for a more equitable investigation:

...The bloodhounds have been unleashed in the field by law and the specific order of Sen. Howard W. Cannon Jr., Nevada Democrat who is chairman of the Senate Rules Committee, and Rep. Peter Rodino, New Jersey Democrat and chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. What we would like to know is -- who investigated them?

The question is asked in the spirit of fair play. Sen. Cannon, for example, has demanded that Ford give him a financial statement and has asked President Nixon to rule that Ford's income tax records may be released for public examination.

Well, since Sen. Cannon is the leader of the group which is to make the first decision on Ford's confirmation, why should we not also know something about
his personal credentials? And having set that precedent, why not also have a crack -- publicly, of course, -- at the personal file of Rep. Rodino?

And let's carry that a little further. Why not suggest that all candidates for Congress lay their necks on the cutting block before they are allowed to run, exposing all of their financial dealings before the electorate as a qualification for candidacy?

If that idea sounds ludicrous, so does the investigation of Jerry Ford. He has been a public servant for a quarter of a century. He hasn't been involved in any scandals, such as taking an attractive blonde female spy to lunch. He hasn't had any nervous breakdowns, and he has been able to demonstrate that he hasn't consulted with any psychologists, although he may have consorted with one or two.

The Jerry Ford case is a good example of Washington "overkill" when a branch of government other than Congress is involved. Why not balance the inequity a bit and have some information on the congressional "investigators"?47

Gerald Ford may have been a known quantity in Michigan, but he had little recognition on a national level prior to the televised confirmation hearings. Primarily a behind-the-scenes man whose expertise lay in committee work, Ford had never run for national office or sponsored any major legislation. Considering the circumstances of his nomination, the News editorial -- appearing as it did nine days after Agnew's resignation -- was inappropriate, at the very least, and certainly lacking in perspective.

The events of the next few weeks concerning Watergate and the plight of the Nixon Administration were to have a profound effect upon the media's and the country's perception of Gerald Ford. As Nixon's moral stock diminished, Ford's image improved, until by comparison Ford
came to be seen as a viable alternative to the embattled Nixon.

The Nixon Downfall

On October 20, in what soon came to be known as the "Saturday Night Massacre," President Nixon fired Special Watergate Prosecutor Archibald Cox for refusing to obey his order to stop seeking White House tapes of conversations between the President and Watergate principals.

Attorney General Elliot Richardson, whose confirmation by the Senate involved his pledge of full independence for the special prosecutor, promptly resigned in protest. When Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus also refused to obey Nixon's order to dismiss Cox, he too was fired. The office of the special prosecutor was then abolished and immediately sealed off by a team of FBI agents.

Nixon's actions threw the sweeping Watergate investigation back into the Justice Department under the direction of U.S. Solicitor General Robert H. Bork, who would succeed Richardson temporarily.

These shocking developments were followed, in dizzying succession, by Nixon's defiance of a court order to release the disputed tapes and then his capitulation to congressional and public outrage, the "discovery" that two crucial tapes were missing (i.e., had never existed), the further revelation of an inexplicable 18-minute gap in
a third tape, the worldwide alert of U.S. armed forces
in an apparent confrontation with the Soviet Union,
Nixon's angry outburst at the media during a nationally
televised press conference and, finally, his attempt to
restore public confidence (dubbed "Operation Candor").

Each of the newspapers sampled responded a little
differently to these incredible developments. One de-
manded resignation, another thought impeachment the wiser
move, a third waivered between the two, a fourth awaited
still more evidence. Though reactions differed in their
intensity -- and in their timing -- an interesting
phenomenon can be observed to have occurred in at least
five of the eight papers surveyed -- those whose initial
reactions to Gerald Ford's nomination had been cool to
tepid. These papers are the New York Times, Washington
Post, Los Angeles Times, St. Louis Post-Dispatch and the
Detroit News. The more horrified and indignant they be-
came at Nixon's actions, the more real became the alter-
natives of resignation or impeachment -- and the more
plausible the presidency of Gerald Ford.

With the administration embroiled in a crisis of
confidence, the calm, plain-spoken Ford -- initially
received as a bland mediocrity -- began to look like the
nation's last bastion of honesty, integrity and candor.

The five papers called repeatedly for an expedi-
tious but thorough investigation of Ford and prompt con-
firmation. The possible succession of House Speaker
Carl Albert, a Democrat, was abhorrent to some, though not all, of the papers. By the time Ford was actually sworn in on December 6, 1973, they were praising his strengths and excusing or ignoring his weaknesses. In less than three months, the emphasis had definitely turned from the negative to the positive.

Although it was generally conceded that a year earlier nobody would have considered Ford for the presidency, the papers seemed almost relieved and grateful to have him waiting in the wings.

On Monday morning, following the Saturday night firings, the Washington Post reported on its front page:

A sudden rising cry for impeachment of President Richard M. Nixon swept the capital today as he sought to quell the worst government crisis in modern United States history and avoid being forced from office. Moves toward impeachment were under way in half a dozen congressional quarters with pressure coming also from organized labor, public lobbies and other groups as well as in a heaving outpouring of outraged public sentiment.49

New York Times, the Last Hold-Out

The most eloquent response to these events came from the New York Times. It was the first to call for Nixon's resignation and the last to relinquish much of its doubt regarding Ford.

In an October 22 editorial entitled "One Man Law..." the Times had this to say about the so-called "Saturday Night Massacre":

The desperation of President Nixon's moves this weekend to block the Watergate investigation makes it plain that neither law nor orderly government process now stand as obstacles to the exercise of his will.

In firing Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, the President has broken his original pledge, transmitted to the Senate by Attorney General Richardson as a condition for the latter's own confirmation, that nothing would be allowed to interfere with Mr. Cox's search for the facts. Mr. Richardson's resignation, followed by the peremptory discharge of Deputy Attorney General Ruckelshaus for refusing to become Mr. Cox's executioner, provides eloquent testimony that the President has embarked on a course that honorable men in his Administration could not follow.

The constitutional confrontation, which the courts and the special prosecutor tried so hard to avoid, has been precipitated by a President who considers himself sole judge of the law and who uses the power of his office to purge independence from the executive branch and to supersede the mandate of the courts by arbitrary exercise of his will...

The weekend debacle has brought to light for the first time some indication of the multitude of ways in which the President has been seeking to obstruct the inquiry into the Watergate scandals. Mr. Cox disclosed that his efforts to get at the facts were frustrated on a much broader front than the disputed tapes of Presidential conversations. Documents of Presidential aides were placed beyond his reach by transfer to the shelter of "Presidential files." This cover of executive privilege was used after Mr. Nixon had personally assured the American people, "Executive privilege will not be invoked as to any testimony concerning possible criminal conduct in the matters under investigation."

"The road now to be taken," the Times said, "must be considered in the grim context of Mr. Cox's parting message: 'Whether we shall continue to be a government of laws and not of men is now for Congress and the people to decide.'"
As the Times saw it, it was the responsibility of Congress to pass legislation that would enable the courts and the grand jury to reconstitute the abolished office of the special prosecutor truly independent from the executive branch.52

For the Times, it was not yet time to speak of resignation or impeachment. The paper was still hopeful that the President would "...turn back from the reckless path down which he is rushing."53

Perhaps the most tragic aspect of the President's course, the Times mused,

is that his studied defiance of law and of the courts is driving a lengthening list of responsible citizens, including many Congressional moderates of both parties, to the conviction that only the constitutional remedy of impeachment offers any hope of restoring the country to balanced government under the rule of law. With a Vice President freshly resigned and no replacement yet confirmed, this would unquestionably have to be a move of last resort -- one that can only be viewed with grave disquiet.54

Facing unprecedented public and political demand for his impeachment, President Nixon, in a stunning reversal on October 23, agreed to obey the federal court order and surrender the controversial White House tapes to U. S. District Court Judge John Sirica. The decision was announced without warning at an afternoon court appearance of Nixon's lawyers, even as the House of Representatives was beginning its investigation into the case for the President's impeachment.55
On October 24 and 25, the *New York Times* reiterated its call for a new special prosecutor. "A nation appalled by the prospect of a President in contempt of court is understandably relieved," the *Times* wrote. "But the fundamental nature of the governmental crisis has not been changed, much less resolved, by the President's decision."\(^{56}\)

On Thursday morning, October 25, the President placed the United States armed forces on worldwide military alert. The *New York Times* accepted the Soviet-American confrontation as a legitimate one in its editorials of October 26 but appeared to be reserving final judgment on October 27:

> The confrontation through which the two superpowers have just moved still has its hazy aspects; but whatever the element of danger that existed these past two days, an outcome of genuine peace talks in the Middle East could go far toward justifying the risks that were taken.\(^{57}\)

The day after the military alert, Nixon's angry outburst during a nationally televised press conference "...did much to undermine the impression he was seeking to create of a President in full command of himself," the *Times* said on October 28. (Nixon had described the media's Watergate coverage as "outrageous, vicious, distorted reporting."\(^{58}\))

The *Times* replied:

Unquestionably, the President has the same right to criticize the press and television that they have to criticize him, but the fury underlying his remarks Friday left no room for doubt that he still
labors under the sense of persecution he revealed so graphically when he told reporters they would "no longer have Dick Nixon to kick around" after his defeat for Governor of California in 1962.

In that context the President's efforts to demonstrate his toughness in meeting the exigencies of the Middle East crisis took on aspects of melodrama instead of providing credible evidence of his coolness and dependability in emergencies... The performance raised new questions about whether Mr. Nixon does, indeed, have the steadiness under fire requisite of a President of the United States.59

The flurry over the U. S. military alert had not yet subsided and no detailed explanations had been forthcoming from Secretary of State Kissinger or the President when the New York Times, disheartened, noted:

...if even at a moment of potential nuclear crisis, questions have to be put about the motives of the man or men making these decisions, the crisis of authority in this country is extracting too great a price to be paid. The resolutions of America's leadership crisis is the most serious and urgent business now before the courts, the Congress and the people of the United States.60

Still reeling from the events of the previous nine days, the Times turned its attention once again to the Ford nomination, declaring that the confirmation hearings "...should be moved along as swiftly as a genuine probing of his [Ford's] qualifications will allow."61

This is how the Times assessed the situation:

--The country must be reassured as soon as possible that, in case the office of President is vacated, the succession will be normal, smooth and entirely predictable;

--Those who voted in the last national election are entitled to know that, in accordance with their balloting, a Republican will preside over the country until the electorate decides otherwise. This would
not be the case if, in the absence of a Vice President, the Speaker of a Democratic House of Representatives were automatically made Chief Executive under the Twenty-fifth Amendment.62

The Times still had its reservations about the nominee:

Compelling as is the need for orderly succession, it cannot be made an excuse for slurring over any real question of Mr. Ford's fitness for the office. Alleged links between campaign contributions and the disbursement of Government favors warrant close scrutiny and fullest explanation. The country cannot afford future belated discoveries a la Agnew.

Congress has an equally important obligation to pass judgment on the competence of a potential President who has never held an executive post nor, in 25 years on Capitol Hill, given his name to a single important piece of legislation...With a voting record that indicates a conservatism greater than that of President Nixon, Mr. Ford would hardly be the independent choice of a Democratic Congress; but the Constitution makes it plain that the choice is Mr. Nixon's to make. It should be confirmed or rejected with every concern for his designate's honesty and competence for the supremely challenging job he may be called upon to fill.63

Above all, the Times declared, the confirmation procedures should be "simple and clean-cut." This was no time for delaying tactics or for forcing Nixon into a package deal with Congress. What is needed, the paper said, is "...directness, nonpartisan judgment and action taken in the spirit as well as the letter of the law. That is the only way in which Congress can properly pass on the Ford nomination."64

By the end of October, the word "impeachment" which, until then, "...could scarcely be uttered without incredulity or shudder..." had blossomed into an active
threat to the Presidency of Richard M. Nixon.\textsuperscript{65}

In a lengthy editorial on "The State of the Presidency," the \textit{New York Times} on November 4 called for the resignation of the President:

The visible disintegration of President Nixon's moral and political authority, of his capacity to act as Chief Executive, of his claim to leadership and to credibility leads us to the reluctant conclusion that Mr. Nixon would be performing his ultimate service to the American people -- and to himself -- by resigning his office before the nation is forced to go through the traumatic and decisive process of impeachment.

The doubts about Mr. Nixon that have gathered an ominous momentum over the past twelve months have arisen, basically, from three different sources -- constitutional, political and personal -- and they are now flowing together in a surging torrent...

The gravity of the case against him rests...on his deliberate violations of the letter and spirit of the Constitution and, flowing out of this, the collapse of public confidence in the integrity of the man who only one year ago was elected to the Presidency by the largest popular majority in American history...

The one last great service that Mr. Nixon can now perform for his country is to resign. He has been trying to "tough it out" for too long at too great a cost to the nation. As long as he clings to office, he keeps the Presidency swamped in a sea of scandal and the American public in a morass of concern and confusion. The state of the union requires nothing less than change in the sorry state of the Presidency.\textsuperscript{66}

By November 12, the imperative is stronger in the Times' editorials:

The issue of the Presidential succession becomes more urgent as Mr. Nixon's authority diminishes daily in the face of even more unanswered questions about his conduct in office. The continuity of government is clearly the paramount concern as Congress considers the nomination of Representative Gerald Ford to the
Vice Presidency. Swift and single-minded attention to the filling of that glaring vacancy is inseparable from governmental stability.67

The Times was still exhorting Congress to examine carefully Ford's personal record and his capacity to fill the office, but a definite change in tone can be perceived. The paper appeared to be more concerned with qualities of integrity and openness and with respect for the law of the land.

The nominee was the same Jerry Ford, but the Times was now willing to judge him by different standards.

The paper did concede at the outset, however, that:

It is true but irrelevant that Mr. Ford would not be the choice of those who voted for Mr. Nixon's opponent in 1972, nor of many Democrats who crossed party lines to give Mr. Nixon his historic plurality, nor of many thoughtful Republicans who are more interested in quality than partisanship.68

The subtle shift in emphasis is apparent in the closing paragraphs:

...The recent memory of the Agnew disaster obviously dictates scrupulous attention to questions of personal integrity. The complexity of the modern Presidency calls for concern over a candidate's past accomplishments and his potential for sound judgment.

The Nixon experience, however, also underscores the importance of qualities that give assurance of a return to an open Presidency obedient to the Constitution. The next Vice President therefore must be expected to understand the difference between executive privilege and executive arrogance. He must acknowledge that law and order must always be compatible with the Bill of Rights. He must willingly concede that "inherent" rights belong to the people, not the President. He must know that no man can faithfully execute the laws if he believes himself above the law.
Although we find many flaws of omission and com-
mission in Mr. Ford's political record and exercise
of leadership, it is ultimately on the basis of
these fundamental questions, along with those of
personal integrity, that Congress must rule on his
fitness for the Presidential succession. Applying
those criteria, free of partisanship, to the
President's choice, Congress should move rapidly
to pass on the Ford nomination. The state of the
Presidency brooks no delay.69

Once the Senate Rules Committee had unanimously ap-
proved the nomination and approval by the full Senate was
imminent, the New York Times became apprehensive and re-
treated to familiar territory. On November 26, the paper
retraced some editorial ground and reviewed its earlier
misgivings about Ford. This time the paper made certain
to point out that the

...members of Congress are not obliged to rubber-
stamp Mr. Nixon's choice. On the contrary, as
surrogates for the people, they have a responsibility
to weigh this nominee's competence, judgment, inde-
pendence and philosophical outlook in terms of
whether he is the man whom they can conscientiously
endorse as the potential President...70

The Times' objections are treated in far greater
detail here than in its initial reaction six weeks earlier,
when Ford was simply a vice presidential nominee. The
events of the preceding weeks -- including revelations of
the two missing tapes and an 18-minute gap in a third
tape -- changed all that. Nixon's position had so eroded
that on November 26 the Times was clearly assessing the
man who would soon be President:

...With regard to competence, Mr. Ford has no
administrative experience, little experience in
foreign affairs and no record of constructive
legislative draftsmanship. No important bills or
proposals bear his name. He has been almost
totally uncreative during his 25 years in the House of Representatives. In 1970, he displayed remarkably poor judgment and inadequate understanding of the constitutional separation of powers when he personally initiated the futile attempt to impeach Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas.

Representative Ford's relentless efforts to undercut the open housing law, the right-to-vote law, and virtually every other civil rights statute of the past decade afford no comfort to the nation's Negro citizens and are clearly out of step with majority sentiment in this country with regard to racial equality. His legislative record is remarkably lacking in compassion...71

In less than two weeks, Gerald Ford would be sworn in as Vice President, and the New York Times, objections notwithstanding, would herald the occasion as "...cause for gratitude that the nation now has a man of undoubted financial probity in the second office."72

Misgivings were then laid aside for the time being as the paper looked to the positive aspects of the situation:

Mr. Ford is a conventional politician with an open, friendly manner who is known to his colleagues in Congress as a willing team worker and a decent, likeable man. In a political system that requires personal trust and a spirit of cooperation if it is to function effectively, those personal qualities are not inconsiderable assets.73

Yet a discouraging conviction persisted, the Times admitted, that the country had not been well served by the President and Congress, and the 25th Amendment had not worked as it was intended to work. "The greater responsibility lies with Mr. Nixon," the Times said, for making no conscientious effort to choose the best man available in the Republican party to serve as a stand-by President. Instead, Mr. Nixon
chose a man whom he knew Congress was sure to confirm without much controversy and who was not of sufficient personal stature to be a dangerous rival.\textsuperscript{74}

The final irony, the \textit{Times} pointed out, was that the "...bland acceptability that is Mr. Ford's salient quality will probably serve to hasten Republican Party pressures for the President to quit."\textsuperscript{75}

Two days later, on December 9, the \textbf{New York Times} again called for Nixon's resignation:

The nation has...already suffered for some months from having an executive branch immobilized by the lack of Presidential direction. The dangerous situation in the Middle East, the energy crisis and inflation require a reinvigorated Presidency. Additional months of strain and stalemant during an impeachment trial might prove costly. On balance, therefore, this newspaper reiterates its view that Mr. Nixon could best serve the nation by resigning. But if he continues to refuse to do so, impeachment is the only recourse.\textsuperscript{76}

Ford's confirmation was already a fact of life, and the \textbf{New York Times} was still grousing about his qualifications for the Presidency:

Except in the vital realm of ethics, Mr. Ford might well represent no improvement. His record on racial equality, civil liberties, economic justice and social reform certainly provides no ground for optimism. His knowledge of foreign affairs is thin; he is untested as an executive, and his speeches are routinely partisan and banal.\textsuperscript{77}

The country scarcely has an alternative, the \textit{Times} concluded, then to act upon the optimistic belief that Ford would offer

...a fresh start and would benefit from a surge of public goodwill and cooperation. If he emulated Harry Truman in recognizing his own limitations,
choosing the best advisers he could find, delegating considerable authority to them, and listening to diverse counsel, he could conceivably turn in a creditable performance.78

Washington Post Straddles the Issue

Unlike the New York Times, which always manages to keep its dignified head no matter how dramatic the events or expressive the prose, the Washington Post's editorials were painstakingly detailed, emotional pleas. The Post's total commitment and deep immersion in the Watergate investigations may account for the fervor of its coverage.

The Monday after the firing of Cox and Ruckelshaus and the resignation, in protest, of Richardson, the Post appeared visibly dazed by this new twist in the convoluted plot that had come to be known as Watergate:

One seeks a moment of repose in which to reflect on the savage events that Richard Nixon has wrought -- but there is none. Instead, each day's astonishment is superseded by that of the next, so that there is neither the time nor tranquility required to appraise the meaning of the unprecedented series of shocks to which the public has been treated... We expect we are speaking for more than instant observers, editorialists and assorted double-domers when we take note of the pushed and pressured condition in which people find themselves and of the genuine anxiety that is thus compounded about what is going on in the U. S. government.

How then are we to take a measure of the state to which Mr. Nixon has brought the institutions over which he was elected to preside?

...Mr. Nixon can no longer require of us that we ignore the sorry state to which he has brought our affairs in order that he may "govern." His actions over the weekend were those of a man who scarcely seems to understand the meaning of the word.79
When Nixon agreed to turn over the disputed Watergate tapes to U. S. District Court Judge Sirica on October 23, the Washington Post sliced through the nation's collective relief with this message of foreboding:

The President said last Friday night that he wished to 'bring the issue of Watergate tapes to an end to assure our full attention to more pressing business affecting the very security of the nation.' We share that aim. But we think there is no more 'pressing business affecting the security of the United States' than the business of deciding whether Richard Nixon, by his performance across the whole range of Watergate related matters, has not proved himself incapable of governing. And that issue, we would argue, has scarcely begun to be resolved by yesterday's decision to surrender the Watergate tapes to the court.

A day later, on October 25, the Post spoke out strongly against the "...ill-considered suggestion now being widely offered that the Congress should delay action..." on Ford's nomination:

There have been arguments advanced that Congress has no obligation to take up a nomination made by a President who faces possible impeachment proceedings. There has been talk of holding Mr. Ford as a hostage for better behavior by the President.

There is the possibility -- which some apparently find quite tantalizing -- that the congressional Democrats, by failing to confirm Mr. Nixon's nominee, could engineer the elevation of one of their own, House Speaker Carl Albert, to the presidency if Mr. Nixon should be unable to complete his term -- and thus sweep their party into a position of power it could not even come close to winning in last year's election.

Speaker Albert was quite properly having none of it, and the Post lauded his efforts to complete the confirmation process before formal impeachment proceedings, if any, were initiated against the President.
"In political terms," the Post observed darkly, "the last thing that the country wants or needs...

...is any more distress, disunity and narrow partisanship. All this would certainly result from an attempt to hold the nomination of Mr. Ford as hostage, either to Mr. Nixon's future performance or in anticipation of the President's impeachment. Moreover, it would be profoundly wrong -- and probably self-defeating as well -- to try to turn impeachment into a congressional coup d'etat which would install a Democrat in the White House. That would be precisely the sort of cynical, exploitive abuse of power which the American people are now reacting so strongly against.

...Those who favor blocking the nomination of Mr. Ford and keeping Speaker Albert next in line, are thus urging a course which Congress and the states specifically repudiated by approving the 25th Amendment. They are also pressing a course fraught with the most dangerous kind of political mischief.84

The Post also took this opportunity to suggest that as long as Gerald Ford's nomination was pending and he had "...such as intense and involved personal stake in the proceedings..." that it would be "fitting" for him to take himself out of any argument over impeachment -- rather than lead the defense of the President in the House, as he was then doing.85 The Post was the only paper of those sampled to raise this point in its editorial columns.

Submerged in the day-to-day minutiae of its own Watergate investigation, the Post's reaction on November 1 to the announcement of the two missing tapes was decidedly cynical:

Cast your mind back to the wholesale shredding of documents at the Committee for the Re-Election of the President, to Mr. Stans' destruction of lists of campaign contributors, to Mr. Haldeman's order
to Mr. Strachan to make sure that the files were clean, to Mr. Erlichman's suggestion to Mr. Dean that he 'deep six' some of the evidence found in Howard Hunt's White House safe, and to the eventual destruction of that evidence by none other than the acting director of the FBI, Mr. Gray. There is more, but that is enough -- enough to make it very nearly impossible to take it at face value, and without further questions, the White House's assertion that these tapes are missing only because they never did exist.86

Given the Post's obvious distrust of and even contempt for Nixon and his cohorts, the paper's November 6 editorial, entitled "The Exorcising of a President," is somewhat of an enigma. Perhaps, the Post was concerned that its deep and subjective involvement in its own Watergate investigations had stamped the paper with an out-to-get-him image. Perhaps, the Post feared that any cries for resignation on its part might be construed as a personal vendetta. The Post argued that respected members of Nixon's own constituency must take the lead. Whatever its motivations, the Post's November 6 editorial, reprinted in part below, is a canny exercise in editorial fence-sitting. Interestingly enough, it appeared two days after the New York Times' reasoned, though somewhat reluctant, call for resignation of the President.

From every part of the political spectrum, voices have been heard...calling for the President's resignation. "Calling for" is in itself a rather loose designation for statements that have been part request, part plea, part demand and part a striking of posture addressed to the only man whose response matters. It is not to minimize the horrendous circumstances which have given rise to this outcry -- or to suggest that Richard Nixon's continued presence in office is desirable -- to
observe that the simple act of wishing aloud that Mr. Nixon would go away begs all the hard and important questions concerning the manner and potential consequences of his doing so.

We are not concerned here to draw up a bill of particulars against Mr. Nixon's continuance in office or to argue in courtroom fashion about his guilt or innocence in specific crimes. It seems to us that an overwhelming case can be made and has been that Mr. Nixon's presidency is now freighted with more than enough liabilities of his own making to recommend his removal and replacement. But when you have stipulated that, you are still left with the fundamental question of how this is to be done in consonance with our established political traditions and juridical procedures and in a manner which promises to achieve the principal objective of so painful an exercise -- namely, the restoration of sustained public confidence in the office of the presidency.

The point is that we have a constitutionally established procedure for the impeachment and removal from office of a president, but it is one that has never been fully exercised and one which a growing number of people believe could only be exercised now at a cost in prolonged public anguish and political disruption at least equal for a time to the cost of perpetuating the disabled and disgraced Nixon presidency. So the cry now is "resign." And yet the speed and seeming ease of this preferred solution could come at a high price, too: the absence of any clear, conclusive and congressionally endorsed finding concerning the President's fitness to continue, and the consequent danger of a public backlash against an event it may come to regard as unfair and for which there is no written, legal justification. The opportunities for political manipulation of all the emotions and uncertainties connected with such an event are limitless and not very attractive. It matters enormously, therefore, how the pressure for resignation comes to the President, who the sources of it are, and the degree to which the public is permitted to understand the nature and the force of the arguments for Mr. Nixon's departure from office.

The President, for example, is unlikely to be much moved by counsel in this regard from those such as ourselves whom he doubtless regards as committed and unthinking adversaries. In fact, Mr. Nixon has shown a rather strong inclination in his public remarks on the subject so far to pretend that the
dissatisfaction with his presidency is confined to some narrow and partisan collection of political opponents who have been out to "get" him since well before Watergate. Therefore, it is all the more important that respected members of his own constituency take the lead...in publicly expressing at some personal risk to themselves their convictions concerning the all but bankrupt condition of the Nixon presidency.

A second requirement in our judgment is that those who tell Mr. Nixon to resign should be equally committed to the commands of the 25th Amendment to the Constitution. Congress...should act expeditiously on the nomination of Minority Leader Ford to fill the vacancy in the vice presidency. In addition to the Constitutional imperatives, there are the requirements of political sense and simple fairness just as Mr. Nixon's departure...should be sanctioned by a genuine sentiment on the part of those who did most to elect him, so the succession should fall to someone who is responsive to that same constituency which prevailed in an election held only one year ago.

Given these requirements, which may or may not be fulfilled, it seems to us that the case for resignation is not necessarily overwhelmingly stronger than the case for impeachment. For those who cry "resign" are asking Mr. Nixon to leave office without a formal, final resolution one way or another of allegations that have been, or might be, made against him. While no formal charges of wrong-doing have been leveled against him, and none may ever be, one must be straightforward and acknowledge the possibility of the President's being pursued into private life through the courts, on criminal charges, and one must squarely face up to the convulsive public impact this could have at a time when the first order of national business would be restoration, not only of confidence, but of pride and dignity in our public affairs.

Events themselves, coming as they do with such remorseless speed these days, may resolve some of these questions or moot them. But if they do not, the questions can neither be avoided nor postponed by those who have taken upon themselves the responsibility for forcing Richard Nixon from office. A president cannot be exorcised, as if he were some unwholesome spirit, merely by repeating the incantation, "Resign!"
So far the *Washington Post* was in agreement with the *New York Times* that "...succession should fall to someone who is responsive to that same constituency which prevailed in an election held only one year ago." Both papers urged Congress to act expeditiously on the Ford nomination, but the *Times* more than once suggested careful examination of Ford's personal record and competence. The *Post*, at this point, appeared to be more wrapped up in the machinations of the Watergate scandals.

The *Post* greeted the news about the 18-minute gap in one of the White House tapes with blatant incredulity:

Did we dream it up over a heavy holiday weekend? Or did President Nixon's lawyers really go into court last Wednesday, on the eve of Thanksgiving, and announce that there is an inexplicable 18-minute missing passage in one of the more crucial Watergate tapes? It does not seem possible that this could happen when you consider everything else that has already happened in the matter of the President's tapes.

The *Post* was beside itself with outrage and frustration, yet it still made no clear-cut demand for Nixon's removal by either resignation or impeachment. Instead, the paper offered more of the same -- pained recitations of Nixon's betrayal of the public trust:

...it has taken Mr. Nixon the better part of four months to reveal to us that evidentiary material lawfully demanded of him by a court of law either never existed or has somehow disappeared. Given the resources at the command of the President and the care with which other urgent presidential business is carried out, to ask us at this stage to believe that this happened by accident -- or even out of nothing more than incompetence or indifference -- is to put the faith of an abused American public to an excruciating test.
By December 3, Ford's confirmation seemed imminent. His nomination had already been approved by large majorities of the Senate and the House Judiciary Committee and was scheduled for full House action shortly. The Post's editorial of that day was the first one in nearly two months that addressed itself to the subject of Ford's qualifications for office.

Whereas the New York Times had thought the congressional hearings to be superficial and had questioned the efficacy of the 25th Amendment, the Washington Post considered the sessions "thorough and serious" and generally much more fruitful than had been expected.

The Times on December 7 declared that the members of Congress had been "notably less conscientious and less exacting in judging Mr. Ford's record and demonstrating capacity for the Vice-Presidency than the Senate was in weighing other nominations of Mr. Nixon for the Supreme Court and lesser offices."92

The Post reacted to the hearings in this way:

...So far, the experience has produced much more which is reassuring, both about the process and about the nominee. Congress has recognized the need to consider the nomination with particular care, both because the nominee is one of its own and because, as Sen. Howard Cannon put it, there is a "very strong likelihood" that the legislators are actually passing judgment on the next President of the United States. Accordingly, the hearings and investigations of both the Senate Rules committee and the House Judiciary panel have been notably thorough and serious. Mr. Ford has been subjected to a far greater and more systematic scrutiny than any vice presidential nominee chosen in the hurly-burly of a party convention.
The process has thus enabled the country to find out a great deal about the congressman who, barring some last-minute hitch, will soon be in line to become chief executive.93

The Post then recalled its initially critical reaction to the Ford nomination some seven weeks earlier:

...we observed that his public service has been characterized by modest ambition and modest achievement, and a certain pedestrian doggedness. His voting record over the years has been uninspired and uninspiring and includes a lack of sensitivity to wrenching social problems and the great issues of civil rights and liberties. The most conspicuous chapter in Mr. Ford's career, his effort to impeach Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas in 1970, was also his worst performance, marked as it was by reckless statements, innuendo, and a great carelessness with facts.94

The hearings had not erased these and other points of concern, the Post noted, but they had underscored "...some countervailing strengths: a record of personal and financial integrity, an open and forthcoming attitude, a real appreciation of congressional and public anxieties about the misuse of presidential power."95

Under lengthy public interrogation, Ford has shown qualities of "decency and sturdiness," the Post said, which make one hope and think that the Douglas affair was a sorry aberration. In short, Mr. Ford has come across as an experienced politician in the classic American sense, a man who understands the democratic system's workings and constraints, who respects public opinion, and who values comity among the branches of government.96

The Post, highly critical of Ford seven weeks earlier, had been impressed by his performance at the congressional hearings. But it was more than the hearings
themselves that had influenced the Post's attitude toward the nominee. The incredible series of events emanating from the White House had so blackened the Post's perception of Nixon that Ford shone brightly in comparison.

The paper was not unaware of these peculiar circumstances when it observed that, "It is a real commentary on the troubles of the time that such fundamental qualities -- prerequisites of office really -- should assume such prominence, and that Mr. Ford's allegiance to the ordinary norms of politics should be sources of so much assurance." 97

Misgivings gave way to the exigencies of the moment as the Washington Post concluded: "Respecting competence, one must at minimum agree with the carefully couched conclusion of the Senate Rules Committee that Mr. Ford has 'fully met reasonable tests' regarding his philosophy, character and integrity." 98

Los Angeles Times Plays It Cool

Los Angeles Times' coverage of the events preceding the confirmation of Gerald Ford was low key and restrained. Compared to the coverage of the New York Times and the Washington Post, the L.A. Times appears much less concerned, almost indifferent at times. It is the lack of emotional involvement, the cool detached manner that creates this impression.

The two eastern papers were fairly devastated by
the so-called "Saturday Night Massacre." The L.A. Times said primly: "Mr. Nixon has made serious mistakes these last days, mistakes that discredit his leadership and peril the balance of federal power. The mistakes require correction." 99

The L.A. Times differed considerably from its eastern colleagues in its assessment of Nixon's attempted compromise on the White House tapes:

We do not know all the details of the negotiations that went on last week. It is well that a compromise was tried. We can understand the willingness of the Senate Watergate committee leaders to strike a bargain that will give them part of what they failed to get through the courts. But we think Cox was only fulfilling his basic responsibility when he rejected the same compromise.100

Both the New York Times and the Washington Post had disapproved of the compromise attempt in the first place and were critical of the willingness of Senators Ervin and Baker of the Watergate committee to accept the initial offer.

When the President agreed to surrender the tapes, the L.A. Times' response on October 24 was calm, considered and even hopeful:

It is a good thing that President Nixon has decided to hand over the White House tapes to the court. His decision will undo some of the damage done in a weekend of bad decisions. It will encourage further compromise and accommodation at a time of national crisis.101

Nixon's decision, the L.A. Times declared, "... should calm some of those who precipitously and prematurely
raised the threat of impeachment. That ultimate recourse is not now justified either by law or politics," the paper concluded.102

It was to be nearly three weeks before the L.A. Times would concede the necessity for impeachment. And even then, resignation was still taboo with this west coast daily.

But on October 24, the Los Angeles Times was still assuring its readers that "...Carefulness, calmness and reason can best prepare the nation for the judgments it may...be required to make" once the Watergate investigation is concluded and the full facts presented to the nation.103

However, in its October 28 editorial, the L.A. Times was openly leery of Nixon's agreement to restore the office of the special prosecutor.104 On November 1, the paper's reaction to the two missing tapes was: "Incredible. Unbelievable."105 Nixon's angry outburst against the media at his October 26 press conference brought this measured response from the L.A. Times. "News-gathering organizations, like other institutions, have their full measure of faults, but it is the events themselves, unprecedented in our history that have shocked the nation -- not the reporting of them."106

Exactly one week after the New York Times called for Nixon's resignation, the L.A. Times announced its qualified position in a November 11 editorial headed "What
To Do About the President:

...The President has lost much of the country's confidence in his integrity. He has lost what both Time magazine and the New York Times, which urged him to resign, called his moral authority. The President by his own acts has brought the Presidency into disrepute and the nation into a turmoil of distrust and uncertainty. It is hard to see how in the best of circumstances he could finish his term in anything but a seriously weakened condition.

But we believe that to go from these premises to the conclusion that he should be asked to resign is too hasty and too risky a leap of logic and judgment. If he is to go, and he may well have to go, we believe that impeachment is preferable to resignation.

Of course, he may choose to resign. Although we think it unlikely now, we can foresee circumstances in which he would conclude that his resignation would be best for him, or for the country, or for his party.

But to accept the idea of resignation is crucially different from advocating resignation as a sound solution to the nation's serious problems with its President.

We believe that in this time of national stress it is most important to follow the constitutional processes. The people elected Mr. Nixon President; the people's representatives in Congress can, if they wish, remove him...

Those who press for resignation argue that the presumed length of an impeachment would be too much for the country to take, and would tempt the principal foreign adversary, the Soviet Union, into adventurous probing of American weakness.

To this argument there are three answers:

First, an impeachment proceeding need not be excessively long. We don't suppose that Congress would proceed to so grave a step without ascertaining beforehand the probability that the consensus of the country demanded the removal of the President. And in the face of such consensus this President, any President, might well resign, anyway.

Second, though an impeachment proceeding could indeed tempt a foreign adversary, we do not believe that such a temptation would be essentially different from
those now afforded by the weakened Mr. Nixon, and he proved able enough to deal with a tough turn of events in the Middle East.

Third, there is the argument that an impeachment proceeding would be excessively divisive at a time when the country longs for domestic tranquility. This is exactly the point where we believe that the advocates of resignation are on the weakest ground. To ask Mr. Nixon to quit by popular demand would settle few if any of those troubling questions on the basis of which he was forced out. It would instead leave the unanswered charges festering. It would leave open the probability of political and personal recriminations that would not calm but would inflame public opinion.

Even if these arguments could be set aside, asking the President to resign is neither straightforward nor courageous. If you think the President has behaved so badly that he should resign, you should take the responsibility of advocating his impeachment.

Mr. Nixon stands variously accused of violating the spirit and the letter of the Constitution. There is no safer, sounder, surer way to deal with these accusations than to resort to the procedure established by the Constitution.

That is not to say that we advocate a rush to impeachment in place of a rush to resignation.

Some people believe that there is already enough evidence on which to remove the President from office. We respect that point of view but we don't share it. There is much evidence, but not yet enough...For us, the central questions to date are the President's handling, or rather mishandling, of the Watergate scandals, and the allegations of corruption in his Administration.

...if the President continues to obstruct the inquiries into the breaking of the laws of the United States, then he will have moved himself closer to that less easily defined kind of offense that we -- and, we believe, the nation -- would consider impeachable.

Even more likely, we think, is the possibility that he will place himself in the position that many see him in now, where suspicion and loss of public trust will impair his ability to govern effectively to an intolerable degree.
We do not think that point has yet been reached, but we would by no means rule out the possibility that it will be. If this happens, impeachment would be called for.

...while the special prosecutor continues his work, and the Senate Watergate committee proceeds with its work, the House Judiciary Committee should move with more dispatch and responsibility and bipartisanship than it has shown to get ready for an impeachment bill of particulars.107

The Los Angeles Times had not commented upon the Ford nomination since its initial reaction of October 14. Now, in the closing paragraph of its November 11 assessment on the state of the presidency, the paper echoed the mood of the New York Times and the Washington Post:

A year ago Ford would have been no one's choice for President. That is not so important now. The important thing is that he has been nominated according to the procedures in the Constitution, and his long record of personal decency and his forthright testimony to Congress make him, if not everyone's first choice, at least an acceptable alternative should the Presidency become vacant.108

In its earlier editorial on Ford, the L.A. Times said that Ford had not achieved great distinction in his career and that the President could have done better in his choice. But the paper had also described Ford as "...a man of broad experience in Washington, a member of Congress for a quarter-century, leader of his party in the House of Representatives for almost a decade, a man popular with his colleagues on Capitol Hill, a politician whose integrity has not been questioned."109

For the purposes of comparison we can, perhaps, describe the L.A. Times' earlier attitude as "lukewarm" --
a blending of positive and negative elements. On November 11, nearly two months later, Ford's "personal decency" and "forthright testimony"—essentially prerequisites for any high governmental position—have made him, in light of recent Watergate-related events, "an acceptable alternative should the Presidency become vacant." The L.A. Times' attitude toward the nominee would appear to be warming from its initially lukewarm reception.

On November 18, the Los Angeles Times restated its position on impeachment and chastised the House for "muddling" the process thus far:

No matter how successful President Nixon's current offensive to regain public confidence may be, from a temporary and strictly political point of view, he still faces as yet unanswered fundamental challenges to his ability, indeed, to his right, to continue in office. We believe that the best procedure for handling these challenges, if they remain unanswered, lies in the impeachment process; we believe that the House of Representatives should prepare to take up impeachment if necessary. So it is discouraging to note that the House is making rather a muddle of its task.¹¹⁰

When Gerald Ford was sworn in on Thursday, December 6, it was "good news" for the L.A. Times. "That this is so is a measure of the disarray of the Nixon Administration," the paper noted the following morning.

Although the paper's attitude toward Ford continued to be favorable, an undercurrent of acquiescence, a feeling of "let's be thankful for even this much" came through the rather-controlled demeanor:

...Ford's assumption of the Vice Presidency, after the wholehearted approval of Congress, should mean
a modest restoration of order and legitimacy in Washington. Against a background of confusion and doubt piled upon confusion and doubt, the prospect of any gain in public confidence in the country's leadership must be welcomed.

The new Vice President, as much as any man can be, is a known quantity. He has been in the House 25 years. He is personally respected by his colleagues, even by those who have disagreed with his conservative outlook.

Perhaps Ford's greatest opportunity will be to act as a conciliator between the executive branch and Congress. In political philosophy, he is compatible with President Nixon, and yet as House GOP leader Ford has been flexible enough to accommodate the views of more liberal Republicans...

...What is important now is the new Vice President's performance. If he can bring to the office a sense of decency, rectitude and nonpartisan high purpose, that will be enough.112

The Outspoken St. Louis Post-Dispatch

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch was second only to the New York Times in its astute and articulate coverage of the two-month period following the Ford nomination. The P-D lived up to its reputation as an outspoken and progressive newspaper by publishing editorials on a subject essentially untouched by the other papers -- the suspected reasons for the military alert -- and by proposing generally unpopular ideas -- such as the possible succession of House Speaker Carl Albert -- with courage and vigor.

When Ford was first nominated on October 12, the P-D seemed quite willing to accept him as Vice President. However, as the situation grew more critical in Washington, the P-D became increasingly more cautious in its
assessments of the nominee.

The President's actions over the next two months so troubled the Post-Dispatch that the paper greeted the confirmation of Gerald Ford with quiet relief and a sense of hope (more for its effect on Nixon's status than anything else). However, the paper's attitude toward Ford can be seen to have mellowed somewhat during the post-nomination period.

The firing of Archibald Cox and the developments triggered by this audacious act on Nixon's part created the first serious threat of impeachment to the President, according to the Post-Dispatch of October 22:

Congress had been reluctant to entertain the idea of this drastic penalty, but the President's sickening actions over the weekend have raised a challenge that can no longer be avoided. Demands for impeachment will be heard when the House convenes tomorrow, and they must be considered thoroughly and promptly.113

The P-D was overwhelmed by the impropriety of Nixon's actions and seemed to be reasoning out loud in an attempt to explain the situation to its own satisfaction:

Unless Mr. Nixon acted in a fit of passion, he must have considered the possibility that the firing of Cox would intensify demands for his impeachment, and he must have concluded that he should proceed nonetheless. Impeachment is rare and difficult, and the President may be gambling that a majority of the House will not vote for it. He may be right, but the House would be derelict in its duty if it did not thoroughly debate the issue.114

As for the President, the Post-Dispatch concluded, he had now "...virtually closed the door to any chance of redeeming himself in the eyes of the public and regaining
a position of leadership.\textsuperscript{115}

Its disgust and contempt was evident as the \textit{P-D} continued:

His credibility is near zero. He has shown his disdain for the Constitution, for Congress, for the public and for the system of laws under which a free society must operate. He has defied the courts. What happened over the weekend is worse than the disgrace and resignation of the man he selected to be his Vice President. It is an intolerable affront to American ideals and aspirations, and it cannot go unchallenged.

Within three days after the Cox firing, the \textit{P-D} was convinced there was "...little chance...of prompt confirmation of Gerald Ford,...whose fate may depend on the outcome of the growing move to impeach Mr. Nixon.\textsuperscript{117}

According to Senator Muskie, the \textit{P-D} said, Congress is unlikely to take decisive action "until the road ahead becomes clearer."\textsuperscript{118}

At this point, the \textit{P-D}'s advice to Congress regarding succession differed markedly from the other papers surveyed. The others generally agreed that the new Vice President should be a Republican in order to carry out the mandate of the 1972 election.

The \textit{P-D}, on the other hand, believed that the 1972 election itself was suspect "...due to the millions black-jacked from business and industry in the President's behalf and the crimes and chicanery indulged in by some of those working for his re-election."\textsuperscript{119}

Within this framework, it was not merely a partisan ruse for the \textit{P-D} to urge Congress to "move slowly on Mr.
Ford." After all, the P-D reasoned, "House Speaker Carl Albert can step in if need be, and if Mr. Albert is not quite presidential timber at least he is a cut above Mr. Ford."\(^{120}\)

Despite its obviously strong feelings about the actions the President had taken, the P-D was still hopeful that Nixon would put the reins on this head-long rush toward disaster. On October 24 the P-D wrote:

...we think both Congress and the public, and the courts, too, would prefer to avoid a constitutional confrontation, and that a genuine change of heart on the President's part would be welcome. Perhaps he can make a case for himself when he addresses the nation by television. But it will take a lot of doing and it will take an unaccustomed humility and a higher regard for the national welfare.

It might help Nixon to redeem himself if he would encourage Congress to appoint an independent prosecutor who could function as Mr. Cox did but wholly outside the control of the Executive Branch.\(^{121}\)

After Nixon had agreed to release the Watergate tapes to the courts, nominee Ford stated that the President's compliance should "...wipe out any semblance of justification for impeachment."\(^{122}\) The P-D was the only paper surveyed that reacted editorially to the Ford statement:

It is not quite that simple," the P-D said on October 25, "and the House is fully justified in gathering evidence to determine whether impeachment proceedings are warranted. True, Mr. Nixon has eased a constitutional crisis by his action, but that does not cancel out the possibility that he may have been implicated in the Watergate and associated scandals. After all, it was his defiance of the law that caused a great public surge of sentiment for impeachment, and that cannot be put down merely by compliance under pressure.\(^{123}\)
As indicated earlier, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* was the only paper sampled to speak out forthrightly on the worldwide military alert and give voice to the suspicions that had been aroused across the country:

The public has no way of knowing whether the worldwide alert of United States armed forces was warranted, for the people do not have access to diplomatic exchanges or military intelligence. But the credibility of the Nixon Administration being what it is, and the domestic circumstances being what they are, there are grounds for questions...

It is not possible to avoid juxtaposing word of the alert with the present low state of President Nixon's fortunes. The flood of protest over his firing of special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox, which brought on the President's capitulation on the tapes issue as well as rising demands for his impeachment, have reduced the Administration to a new low in public esteem. What could be more logical than creating a foreign "emergency" to remove the heat?...

Implicit in news of the alert and Mr. Kissinger's press conference remarks was the impression that a jittery President was directing attention to latent threats from abroad, saying, in effect, that he should be relieved from Watergate pressures so that he might be free to devote his attention to the vital field of foreign affairs.

A noble thought, but the mundane fact is that the President cannot lead in foreign policy any more than he can attack domestic problems effectively unless he has the confidence of the people, which he now lacks. Perhaps the furor over the alert is in reality a timely reminder that the United States might suddenly be drawn into a genuine world crisis with its leadership paralyzed by scandal. It is a sobering notion, and should produce continued efforts to clean up the Watergate mess, even if the truth should force Mr. Nixon from office."}

Two days later, the *P-D* was at it again:

President Nixon's highly questionable alert of United States armed forces, allegedly to sway the Middle East policy of the Soviet Union, raises the question of whether the President's judgment may have been impaired by the unremitting pressures of
the Watergate and associated scandals. There are many peculiar circumstances surrounding the alert, and Senators Fulbright and Symington are on the right track in seeking to find out what the scare was all about...The people deserve a proper evaluation of this episode, which might have been so perilous.125

The P-D had its final editorial say about the military alert on Tuesday, October 30, in response to the President's October 26 press conference. The paper's skepticism was still apparent:

A major theme that ran through President Nixon's televised news conference last Friday was the President's insistence that his quick response to a Russian move in the Middle East showed he was in command in Washington and that his ability to lead the nation in international affairs had not been impaired...Mr. Nixon denied it was all 'a blown-up exercise' to divert attention from Watergate. Nevertheless, the political use he immediately made of the incident suggests at the least Administration readiness to exploit what happened...We do not see any comfort for the nation in the way Mr. Nixon reacted to Mr. Brezhnev's note, which, insofar as is authentically known, was not accompanied by overt, hostile Soviet military moves. It seems to us a jittery public was needlessly alarmed by the startling proclamation of the alert, news leaks to an anti-Russian hawkish Senator, and a major news conference by Secretary of State Kissinger (and then the presidential press conference) all within 36 hours. Instant crisis, instant solution...126

On the same day, the P-D turned to the on-going question of Gerald Ford's confirmation and urged Congress "...to proceed with such dispatch as is consistent with prudence." Mr. Ford's record should be thoroughly examined, the paper said and warned that the Democrats "...would be doing the country a disservice if they delayed a vote for political reasons."127
There were "ample grounds" for proceeding with caution, the P-D noted. Within a short time, the various investigations and "judicial maneuverings" connected with the Watergate scandals could have a bearing on the status of President Nixon, and consequently on the situation of the Vice President-designate.128

"It may not be possible," the P-D mused, "but it certainly would be desirable for Congress to have a clearer picture of Mr. Nixon's future than at present before Mr. Ford is confirmed. If Mr. Ford is fated soon to become President, that would surely make a difference."129

The Post-Dispatch was the only paper to say outright that it would be preferable if we knew what was going to happen to Nixon before we made our final decision on Ford. The other publications sampled all urged, with varying degrees of urgency, the expeditious investigation and confirmation of the nominee.

Nonetheless, the P-D thought it was unlikely that Ford's confirmation would have any great effect on the crisis in the Executive Branch:

...should anything happen to the President, the succession is protected in the person of House Speaker Carl Albert. In short, what Congress needs to do is to make sure it has all the facts and insight it can command about Mr. Ford and the whole complex of President-Vice President issues and then vote without further delay.130

The following day, October 31, the nation learned of the two missing White House tapes. The P-D voiced its
incredulity in a November 2 editorial:

It is doubtful whether one person in 10,000 will accept the Nixon Administration story that two of the nine vital White House Watergate tapes promised to United States District Judge John Sirica never existed. The public will choose to believe, we think, that the recordings of presidential conversations are nonexistent because they contained evidence implicating President Nixon in the scandals, and that he never intended that the court should have such evidence...It is tragic that the President's veracity is subject to such doubt, but in fact it is. Senator Goldwater of Arizona, Republican candidate for President in 1964, says Mr. Nixon's credibility has sunk to "an all-time low, from which he may not be able to recover."131

After twice publicly suggesting that House Speaker Albert could always step in should a vacancy in the presidency occur, the P-D apparently shelved that idea and on November 4 proposed another -- once again standing apart from the newspapers sampled:

Rather than allowing the Government to be taken over by a caretaker Administration until 1977, Congress could, as it did once before from 1792 to 1886, provide by law that in the event of vacancies in the office of President and Vice President, a special election would be held to choose new occupants for these offices. This procedure, which is authorized by the Constitution (Article 2, Section 1, Clause 6), would give the people a chance to revise the mandate they were misled into giving in 1972. It would provide for a democratic response to corruption and redeem our faith in popular government.132

By November 8, the P-D was taking a serious look at the alternatives open to the President and even suggesting that there might be some middle ground between resignation and impeachment which would allow Nixon "...to escape with a vestige of honor." To a great extent, the P-D pointed out, the choice was really his. "He should consult
seriously with the leaders of his own party, and with influential Democrats, and determine upon a course that would enable the country to move forward without him but with renewed faith in new leadership.\textsuperscript{133}

The confirmation hearings had been underway for several days, and Gerald Ford was making "...a better-than-expected impression," the \textit{P-D} admitted. Until then, a number of Republicans in national office had been reluctant to demand Nixon's resignation, or impeachment, pending congressional confirmation of the Vice President-designate. There appeared to be little doubt now, the \textit{P-D} said, that Ford would be confirmed possibly in early December. Once that happened there would be no chance of the position falling to Democrat Carl Albert, and many people expected "...a new surge of Republican pressure from Representatives and Senators who are afraid to go into the 1974 elections with the Nixon albatross on their backs."\textsuperscript{134}

By mid-November, Nixon's "Operation Candor" was in full swing and the \textit{Post Dispatch} saw it as another reason to move full-steam ahead on the impeachment inquiry:

President Nixon's carefully stage-managed series of meetings with Republican members of Congress fits the White House pattern of dealing with Administration scandals by political manipulation and public relations techniques rather than by the 'full and total disclosure on the part of Mr. Nixon' which Senator Percy was lead to say would be forthcoming.\textsuperscript{135}

If Mr. Nixon really wanted to establish his innocence with the public, the \textit{P-D} challenged, he could go
voluntarily before the Senate Watergate committee and testify under oath in public. He could "...deliver documents that are requested instead of invoking presidential confidentiality and ordering his indicted subordinates' files sequestered among presidential papers." In the absence of such a show of cooperation, the paper said, "...Congress should press on with its impeachment inquiry and with the establishment of a truly independent prosecutor."\textsuperscript{136}

What Nixon should do, the \textit{P-D} concluded, was "...what his nature apparently forbids -- be open and candid, and even a little humble, before the people whose servant he is supposed to be."\textsuperscript{137}

On November 19, eight days after the \textit{Los Angeles Times} had reached a similar conclusion, the \textit{Post-Dispatch} faced the fact that "...at any other time or circumstance it would be difficult to imagine him [Ford] being considered as a potential successor to the presidency."\textsuperscript{138}

The \textit{P-D} still had serious doubts about Ford's fitness for office, and it aired those doubts in greater detail than in any previous editorial on November 19:

...That Mr. Ford's own Republican party has never thought of him for higher office may be taken as an indication of how apparent are his limitations...

As a lawmaker he has been a mediocrity; one may search the record in vain for any significant legislation bearing his name. As a minority leader he has been little more than an errand runner for the White House, a role attested to by his faithful advocacy of President Nixon's Indochina policies. In the area of social legislation, Mr. Ford has voted
against food stamps, public housing, minimum wages and the Office of Economic Opportunity.

Perhaps most disturbing, however, is Mr. Ford's performance on civil rights. On matters relating to improving opportunities for minorities, Mr. Ford's vote has consistently been a negative one. In 1971, for example, he voted to delete major provisions of a bill to strengthen the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In 1969, he led efforts to frustrate the extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. He now supports a constitutional amendment to prevent school busing for integration purposes...\(^\text{139}\)

After that devastating run-down, the \textit{P-D} took a look at the positive side in an attempt to balance the scales: "To be sure, Mr. Ford has admirable qualities. His honesty and integrity have not been seriously challenged, and unlike Mr. Nixon he is neither secretive nor resentful of advice."\(^\text{140}\)

Such traits alone, the \textit{P-D} conceded, "...are scarcely sufficient to commend a person for the presidency, but we believe them to be necessary for the position. They are traits which will permit a limited person to grow in higher office."\(^\text{141}\)

Whether Gerald Ford was indeed capable of such growth was something that Congress should be considering very carefully, the paper advised.\(^\text{142}\)

Once the Senate had confirmed Ford and House approval appeared to be imminent, the \textit{P-D} took one last opportunity, on November 28, to publicly re-think the whole Ford dilemma. After weighing the advantages and disadvantages once again, the \textit{P-D} came up with this conclusion (which the \textit{New York Times} was to echo on December 7):
While all of these factors explain the rationale behind the nomination and the easy confirmation by the Senate, they do not mean that either the President or the Senate have acted in the public interest.

By handling this vice presidential nomination according to the conventional political rules, both the President and the Senate have forsaken an opportunity to apply the new Twenty-fifth Amendment so as to ensure that a superior vice president stands ready to assume the office of president should the need arise.¹⁴³

Point made, the P-D began a process of rationalization well removed from its earlier critical stance:

In confirming Mr. Ford, the Senate has at least moved to fill the vice presidency with a man who can perform the necessary duties of that office and who, should he succeed the President who faces possible impeachment and removal, would bring to the presidency an occupant not tainted as Mr. Nixon is by multiple scandals.¹⁴⁴

However, the Post-Dispatch was not quite ready to give in and offered one last, quick suggestion to Congress "...to make sure that Mr. Ford did not use illegal or improper means in his 1970 effort to unseat Justice Douglas of the Supreme Court." That was a part of Ford's record that had not been fully explored, the paper said.¹⁴⁵ On October 17, the P-D had published a strong editorial on the Douglas affair, suggesting that Ford appeared to have "...lent his support to an executive effort to undermine the judiciary."¹⁴⁶

The P-D concluded its exercise in rationalization by observing that,

By completing the task of filling the vice presidential vacancy with a Republican, Congress will at least be removing an impediment to Republican cooperation in a thorough impeachment inquiry looking
toward uncovering wrongdoing and cleansing the Government, an objective which is in the interest of both major parties and the American people.\textsuperscript{147}

Two days before Gerald Ford was sworn in as Vice President, the \textit{Post-Dispatch} told its readers that it doubted that formal impeachment proceedings would actually be initiated in the coming months. "We would think Mr. Nixon would resign before events reached that stage," the paper declared, "but it is nevertheless important that Congress be prepared for the step."\textsuperscript{148}

What seemed more likely to happen, the paper surmised, was that the stance of Republican leaders would undergo a change once Ford was confirmed. "That would assure Republican control of the White House if Mr. Nixon should resign, and it would free members of his party to work for his removal before the 1974 congressional elections."\textsuperscript{149}

The \textit{Post-Dispatch} saw Ford's impending confirmation as a significant turning point for the crisis-ridden administration and the nation:

We have felt for many months that if Mr. Nixon cannot regain the confidence of the country he should resign rather than force Congress to impeach him. Regaining the people's trust now seems out of the question, and in some way or other the trust of the people in their government must be restored. It is fair enough that the turning point should be the confirmation of Mr. Ford. After that, Mr. Nixon ought to make preparations for an exit under as graceful circumstances as can be managed.\textsuperscript{150}

It was December 9, 1973 and the confirmation of Gerald Ford as Vice President was a fait accompli. The
Post-Dispatch was plainly relieved as it observed: "...the nation can finally confront the possibility of removing President Nixon from office secure in the knowledge that his successor would be an adequate if not inspired replacement."\(^{151}\)

A edge of weariness crept in: "Whether the removal is voluntary or through impeachment seems of less importance than the fact that it occur..."\(^{152}\)

Then came the capitulation. Much as the Washington Post had done six days earlier, the P-D admitted it had seen the error of its ways -- Ford was really a decent chap -- and promptly excused the Douglas brouhaha as "a misdirected exercise in partisanship rather than evidence of an enduring lack of judgment."\(^{153}\)

If not exactly contrite, the P-D was at least resigned to its fate as it resolutely announced: "...we are prepared to accept Mr. Ford in his new role with the hope that he will discharge his duties competently and will grow in his job."\(^{154}\)

Christian Science Monitor, the Kindly Patriarch

The Christian Science Monitor which had accepted Gerald Ford's nomination with equanimity, responded to the Watergate-related activities with the same calmness of mind and even-tempered disposition.

The Monitor's reaction to the firing of Cox lacked the palpable outrage of the New York Times, Washington Post
and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. On October 23, the *Monitor* assessed the mood of the American people following the Saturday Night Massacre:

Last November the majority of the American voters chose Richard Nixon to be their President for the following four years. There is no evidence that a majority yet wish to see him leave that office although their confidence in his conduct in office has sunk to a new low point.

So far as the public record shows, a substantial majority of Americans approve of Mr. Nixon's handling of American foreign policy and a great many probably approve of much of his domestic policy. Certainly a substantial minority, conceivably even a majority, would be willing to pay the price of tolerating his breach of faith on Watergate in order to keep him in office...

But, the *Monitor* conceded, "...that price is now high and getting higher." Thus, the question was asked, "What's to be done?" and, with some reluctance and a measure of sadness, the *Monitor* offered this analysis of the alternatives:

...The constitutional crisis can be resolved if Mr. Nixon will retreat from his new position and put himself back within the law and within the range of his own promises to the Congress and to the American people. This newspaper, and certainly most Americans, would prefer to have Mr. Nixon remain in office as a constitutional President than accept the ordeal of what must happen if he continues to defy the courts and the Congress.

Thus we urge Mr. Nixon to reconsider what we can only regard as most ill-conceived action. He should return to his earlier assurance that he will abide by a "definitive" decision of the Supreme Court. He should cooperate in getting the matter of the tapes on its way to the Court. If he would do that, the constitutional crisis would come to a quick conclusion and the country could get back to normal business...
If Mr. Nixon continues in defiance of the courts and of the Congress, the road ahead will have to be traveled, no matter how painful it would be. The United States is not a monarchy. The President is subject to the laws as much as any other citizen. If he continues in defiance of the courts, or of his pledges to the Congress and to the public -- the Congress will have to set forth down the impeachment road.

We profoundly hope that it will not come to that. What is needed is calm, dispassionate evaluation rather than precipitate action. We hope very much that Mr. Nixon will reconsider. But if he refuses, then the Congress must move. No man in the United States is above the law and the courts.

Compared to the other newspapers sampled, the Monitor's reaction to Nixon's decision to surrender the tapes might be considered an over-reaction:

-- "We are profoundly thankful that the constitutional crisis...is resolved for the moment..."158

-- "...that dramatic moment when presidential counsel Charles Alan Wright declared that 'President Nixon will comply in all respects with the order of this court' ...

-- "...We congratulate all who had a share in the right decision on having reached the right decision -- at long last...

-- "...We can be thankful today that no matter how painful the process, the right decision was reached."

-- "...Future presidents will for a long time remember the events of the 23rd of October. The lesson is clear and simple. Presidents do not defy the law."

Like a loving grandparent so willing to forgive the
transgressions of a favored grandchild and so eager to make amends to the youthful penitent -- the Monitor began to plan for the new way of life which must necessarily follow this inglorious misdeed:

The way is now clear for a lot of overdue and necessary housecleaning... All the closet doors must be opened. Any questions about what lies inside must be resolved. Sunlight and fresh air must, by whatever means, be let in... What happens during the final three years of the Nixon term of office will depend first on the results of the housecleaning. It should be done as quickly and thoroughly as possible... 163

The remaining problems in the whole Watergate spectrum, the paper temporarily laid aside with a punctilious, "... although there are some serious matters to be tidied up..." 164

The "most desirable outcome" of this exercise in clean living was "... a Richard Nixon cleared of doubt and operating within the constitutional boundaries now newly defined." 165

To the Monitor it seemed that things would surely work out. After all, Nixon's foreign policies were "excellent and operating well." The Middle East cease fire was "impressive evidence" of that. 166 But even the Christian Science Monitor had to admit that Nixon's domestic policies needed "rethinking." While the housecleaning was going on, the paper said, "this task should be taken in hand. Some priorities need revising. Economic stability should be high on the list." 167
One last gentle reproof and a word of grandfatherly advice:

...From last November [1972] to the constitutional crisis Mr. Nixon...[had been] behaving too much as a factional partisan, too little as President of all the people. We urge him to rethink his role and be sure that in domestic as well as in foreign matters, he is going to be a President of all the people.168

While the Christian Science Monitor was playing the kindly old patriarch, the country was trying to comprehend the latest in a series of incomprehensible announcements emanating from Washington -- the worldwide military alert. The Monitor seized up the situation and, four days later, presented this interpretation for its readers:

...The President's tenure seems to be split along two separate tracks.

On one of those tracks, the conduct of foreign affairs, the past week's events show him holding to the direction of his successes. It is still early to know with precision whether the President overplayed his hand in issuing a worldwide U.S. military alert in securing a Mideast cease-fire and observer deal with the Soviet Union. But the effect on [sic] his actions can be seen in the heading of U.N. forces toward the war zones and the first talks between Israeli and Egyptian military leaders in 17 years.

On the domestic track the President continues in deep trouble. The latest Gallup poll shows the President's standing with the American people has plummeted from a high of almost 70 percent approval at the start of his second term, to below 30 percent approval at the weekend of his greatest domestic crisis -- the firing of special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox...169

In the nearly two-month span between Ford's nomination and confirmation, the Monitor paid little attention to the nominee. In fact, the most it had to say about the
Vice President-designate was said the day after he was sworn in. During these two months, the Monitor concentrated on President Nixon and the political ramifications of Watergate and related problems.

The paper did once reassure Republican conservatives, on November 5, that Gerald Ford was "...at least as conservative as Mr. Nixon, in some respects more so." 170

There was no reason to fear for their disenfranchisement, the Monitor told conservatives. "Mr. Ford would not give a leftward tilt to national policy." But he would add something which had been dangerously missing in government -- a spirit of conciliation and calm communication between the White House and Capitol Hill, the paper said. 171

Three days after the New York Times called for Richard Nixon's resignation, the Monitor was still quoting Senator Barry Goldwater: "The time hasn't come for him [Nixon] to resign." And as the Monitor saw it, so long as Goldwater said no, there could be no united front of conservative Republicans favoring resignation. The initiative was in Republican hands. 172

The Monitor's interpretation of "the politics of it all" was unique among the newspapers sampled:

Conditions just about as they are, are ideal for the Democrats. Richard Nixon, in office, is in the political spotlight, is a constant reminder of things done by members of his administration which ought not to have been done, and hence is an almost ideal political target...
So Democrats lose their favorite target if Mr. Nixon were to resign. Also, they run the risk of seeing the successor-presumptive, Gerald Ford, become both a successful and popular president, which is entirely possible.\textsuperscript{173}

If things went as far as impeachment, the \textit{Monitor} figured, the Democrats would have to go along with it, for appearance's sake. "But they were dragging their feet as much as they dared," the paper said.\textsuperscript{174}

The \textit{Monitor} concluded that "...it would be imprudent of Republicans to make any decisive move until a Republican is safely seated in the vice presidential office. Senator Goldwater's remark...was a wise signal."\textsuperscript{175}

During President Nixon's televised speech before the Associated Press Managing Editors Association on November 17, the \textit{Monitor} perceived "...a man who realizes the seriousness of his credibility gap and is prepared to fight in new forums to restore public trust."\textsuperscript{176}

What the \textit{St. Louis Post-Dispatch} had called "an exercise in public relations" the day before,\textsuperscript{177} the \textit{Monitor} described as "...a new appearance of confidence, flexibility and willingness to discuss previously avoided matters [which] added up to what could mark a political upsurge in national acceptance."\textsuperscript{178}

On November 19, the \textit{Monitor} observed that "...surface indicators of the public mood have been shifting like a weathervane in the past month -- from what seemed like a rush toward demanding resignation or impeachment to
uncertainty about both."

During the two-month period under consideration, the Monitor made no public editorial commitment favoring resignation or impeachment. Nor did it straddle the editorial fence between the two as did the Washington Post.

The closest the Monitor came to even acknowledging the possibility of Nixon's ouster was in this ominous warning of December 4, two days short of Ford's confirmation:

Until this week Mr. Nixon had special bargaining power. The alternative to him as President was until recently Spiro Agnew. Since Mr. Agnew's resignation the alternative has been a Democrat. But from the moment Mr. Ford is finally confirmed there will be a Republican alternative in Mr. Ford who is acceptable to the Republicans in Congress.

We urge Mr. Nixon before it is too late to welcome Mr. Ford into his councils and to heed his advice.

The Monitor's editorial reaction to Gerald Ford on October 15, 1973, though limited in length and depth, can certainly be described as accepting or positive. The paper had little to say about the man during the post-nomination period. Its wholly favorable editorial of December 7 can be considered an expanded version of a previously held opinion, unaffected by Watergate-related events which had occurred during that period.

The paper's December 7 editorial is reprinted, in part, below:

Gerald Ford of Grand Rapids, Mich., is probably the most thoroughly investigated person ever to reach
the top level of government in Washington.

During the two months since he was selected by President Nixon (on the advice of the Republican leaders in Congress) to replace Spiro Agnew, a host of FBI agents, special investigators for Senate and House, newsmen, and private citizens have looked into every episode in his life. What probably should be done in the future with all prospective presidential and vice-presidential candidates has been done with Mr. Ford. The United States is getting a known, not an unknown, quantity for its new vice-president.

It is getting a man who came to the Congress of the U.S. 25 years ago (1948) and has, during the intervening years, won the respect and friendship of his colleagues in the House of both parties and all political persuasions in spite of being of conservative personal inclinations. He is...a political person who can meet and come to reasonable accommodations with persons of differing political views. He is not dogmatic or doctrinaire. His own personal course is steadily conservative, but his search is for the accommodation which makes the business of government possible.

Also, and of first importance to the future, Gerald Ford is a man of the Congress. He has risen in it to the leadership of his own party in the House. He knows its workings. He believes in the American system as laid down by the Founding Fathers and as evolved from their blueprints. It is a system in which government is conducted by the executive branch of the government on the basis of constant consultation with the Congress.

His selection for the vice-presidential place has been virtually unanimous in the Congress largely because he is both a reasonable person and one who understands and approves and says he will always try to preserve that system of daily consultation between Capitol Hill and White House...

...He is intended by the Congress to be the first vice-president-in fact in American political history. He is expected and intended to be in the center of all White House decisions and to assert the views of the Congress in those decisions.

It will be a fascinating experiment to watch. Americans are about to discover whether in fact the drift toward the so-called "imperial presidency"
can be reversed and the familiar American style of government restored.\textsuperscript{181}

**Chicago Tribune Stands Apart**

The *Chicago Tribune*'s firm support of President Nixon and his Vice President-designate Gerald Ford never flagged and, if anything, gained in conviction during the tumultuous two months preceding Ford's confirmation.

The *Tribune*'s perceptions and interpretations of the events during this period differed so markedly from all other papers sampled that no adequate benchmark for comparison can be established. The material -- partisan to the extreme -- appeared to bend reality to its own ends. At one point, the *Tribune* even acknowledged that its editorial stance was different from most other publications.

Samples of editorial statements regarding President Nixon, Gerald Ford, Watergate and related events will be cited below. The *Tribune*'s consistent support of Ford must be understood within a philosophical framework that is basically incompatible with that of the *Los Angeles Times* and *Christian Science Monitor*, both of which reacted favorably to Ford's nomination and ultimate confirmation.

Following the dismissal of Archibald Cox, the *Tribune* declared that President Nixon had perpetrated what may have been the "worst blunder" in the history of the Presidency.\textsuperscript{182}
He blundered and now must pay the price, the
Tribune said,

...But neither he nor the nation should be subject
to the price many of Mr. Nixon's critics and political
enemies now seem to have in mind -- a hysterical,
inflammatory, and divisive political inquisition such
as that which led to the purely political impeachment
of President Andrew Johnson in 1868. We are, as
Mr. Cox said, a nation of laws, not men. Personalities,
personal hatreds, and partisan ambitions must not be
allowed to intrude upon the resolution of this con­
troversy. 183

Here, the Tribune agreed with the other newspapers
that "...Talk of holding his [Ford's] appointment hostage
for release of the Watergate tapes and the like cannot be
countenanced." 184

To this widely held opinion, the Tribune added its
own touch: "His appointment has nothing to do with the
Watergate controversy and his qualifications for office
have not been changed one whit by the events of the week­
end." 185

Ford's qualifications for office may not have been
affected by the Saturday night firings as the Tribune
suggested, but as has been shown earlier, Watergate-
related events did affect the standards by which Ford was
evaluated for office. For as Nixon's position weakened,
Ford came to be seen as potentially the next President
and was interrogated accordingly by the congressional
committee.

On October 23, the Tribune renewed its appeal
against impeachment:
One colossal blunder does not justify another. President Nixon's dismissal of special prosecutor Archibald Cox and the accompanying loss of his high command in the Department of Justice do not justify a clamor for instant impeachment.

Who in the country really wants to substitute Speaker Carl Albert (D., Okla.) for President Nixon? Yet that would be the consequence if the President were to resign precipitately or if he were successfully impeached before his nomination of Rep. Gerald Ford as Vice President was confirmed...

Certainly before Congress devotes any attention to impeachment resolutions, it should act on the nomination of Rep. Gerald Ford as Vice President. To talk about vacating the position of chief executive when the next in line is a member of a party different from the incumbent's would be highly irresponsible...

After President Nixon agreed to surrender the disputed tapes to Judge Sirica, the Tribune noted that,

...The forces set in motion are still in motion, but the President's new decision on the issue of the tapes provides occasion for reevaluation on all fronts...

The House Judiciary Committee has been set to work on impeachment resolutions, but the question of impeachment, if not mooted, is certainly now altered in character and scope. Mr. Nixon cannot now be accused of withholding evidence or dealing contemptuously with the courts and his action in firing Mr. Cox was recognized by all as legal, however unwise.

The Tribune's first major philosophical departure from the other newspapers surveyed came on October 25. Even the paper itself had to admit this one was different. The editorial, entitled "A Political Failure, is excerpted below:

Now the analysis of President Nixon and his conduct of his office becomes almost a parlor game. Everybody is doing it. We offer ours and it is different
from most we have seen.

We do not look for clues in the maze of thickets of clinical psychology. Is he lonely, isolated, desperate, despairing, depressed, power-mad, introverted, suspicious, vindictive, obsessed by an inflated view of his own importance in history? Possibly, but we don't know.

We do know that since his first term his performance has led him to the brink of the ultimate disaster for a President -- impeachment and removal from office. And we do know that the most significant departure from his successful style of leadership in his first administration has been that he has seemed...to shift from the role of political leader to the role of statesman. If the shift brought triumphs in foreign fields, it also brought abysmal failure in domestic affairs.

Surely this is a paradox, that statesmanship has failed where politics had succeeded. We frequently advise our leaders to rise above politics to statesmanship. In Mr. Nixon's case, that advice -- if he heeded it or if he thought of it himself -- has been a disaster.

It was an almost fatal miscalculation on the President's part to assume that the people of the United States were really on the level when they seemed to say they hold politicians in contempt and venerate statesmen. Actually, they cherish politicians because politicians must pay attention to the people...[T]he statesmen who take themselves so seriously that they lose contact with the people rapidly ride to a fall. Lyndon Johnson was a classic case history -- an enormously successful politician and a dismal bust as a "statesman"...

It is easy to see how Mr. Nixon fell into this trap. He began deemphasizing his political role in the last days of his first administration. He mistakenly chose to stay above the election fray of 1972.

It was obvious that he had decided that with his last election behind him there was no need to accept compromises, to yield to accommodations, to conciliate his enemies, to sell his policies as he had found it necessary to do in his first term. He almost let his country down because of a preoccupation with a legalistic and theoretical issue affecting his personal dignity, vanity, and possible place in history books.
We hope he has learned that a successful President, especially a second term President, must continue to function like a cruise leader on an excursion ship rather than a captain of a battleship. He must propose attractive and sound ideas and...sell them persuasively after the time-honored tradition of the politician. He must respect his party -- an instrument that he shunted aside toward the end of his first term. He must respect the Congress. He must respect the media... Above all, he must respect the people. He must be prepared to listen to the small voices and not exclusively to the throbbing drums of history. We would like to see a lot more of Dick Nixon the politician, and a lot less of Dick Nixon the statesman. 188

The day after the Senate Rules Committee began its inquiry into the background and qualifications of Vice President-designate Gerald Ford, the Tribune urged that Ford be confirmed as expeditiously as possible. 189

The committee would do well to heed the admonitions of its chairman "...not to indulge itself in an 'ideological tug-of-war' over Mr. Ford's voting record but to limit itself to whether the nominee is qualified to be President. Since this is the only question at issue, Congress should be able to confirm Mr. Ford very quickly." 190

The Tribune agreed with the President that he should not resign and on November 11, after the initial flurry over the missing tapes had died down, the Tribune reassessed Nixon's position:

What we said of Mr. Agnew applies also to Mr. Nixon: If he believes he has done something to discredit his office, then he should resign. But from the evidence thus far, it is impossible to say for sure whether the obstinately evasive attitude of the White House has been to protect the President, to
protect certain members of his staff, or as he has maintained, simply to preserve the constitutional privilege of the executive office.\textsuperscript{191}

Coming so quickly on the heels of Nixon's firing of Cox, his defiance of the court order and the revelation of the two missing tapes, such reasoning by the Chicago Tribune is open to question.

The Tribune's advice to the President at this juncture included an idea which is unlike anything advanced by others in the sample. The paper suggested that Nixon "...stop the confusing business of trying to defend himself and the Presidency at the same time and thus creating the impression that he is using the Presidential seal to hide his own misdeeds."\textsuperscript{192}

He can do this, the Tribune proposed, "...by naming a sort of trustee whose duty would be to determine what was necessary to protect the constitutional independence of the President under the separation of powers. Mr. Nixon could then concentrate on defending himself."\textsuperscript{193}

A second radical departure from the general tenor of editorials regarding Watergate occurred on November 19. It appeared to be the Tribune's attempt to rationalize Watergate and its ramifications as part of the general malaise:

...While it is true that a President must live up to standards higher than those that apply to lesser mortals; and while it is true that the whole Watergate saga has been distressing, it is still inappropriate for anyone to criticize unless his own record is clear. And in a day of generally sagging moral character, when corruption is found in both political parties; when the
young people who have complained the loudest about Mr. Nixon can often be found signing up for food stamps at taxpayers' expense in order to prove their "independence" of society; when shoplifting is rampant; when it is widely regarded as acceptable to demand unreported wages in cash in order to get undeserved payments in Social Security, welfare, or unemployment compensation; and when otherwise intelligent employers acquiesce in this form of cheating, it is fair to ask whether Watergate is indeed the shocking aberration that some claim, or is simply the most conspicuous manifestations of an amorality that has been around for some time... 194

The Tribune was obviously pleased with the confirmation of nominee Ford on December 6 and the next day wrote:

The overwhelming confidence expressed in Gerald Ford by his colleagues in the Congress, and the thoroughness [sic] of the investigation into his background and qualifications, assure us that we have a man who is well suited for the high office and will be responsible and responsive to the people. 195

Unlike the New York Times and St. Louis Post-Dispatch, which expressed dissatisfaction with the manner in which the mandate of the 25th Amendment had been carried out, the Tribune was confident it had been shown to work. America's "...congressional house is in order and a means of orderly succession to the Presidency has been re-

stored." 196

One less desirable effect of the confirmation, the paper said,

...will be to encourage demands for Mr. Nixon's instant impeachment or resignation...It is true that Mr. Ford's confirmation removes a major deterrent to these demands -- namely the lack of a Vice President. But the facts in the Watergate case, the constitutional issues involved, and the seriousness of the question of congressional removal of any President have not been changed one bit. The Watergate matter must be resolved, but
thru the equitable and reasonable processes of law. Politics, which has been a driving force behind too much of the impeachment activity, must not intrude.\textsuperscript{197}

The \textit{Tribune}'s recurrent theme of "instant impeachment or resignation"\textsuperscript{198} was another singular characteristic which placed the paper far afield from the rest of the study sample.

\textbf{Detroit News is Hopeful}

On November 4, the same day that the \textit{New York Times} called for President Nixon's resignation, the \textit{Detroit News} published its own request for Nixon's departure:

After Rep. Gerald Ford has been confirmed as vice president, President Richard Nixon should resign.

If he does not resign, serious consideration should be given to his impeachment...

We would prefer to see the nation avoid the stress and turmoil of impeachment. That stress and turmoil could be avoided, of course, if Mr. Nixon would, after Ford's confirmation, step down and let the new vice-president succeed to the presidency...\textsuperscript{199}

This was not an easy decision for the \textit{Detroit News}; it had come to these conclusions "with deep regret"\textsuperscript{200} and, Watergate aside, the \textit{News} said, "...We still agree with many of his basic policies and we believe that many of his successes will be recognized by historians of the U.S. presidency."\textsuperscript{201}

Less than a month earlier the \textit{News} had been worried about the kind of president Ford would make if something happened to Nixon. However, the paper had ended its editorial on an optimistic note, hoping that Ford would
"rise to the occasion" as did Harry Truman. Now the News was urging Nixon's resignation and telling its readers that, "Ford may not be the glamor boy of American politics but he is a competent man whom people trust, a man who could bring unity to a divided nation." Like the Los Angeles Times, the Detroit News appeared to be warming to the idea of Gerald Ford as president -- and doing so as a direct result of its changing attitude toward Richard Nixon.

As had the Christian Science Monitor, the News more than once during the post-nomination period accused the Democrats of "...dragging their feet on Ford's confirmation, apparently hoping to install a Democratic president if they can get rid of Mr. Nixon before Ford can take office." Fortunately, the News noted, Democratic leadership in the Congress wasn't going along with "...that kind of opportunism."

The News' editorial that appeared the day after Ford's confirmation opened with an observation almost classic in its understatement: "Up to now, Gerald Ford could not have looked less like a man of destiny; now there he is -- confirmed as vice president of the United States at a crucial moment when the President, the nation and the Republican Party look toward that office for special leadership."

Having been driven, finally, to call for Nixon's resignation, however reluctantly, the Detroit News now
approached the subject of Gerald Ford in a more positive frame of mind. If not grandiose in its praise, the News was certainly respectful and even reassured by Ford's confirmation. Portions of the December 7 editorial appear below:

Ford's confirmation gives President Nixon a vice president who agrees with Mr. Nixon's political policies and who can help rebuild -- if rebuilding is possible -- the crumbling edifice of the President's popularity and prestige.

If called upon to succeed Mr. Nixon in office, Ford would enjoy the bipartisan support and the reputation for integrity needed to restore public confidence in the presidency. Likewise, he would give the Republicans a fighting chance to put back together a party torn asunder by corruption at the top.

Whatever Ford's fate, nobody can say he was another political hack picked, without thought to merit, in the back room at a convention and rubber-stamped by weary politicians seeking mere regional balance for the ticket. No vice-president nominee in history has been so carefully scrutinized before taking office.

He was questioned and investigated in many days of public and closed hearings in Congress, exhaustively examined by the FBI, put under a microscope by the Internal Revenue Service and subjected to balloting in a House and a Senate dominated by the opposing party.

Since Ford has emerged unscathed from the gauntlet of the new political morality, his name automatically enters the speculation about the presidential election of 1976, which almost certainly will be fought on issues of character and principle raised by the Watergate scandals...

...the country can take assurance and hope from Ford's confirmation. It established an orderly line of succession between Mr. Nixon and a vice-president who could carry out the mandate of the 1972 election and who at the same time would have what Mr. Nixon no longer has -- the nation's confidence in his personal integrity.
Two days later the *News* became the only one of the newspapers sampled to comment editorially on Ford's remarks following the swearing-in ceremony:

Vice-President Ford's brief speech following the oath-taking did not rank alongside the Gettysburg Address. (As the vice-president himself observed, he is a Ford and not a Lincoln.) But its quiet humility and affirmation of old and essential virtues suited the occasion perfectly.

Ford's remarks about his good friendships in Congress, the rule of law and the need to support the Constitution stand in stark contrast against the background of Watergate and the struggle between White House and Congress.

Excessive professions of humbleness can prove as harmful to a political figure as overweening pride. However, the genuineness of Ford's muted approach to his new powers was refreshing and heartening to a nation appalled by the arrogance of the Haldeman-Ehrlichman era...

Gerald Ford's confirmation could prove to be a "blessing or a curse" to President Nixon, the *News* observed. But for the nation --

...only good can come from the confirmation at this time of a vice-president who promises with a sense of dedication we cannot doubt: 'to uphold the Constitution, to do what is right as God gives me to see the right, and within the limited powers and duties of the vice-presidency, to do the very best I can for America.'

Absolved from its reservations about Ford, the *News* closed with this glowing tribute: "Michigan is proud to have given this man to the nation."

*Grand Rapids Press*, A True Believer

The *Grand Rapids Press* continued to support its favorite son throughout the post-nomination period. On
November 11, the Press observed:

The give-and-take of the Ford testimony had almost a soothing effect. He was in charge without being Prussian, firm without being arrogant. He expressed thoughts about country and flag at which cynics didn't even hoot and guffaw. On the heels of yet another revelation about 'the tapes,' Mr. Ford was just plain believable. There was little circumlocution, no guile and -- thank God -- not even charisma.

The Press was the only one of those sampled to have quoted editorially columnist David Broder's observation that, "Gerry Ford is one of the most decent human beings in Washington." 

Amid calls for Mr. Nixon to resign or be impeached, the Press said, "Mr. Ford's presence is reassuring...his confirmation cannot come too soon." 

The Press's editorial response to Ford's confirmation was surprisingly brief and lack-luster. However, the paper did take note of the fact that the confirmation had a significance which extended "...far beyond that generally associated with the duties of his new office. That he can become the nation's 38th President is a possibility that cannot be easily discarded."

Given the Press's initially positive response to the Ford nomination, the paper's editorial stance appeared to have been consistent throughout the period studied and not at all affected by other events in Washington.
FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER II

1 "Choosing a Successor," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, October 11, 1973, p. 2B.

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11 Los Angeles Times, loc. cit.


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26 terHorst, pp. 100, 119.
29 "'Obsessions of the Past,'" The New York Times, October 14, 1973, Sec. 4, p. 2.
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33 Ibid.
34 "The Choice for Vice President," St. Louis Post Dispatch, October 14, 1973, p. 2C.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 "A Struggle Avoided," The Detroit News, October 15, 1973, p. 6-B.
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46 "Target for Inquiry," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, October 17, 1973, p. 2E.
47 "Who Probes the Probers?", The Detroit News, October 19, 1973, p. 18A.
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105 "Incredible...Unbelievable...," Los Angeles Times, November 1, 1973, Part II, p. 6.


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"Traveling the Uphill Road," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, November 18, 1973, p. 2C.


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"The Path to Impeachment," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, October 25, 1973, p. 2C.

Ibid.

"The Strange Alert," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, October 26, 1973, p. 2B.

"Why the Alert?", St. Louis Post-Dispatch, October 28, 1973, p. 2C.
126 "On Making Foreign Policy," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 30, 1973, p. 2B.

127 "Confirming Mr. Ford," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 30, 1973, p. 2B.

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid.

131 "The Case of the Missing Tapes," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 2, 1973, p. 2B.


134 Ibid.

135 "Stage-Managed Rebuttal," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 16, 1973, p. 2B.

136 Ibid.


138 "Mr. Ford's Limits," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 19, 1973, p. 2B.

139 Ibid.

140 Ibid.

141 Ibid.

142 Ibid.

143 "Tradition Rules in Ford Vote," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 28, 1973, p. 2E.

144 Ibid.

145 Ibid.


149 Ibid.

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151 "The Obstacles Are Gone," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, December 9, 1973, p. 2D.

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154 Ibid.


156 Ibid.

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The Christian Science Monitor, loc. cit.


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195 "Our New Vice President," Chicago Tribune, December 7, 1973, Sec. 1, p. 16.
196 Ibid.
197 Ibid.
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CHAPTER III

REIGNATION OF RICHARD NIXON AND
ASCENSION OF GERALD FORD TO THE PRESIDENCY

Gerald Ford was to serve as the nation's 40th Vice
President for only eight months, as the saga of Richard
Nixon twisted ineluctably to its fateful conclusion.

The mood of the country during these months was
described in almost poetic terms by Associated Press writer
Saul Pett:

The country was rocked by lunges and turns. The
public credulity was strained and the system itself
was stretched to the edge in traumatic clashes of
great issues and mean causes.

The long road twisted and straightened, dipped and
leveled, but always it was narrowing. Finally,
only a cul'de sac remained, with one man in it,
the President of the United States. 1

On July 24, 1974, a little more than two years
after the Watergate break-in, the Supreme Court ruled
unanimously that the President must provide "forewith the
tapes and documents of 64 conversations subpoenaed by
Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski. Among them were the
critical tapes of June 23, 1972, which were to prove fatal
to the foundering President. Executive privilege, the
Court held, "...must yield to the demonstrated, specific need for evidence in a pending criminal trial."²

(The June 23 tapes contained three conversations with H. R. Haldeman, less than a week after the Watergate break-in, in which Nixon "...knowingly conspired in the beginnings of a cover-up...not for the sake of national security interests but for his own political purposes.")³

President Nixon had apparently known since early May of the potentially damaging nature of the June 23 tapes, but failed to warn his defense attorneys until the Supreme Court reached its decision on July 24.⁴

One person Nixon surely hadn't told was his vice president, wrote Saul Pett. "The next day [July 25] in Muncie, Ind., Gerald Ford went out to the end of the limb. 'I can say from the bottom of my heart the President is innocent and he is right,'" Ford told his audience.⁵

Transcripts of the June 23 conversations and a written statement by the President were made public at 4 p.m. on Monday, August 5, 1974 -- the 766th day of the Watergate cover-up. Nixon admitted listening to the tapes in May, recognizing "potential problems" but telling no one.⁶

Release of these highly damaging transcripts was to precipitate the downfall of Richard Nixon. Editorial reaction during Nixon's last few days in office became a prelude to the press's euphoric reception of Gerald Ford as President. The editorial pattern established during
Ford's post-nomination days the previous fall can also be observed during the week of August 6-12, 1974 -- Nixon's last week in office. The worse Nixon appeared to the editorialists, the better Ford looked -- until Nixon's blackest hours became Ford's brightest.

During the two days following release of the transcripts, editorial reaction varied widely among the eight newspapers sampled. Four called for Nixon's immediate resignation, two urged impeachment, one maintained an either-or stance and one took no stand at all.

The *New York Times*, which had appealed for resignation as early as November 4, 1973, was now arguing for impeachment: "Against the now-deafening cries for his resignation, we see considerable merit in the President's attitude as expressed at an urgent Cabinet meeting yesterday, that he intends to 'allow the Constitution to be the overriding factor.'"

Resignation at an earlier time, as the *Times* itself had suggested, "...could have spared the people of this land much grief," the paper said. But it was too late now.

To accept the President's August 5 statement as a guilty plea, the *Times* reasoned,

...and suggest that resignation would now close the book on Watergate would leave too many loose ends, too many questions unresolved. It would do nothing to inhibit subsequent fostering of the myth of a President hounded out of office by his political enemies. Doubts could be created whether the President would actually have been convicted in an im-
impeachment trial, whether his departure from office was really justified by the facts.\textsuperscript{10}

There was only one sure way to prevent such occurrences, the \textit{Times} declared:

For the sake of the historical record and the confidence of the people, now and in the future, in the integrity of the constitutional system, the issues on which the President is to be removed must be fully aired in the Senate, acting as a court under the Constitution. Just in the interest of saving a few days, the Congress should not fall into the trap -- once considered around the White House -- of moving through \textit{pro forma} votes to achieve an outcome that seems inevitable now but may appear intemperate or unfair to future generations.\textsuperscript{11}

Impeachment and conviction need not be a "national agony, to be avoided at all costs," the \textit{Times} concluded. "The nation has already gone through that agony, or the worst of it...to frustrate the constitutional machinery now would deprive the Republic of the benefits -- the definitions of impeachable offenses, of strict accountability of the President under law--which alone can redeem that agony. That must be the overriding factor."\textsuperscript{12}

The \textit{St. Louis Post-Dispatch} was the only one to agree fully with the \textit{Times}' stand on impeachment:

Although resignation would have the beneficial effect of removing this unfit President from office, it could, depending on the circumstances, leave serious questions unsatisfactorily answered...In justice to the American people and as a lesson to the future, Mr. Nixon should be judged on all three articles of impeachment, with all the evidence being submitted and a determination being made according to the procedures provided by the Constitution.\textsuperscript{13}

Of the four newspapers calling for resignation, the \textit{Los Angeles Times} is the only one to have completely
reversed its earlier editorial position. On November 11, 1973, the paper had declared impeachment to be preferable to resignation. On August 7, two days after release of the June 23 transcripts, the Los Angeles Times' lead editorial described Nixon as "not fit to be President" and called for his immediate resignation: "There is no question that he will be impeached. His admissions on Monday assure his conviction in the Senate. To resign is to achieve the purpose of impeachment while sparing the nation more weeks of his inevitably uncertain leadership."

If Nixon refused all appeals for resignation, the L.A. Times said, then the impeachment must proceed. We have confidence that this process can be executed without undue disruption to the nation," the paper added.

The Los Angeles Times' August 7 editorial is particularly noteworthy for its heightened emotional level. No longer the detached and dispassionate commentator, the paper was angry and felt betrayed by the man it had supported editorially throughout his political career:

...No one can read those conversations between Richard Nixon and H. R. Haldeman without anger -- anger at these men whose arrogance let them, with such apparent ease, abuse trust, pervert the system of government and breach the law in a voracious bid for more power.

And when this record is read in contrast to the protestations of innocence that have been mouthed by Mr. Nixon in statement after statement for 18 months, the anger can only grow. For there is revealed a man who not only conspired to obstruct justice, not only sought to use for his own partisan purposes both the Federal Bureau of Investigation
and the Central Intelligence Agency -- terrible abuses of authority -- but a man who also distorted the truth in statements to Congress, to the nation, even to his close associates, and was not content with lying, but went on to assail the character and the motives of those who sought to expose the truth ...

We ourselves especially feel the betrayal of Mr. Nixon. This newspaper has supported him in his candidacy through a political career that we have more often cheered than criticized. As recently as 1972 we supported his bid for reelection.

We regretfully must now conclude that he is at the end of the political road. The sooner he leaves the White House, the sooner this nation can begin anew. As Rep. Charles Wiggins said so eloquently when he, too, found himself betrayed, this is a time to plan the orderly transfer of power to Gerald Ford.16

On August 6 and 7, appeals for resignation also appeared in the Christian Science Monitor and the Chicago Tribune -- which had both cautioned against precipitate resignation or impeachment prior to Gerald Ford's confirmation -- and in the Detroit News, whose first call for resignation came on November 4, 1973,17 the same day as the New York Times.

The Christian Science Monitor, in a formal tone, stated that Nixon's resignation would be "an act of statesmanship":

...We therefore call on Richard Nixon to spare his country the ordeal of impeachment and trial and to perform an act of statesmanship by stepping down voluntarily. We do so with deep sadness and in a spirit of compassion but with conviction that a speedy transfer of power will help cleanse the miasma of criminality that has so pervaded the executive branch of government, restore integrity in high office, and thereby strengthen and protect our republic.18
The Washington Post, in the vanguard of Watergate reporting, maintained an either-or position toward resignation or impeachment. That Nixon would leave office before his term was up was a foregone conclusion. What concerned the Post was the manner of his departure.

The Post expressed its concerns on August 8:

Reports of Mr. Nixon's decision to resign proliferate. And the belated rush toward impeachment, set off by the President's disclosure of new evidence on Monday, has long since turned into a stampede. Nowhere in any of the sudden ferment, however, is there yet an assurance that either process will produce a result that does justice to the ordeal to which the nation [and not to mention, the Washington Post] has been put these past two years...

At this point, the paper said, it was impossible to know whether the conditions of Nixon's departure would meet what the Post considered the minimum requirements:

These are that a sufficient public record of the reasons for Mr. Nixon's departure be compiled, that it present a compelling case for so extraordinary a step, and that the necessity for this step be accepted by him as well as by a broad and representative majority of the American people...

Having been deeply submerged in its own investigations of the Watergate scandals for two years, the Post was, perhaps, overly sensitive to political stirrings in Washington and took almost an alarmist view of the situation:

...what appears to be developing among members of Congress is a kind of Tonkin Gulf mind-set from which could come a resounding but hollow and ultimately dangerous verdict founded upon the simple proposition that the President has committed, and virtually confessed to, a single identifiable, demonstrable indictable crime -- and thus must go.
Even if Mr. Nixon resigns, he will have been propelled into doing so by a sudden, massive defection of hardcore supporters, many of them finding political safety in numbers and clinging fast to a short portion of one presidential transcript which they can claim as evidence sufficiently "clear and convincing" to sustain a charge of obstruction of justice against the President.

From the Post's perspective, the heart of the matter rested in Article II of the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment resolution. It was this article that took the case against the President "beyond obstruction of justice (Article I) and defiance of Congress (Article III) to the abuses of presidential powers..."22

The Post reasoned that:

...the offenses catalogued in Article II -- assorted abuses and misuse of the police and tax powers, and of agencies such as the IRS, the CIA and the FBI -- go a very long way toward defining the standards of conduct the people demand of the presidency. To be sure, this is a kind of negative definition, a definition of intolerable conduct which in turn sets a standard of expected behavior. But that is precisely why, however Mr. Nixon departs, there must be some direct and specific acknowledgment of these offenses and of their unacceptability.23

That was why Nixon's departure -- whether by resignation or impeachment -- "must not have as either its price or its consequence a dismissal of these grave charges," the Post concluded.24

No editorial stand on impeachment or resignation was taken by the Grand Rapids Press, Gerald Ford's hometown newspaper.

The eight papers sampled were almost evenly divided on the question of immunity for the President,
with four "pro," three "con" and one "no comment."

Among the ardent "no deal" contingent were the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, St. Louis Post-Dispatch and, surprisingly, the Chicago Tribune.

The New York Times expressed the general sentiments of the study sample on August 8 when it observed: "The last thing the country would want to see is a mood of vindictiveness against a fallen President, a man who voluntarily or involuntarily surrenders the powers of the Presidency."\(^{25}\)

Nonetheless, the Times pointed out, "There is no case in Constitution, law, morality or even practical politics for an advance commitment granting Mr. Nixon immunity from prosecution after he leaves the White House."\(^{26}\)

The paper was adamant in its opposition to immunity:

...Whether or not he [Nixon] should be prosecuted is a separate issue that cannot be decided now; it would be the ultimate degradation to engage in extralegal "plea-bargaining" in a situation already so full of sordid chapters...

...the suggestion is untenable that Mr. Nixon could negotiate some legal protection before leaving office. In the first place, it is dubious that any legal or constitutional way exists to do it. The Congress could not sustain an act of legislation to exempt one citizen from the provisions of Federal statues. It would be the height of improvidence for Vice President Ford, whatever his personal inclinations, to enter any deal for future leniency that would have the effect of gaining for him the Presidency.
Any blanket immunity for Mr. Nixon would be patently offensive while his lieutenants -- from H. R. Haldeman and John Mitchell all the way to Gordon Strachan -- were facing prosecution and the threat of prison terms. Some have already gone to jail. Their proved or alleged crimes were some of the same that could be charged against Mr. Nixon. How could they in fairness be punished when the man they were serving was left invulnerable to the law?...27

The Chicago Tribune, a Nixon loyalist of long standing, tempered its opposition to immunity with a plea for mercy:

...at the moment, we foresee no disposition on the part of a new administration, the courts, or the public to pursue the prosecution of Mr. Nixon once he has left office. This inclination toward mercy would obviously be stronger in the event of resignation than if the battle were carried thru impeachment. If there is to be any added incentive to Mr. Nixon to resign, therefore, it should be a less formal one -- a gentlemen's agreement, or even, as proposed, a resolution expressing the "sense of Congress" that there should be no further prosecution on the basis of evidence now available. Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski would not be bound by it, but surely would be guided by it.

There is a precedent for this in the handling of former Vice President Agnew's resignation; and certainly his resignation met the interests of the nation better than the ordeal of an impeachment.

If Mr. Nixon agrees to step down promptly, and if there are no disclosures of new offenses, matters can be resolved without sacrificing justice. Mr. Nixon will be deprived of what he holds so dear: the Presidency, his political power, and the adulation of history. And the nation will get what it so badly needs: a new President and an opportunity to put the whole Watergate mess behind it.28

The two newspapers favoring immunity for President Nixon were the Christian Science Monitor and the Detroit News. Once again, the Washington Post maintained an
either-or stance -- provided certain conditions were met -- and the Grand Rapids Press took no editorial stand on the subject.

The Monitor explained its position as follows:

...We would...favor a procedure by which Mr. Nixon would voluntarily resign in return for immunity from prosecution if he cooperated fully with the Justice Department and provided all the evidence required. The objective of the Constitution's provision for impeachment and removal is not to punish a president found guilty of "high crimes and misdemeanors" but to protect the office of the presidency from abuse of power or criminal activity. Now that the President himself has provided proof of his culpability, his resignation would make it possible to shore up and safeguard that office...

The Detroit News, which found it "distasteful to think of Congress bargaining with the President of the United States for his resignation," observed somewhat irreverently, "But if a grant of immunity from criminal prosecution will hasten Mr. Nixon's departure by one day, the deal should be made and this agony ended."

In a cryptic diary format, Richard L. Strout of The Christian Science Monitor chronicled President Nixon's last days in the White House:

Mon. Aug. 5: Amidst wild scenes in the White House press room press secretary Warren at 4 p.m. gives out a presidential statement and three transcripts of taped Nixon-Haldeman conversation of June 23, 1972. These show finally, after two years, that Mr. Nixon was aware of the Watergate cover-up six days after it happened, previous denials notwithstanding, and participated in it.

Tues. August 6: A firestorm hits the capital. Even as Mr. Nixon tells a hastily summoned Cabinet meeting that he will stay, all 10 of his previous loyal House supporters on the House Judiciary Committee
withdraw their backing. A silent crowd gathers before the White House high fence.

**Wed. Aug. 7:** Three top Republican leaders pay the gloomy visit to the White House that some have predicted for almost a year would eventually come: Sen. Barry Goldwater, onetime presidential candidate; Senate Leader Hugh Scott; and House Leader John J. Rhodes. They report impeachment inevitable, Senate conviction probable. Only 15 votes are left in the Senate, says Senator Goldwater. Mr. Nixon hesitates. The crowd grows before the White House.

**Thurs. Aug. 8:** President Nixon asks air time and over all networks. At 9 p.m. eastern standard time, appearing calm and controlled, to the greatest TV-radio audience in American history, he says he will resign at noon next day.

His speech is conciliatory and acknowledges that some of his judgments were "wrong." But he does not admit guilt, and attributes departure to inability to command "a strong enough political base in Congress" rather than to personal fault...31

The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* apparently learned of Nixon's decision early Thursday, August 8, and, as an evening paper, was able to comment editorially on the impending resignation in that day's edition. The *P-D*'s August 8 editorial foreshadows the reactions of the rest of the study sample, whose editorials on the resignation appeared the following day:

...Mr. Nixon's headlong fall from grace is a personal tragedy perhaps without parallel in American history. It is, in a sense, a tragedy for the entire nation, for the landslide victory he achieved in 1972 provided him with a mandate to provide the strongest kind of leadership in every field of national affairs. That opportunity was cruelly squandered, and no American is better for it.

Yet in a larger sense, the end of the Nixon presidency is an occasion for renewed confidence in America's institutions of Government and its Constitution -- the "system" if you will. For despite all that Mr. Nixon and some of the most powerful men in
the Government tried to do, they were unable to transport the presidency to a place beyond the reaches of the law. Justice, working through the courts and working through the Congress of the people, has triumphed; let that be celebrated...32

For the most part, editorial response to Nixon's resignation was a collective sigh of relief that the ordeal was over at last. The resignation was interpreted as a reaffirmation that "the system" does, indeed, work. There was a general mood of compassion for the departing President, although three newspapers -- the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* -- emphasized that Nixon still didn't seem to comprehend the enormity of his offenses.

Several of the papers assessed Nixon's overall policies and achievements. With the exception of the *Detroit News*, the consensus was good-to-excellent in foreign affairs and, excepting the *Chicago Tribune*, fair-to-dismal on the domestic front.

The *Detroit News* declared that Nixon's "overtures to Red China and the Soviet Union were probably overrated as master strokes of diplomacy" and conceded only that his visits "did constitute a new and hopeful effort to restore the lines of communication -- obviously a prerequisite to any genuine improvement in relations."33

The *Chicago Tribune* cautioned against using Watergate as an excuse to dump Nixon's policies:

...many of the Nixon administration's tenets deserve to be proved correct, however inconsistent
or unsuccessful it may have been in pursuing them. The economic truisms which it voiced; the trend toward decentralization of government; the steps to improve world communication (despite the disastrous failure of communication between the White House and the country) -- these are all sensible and right. If they are thrown out along with Watergate, and if the country turns back toward Big Government and bigger spending, and to moral permissiveness at home and trade restrictions abroad, then Watergate will have proved far more disastrous than anything now imaginable.

The editorials generally acknowledged that the conservative Republican mandate of the 1972 election would be carried out by Gerald Ford, and all looked to the new President to restore the nation's trust and confidence in its government.

Perhaps the most effective of the August 9 editorials appeared in the *New York Times*. It is reprinted, in part, below:

...The forced departure of Richard M. Nixon from the Presidency -- for that is what it was even though his resignation is nominally an act of his own volition -- is in a larger sense a reaffirmation of the strength of the United States and of the structure of American democracy.

For the events that have been exposed under the generic name of "Watergate," including the disgrace of former Vice President Spiro T. Agnew and culminating in Mr. Nixon's resignation, represented a profound subversion of American democratic institutions, an attempt to seize and consolidate control -- not by arms but by the far more effective and penetrating method of subtle accretion of political power in the Executive Office. This is really what was going on at the pinnacle of government, in the White House itself; and this, along with all his other violations of law, is what Richard M. Nixon resolutely refused to acknowledge -- or even refer to -- in his muted appeal to the American people over the airwaves last night.
Thus, while Mr. Nixon's degradation is a deep personal tragedy and a poignant disappointment for those millions upon millions of Americans who had placed their trust and confidence in him, it is at the same time a triumph for the people of the United States as a whole, whose faith in free and representative government, in the sanctity of the Bill of Rights and of the constitutional system established on this continent nearly two centuries ago, is the bedrock of our political strength.

Not even the stanchest opponents of Mr. Nixon can rejoice in the tragedy that has befallen him. Certainly we who have been among his most persistent critics take no joy in his personal disaster, but all Americans who maintain their belief in a government of laws rather than of men must be thankful that it has survived this extraordinary trauma with resolution and with honor.

Mr. Nixon's Presidency was surely not without its positive accomplishments, especially in the arena of foreign affairs, as he understandably stressed in last night's speech. This quixotic man, whose political career was founded on virulent opposition not merely to anything that could be made to look like Communism but to any effort to reconcile the Western and Communist worlds, was the President under whom the policy of detente with both the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China went further than it ever had had before. While the crucial question of limitation of armaments and many other facets of foreign policy are in less than satisfactory condition, the United States is in a generally better relationship with the rest of the world, including our own allies, than when Mr. Nixon assumed office five and a half years ago.

The domestic record, on the contrary, has little to commend it. With inflation the worst in modern times, Mr. Nixon leaves the American economy in a shambles. In virtually every other crucial area of domestic life -- from race relations to social policy to environmental quality -- Mr. Nixon's accomplishments have been largely negative. In terms of public morality, the record of the President and his immediate entourage has, obviously, been abysmal -- a point to which he, obviously from last night's address is still totally oblivious...

...While one can have only pity for Mr. Nixon today, one can have pride in the institutions that have
proved strong and resilient enough successfully to surmount the severe internal crisis and the insidious internal danger with which the Presidency of Richard M. Nixon threatened this Republic.  

The **Los Angeles Times**, observing that Nixon was "apparently unaware of the seriousness of the things he did," nonetheless praised his resignation address as having "set a proper goal and a proper tone for the nation." The President has "...appealed for a healing of wounds, and committed himself to that process," the paper said. "He has affirmed the importance of peace, and justly recalled his contributions in that cause. He has reassured the nation about the quality of the man who today succeeds him..."  

In a separate editorial on the same day, the **Los Angeles Times** voiced a strong appeal that Nixon "...receive no benefit that would have been denied him had he been convicted in the impeachment process."  

Entitled "No Reward for Malfeasance," this was the only one of the August 9 editorials to have dealt with the financial ramifications of Nixon's resignation.  

The **L.A. Times** perceived "no vindictive mood in the nation," it said, and thus, by implication, it too felt no vindictiveness toward the fallen President.  

(Of the three Nixon supporters that had held out against resignation or impeachment the previous fall -- the **Los Angeles Times**, **Christian Science Monitor** and **Chicago Tribune** -- the **L.A. Times** was the only one to have
admitted publicly, on August 7, that it felt betrayed by Richard Nixon). 39

Despite the implicit disclaimers, "No Reward for Malfeasance" appears to be the reaction of a believer who has been burned -- a loyalist betrayed. The editorial is reproduced, in part, below:

"...It clearly was not the intent of Congress, when it made generous provision for retired Presidents, to reward malfeasance in office. It would be perceived as an injustice to apply provisions for pension and other retirement benefits, designed to reward those who have served with honor, to a person departing in disgrace.

We think the American people would object if resignation appeared to be a device to escape an inevitable judgment while, at the same time, enjoying the financial rewards provided to assure the dignity of those who fulfilled their constitutional mandate.

We have the word of the leaders of Congress that Mr. Nixon faced certain conviction. Many of those same leaders have urged him to resign to spare the nation a prolongation of the uncertainties of his leadership, and Congress the diversion of a trial no longer needed to determine his guilt. His response to the appeals for resignation is in the national interest. But this provides no reasonable justification to reward him for taking a quicker path to the same destination.

It seems to us that the concern we sense about the equity of benefits attending Mr. Nixon is not vindictive but grows from a concern that all must be equal before the law.

The question of the emoluments becomes inevitably intertwined with the legal jeopardy of Mr. Nixon, once out of office, in the courts of the nation.

Had he been impeached and convicted he could, under provisions of the Constitution, have been "liable and subject to indictment, trial, judgment and punishment, according to law." His status upon resignation is the same. There would appear to be no provision
under which he could be granted immunity from the law, nor should there be such provision.

But again, we perceive no vindictive mood in the nation. The people of America show no desire to see the President hounded from court to court for crimes for which he has already paid.

His resignation from office, his acceptance of the same financial status he would have had upon conviction in the Senate, would seem the best possible assurance that he will face no further prosecution.40

Nixon's ultimate place in history would be assigned to the historians of the future, the papers said. "...The story of Richard Nixon is a story of what might have been," the Detroit News observed quietly.41

The Chicago Tribune, perhaps the most devoted Nixonite in the group, thought it "foolish" to predict history's verdict of the Nixon administration and noted, rather smugly, that,

Time tends to edit and often revise the passionate judgments made in the vortex of a political storm. Herbert Hoover, who left office as a villain, lived to see himself honored and respected...Time has been kind, too, to Harry Truman. On the other hand it has whittled down the halos accorded to Franklin Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy.42

* * * * *

At 9:30 on the morning of August 9, 1974, President Nixon and his family entered the White House East Room to a standing ovation.

His face wet with tears, the President "...bade an emotional farewell to the remnants of his broken Administration...urging its members to be proud of their record
in government and warning them against bitterness, self-pity and revenge."

In a moment of supreme irony, Nixon cautioned his cabinet and staff, "...always remember, others may hate you, but those who hate you don't win unless you hate them -- and then you destroy yourself."

Within minutes, Richard Nixon -- accompanied by his wife, daughter Julie and her husband -- had boarded a waiting helicopter on the White House lawn en route to Andrews Air Force Base and his San Clemente, California estate.

Scarcely two hours later, in the same historic East Room, Gerald Rudolph Ford, the nation's 38th President, was administered the oath of office by Chief Justice Warren E. Burger.

While portraits of Richard Nixon were being quietly removed from the corridors of the White House and pictures of Gerald Ford mounted in their place, the new President was stirring his East Room audience and millions of television viewers with these firm words of assurance: "Our long national nightmare is over...our Constitution works; our great Republic is a government of laws and not of men. Here the people rule."

The immediate editorial reaction to the transfer of power formed interesting patterns. The five newspapers that had been cool-to-lukewarm to the Ford nomination the previous fall -- the New York Times, Washington Post,
Los Angeles Times, St. Louis Post-Dispatch and Detroit News -- were glowing with praise after he was sworn in as President. (It should be noted, however, that the New York Times and Los Angeles Times were at first hesitant in their response to the new President but soon climbed on the Ford bandwagon.)

The greatest overall change in attitude toward Ford was exhibited by the three newspapers that had been most virulent in their condemnation of Richard Nixon -- the New York Times, Washington Post and St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Those which had been supportive of Ford throughout the period under study -- the Christian Science Monitor, Chicago Tribune and Grand Rapids Press -- received his new status with confidence and pride.

A detailed analysis follows comparing each newspaper's editorial position at the time of Ford's vice presidential nomination, his confirmation and his ascension to the presidency.

New York Times

When Gerald Ford was named vice president-designate, the New York Times stated that he had "few visible qualifications as a potential President" and was a "routine partisan of narrow views and long but limited experience." Despite Ford's popularity in the Congress, the Times said, "his record gives few signs of imagination, social
compassion or broad understanding." 47

The *Times*' objections to Ford were eventually overshadowed by the unfolding Watergate drama. By the time Ford was confirmed two months later, the paper had begun to stress the positive aspects of the situation:

...Mr. Ford is a conventional politician with an open, friendly manner who is known to his colleagues in Congress as a willing team worker and a decent, likeable man. In a political system that requires personal trust and a spirit of cooperation if it is to function effectively, those personal qualities are not inconsiderable assets." 48

The *Times*' misgivings about Gerald Ford had apparently lingered on and emerged again on the morning of August 9, a matter of hours before Ford was to be sworn in as President. The editorial, although essentially critical, was nonetheless a sincere effort to give Ford every benefit of the doubts the *Times* evidently still held. It is reproduced, in part, below:

...Predicting the shape that any man will give to the mantle of the Presidency is risky, but in his quarter-century in Washington, Gerald Ford has sharply defined his public image. He is a plain man from the middle of America. His speech is often marked by flat homilies and dreary blandness, and his public record reflects the stolid conservatism of the Grand Rapids constituency which he served so faithfully in Congress for more than two decades.

In the House, Mr. Ford was a predictable, fierce, but amiable partisan. As he himself suggested in his typically straightforward talk last night, he had many adversaries in the House but no enemies. His colleagues on both sides of the aisle like him and respect him for his integrity.

Mr. Ford has gained no reputation for vision, imagination, creativity or compassion. His legislative record -- such as it is -- is to the right of
center. He terms himself a fiscal conservative and his consistent opposition to social programs bears witness to the accuracy of that self-evaluation. His administrative and foreign affairs experience is negligible. But his very first announcement, that he would continue Henry A. Kissinger as Secretary of State, indicates that he recognizes quality when he sees it.

Whatever limitations his record may suggest, there is little question that Mr. Ford brings a dogged determination to the Oval Office. From the playing fields of Ann Arbor to the grinding hours he logged in Air Force Two serving the Republican party and defending its leader, Mr. Ford has displayed enduring grit.

His service in the House may prove no reliable predictor of his politics as President. Freed of the rigid constraints of his western Michigan constituency, he has given assurance of his intention to take a broader view on civil rights and other issues -- in short, to prove that he is a representative of all the people. Mr. Ford has shown over the years that he is a sincere man devoted to his duty as best he sees it.

His roots are deep in the elemental decencies of his Middle-Western origins. His respect for Congress is real. In his confirmation hearings, he said, "I think the President should carry out the law." His qualities should serve him well as he assumes the burdens of a Presidency he never sought under circumstances that he and the country devoutly wish never had occurred...49

Gerald Ford's brief and simple address to the nation, after he was sworn in as President, was a powerful salve for the disillusionment and uncertainties of the Watergate ordeal. Its effect was most dramatic upon the New York Times, which 24 hours earlier had described Ford as "a predictable, fierce, but amiable partisan...who has gained no reputation for vision, imagination, creativity or compassion."50
The next morning, August 10, the Times had this to say about the new President:

The simplicity with which Gerald R. Ford addressed the nation as he took the oath of office in the White House yesterday reflects the nature of this unpretentious man, who through an extraordinary and ironic chain of circumstances has become the 38th President of the United States. It also suggests the straightforwardness and the humility which may be expected to characterize Mr. Ford's approach to the awesome responsibilities of the great office he now will occupy for the next two and a half years...

There can be little doubt in the minds of any one who heard him in the East Room of the White House yesterday, which Mr. Nixon had vacated only a few hours earlier, that its new occupant is deeply committed "in all my public and private acts as your President...to follow my instincts of openness and candor." That is what the American people wanted to hear from their President, and, more important, it is something that now they can believe.

With little real preparation for taking on the most powerful political post in the Western world, a post that he certainly never sought and probably never even wanted, Gerald R. Ford has a right to call on the moral support of his countrymen, especially in these first few days as he attempts to organize his Administration and learn how to handle the reins of government. Instinctively the American people of all shades of opinion will respond to his appeal; and the Congress voted unanimously yesterday, with intuitive recognition of the need for unity in a time of crisis, to assure the new President of its cooperation and "fervent hopes for success in office."

...While in his 25 years of service in the House of Representatives Mr. Ford proved himself no statesman but, on the contrary, the most faithful of the faithful of his party, he did build a deserved reputation for decency, integrity and honesty, which will serve him -- and this country -- well. With his political philosophy many Americans, including of course many if not most members of Congress, are in sharp disagreement; but he comes into office with a huge reservoir of personal good feeling that will constrain even his strongest political adversaries from opposing him merely for the sake of opposition. That time will doubtless come; but, fortunately for the country, it is not now.
Mr. Ford's first Cabinet move, the announced retention of Secretary of State Kissinger, speaks well for him, emphasizing the continuity of America's foreign policy. His entire demeanor, his promise to be "President of all the people," speaks even better for the continuity -- and unity -- of the American system, as our democracy passes through its time of trouble with strengthened confidence in its ability to meet the political and economic challenges that are pressing hard upon us...  

Washington Post

In October, 1973, the Washington Post had been extremely critical of President Nixon's nomination of Gerald Ford to succeed the disgraced Spiro Agnew. On October 14, the Post implied that Ford lacked the "genuine fitness and distinction" to be President and stated:

...For over 25 years he has pursued a congressional career of modest ambition and modest achievement. At no point has he shown a keen or impressive grasp of the complexities of hard questions. Pedestrian, partisan, dogged -- he has been the very model of a second level party man. It is no accident that over his quarter century of unremarkable service in the House, he has never been put forward seriously as a candidate for the presidency -- or laid serious claim to the office on his own behalf.

By December 3, 1973, four days before Ford was confirmed as vice president, the Washington Post had modified its initially critical stance. The congressional hearings, the Post said, had underscored some "countervailing strengths" in Ford: "...a record of personal and financial integrity, an open and forthcoming attitude, a real appreciation of congressional and public anxieties about the misuse of presidential power."

Under lengthy public examination, Ford had shown
qualities of "decency and sturdiness." To the Post, Ford had come across as "an experienced politician in the classic American sense, a man who understands the democratic system's workings and constraints, who respects public opinion, and who values comity among the branches of government." 55

The Post's pendulum of editorial opinion had swayed to one side at Ford's nomination to the vice presidency, and it swung to the opposite extreme upon his ascension to the highest office in the land: Ford's speech was a "flawless response." His government will be "clear-headed and sensible." And the man himself could not fail to retain the people's support. 56

The Washington Post's editorial for the morning of August 10 is excerpted below:

The transfer of power proceeded with dignity, as everyone assumed it would, and concluded on a strongly reassuring note. In his brief address following the oath of office, President Ford struck precisely the right tone on each of a succession of points to which, he knew, the country wanted to hear him speak. His words, simple and candid, were a flawless response to an extremely difficult situation.

Acknowledging that these circumstances had no precedent in American history, he made it self-evident that the Constitution had provided for them, and that the procedures of transfer entirely followed our traditions. Since he had not been elected to the office, he reasoned, he must bear an even broader responsibility to the whole country than the presidents who won on a partisan platform. As to the legitimacy of his authority, it lies technically in his confirmation as Vice President by a Congress whose members, as he said, "were my friends and are my friends." In the larger sense, legitimacy lies in his acceptance by the people of this country, and that overwhelming and warm acceptance cannot be doubted.
President Ford did not evade the painful subject of the events that brought him to the White House. The central fault of the past administration was its custom of dividing the world into its friends, whose obedience had to be absolute, and its enemies whose hostility was assumed to be personal and implacable. The President offered his own judgment on this practice when he spoke of the virtue of charity in public life. As for the evils that led to his predecessor's downfall, President Ford again spoke directly: "I believe that truth is the glue that holds government together -- not only our government but civilization itself. That bond, though strained, is unbroken at home and abroad...My fellow Americans, our long national nightmare is over."

...in his generous and temperate address yesterday Ford spoke of reconciling justice with mercy. He faces no more delicate and perplexing dilemma than dealing with the consequences of the last administration's misconduct. High officials of that administration are about to come to trial, and Mr. Nixon himself has now given up the special protections of his former office. Perhaps the only thing to be said with certainty is that the most painful and difficult choices in the whole affair still lie ahead.

But we have confidence that those choices will be made by a clear-headed and sensible government, with no purpose to serve but the national interest. President Ford's words yesterday were evidence that he is in tune with the country as a whole. A man who deals in so open and honest a manner with the American people cannot fail to retain their support.

Los Angeles Times

The Los Angeles Times' reaction to the Ford nomination in October of 1973 has been described here as a lukewarm blending of positive and negative elements. Within four weeks, the paper had modified its public position on Ford in light of recent Watergate developments. On November 11, the L.A. Times declared:
A year ago Ford would have been no one's choice for President. That is not so important now. The important thing is that he has been nominated according to the procedures in the Constitution, and his long record of personal decency and his forthright testimony to Congress make him, if not everyone's first choice, at least an acceptable alternative should the Presidency become vacant.58

Nine months later, on the morning of August 9, 1974 -- the day Gerald Ford was to be sworn in as President -- the Los Angeles Times reassured its many conservative readers that,

...He [Ford] goes to the White House as Mr. Nixon's choice as heir, and that confers on him some of the authority that Mr. Nixon received in his remarkable electoral victory less than two years ago.

He speaks on domestic matters for that right-of-center part of the Republican Party with which Mr. Nixon identified and felt most comfortable, and in this way he can reassure those millions who, by their votes for Mr. Nixon were supporting a program that they thought best for America.59

The Los Angeles Times had lost its cool two days earlier, displayed anger and admitted feeling betrayed by Nixon.60 But on August 9, the L.A. Times was its old calm and dispassionate self again, as is apparent in this assessment of the incoming President: "He brings to the Presidency a long experience in and a firm respect for the American political process, the result of his years in Congress. That in itself will help restore a balance in the federal government and improve the working relationship between the executive and the legislative branches."61

In a separate editorial that same day, the L.A. Times urged Ford to nominate Nelson Rockefeller as his
vice president:

The first days of the Ford administration will be critical. The new President must assume control of a vast executive bureaucracy that has been without the President's full attention for months. He must move decisively to generate early confidence in his leadership at home and abroad.

Crucial to that confidence is the selection of a Vice President whose public record is one of integrity, whose background in government is extensive and whose skills and expertise extend into governmental areas in which Mr. Ford has no equivalent experience. [emphasis added]

Rockefeller has all three qualifications.62

The Los Angeles Times evidently perceived certain deficiencies in Ford's background. But the tone is muted and, it would seem, purposefully understated during these morning hours before the oath-taking.

For the next three days, the L.A. Times had little to say about the new President. In a prideful, "the-system-works" editorial on Sunday, August 11, the paper's only comment about Ford was: "There is no question that the nation will respond to Mr. Ford's challenge to 'go forward now together.'" 63

The reason for the L.A. Times' noncommittal attitude toward Ford can only be surmised. Perhaps the paper was wary, since it had recently been "burned" by someone it had supported for so long (Nixon). Whatever the reason, the Los Angeles Times seemed to be holding back, watching the goings-on with a skeptical eye.

By Monday, August 12, the national mood of hope
and renewed confidence had become infectious. That night, President Ford gave his first address before the Congress. The paper liked what it heard and the next morning, throwing caution to the winds, joined the Gerald R. Ford Fan Club:

We like the way our new President is going about his business.

His approach to his job is just what the country needs right now. He is consulting, and listening and taking his time making up his mind about the potentially most important decision he will make as President -- his choice for Vice President.

Mr. Ford's manner is just what the country needs right now, too. He is relaxed. He is straightforward. By all accounts he has been a decent man all his life, and when he talks he sounds like a decent man. He talks in cliches, but they are believable cliches. As Jack Smith wrote yesterday of Mr. Ford's first speech, "If his words were without polish, they were also without guile."

He is more like the ordinary guy than the last several Presidents. He is ambitious, but his ambition has never been overweening. It has had no darker sides. He has always seemed to be at ease with himself. No one we know of has ever called him brilliant, but many have called him sound. No one has ever thought him innovative, but many have found him sensible.

It is too easy, though, to dismiss him as the average or the ordinary man. In the first place, his achievements to date are not ordinary. In the second place, the qualities of the average American -- honesty, candor, devotion to duty, a plain sense of right and wrong -- are, when you stop to think about it, no mean qualities. This average man, as some people are calling him, may yet turn out to be uncommon indeed.

But we don't know yet. We know his qualities, but we don't know the purposes he will turn them to, the advisers he will select, the course he will chart for the nation. So it was with considerable interest that we listened last night to the new President's speech.
It reinforced our impression of his personal qualities. We liked the way he said, "We have a lot of work to do...let's get on with it." We were impressed by the evident sincerity of his desire to be President of all the people -- black, brown, red and white, young and old, working people of all occupations, women's liberationists and male chauvinists. A relaxed sense of humor never hurt any President. We admired the candid way he promised no more abuse of government power. And we were impressed by the evident sincerity, too, of his willingness to cooperate with Congress, so long at odds with the executive.

Yet no less striking was Mr. Ford's ready assumption of the powers of the Presidency, and his apparent willingness, even eagerness, to use them. He did not sound at all like a man willing to be only a caretaker President. He sounded forceful and looked confident...

...The shape and aim of the new President's policies are not yet in focus, and the speech did not do much to sharpen them. That will come in time. And indeed, on them he will be ultimately judged. But we like the way he is going at his job, and we are sure nearly everybody hopes he will do it well.64

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

When Ford became vice president-designate early in the fall of 1973, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch seemed quite willing to accept him -- as vice president. But as the situation deteriorated in Washington, the paper began to reassess the nominee. On November 19, the P-D aired its doubts about Ford's fitness for the presidency:

...That Mr. Ford's own Republican party has never thought of him for higher office may be taken as an indication of how apparent are his limitations...

As a lawmaker he has been a mediocrity; one may search the record in vain for any significant legislation bearing his name. As a minority leader he has been little more than an errand runner for the White House...In the area of social legislation, Mr. Ford has voted against food stamps, public housing,
minimum wages and the office of Economic Opportunity.

Perhaps most disturbing, however, is Mr. Ford's performance on civil rights. On matters relating to improving opportunities for minorities, Mr. Ford's vote has consistently been a negative one...65

The Post-Dispatch did recognize Ford's admirable qualities -- honesty, integrity, openness, willingness to take advice -- and conceded that although these traits alone were insufficient for the presidency, they would permit a limited person to grow in office.66

Nixon's actions during the fall of '73 so troubled the Post-Dispatch that it eventually accepted Ford's confirmation with quiet relief and a sense of hope that Ford's new status would surely affect Nixon's.

Within hours after Gerald Ford became President, the P-D published an editorial which appears to have been written before the oath-taking and Ford's address to the nation. It made these cautious observations about the new President:

...the Ford mandate is different...in many ways that Mr. Nixon made it different. The difference is that above all else the public now expects a President in whose conduct of office it can trust -- a President who will provide leadership within the framework of the Constitution and the balanced powers of government.

For Mr. Ford, that may be the simpler part of his task. He has earned a reputation as an honest, forthright man with reverence for the American form of government. Still it is essential that this regard show through every aspect of the Ford Administration.

The remainder of the new President's obligation is more complex and could prove more personally demanding. That is to proceed with a foreign policy that expands the prospects for peace, and with a domestic
policy that has been neglected or even misdirected in the face of staggering problems. These obligations will place extraordinary demands on the capacities of a man who, in Congress, appeared to be a cold warrior and strict conservative...67

By Sunday, August 11, the Post-Dispatch, too, had succumbed to the charms of President Ford's "little straight talk among friends":

Gerald R. Ford's brief address on assuming the presidency told Americans what they desperately wanted to hear: that the new Administration would contrast greatly with the one immediately past, that it would respect the Constitution and the Congress and the public, and that it would be open with the people.

It was "just a little straight talk among friends," Mr. Ford said. Under the circumstances nothing could be more reassuring to a nation that has heard too little straight talk or evidence of friendly leadership that could restore faith in government and repair civic disunity.

The talk was, in short, a fine beginning. If it stood President Ford in stark contrast with his predecessor, that was a matter of necessity. While Mr. Ford spoke with earnest compassion for Richard Nixon and his family, he immediately distinguished his own Administration from what had gone before. He had not gained office by promises to anyone, he said; he had not subscribed to any partisan platform; he was indebted to no one. His Administration would be true to a government of laws, not of man.

Thus President Ford established a style which, in this case, amounts to substance. However he may deal with the issues of the times -- and people are bound to disagree on immediate issues -- there is national confidence and unity to be gained from an open presidency devoted to traditional principles of government.

We believe the people can expect that kind of presidency from Mr. Ford because that is the kind of man he has proved to be through 26 years in public life. He has not been devious or secretive. He has not engaged in improper political manipulation. He has been an open man who made friends even of political antagonists...68
There was only a hint of the P-D's earlier doubts about Ford's fitness for office: "It is also true that in Congress Gerald Ford showed himself to be a standard conservative. His personal style has been cautious rather than innovative, and it can be expected that this will be translated into presidential actions in the future." 69

Specific policies could wait, the paper said, "... though not for long. Executive leadership abhors a vacuum." 70

The P-D's closing lines captured, perhaps unwittingly, the phenomenon that was sweeping the nation during that historic weekend: "For the moment is [sic] enough to say that, almost overnight, President Ford's character and style have begun to dispense with mistrust of the presidency." 71

Christian Science Monitor

The Christian Science Monitor's response to the Ford nomination had been generally positive, although the paper did point out that Ford was "... a man who has not been thought of as presidential timber but whose nomination could be seen as a politically acceptable compliment to the Congress he has long served." 72

The Monitor's opinion of Ford was unaffected by the Watergate-related events of the post-nomination period. When Ford was confirmed as vice president, the paper observed that the nation was getting,
...a man who...has won the respect and friendship of his colleagues in the House of both parties and all political persuasions in spite of being of conservative political inclinations. He is...a political person who can meet and come to reasonable accommodations with persons of different political views. He is not dogmatic or doctrinaire. His own personal course is steadily conservative, but his search is for the accommodation which makes the business of government possible.

Although the Monitor is an evening newspaper, its editorial of August 9 appears to have been written even before Nixon announced his resignation at 9 p.m. EST on August 8. There is a reference to "Nixon's anticipated resignation" and no mention of Ford's address to the nation following the swearing-in (which would have taken place several hours before the paper "hit the streets").

On August 9, the Monitor observed that Ford is "respected as a man of honesty and common sense. His new job may well unlock new and creative strengths. Certainly his experience in Congress will make it possible for the White House to work with the lawmakers rather than to ignore and bypass them." 74

With God's help, the paper said, "We are certain that...he will have the strength and wisdom to fulfill the awesome challenges that lie ahead. We hope the American people give him their full support." 75

It is interesting to note that a newspaper like the Monitor, which had been supportive of Ford all along, should say, "We hope the American people will give their full support." [emphasis added] While a paper like the
Washington Post, formerly critical of Ford, should write, "A man who deals in so open and honest a manner with the American people cannot fail to retain their support."[emphasis added] The Post, it seems, is displaying the zealousness of the convert.

Since the Monitor does not publish on weekends, its response to Ford's address (after the oath-taking) was delayed until Monday, August 12.

Ford spoke "eloquently and assuringly," the Monitor said. His words offered "the recipe for healing of the nation...By his humility and simplicity, President Ford has begun to change the atmosphere and image of the presidency and the tone of openness he has struck comes as a great relief after the atmosphere of clandestine maneuverings that characterized the Nixon years."77

The Monitor was not a latecomer to the Ford camp. Having been supportive since early fall of '73, the paper spent little time on August 12 convincing itself or anyone else of the comparative worth of the new President.

The Monitor's comments about Ford's first actions as President were positive but not excessive: "We appreciate Ford's decision..." "We welcome...Ford's approach ...

Of foremost importance to the Monitor on this day was the unique opportunity for a "new brand of leadership" -- a restoration of that "openness and directness that will
enable all branches and agencies of government to function according to law." 78

The Monitor's idealistic hopes for the new President and the country are contained in the closing paragraphs:

...the nation stands now on the threshold of possibility for real leadership. Not a leadership which reads the public opinion polls and then determines how to act on a given issue or play a certain policy. But a leadership that formulates policies on the basis of the highest conceived good and then seeks to enlist all segments of society in an understanding and execution of those policies.

President Ford may well provide that leadership. 79

Chicago Tribune

By far the most single-minded devotion to the causes of conservativism and Gerald Ford was exhibited by the Chicago Tribune. In the fall of '73 the paper had offered some rather transparent justifications for obvious and generally acknowledged weaknesses in Ford's background.

Regarding his undistinguished legislative record, the Tribune reasoned that the House of Representatives was so large that no single member could have much impact on the national consciousness anyway. 80

When Ford was confirmed as vice president, the Tribune declared proudly that the country had a man who was "well suited for the high office." 81

On the day that Ford was to be sworn in as President, the Tribune echoed Nixon's remark that the
leadership of the country would be in good hands. "Ford deserves -- and we're confident he will get -- the support and cooperation of Congress and the country, regardless of partisan or other differences," the Tribune added.82

The following day, August 10, the Tribune described Ford's first address to the nation as "an auspicious beginning": "The few words spoken by President Ford...were well chosen, dignified, and encouraging. Mr. Ford was generous to Mr. Nixon and even offered a prayer for the Nixon family. Yet his words and his attitude reflected a simple straightforwardness that has not been seen around the White House for at least a decade."83

His remarks were simple -- maybe even a little corny -- the Tribune admitted. But they were "the right recipe for the occasion."84

Applying that recipe to the problems ahead would not be easy, the paper said. "But thru it all -- as Mr. Ford clearly recognizes -- the need is to shed the curses of the Nixon administration without sacrificing the good in it."85 Saving "the good" in the Nixon administration had been a recurrent theme in the Tribune's recent editorials.

The paper had great faith in the new President, as evidenced by this August 12 prediction:

One of the happiest aspects of President Ford's brief Vice Presidency was his candor and accessibility in dealing with fellow politicians, the public, and the press. He harbored no hostility or fear and viewed no one as his enemy; he was friendly and
cheerful and always willing to listen.

If he can preserve that attitude in his new office -- even beyond the "honeymoon" that will doubtless be accorded him -- he may have one of the most successful Presidencies on record...

**Detroit News**

The largest daily in Gerald Ford's home state of Michigan had this to say after his nomination as vice president:

...there is about Ford an air of ordinariness which causes some misgivings. Yet these same misgivings were felt with regard to a senator named Harry Truman when he was selected as a running mate by President Franklin Roosevelt.

It is a trite thing to say, but nevertheless true, that the presidency has a way of causing men to rise above themselves. Harry Truman succeeded to the presidency under the most difficult of circumstances and became one of the great presidents of our history.

If a Harry Truman could rise to the occasion, a Gerald Ford might do so, too...

On November 4, 1973, the day the *Detroit News* called for the resignation of Richard Nixon, the paper told its readers that, "Ford may not be the glamor boy of American politics but he is a competent man whom people trust, a man who could bring unity to a divided nation." The day after Ford's confirmation, the *News* remarked, with classic understatement, that "up to now, Gerald Ford could not have looked less like a man of destiny; now there he is -- confirmed as vice president of the United States at a crucial moment when the President, the
nation and the Republican Party look toward that office for leadership."\(^8^9\)

However tongue-in-cheek that comment may appear at first reading, the News was genuinely reassured by Ford's confirmation and tried to convey this feeling to its readers: "...the country can take assurance and hope from Ford's confirmation. It established an orderly line of succession between Mr. Nixon and a vice-president who could carry out the mandate of the 1972 election and who at the same time would have what Mr. Nixon no longer has -- the nation's confidence in his personal integrity."\(^9^0\)

By the Sunday following Ford's ascension to the presidency, the Detroit News had come a long way from "Ford may not be the glamor boy of American politics" and "There is about Ford an air of ordinariness."

In his first speech as President, Gerald Ford could do no wrong. The News was "sold" -- completely:

"Forward together." It was perhaps not the most original phrase in the history of political oratory but certainly none could have been more appropriate for the occasion: Gerald Ford's first speech as President of the United States.

In the wake of the agony of Watergate and the resignation of Richard Nixon, a stunned and divided nation needs, as it has rarely needed before, to regain a sense of togetherness and mobility. Just as they needed the resignation of Richard Nixon, Americans needed the calm, conciliatory words they heard from their new President.

Combining goodwill and good sense, President Ford managed in the same brief speech to plead the case for mercy toward former President Nixon and convey his own determination to avoid the pitfalls into which Mr. Nixon stumbled.
We believe Mr. Ford spoke the sentiments of most Americans when he urged the application of the Golden Rule to the fallen president. Mr. Nixon has suffered embarrassment, humiliation and political loss sufficient to satisfy all but the most blood-thirsty partisan...

...President Ford asks that we start anew, moving away from what has distressed us and toward better times for America. For his own part, he promises what the country has lacked for too long -- a truthful and candid presidency, an "open" administration that communicates with the people.

The new President's first speech struck the appropriate note for the transition to the new era. He will need the help of every citizen to make that transition a success. If this honest, openhearted man cannot bring us back together and start us on the way to happier and more prosperous days, who in the world can?

The last sentence of the News' editorial sums up the collective mood of the five newspapers -- initially critical or lukewarm -- toward the new President. This simple, almost ingenuous remark symbolizes the long editorial path traveled by those five papers in the 10 months since Ford's vice presidential nomination.

**Grand Rapids Press**

The Grand Rapids Press was behind its favorite son from the outset. It was the only paper in the study sample to have quoted columnist David Broder's observation that, "Gerry Ford is one of the most decent human beings in Washington."92

The Press's editorialists had surprisingly little to say when Ford was confirmed as vice president. But on
the day their hometown boy became "Mr. President," they devoted an entire editorial column, top to bottom, to the subject. The Press was at once proud, respectful and affectionate.

The first three paragraphs of the editorial summed up -- as no other paper in the sample had -- the incredible improbability of it all:

There are several paths Gerald R. Ford could have taken to the presidency of the United States, but none of them are so improbable as the one that has led him to the highest office in the land if not the world.

President Ford was not a "name" senator, the route taken by a number of our recent Presidents. Neither was he a governor, a big-city mayor, a war hero, not his party's spellbinding orator. And in his automatic succession to the presidency, Mr. Ford was not, for the first time, an elected vice president.

Instead the President became the nation's leader by virtue of the 25th Amendment to the Constitution -- an appointee to replace a felon vice president and a successor to a discredited President.

So much for the mechanics of getting the man to his post. It is better not to dwell on them for the country is longing for a fresh start and a cessation of hates, doubts and uncertainties of the past few years.

Whether through luck or providence, there is no Republican leader in evidence today who is more qualified and more needed in the White House. And there is no one who, from past performance, is more likely to salvage his party's unfulfilled or discarded promises of lowered voices and national unity...

...The job confronting the new President is enormous as are the handicaps built into the transition and beyond his control. In having to complete the term of a President who until recently had majority support from both the public and political sectors, Mr. Ford is denied the luxury of being able to sweep clean
previous programs and personnel and, if all else fails, blame the prior officeholder.

He will be pushed and shoved by those who were part of the November, 1972 election mandate and by those who demand greater bipartisanship after having felled one archpolitical foe. But among those who know Gerald Ford best--and that one [sic] have to include much of the Grand Rapids area population--there are few doubts that he will succeed spectacularly in pulling together the tattered ends of the national government and national temper.

In his brief speech upon assuming the vice presidency last Dec. 6, President Ford . . . noted with a smile, "I'm a Ford, not a Lincoln."

A Lincoln? That assessment will have to come much later. But a Ford is what the country has right now, and the choice could not be better.93

During his first few weeks in office, Gerald Ford did much to dispel the clouds of distrust and suspicion which had descended upon the Nixon White House. But the "era of good feeling"--as the New York Times would call it94--was to be short-lived.
FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER III


2 Ibid.


4 Los Angeles Times, loc. cit.

5 Los Angeles Times, loc. cit.

6 Los Angeles Times, loc. cit.


8 "The Overriding Factor . . . ," The New York Times, August 7, 1974, p. 34.


12 Ibid.

13 "The Nixon Confession," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, August 7, 1974, p. 2B.


16 Ibid.

17 "Enough is Enough!" The Detroit News, November 4, 1973, p. 3E.


20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.


26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.


29 The Christian Science Monitor, loc. cit.

30 "Immunity for Citizen Nixon," The Detroit News, August 8, 1974, p. 6B.


32 "The Impending Resignation," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, August 8, 1974, p. 2B

33 "Nixon: An American Tragedy," The Detroit News, August 9, 1974, p. 6B.

34 "Mr. Nixon's Place in History," Chicago Tribune, August 9, 1974, Sec. 1, p. 10.


37 Ibid.

40 "No Reward for Malfeasance," Los Angeles Times, op. cit.
44 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
57 Ibid.


65 "Mr. Ford's Limits," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, November 19, 1973, p. 2B

66 Ibid.

67 "The Ford Mandate," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, August 9, 1974, p. 2B.

68 "A New Presidential Style," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, August 11, 1974, p. 2C.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.


75 Ibid.


77 "Restoring Leadership," The Christian Science Monitor, August 12, 1974, p. 16.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

"Our New Vice President," Chicago Tribune, December 7, 1973, Sec. 1, p. 16.

"The Resignation," Chicago Tribune, August 9, 1974, Sec. 1, p. 10.


Ibid.

Ibid.

"... Mr. Ford and the People," Chicago Tribune, August 12, 1974, Sec. 1, p. 20.

"A Struggle Avoided," The Detroit News, October 15, 1973, p. 6-B.


"A Man of Integrity," The Detroit News, December 7, 1973, p. 8-B.

Ibid.

"Ford's Aim is Unity," The Detroit News, August 11, 1974, p. 8-G.


CHAPTER IV

THE PARDON OF RICHARD NIXON

The national mood of relief and reawakened confidence created by Gerald Ford's ascension to the presidency continued unchecked during his first month in office. And nowhere was the euphoria more intense than in the nation's capital, which had emerged spent but victorious from its long and difficult battle.

"The change [in Washington] after August 9 had been quite dramatic," wrote John Herbers of the New York Times, "as the unpretentious man from Grand Rapids, Mich., opened the corridors that had festered under the siege mentality and arrogance of the Nixon years. For a month the aura of trust and good feeling continued." ¹

Press coverage of the new President during these early weeks, according to Los Angeles Times media critic David Shaw, was inclined to be "too gentle and uncritical . . . frequently imputing to him [Ford] many virtues that, in the words of Peter Lisagor of the Chicago Daily News, 'he didn't possess, we knew he didn't possess and he didn't even claim to possess.'" ²

Ford's honeymoon with the press was not unprecedented. "It is customary for an incoming President to
enjoy a brief period of bliss with the press, Congress and the public alike," Shaw pointed out. ³

However, Ford had come to the presidency under extraordinary circumstances which had greatly influenced the nature of the traditional honeymoon.

In the words of James Deakin, White House correspondent for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Ford was "the luckiest President of them all; he succeeded the worst President in our history, the worst act ever. The press was so high on Ford not because he was Ford, but because his predecessor was Richard Nixon." ⁴

Through all the euphoria, at least one warning was sounded that the country was headed for a fall. It came only hours before the "crash," as Washington columnist Mary McGrory called it. ⁵

In the Sunday, September 8, edition of the New York Times, Joe McGinniss, author of "The Selling of the President, 1968," warned readers:

... In our lust for decent leadership we are creating an idol whom, history suggests, we will eventually feel compelled to destroy. ... In selling ourselves an ideal President who does not and who never can exist, we are once again repeating the destructive process of buildup and letdown that we have suffered through so often in the recent past.

I am afraid that the selling job we are doing on ourselves can only lead to disappointment. ⁶

Little heed was paid Joe McGinniss as millions of Americans sat stunned before their television screens watching a grim-faced Gerald Ford announce his "full, free
and absolute pardon" of Richard Nixon for "all offenses against the United States which he . . . has committed or may have committed or taken part in during the period from January 20, 1969, through August 9, 1974." 7

The pardon was unconditional; no admission of guilt was demanded of the former President and none was forthcoming. In a statement released from his San Clemente, California compound, Nixon accepted the pardon, conceded only "mistakes and misjudgments" and admitted no criminal guilt. An accompanying agreement would permit Nixon to eventually destroy the very tapes that had led to his downfall, however all documents and tapes were to be retained for three years by the government for possible use in court cases related to the Watergate scandals. 8

The pardon was apparently an independent and solitary decision by President Ford. Special Watergate Prosecutor Leon Jaworski was not consulted. 9 According to the New York Times, only four persons in Washington (besides Ford) knew of the pardon negotiations with Nixon. "When the President went on the air, the surprise was complete," the Times said, and the reaction was "immediate and overwhelming." 10

J. F. terHorst, Ford's press secretary and first presidential appointment, quickly resigned in protest against the pardon. 11
Thousands of telegrams poured into the White House, "in a display of public shock that recalled the reaction to the 'Saturday night massacre' of 1973."\textsuperscript{12}

"In Congress," the Times noted, "the warm feelings for Mr. Ford cooled. There was even an effort begun, by Representative Bella Abzug of New York, to have the House Judiciary Committee open a formal inquiry into the circumstances in which the pardon was conferred."\textsuperscript{13}

Within three days, Ford's favorable Gallup rating had plunged from a 71 percent approval rate to 49 percent.\textsuperscript{14} In the first week, letters to the editor were running 23 to 1 against the pardon at the Los Angeles Times\textsuperscript{15} and 45 to 1 against at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.\textsuperscript{16}

Seven of the eight newspapers in the sample responded to the pardon with moderate to severe disapproval. The lone exception was the Detroit News--the only paper to appeal for clemency before the pardon and the only one to approve of the pardon after it was granted. However, all eight were dismayed at the possibility of a blanket pardon for all Watergate offenders and spoke out strongly against such action.

It was the timing of the pardon--rather than the pardon itself--to which the seven papers objected so fiercely. They agreed that clemency would have been appropriate, and readily accepted by the nation, after the judicial processes had been carried out.
Excepting the Detroit News, all were deeply concerned that the preemptive pardon had effectively "sealed the book" on Watergate, thus preventing the full story from being recorded for history. Some feared that without such a record, Nixon's resignation may someday be looked upon as a political ouster.

Speculation regarding a possible "deal" between Nixon and Ford was widely discussed, but not a single paper even considered it as a plausible explanation.

Several papers questioned Ford's appreciation for the spirit of the law—one of the qualities for which Ford was so highly praised at the time of his confirmation as vice president.

Without exception, all eight newspapers believed the requested $850,000 in transition funds for the former President was excessive.

The New York Times, the last to relinquish its doubts about the new President—and the first to resurrect them—was the most vituperative in its condemnation of the pardon. However, the Times was also the only one to admit that it had recently been singing Ford's praises. None of the other papers even acknowledged their abrupt turnabout. Most damned Ford as easily as they had praised him. Apparently it was all right for a newspaper to have a change of heart on a given issue, but it was unacceptable for a President to do so.
The Los Angeles Times, the only one to have admitted feeling betrayed by Nixon, voiced unnecessary disclaimers of vindictiveness (once again) even though it had expressed only moderate disapproval of the pardon.

Overall, the newspaper least alarmed by the whole ruckus was the Christian Science Monitor, not unlike its generally placid reaction to other Watergate-related events in the recent past.

It has been observed here that the three newspapers exhibiting the greatest overall change in attitude toward Ford (from his nomination as vice president to his confirmation and, ultimately, his ascension to the presidency) had also been the most virulent in their condemnation of Richard Nixon. These papers were the New York Times, Washington Post and St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and they were also the most vitriolic in their reactions to the Nixon pardon.

A discussion follows of each newspaper's reactions for at least a week after the pardon.

**New York Times**

The New York Times was still airing its doubts about Gerald Ford's fitness to assume the presidency even as he was being sworn into office on August 9, 1974. But Ford's simple and straightforward address convinced even the cautious Times. In the ensuing days, skepticism gave way to praise and the Times, too, was swept up in the
euphoric mood of relief and hope that engulfed the nation during the early days of the Ford presidency.

Within three weeks, however, the Times was the first to recognize that this "era of good feeling" must soon be translated into effective leadership. On September 2, six days before Ford was to pardon the former President, the Times sounded this gentle note of caution:

The transition from Richard Nixon's clandestine and oligarchical reign to the open Presidency ushered in so appealingly by Gerald Ford has already done much to rekindle public faith in the integrity of constitutional government. Durable confidence in the President's capacity to deal with the nation's problems, however, calls for a swift recognition in the White House that this restoration of public trust cannot long survive on a diet solely of relief and euphoria. Dismantling the Nixon Administration's machinery for national mastery must be viewed as only a prelude to effective leadership. . . .

It would be unreasonable so soon to expect many hard answers from the new President. But it will be counter-productive, and ultimately dangerous, to let good feeling become a blinder shutting out awareness of the need for effective policies.17

A week later, the Times' reaction to the Nixon pardon was one of palpable outrage:

In giving former President Nixon an inappropriate and premature grant of clemency, President Ford has affronted the Constitution and the American system of justice. It is a profoundly unwise, divisive and unjust act. . . .18

Had clemency followed conviction rather than preceded it, the Times argued, "there would have been wide acceptance of President Ford's exercise of his power to pardon."19 This was to be echoed repeatedly in the next few days by seven of the eight newspapers sampled.
The Times, in a marked departure from its normally restrained demeanor, heaped devastating verbal abuse upon the new President:

... He [Ford] could probably have taken no single act of a non-criminal nature that would have more gravely damaged the credibility of this government in the eyes of the world and of its own people than this unconscionable act of pardon.

... [B]y recklessly pushing aside special prosecutor Leon Jaworski and the grand jury and the trial jury as well, President Ford has failed in his duty to the Republic, made a mockery of the claim of equal justice before the law, promoted renewed public discord, made possible the clouding of the historical record and undermined the humane values he sought to invoke.... In a time when the nation has been repeatedly dismayed by so many acts of corruption, intrigue and deceit, [the] President has signally failed to provide courageous and impartial moral leadership.20

The untimely pardon "... might have stirred less public outrage," the Times reasoned,

if the President, in what amounted to secret and discreditable plea bargaining with his predecessor, had insisted on a frank and forthright confession of guilt. Instead, he settled for an unctuous, guileful statement from Mr. Nixon in which the former President admits nothing specific and skillfully blurs the issues. The Justice Department's deal with former Vice President Agnew last year was seriously questionable; yesterday's arrangement sinks below that poor precedent.21

Instead of adhering to his own "wise public pronouncements" on the issue of clemency, the President had "moved secretly and suddenly to block the normal workings of justice." It was "an act of flagrant favoritism," the paper charged, which could only "outrage and dishearten millions of ... citizens who thought that at last the
laws of this nation would be enforced without fear of favor." 22

As far as the Times was concerned, the precipitate pardon surely vindicated those who had urged at the time of Nixon's resignation, "that Congress go forward with the constitutional process of impeachment by the House and trial by the Senate." 23

Ford's "blundering intervention" had dealt "a body blow to . . . [his] own credibility and to the public's reviving confidence in the integrity of its Government," the Times concluded. 24

Two days after the pardon announcement, the New York Times was still visibly shocked and angered:

Far from writing The End on the tragedy of Watergate, President Ford's sweeping pardon of former President Nixon has only muddied further the ambiguities and uncertainties left in the wake of that whole lamentable episode. A more divisive and distasteful outcome could scarcely be imagined. 25

But it was evident that the paper had begun to calm down and was exploring alternative actions to meet yet another government crisis. The Times seemed to be thinking aloud as it considered the legal and historical implications of the pardon:

... How are the citizens of today and of future generations to know beyond challenge, whether any or all of the criminal accusations against the former President were justified, whether they could be made to stick before a jury of citizens within the system of justice?

Even upon his pardon, Mr. Nixon acknowledged having made only "mistakes and misjudgments." That is far short of specification of a crime, much less confession
of one. In a legal sense, even the act of pardon is apparently no confirmation that crimes were actually committed—constitutional scholars come down on both sides of this point. ... Without the firm seal of a conclusive judgement by constitutional institutions, the way will be open for a subsequent demagogic rewriting of history that could poison the political atmosphere for generations to come. ... 26

Under the circumstances, the Times believed there was now "a strong case for the full House of Representatives to resume consideration of the Judiciary Committee's impeachment report, and vote on it in some form that would stand as a formal verdict by the Congress. 27

Beyond that, the paper said, the President also had an obligation to define just what crimes he had pardoned Nixon for:

There are too many mysterious circumstances surrounding the decision for anyone to have confidence that the whole story is out. The least Mr. Ford can do is to tell the American people, without ambiguity or extra legal emotionalism, just what the case against Mr. Nixon was. 28

Official disclosure on September 10 that the President was considering pardons for all those convicted or accused of Watergate-related crimes brought on a firestorm of protest from the Congress, the press and the public.

The Times feared the perpetration of another cover-up. In an editorial entitled "Nightmare Compounded," the paper declared:

... The foreclosing by President Ford of the judicial process on which the nation now depends to learn the truth of the abuses perpetrated upon it by the man who put Mr. Ford in the White House would make the new
President the central figure in a cover-up as worrisome and divisive as the one that drove Mr. Nixon out of office.

Instead of closing the book on an agonizing national scandal, amnesty for all the Watergate conspirators and cancellation of a trial now less than three weeks away would perpetuate that scandal with far greater political, legal and moral consequences than those the country has already suffered. . . .

The implications of a blanket Watergate pardon were horrendous: "No convincing argument could be advanced for keeping any convicted public official, judge or civil servant in jail. Indeed, it would be hard to explain why all the prisons should not be emptied and all the courts disbanded." 30

It was precisely because of the dangers inherent in the "indiscriminate and ill-considered" use of the pardoning power, the Times explained, that it had been invoked only under extraordinary circumstances in centuries of English and American jurisprudence. "Each exercise of executive clemency involved risk to the concept of equal justice," the paper said. 31

And that was why, the Times concluded, "President Ford, having erred so grievously in his precipitate pardoning of his predecessor before any court process against him had even begun, would do well to think through the implications of further pardons more carefully than he did the first." 32

Within three days after the pardon, the New York Times had once again begun to question Ford's fitness for
the presidency: "How well can a President so easily swayed in a decision of such moment measure up to the challenges involved in fateful negotiations with foreign powers and domestic interests eager to capitalize on gullibility or weakness." 33

An even more ominous sign for the future, the Times said, was the President's comment during his pardon address that the Watergate scandals were a national tragedy "in which we all have played a part." Surely, we have all been victims of this tragedy, the paper said, but it would not abide the suggestion "that the American people, not just the cynical handful who occupied positions of highest power, bear the blame for it." 34

If that was Ford's considered judgment, the Times averred, "it is a fuzzing of responsibility which boded only ill for the near and distant future." 35

By Thursday, September 12, it was back to politics as usual, the Times noted. "The candor and forthrightness that were so refreshing in the first days of the Ford Administration have now vanished in fog, with public statements becoming inoperative almost as soon as they are issued." 36

Illusions shattered, the Times was besieged with doubts regarding the new President: "Questions are inevitably raised as to Mr. Ford's credibility, his judgment and the genuineness of his desire to reach accommodations that can attract bipartisan support." 37
To the Times it was painfully evident that Ford had "misunderstood the political as well as the ethical realities when, in explaining the Nixon pardon, he said that 'ugly passions would again be aroused' by litigation involving the former President."\textsuperscript{38}

Ford's own quarter-century on Capitol Hill should have taught him that "the ugliest passions are always those that feed on public questions about truth withheld," the paper observed sadly.\textsuperscript{39}

The agreement allowing Nixon joint custody with the government of his White House tapes and documents was severely criticized by the press, and the New York Times was no exception. It was an unwise decision, the paper said, which reaffirmed a highly questionable precedent and, in effect, perpetuated the Watergate cover-up. The Times added:

\begin{quote}
\ldots President Ford has said that he wants to "seal" the Watergate book. That cannot be done by attempting to cover up the untold story, for Watergate was not simply a set of crimes or a series of scandals, but a fundamental threat to American democracy. Until the American people can work their way through all the facts of that threat, they will be unable fully to erect effective defenses against similar threats in the future. Only when such defenses are in place will Watergate be fully behind this country. Giving Mr. Nixon a further opportunity to impede that task is exactly the wrong way to "seal" the Watergate story.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

Exactly one week after the Nixon pardon, the New York Times published "Mr. Ford's Folly," a summary of the effects and implications of Ford's precipitous action a scant 30 days into his presidency. The editorial was a
bitter indictment of the man who the Times had finally come to praise just seven weeks earlier. The paper again proposes that Congress ratify the declaration of the House Judiciary Committee that Nixon would have been impeached had he not resigned. Ford's competence is repeatedly called into question in no uncertain terms. The September 15 editorial is excerpted below:

With his signature on President Nixon's pardon a week ago today, President Gerald R. Ford committed an act of monumental folly that assured the cover-up of a cover-up, subverted the spirit of the law and the Constitution, plunged the country once again into bitter political division and undermined Mr. Ford's own credibility as a man of judgment, candor and competence.

By springing on the public "a full free and absolute pardon" for former President Nixon before he had been indicted, tried or convicted, Mr. Ford instantaneously reverted to that level of political camaraderie that was so winning during his quarter-century in the House but is now proving grotesque in the post to which he had been elevated by the very patron whom he has now absolved of wrongdoing.

If Mr. Ford acted purely out of human sympathy, his compassion overwhelmed good judgment, for it was directed solely toward his former mentor with no concern for the people of the United States whose faith in democratic government rests squarely on the ideal of justice under law which Mr. Ford has now condemned. . . .

If Mr. Ford acted impulsively he showed an alarming recklessness. The speed and manner in which he pardoned Mr. Nixon, controverting his previous statements on the subject, have already raised ugly suspicions about the possibility of prior commitments or understandings—doubts which Mr. Ford alone can dispel by the exercise of more frankness than he has yet shown in this critical test of his candor and his forthrightness. If Mr. Ford's effort to exonerate the man to whom he owes so much speaks well for his sense of personal loyalty, it speaks volumes for his rash disregard of the proprieties of public life.
There is here no question of vindictiveness or of a desire to see a former President of the United States behind bars. Clemency and even a "full, free and absolute" pardon might well have been acceptable after Mr. Nixon's trial, particularly if his health would have been affected; but it is a defiance of equity and a degradation of ethics for Mr. Ford to have exercised the pardoning power at this time and in this way.

By grace of the new President, the former President has thus been allowed to thwart the indictment and trial that was surely in the offing, just as he thwarted inevitable impeachment by his resignation. Under these circumstances it would serve the cause of justice and of history if the bipartisan leadership in Congress now had the courage to propose Congressional action ratifying the unanimous declaration of the House Judiciary Committee that if Mr. Nixon had not resigned, he would have been impeached. . . .

. . . Mr. Ford wiped out the era of good feeling that he himself had inaugurated; and he guaranteed that the Republican party and Republican politicians—no matter how innocent—will be burdened with the incubus of Watergate, at least until the next Presidential election.

If Mr. Ford genuinely thought that by extending to Mr. Nixon this premature pardon (as the Association of the Bar of the City of New York termed it) he was thereby relieving the country of the prospect of a year or more of "ugly passions" and "polarized" opinions, he showed incredibly poor judgment bordering on moral obtuseness. If he thought that by misleading the public as to his intentions before he sprang the surprise decision, he was insuring "domestic tranquility," he demonstrated his low estimate of the intelligence of his fellow citizens, to whom he owes a special responsibility because he was appointed, not elected, to his high office.

If he had so little understanding of the import of what he was doing that he allowed Mr. Nixon virtually to dictate the conditions on which his pardon would be granted, including a highly questionable agreement to retain control of the tapes, then Mr. Ford's competence must be called into the most serious question.

All the qualities of simplicity and forthrightness for which we among others praised the new President at the time of his accession to office would be of
no avail to him or to the country if he fails to comprehend the responsibility of the Presidency—a responsibility not to his friends, not to his party, not even to Congress but to the people and to the body politic, to the traditions and to the history, to the living fabric and to the transcendent spirit of the Republic.

Mr. Ford has placed his predecessor, to whom he owes his office, above and beyond the law. He has given his regal status not befitting democratic institutions; and in so doing he has demeaned the Constitution, the Presidential office, the courts, and, above all, the American people’s sense of equity, justice and democratic decency.41

Washington Post

The Washington Post, for so long steeped in the machinations of the Watergate scandals, spent nearly as much time restating its case against Richard Nixon as it did responding to the pardon. In fact, the Post was so sensitive to anything related to the former president that following Ford's August 28 press conference, the paper almost predicted the Nixon pardon:

... [W]hen you put together everything that the President said in response to questions on this subject at his press conference, it adds up to something more than a simple affirmation of the Special Prosecutor's obligation to abide by his oath of office. In fact, it suggests a predisposition on his part to resolve a potential criminal proceeding against Mr. Nixon on the basis of his reading of public opinion or congressional sentiment before the matter has even begun to be dealt with by the orderly judicial processes—and before a related criminal proceeding, the Watergate cover-up case, in which Mr. Nixon has been named as an unindicted co-conspirator has even gone to trial.42

The Post's first reaction to the pardon was one of blatant incredulity:
President Ford was in no danger of losing his power to pardon Richard Nixon for any offenses with which Mr. Nixon might have been charged. And he had already indicated a disposition to come down on the side of personal leniency in this matter. By acting prematurely and abruptly he has thus not added measurably to anything but Mr. Nixon's immediate ease of mind. And he has done so at a terrific cost.

That cost has first to do with the dignity and vitality of our system of government. . . .

The paper drew an interesting parallel between private business and public consequences to support its contention that the pardon was, in reality, a continuation of the cover-up:

... One way and another Mr. Nixon managed to use the powers of his office to abort and/or subvert every solemn and orderly process undertaken in the past two years to make a full public accounting of the Watergate misdeeds. If you believe that those misdeeds were somehow the private personal business of Mr. Nixon and his aides and that they had no effect more important than the suffering their disclosure might have caused him, then Mr. Ford's summary grant of a preemptive pardon might make sense. But for those of us who believe that the consequences of Watergate were public consequences having to do with an office and a system of government which were not Mr. Nixon's personal property, then this newest use of the powers of the presidency to curtail inquiry and to relieve Mr. Nixon of responsibility for this action will strike you as nothing less than a continuation of a cover-up. We do not believe Mr. Ford intended his action to have that as its primary purpose. But that will be its primary effect. This is the more so when you consider that in connection with the pardon, Mr. Ford also granted Mr. Nixon ultimate control over access to tapes, documents and other presidential papers which almost certainly would shed further light on one aspect or another of the Watergate scandals. . . .

Unlike the New York Times, the Washington Post believed "the very concept of a pardon presumed at least a very strong likelihood of guilt. There . . . was no need to pardon the innocent," Post declared. The Times was
more inclined to favor the legal interpretation that a pardon did not necessarily confirm the commission of a crime. 46

For the first few days after the pardon there were many rumors regarding the state of Nixon's health, in relation to the pardon. The Post's initial reaction on September 10 was that Nixon's health "... or some other unknown reason [had] propelled President Ford into his precipitous action; the consequences of his acting now are too numerous and too serious to believe otherwise." 47

The Washington Post felt strongly, as did seven of the eight papers sampled, that it was the timing of the pardon—not the pardon itself—that was most offensive and potentially damaging to the concepts of justice and democracy. The Post stated:

... Just in case it is necessary we will state once again our own sense that the rule of law would not have suffered from an ultimate show of mercy in relation to Mr. Nixon. There would have been a proper time in the orderly development of judicial proceedings for intervention by President Ford, if in fact the courts themselves had not seen fit to spare Mr. Nixon the ultimate consequences of any conviction. To spare Mr. Nixon any of the legal consequences that would have confronted an ordinary citizen, however, is to misread and misjudge what Watergate has been all about from the beginning: an arrogant, arbitrary distinction between common people and their government leaders when it comes to the faithful observance of the law... 48

For the next two days (September 11-12), the Washington Post said nothing more about the pardon in its editorial columns. The New York Times, it will be recalled, had published vituperative editorials every day for a week
after the pardon. Then, on September 13, the Post made a concerted effort to face—and accept—the reality of the situation:

As a practical matter there is nothing to be done about President Ford's premature pardon of Richard Nixon for offenses that were not even specified. Mr. Ford's action is not revokable, and the damage to the current judicial proceedings and to public confidence in our institutions simply must be endured.49

You could argue that Ford's "error proceeded from a misplaced belief in one of his own rhetorical flourishes," the Post said.

[But] . . . Watergate was neither a "nightmare" nor a "bad dream" from which the nation could simply be awakened by a President determined to restore its tranquility. Watergate happened. It was a reality, and all along the problem was finding the proper public instrument to deal with that reality.50

(It is interesting to note, at this point, that the Washington Post had quoted those very same "rhetorical flourishes" after Ford was sworn in as President—and had done so in a complimentary context.51)

Having pursued Watergate and the Nixon administration for two intensely difficult years, "letting go" was no simple matter for the Post. Try as it would, the paper still continued to grouse about the wrongdoings of the ousted President and his subordinates.

Five days after the pardon the Post seemed, if not entirely forgiving, at least not as condemning as the New York Times:

... Mr. Ford has had his Bay of Pigs, you could say, and one can even be generous about it if that is what...
his was: an early and monumental blunder, born of miscalculation, ingenuousness, and a considerable degree of self-indulgent and unpresidential impulsive-ness on the part of a new and untested President. We won't be sure about this for some time, and the cost to the Ford presidency is going to be high in any case--despite the gratifying evidence of a return to the rule of law in his prudent second thoughts about a general amnesty for all of the Watergate particip­ants. . . .

In the view of the Washington Post, redemption was still possible for the new President who had blundered so badly:

... [E]ven the high cost of the presidential pardon can be partially redeemed . . . if Mr. Ford derives one inescapable lesson from his recent misadventure. It is that it is time for him to become wholly his own man. By that we don't mean to endorse the iso- lation in which he apparently took his decision to pardon Mr. Nixon. Rather, we mean that he should be moving quickly and forcefully to remove the Nixon men and the Nixon memories--in short, the Nixon influence--from the White House.53

(It was to be three more days before the New York Times would express concern about the "continuing echo of Nixonian voices" in the new administration.54)

One week after the pardon, the Washington Post devoted its lead editorial to the status of Nixon's presi-dential tapes and documents, a subject almost as contro-versial as the pardon itself:

In response to strong objections from the Special Prosecutor's office, the White House has now suspended the deal which gave former President Nixon almost com­plete control over the papers, tapes and other records of his presidency. To the extent that this is the first step toward renegotiating the agreement, it is welcome because the paper's pact was just as ill-advised as the premature pardon which it accompanied. As the Special Prosecutor has recognized, the agreement between Mr. Nixon and GSA Administrator Arthur F. Sampson was a giveaway by the government--a giveaway
which gave Mr. Nixon every opportunity to use the records of his presidency to obstruct justice and stonewall history.

This was an open invitation to a monumental cover-up.

At the same time President Ford immunized Mr. Nixon against federal prosecution, he also gave his predecessor the power to undermine or frustrate other probes and prosecutions as well. It is no wonder that the Special Prosecutor has objected so forcefully.

The agreement was doubly obnoxious because the cover-up could be an endless one. Mr. Nixon has expressed his "desire" to donate "a substantial portion" of the documents, excluding tapes, for historical purposes at some future date, but absolutely no binding commitment has been made. Thus he and his family would be at liberty to write their own memoirs, to publish selected documents and transcripts, to open the files to sympathetic writers—and to bar access, forever, to everybody else. Key documents and tapes could be suppressed and eventually destroyed with their contents undisclosed. Together with the presidential pardon, this adds up to a kind of eternal immunity protecting Mr. Nixon from final and dispassionate judgment either in the courts or at the bar of history.

President Ford now had an obligation to renegotiate the agreement for the tapes and documents, which had been "so rashly signed," the Post said. "He should regard this as an opportunity to demonstrate his commitment to fair and thorough enforcement of the laws, and thus repair some of the damage caused by the precipitous pardon and the initial decision to give these vital records away."

After Ford's September 16 press conference, at which he was questioned extensively about the Nixon pardon, the Post seemed more visibly distressed by the pardon than had been apparent in earlier editorials:

The more President Ford elaborates on his reasons for pardoning Richard Nixon, the more troubling those reasons become. For at bottom they rest on an assumption that (1) the orderly playing out of the judicial
processes would have constituted a source of "turmoil" and "divisions" in the country and (2) the way to "heal the wounds" of Watergate is to slam the books shut on the case against Mr. Nixon before we have even heard the case.  

For a while, the Post said, there had been reason to suppose there was something else involved in the pardon decision. But Ford had been given ample opportunity at his press conference "to come forward with something more persuasive than his argument about the 'healing' effect of a pardon of Mr. Nixon," the Post recalled. Although Ford hadn't excluded Nixon's health as a factor, he did insist that he was "more anxious to heal the nation." That had been his "top priority."  

Perhaps the Post had really been hoping against hope that there was, indeed, something more to it than had initially been revealed to the nation. For on September 18, the paper was obviously disappointed and even a little saddened to face the grim truth: "So there it is. That is apparently the only story Mr. Ford has to tell about the affair, and at this point it seems fair enough to take it on its face. And that is profoundly disheartening."  

What Ford was doing, the Post declared, was "selling this country short in terms of both its good sense and its fortitude." Curiously enough, the paper noted, during his vice presidential hearings Ford had relied on "the same kind of intuition to reach precisely the opposite conclusion--[that] the country . . . would not 'stand for' a summary pardon of President Nixon."
When Ford was asked about this discrepancy at his September 16 press conference, the Post said, "the President dismissed the importance of his earlier judgment by saying that at the time he was not yet President so the whole thing had been merely 'hypothetical.'" But how were the conclusions that resulted in the actual pardoning any less hypothetical, the Post wondered: "The hypotheses this time were simply different ones. They were that the country somehow would not be able to tolerate the stress of watching and waiting for the ordinary processes of justice to be applied to a former President." 61

Los Angeles Times

The Los Angeles Times at first regarded the pardon of Richard Nixon with the same calm, dispassionate demeanor with which it had received the firing of Special Watergate Prosecutor Archibald Cox the previous fall.

On October 22, 1973, the L.A. Times stated: "Mr. Nixon has made serious mistakes these last days. . . ." 62 Nearly a year later, the paper used the same key words--"serious mistake"--to describe Ford's preemptive pardon of Nixon:

President Ford's reasons for pardoning Richard Nixon were compassionately presented, but we believe Mr. Ford made a serious mistake in granting the pardon now.

It is not consistent with the fundamental American principle that sets everyone equally before the law, and that puts no man, not even the President, above the law. 63
During the fall of '73, the Los Angeles Times had been one of the three newspapers that had held out against resignation or impeachment. Months later, when the last damaging transcripts were released on August 5, the L.A. Times was the only one of the three to publicly admit that it felt betrayed by Richard Nixon. With an implicit denial of vindictiveness, the L.A. Times was the only paper to demand that Nixon be denied the lifetime pension and other emoluments granted outgoing presidents. That demand was made in a chilling editorial, entitled "No Reward for Malfeasance," which was published on the morning of Nixon's departure from office.

Exactly one month later, on the morning after the pardon announcement, the L.A. Times again brought up the specter of "vindictiveness." Its editorial was no more critical--and in some respects, less so--than the other newspapers sampled, yet the L.A. Times felt obliged to explain once again that it was not feeling vengeful toward the former President. Not one of the other papers had found it necessary to apologize for its editorial position on the Nixon pardon.

After pronouncing the pardon to be a "serious mistake," the L.A. Times declared:

We do not say this in a spirit of vindictiveness. This newspaper supported Nixon in every election of his political career. We do not wish to see him sent to jail. We do not suppose any American wants to see him hounded from courtroom to courtroom the rest of his life. Had he been brought to justice, the ultimate
resolution of his case could well have included clemency.

Mr. Ford's pardon, however, cuts short the judicial process before a final judgment is made, just as Nixon's resignation cut short the impeachment process. The record of Nixon's impeachable offenses was laid out by the House Judiciary Committee, but conclusive judgment has been given by neither Congress nor the courts.

Thus in the absence of either a candid admission of guilt by Nixon or a formal conclusive finding by Congress or the courts, the issue is left unresolved for the records and for history.

In the same editorial in which the L.A. Times had given its obligatory denial of vindictiveness, the paper also argued that Nixon should be denied the "perquisites" of a former President. (The other newspapers also discussed financial matters but did so in subsequent editorials, while commenting upon the requested $850,000 in transition funds for Nixon.) The Los Angeles Times repeated its no-reward-for-malfeasance plea on September 9, the day after Nixon was granted the pardon:

... Nor is it right for the former President to be left, as Mr. Ford's pardon leaves him, entitled to all the money and all perquisites the nation gives to former Presidents for honorable service. Nixon dishonored his office and his country, but by resignation as he was about to be impeached and removed, and by receiving Mr. Ford's pardon, he is being treated as if he had done nothing to deserve less than the full respect of a grateful nation.

Two days later, the Los Angeles Times was visibly shaken by the latest disclosure from the White House regarding pardons for all Watergate offenders. In stunned disbelief, the paper asked: "Is one grave mistake going to
beget another? It cannot be. To issue a blanket pardon would mock the American system of justice. It would affront the American people. It would make cynics of us all. 68

This time the paper made no unnecessary apologies or disclaimers but stated firmly what was to be heard, in one form or another, from seven of the eight newspapers in the study sample:

... Mr. Ford's precipitate pardon of Richard Nixon was as unnecessary as it was unwelcome. Everything that he sought to gain could have been achieved without disrupting the fair application of justice. The former President could have been spared the anguish of a trial. If Nixon has, as Mr. Ford suggested, paid adequately for his wrongdoing, he could have been spared further punishment. But the time for clemency should properly have been when the extent of the record was known...

... of course it appears unfair for Nixon to remain free while those who worked for him are in jail. This is only one of the unfortunate results of Mr. Ford's ill-considered—and imperfectly explained—decision to pardon the former President.

But Dean's guilt is unchanged by the pardon of Nixon. The allegations against H. R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman and John Mitchell are not diminished by the events of last Sunday. And so with all the others. The crimes of Watergate are offenses against the nation. If they went unpunished, who then would have any confidence left at all in the equal application of the law? 69

The L.A. Times pointed out that Ford had justified his act of pardon on the grounds that Nixon, by resigning from office, had paid for his misdeeds. "Even if one were to accept that reasoning," the paper added, "—and we do not— it cannot be applied to the others already convicted
or facing trial. They have suffered. . . . But none has paid the penalty that Nixon has paid."  

Within a week after the pardon, it was clear to the Los Angeles Times that, 

. . . a central element of President Ford's precipitate and foolish decision to grant an absolute pardon to Richard Nixon . . . [had been] the President's failure to talk it over fully with enough advisers. . . . 

. . . [W]hen the new President granted the pardon, he was doing something that got the last two Presidents in serious trouble. He was acting in secret, and he was acting almost alone.  

Ford's surprising decision was all the more shocking, the paper said, "because it contradicted both his promise of an open Presidency and his statement to Congress on clemency last year, and it ran counter to the impression he left only the week before that the question of pardon would be reserved until the legal process had unfolded."  

Ford's mistake had cast doubt on his judgment, the L.A. Times said, and "it . . . [was] the misfortune of the country that the doubt . . . [was] going to persist for a long time."  

Seven days after the pardon, the New York Times was still condemning Ford and proposing further congressional action,  

while the Washington Post was worrying about "stonewalling history" and "eternal immunity."  

In contrast, the Los Angeles Times, still struggling with its own disappointment, was already looking toward Ford's recovery of public confidence:
It would be wrong . . . to assume that the new President is ruined. He can begin to recover the ground he so rashly lost if he takes the lessons of last week to heart.

He needs the best advice he can get, and the best advisers. Cronies aren't enough. He needs to do what he promised—to listen to many people before he makes an important decision. . . .

He needs to get his own people around him in the White House and the Cabinet . . . [who] have Mr. Ford's full confidence, and full confidence in Mr. Ford.

And he needs to explain what really led him to grant that pardon. . . . The explanation he gave was unsatisfying, and so there is a flood of speculation. Little of it is complimentary to Mr. Ford. Unless he can explain more convincingly, that corrosive suspicion will persist. People have lost a good deal of confidence in him.

He can gain it back, if the people come to perceive that he has taken hold of his job and is doing the right things. . . .

*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, which had expressed serious doubts about Ford's competence in the fall of '73, was also swept up in the euphoria that followed Ford's ascension to the presidency.

The *P-D's* editorial about-face toward the new President was as dramatic as the *New York Times*', and its reaction to the pardon one month later was very nearly as caustic. However, the *Post-Dispatch* appears to have recovered its equilibrium well before both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. 
Ford's precipitate act pierced the Post-Dispatch deeply. The paper's mood on September 10 was heavy with disillusionment and cynicism:

If all that were done by President Ford's pardon of former President Nixon was the damage to the credibility and moral tone of his Administration, it would have been a severe but ultimately supportable blow to the republic. But Mr. Ford's precipitate act of clemency is more than a self-inflicted wound on his Administration; it is a lethal stroke against the principle of equality under the law on which the nation's system of justice rests.

The resignation of Mr. Nixon had appeared to be a triumph of law, an affirmation of the rule that no American, not even the President, is immune from its reaches. As Mr. Ford declared in his swearing-in speech, "Our Constitution works; our great republic is a government of laws and not of men." Yet in scarcely a month, Mr. Ford appears to have forgotten these noble words, for in absolving Mr. Nixon of any criminal liabilities for acts which occurred while he was in the White House the President is clearly promulgating a double standard of justice. . . .

. . . Mr. Ford assumed precisely the same arrogant stance so often taken by Mr. Nixon, that of arbitrarily deciding when and how the laws are to be applied. Mr. Ford says that only he can "write the end" to the Watergate tragedy. That is as presumptuous as it is unfounded.

Indeed, Mr. Ford's misguided act has guaranteed that Watergate will continue to infect the nation. . . . Thus in trying to heal the wounds of Watergate, Mr. Ford has succeeded in deepening cynicism about government. Such a mood can only detract from his efforts to solve the country's pressing problems. . . . It appears that like his predecessor, Mr. Ford will have to learn that if he cannot be believed, he cannot govern effectively. 77

Many Americans will suspect a deal between Nixon and Ford, the P-D said. Ford's own reputation for candor—which contributed to the euphoric honeymoon period—would have to be rebuilt, "painfully and almost from scratch." 78
By closing the book on Mr. Nixon, the paper said, the President had left unfinished "the most pressing remaining piece of business about the Watergate scandals: a precise, formal delineation of Mr. Nixon's role in them." Discarding the possibility of a court trial, such a "delineation" would still be possible, the P-D declared, "if Congress . . . [resumed] the impeachment proceedings—proceedings which the Constitution specifically exempts from the compass of a president's pardoning authority."79

(The New York Times, it should be noted, had suggested only that the full House of Representatives vote on the Judiciary Committee's impeachment report in some form that "would stand as a formal verdict by the Congress."80 Although the Times did state that those who had urged that the impeachment process continue after Nixon's resignation had been vindicated,81 the paper did not itself propose such action following the pardon.)

The Post-Dispatch recognized that resumption of the impeachment proceedings may be impracticable from a political standpoint but emphasized that ". . . such proceedings . . . now remain the only avenue by which the public is likely to learn that truth. It may well be also the only avenue by which the historical record can be fully set forth, inasmuch as Mr. Nixon has now been given the right to ultimately destroy the White House tapes."82
The news that a blanket pardon was under consideration by the White House shocked and dismayed the Post-Dispatch. On September 11, the paper stated.

It is difficult to imagine any single act that would so thoroughly compound the incalculable damage already done by President Ford's full pardon of former President Nixon than to extend this act of clemency to all who have been convicted of or are about to stand trial for their involvement in the Watergate crimes. Thus it must be hoped that by authorizing a White House aide to announce that such a blanket pardon is "under study," Mr. Ford was testing the country's reaction before making a decision. Even if this was the case, it says precious little for the President's appreciation of the nation's sensibilities. . . . To suggest that justice will have been dispensed equally if everyone connected with Watergate is pardoned is to engage in the most superficial kind of reasoning. . . .

It is meaningless, even offensive, to talk of equalizing the law through a blanket pardon while thousands of lesser persons charged or convicted of burglary or conspiracy serve prison terms or await trial. The Nixon pardon was an incredible blunder, but it will scarcely be corrected by repetition.

Furthermore, through such an action Mr. Ford would be telling his fellow citizens and the world that the system of free elections--the wellspring of the American democracy--can be abused with impunity, that actual and alleged violations of federal law can be overlooked if the transgressions were directed at nothing more significant than the disruption of the political process. The effect that such an obscene commentary on America would have on the public's spirit is obvious, for how could respect for law and government be sustained if two presidents in succession abjure the judicial process in favor of highhanded action, the sum practical effect of which is to cover up crimes? . . .

After a succession of "properly applauded statements and declarations," the Post-Dispatch noted sadly, the new President . . . [had] attempted his first substantive act and . . . brought down a hornet's nest."
How was Ford to repair the damage to his infant administration, the paper wondered. It was only the third day after the pardon announcement, yet the P-D rebounded from its initial shock to offer these suggestions:

(1) Ford must "... sever the ties which bind him to his discredited predecessor ... abandon any thought of further pardons," (2) "... give serious consideration to urging the Senate to ... review ... [and accept] the House Judiciary Committee report," (3) "... go before the people, preferably at a press conference ... and explain [his actions] fully. ..." 85

The Post-Dispatch had this grave warning for the President on September 11: "What ... [Ford] must at all costs avoid is a second mistake of the magnitude of the Nixon pardon; for should he commit another, as with a blanket pardon, the people will have reason to question his competence to command the Oval Office." 86

The following day, the Post-Dispatch renewed its request that Congress resume the impeachment proceedings. By doing so, the paper said, the full facts would be formally recorded and Congress "... could reach a judgment as to the former President's eligibility to hold federal office or to receive a presidential pension and other perquisites." 87

The P-D was full of ideas to snag the elusive Nixon:

... Or Congress could pass a formal censure resolution which might do the same thing in a shorthanded
way. Or the Watergate grand jury might still indict Mr. Nixon, providing a basis for judicially testing the scope of the presidential pardoning power... Finally, Congress could further expose the Watergate machinations by setting up another joint investigating committee or a special commission.

Any one, or a combination, of these steps "would require varying degrees of political courage," the _P-D_ declared. "But the effort must be made... Watergate must not be swept into the dustbin of history with the implication that the worst scandals in the American experience can be simply forgiven and forgotten when a disgraced president resigns and his personally chosen successor pardons him." 

President Ford's press conference on the evening of September 16 served only to exacerbate the _P-D_ 's returning doubts about Ford's competence to hold office. The paper's editorial of September 17 is, in a subtle way, its most severe indictment of Ford to date. The last paragraph, a blatant challenge to Ford's authority, is an almost desperate appeal to forestall suppression of the truth about Watergate. That editorial is excerpted below:

For the better part of a half hour last night, President Ford attempted to justify his decision to grant a sudden and full pardon to his predecessor. On the basis of what he said, there is little cause to doubt that he acted out of laudable motives; but by the same token there is every reason to be gravely concerned about the quality of his judgment and the depth of his appreciation for the spirit of law that underlies the nation's constitutional government.

In his press conference, Mr. Ford made it plain for the first time that he considers former President Nixon
guilty of the offenses for which the impeachment action was in the process of removing him from office. Mr. Nixon's acceptance of the pardon "can be construed" as an admission of culpability, Mr. Ford said, and he added that the evidence compiled in the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment report was "very persuasive."

Furthermore, said Mr. Ford in clearly passing moral judgment on Mr. Nixon, the resigned President "has been shamed and disgraced" by Watergate.

Yet the question that must be asked is whether Mr. Ford's personal judgment, however much it coincides with the weight of evidence presented so far, is sufficient reason to short-circuit the judicial process. And here, we believe, the answer must be a resounding No, for to believe otherwise is to hold that the orderly system of due process, which every American enjoys as a basic right, is subservient to the judgment, whim, disposition--call it what you will--of a single person. Put another way, to deny the law its opportunity to run the full course is to deny society a decisive judgment--the end for which the entire judicial system exists. That is why Mr. Ford's act of clemency must be recognized as a profound affront to a fundamental institution of government.

... Watergate, as Americans scarcely need to be reminded, was no ordinary crime or sequence of crimes; it was a wholesale assault on the democratic system which very nearly succeeded. In the process, a corrupt Chief Executive was forced to resign the office he had so badly abused. Thus to imagine that wounds can be healed by suppressing the truth--by denying living Americans and history a full record of what transpired--is to indulge in a simple-minded fantasy.

Worst of all, Mr. Ford has set the stage for Watergate to live on as an enduring lesson that, put to the ultimate test, the system functioned but only to a point, that in the final analysis it was judged that the welfare of the nation was better served by putting a former president above the reaches of the law than letting justice proceed.

But in this crucial matter, Mr. Ford need not stand as the final authority. Though temporarily suppressed, the truth can yet emerge to free the country from the corrosive influence of Watergate. Mr. Ford's pardon may still be legally challenged on the grounds that it is nonspecific. Congress can act to empower the Watergate prosecutor to make a full public report.
The impeachment proceedings can be revived. Whatever the means, the people deserve assurance that they have not placed their faith in the American system in vain.90

**Christian Science Monitor**

The *Christian Science Monitor* was slow to grasp the implications of the Nixon pardon and, overall, appeared to be the paper least alarmed by the whole affair. In its usual calm and reserved manner, the *Monitor* combined moralizing and practicality in its editorial reactions to the pardon. The paper's September 9 editorial is a good example of this dualism:

Since Nixon had been granted "unconditional amnesty," the *Monitor* said, the initiative was now his. The paper urged Nixon to come forward and tell all—and sounded as though it actually believed he would.

He [Nixon] said in response to the pardon that he was wrong in not dealing forthrightly with Watergate. He now has the opportunity to make his response concrete by forthrightly supplying what the courts need and what the public still yearns to know—the full truth behind the ordeal to which his administration subjected the country.91

With a polite pause, the *Monitor* calmly turned to a realistic appraisal of the "double standard" created by the pardon:

... Mr. Nixon has a full pardon plus requested additional funds beyond those statutorily required for a former president—while former subordinates face trial, have been convicted, or are in prison.

Can this double standard be squared with the working of the system upon which Americans have been congratulating themselves? ...92
The Monitor did not seem too disturbed by the pardon the day after its surprise announcement. It was, after all, President Ford's response "... to the need for compassion urged by many voices, including this newspaper's, as an accompaniment to the workings of justice." And, as to the future, well it would be "unfortunate," the paper said, if Nixon's pardon were taken as "a precedent for erring presidents to wipe the slate clean through resignation. . . ."  

Figuratively speaking, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch half feared democracy would come crashing down about its ears, while the crusty, old Monitor puffed on its editorial pipe and figured it would be "unfortunate" if the pardon set a precedent for the future.  

(Note: During the post-nomination period discussed earlier, the Monitor had probably been the paper least affected by Watergate-related events. It had accepted Ford's nomination and confirmation with equanimity and appears to have received the Nixon pardon with the same calm, even-tempered disposition.)  

It was two days before the Monitor recognized the full impact of the pardon. On September 10 the paper acknowledged that it was "deeply disturbed about the implications of the Nixon pardon for the moral leadership of the United States."  

Finally, the Monitor began to ask--and answer--the right questions:
The fundamental question that has surrounded the whole Watergate affair remains: Is this to be a government based on law and justice for all? Or a government that places considerations of person above principle?

In strictly legal terms, it [the pardon] has set the precedent of a double standard for the American people that is morally wrong and politically dangerous. It, in effect, undercuts the American system of justice by pulling the rug out from under Judge Sirica, Leon Jaworski, and so many others who are trying to uphold the law and apply it equitably.

Politically, the decision also creates a heavy burden. The President has in effect allowed Watergate to touch himself by this erosion of the legal process. Americans can now ask: If a citizen cannot depend on his government to defend the principle of equality before the law, is there security for anyone?

Historically, the premature pardon—and we would have favored mercy ultimately—leaves unresolved some of the greatest issues in American history. Watergate touches on the most fundamental of crimes—the abuse of power—and affects the moral, political, and economic strength not only of America but of the world.

Once again, a dualism of viewpoint can be observed in the same editorial—a bit of moralizing and a dose of practical reality:

First the morality:

Throughout the land there has long been an unfortunate psychological climate created by the fact that law-breakers often go free. A failure not to apply the law equally to all, including the man who held the highest position of trust, may only fuel the cynicism and bitterness of young people and others who believe government has lost its moral force.

Then the reality:

After such an able start as President and [a] successful effort to unite the country, Mr. Ford has now created divisions anew and handed the Democrats an issue in the November election. The decision is also likely to intensify feelings on both sides of the sensitive
In the initial aftermath of the Nixon pardon, public reaction, rather than abating, grew more intense as the week drew to a close. So it was with the Christian Science Monitor, which appeared slower to grasp the massive implications of the pardon than the New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times and St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Five days after the pardon announcement, the Monitor declared: "The doubt and confusion that have arisen in the wake of President Ford's unconditional pardon of Richard Nixon are disheartening to a nation yearning for order." 99

Grave questions had arisen which warranted public explanation, the Monitor said, and an early press conference would do much to clarify the President's position.

The paper was "grateful" to learn that Ford had rejected the idea of a blanket pardon for all Watergate offenders:

Everyone wants done with Watergate, but it is impossible to put this dark chapter behind until the truth about the conduct in the Nixon White House is fully out. Continuation of the judicial process is the fairest and most effective means of extracting the facts. 100

Another way of getting out the truth about Watergate, the Monitor said, was "... the report to be prepared by the special prosecutor. But there is some legal question ... whether it could include charges or
evidence . . . [now] excluded from the court process due to the Nixon pardon." The paper suggested that perhaps Ford himself "could make possible a revision of the Nixon published transcripts, with full and correct versions of all tapes, including the 64 extracted through Supreme Court decision." ¹⁰¹ (This idea was unique among the eight newspapers sampled.)

Unlike the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Christian Science Monitor appeared confident that enough remained of Ford's reservoir of goodwill to "build on" in the wake of the Nixon pardon. The Post-Dispatch, on the other hand, believed that Ford's reputation for candor would have to be rebuilt "painfully and almost from scratch." ¹⁰²

The Monitor's confidence is implicit in this statement: "If Mr. Ford is to build on the trust he has so admirably won in the month since he took office, he should promptly confront current speculation with facts. . . ." ¹⁰³

However, whether Ford would, indeed, build on that confidence was still unclear:

. . . The speculation will not go away unless Mr. Ford provides convincing answers to such questions, either by volunteering them, by responding to the press, or by testifying before the hearings that Congress would have to consider calling in the absence of presidential openness on the subject.

Mr. Ford presented the pardon itself as a forthright executive act of conscience. It is to be urged he will handle the aftermath with equal forthrightness. To dissipate the moral dismay now widespread across the nation he must convey that firm regard for justice that will make the conclusion of Watergate a model of government under law. ¹⁰⁴
Ford's press conference on September 16, which had stirred such doubts in the editorial mind of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*,\textsuperscript{105} did much to allay the immediate concerns of the *Christian Science Monitor* and set the paper on a forward course. The *Monitor* was reassured that: (1) there had been "no deal or understanding" between Ford and Nixon, (2) Nixon's acceptance of the pardon could be construed as an admission of guilt, and (3) the actions of the House Judiciary Committee were "persuasive evidence" of culpability.\textsuperscript{106}

The *Monitor* reluctantly concluded:

It is doubtful Mr. Ford will have persuaded everyone that his decision on pardon at this time was a right one. But he came across as candid and sincere in arguing his act serves the interests of giving the nation a period of calm after Watergate.

We have not shared his judgment that the decision would heal the turmoil in the nation. It seems to us the judicial process could have continued--and would have without turmoil--but that the pardon itself introduced a turbulent element.

Nonetheless, we feel it is time to accept that decision without recrimination and to move forward from this point. . . .\textsuperscript{107}

**Chicago Tribune**

When Gerald Ford was sworn in as President, the *Chicago Tribune* had contended that Ford clearly recognized "the need . . . to shed the curses of the Nixon administration without sacrificing the good in it."\textsuperscript{108}
Ford's blundering attempt to shed those self-same "curses"—by granting an absolute pardon to Richard Nixon—brought this reaction from the Tribune on September 10:

Dismay and regret. These are the two words that best describe our reaction to the manner and timing of President Ford's announcement of a full pardon for Richard Nixon.

Note that we said the manner and timing, not the decision itself. We can applaud the President's compassion. We agree with him that an early resolution of Mr. Nixon's status is in the national interest; we have made the same argument ourselves, especially when we called in May for Mr. Nixon's prompt resignation or impeachment.

If Mr. Ford had made the announcement under normal conditions instead of unexpectedly on a Sunday morning, and if he had explained candidly and fully why he had changed his mind since saying on Aug. 28 that he would reserve his decision on a pardon until after the wheels of justice had begun to turn, we might be praising him today for making a courageous decision on another controversial issue. . . .

It was evident to the Tribune that Ford was, in effect, "asking the country to take his word for the wisdom of his decision." While a President may be justified in asking the country to take his word on some things, Watergate was definitely not one of them, the paper insisted.

This former devotee of Richard Nixon provided a rather graphic description of the aftermath of the pardon:

Mr. Ford's announcement has left a sour smell all too reminiscent of Mr. Nixon's handling of Watergate. . . . There is the implication that wherever the subject of Watergate arises, it will be accompanied by suspicion, secrecy, and divisiveness. This is precisely the atmosphere that Mr. Ford has been trying—so far successfully—to avoid.

He has now undone much of the good he has done. He has jeopardized the "good marriage" which he sought with
Congress. Instead of helping Republican candidates for office shed Watergate as an issue, he has revived it in his own person.110

During the two-month period following Ford’s vice presidential nomination, it became apparent that the Chicago Tribune was addressing the same issues as the other newspapers, but from a different philosophical framework. That same tilt in perspective can be observed in a second editorial (on September 10) in which the paper discussed "some self-evident arguments in favor of the pardon quite aside from compassion."111

What had been mentioned merely in passing by the other newspapers became a credible justification to the Tribune:

With Mr. Nixon now safely beyond the reach of the courts, he can no longer hide behind the Fifth Amendment in refusing to appear or to testify at the trials of his former subordinates. The Supreme Court has punctured his power to invoke a blanket claim of executive privilege. He is left with no recourses other than those of any citizen—to tell the truth or to be cited for contempt or perjury. And his pardon does not apply to these... Under competent questioning, Mr. Nixon could be forced to admit just about everything that would [have emerged]... in his own trial.112

The Tribune assumed, as did others in the study sample, that Nixon would probably have been pardoned anyway after his own conviction. If this is so, the paper said, "then it is fair to wonder what could have been gained by putting a former President in the dock in a long and agonizing trial."113
Just as the Tribune had once rationalized the Watergate scandals as symptomatic of the general malaise, the paper now presented its own distinctive version of Richard Nixon's offense against the nation:

The issue is further clouded by the fact that Mr. Nixon's offenses were more political crimes than statutory crimes. The evidence is overwhelming that he failed in his obligations as President; but we're not sure that he could have been convicted in a police court. And imagine the hullabaloo and confusion that would have arisen if Mr. Nixon had been acquitted. By merely accepting the pardon instead of demanding his right to a trial, Mr. Nixon has made a statement of contrition more meaningful than his formal statement.

Reaction to the precipitous pardon of the disgraced President intensified rather than diminished in the week following Ford's announcement. Although the Tribune often charted its own solitary path, its editorial of September 11 reflected this national mood:

Letters to our Voice of the People and reports from across the country reflect mounting indignation over the full pardon granted to Richard Nixon. The more it mounts, the more appalling seems the miscalculation that led President Ford to rush ahead with this announcement, on a Sunday morning, even tho—as it now appears—he failed to get the "confession" that his lawyers had sought from Mr. Nixon in return.

And so the pardon that was so widely expected, sooner or later, and that probably would have been accepted and even welcomed at a later time, or with a more adequate explanation, has become the subject of a raging controversy itself. A step that was intended to free the Ford administration once and for all time from the jinx of Watergate has done the reverse. Watergate has led Mr. Ford into a miscalculation of public reaction no less incredible than those which led Mr. Nixon to his downfall. The jinx goes on.

How perverse that the very paper which underplayed the Watergate scandals—by assigning collective blame to
the nation at large—should now label Watergate as a "jinx,"
thus removing it from the sphere of the general malaise.

For the Tribune, Ford's miscalculation was doubly
hard to understand—and accept. The paper had viewed Ford
as "a man who . . . [had] always shown an ability to sense
public opinion and who . . . [had] shown every sign, since
becoming President, of restoring that degree of communica-
tion between President and press that enables a President to
know what's on the public's mind as well as vice versa."117

The Chicago Tribune, a formerly ardent supporter of
Richard Nixon, had done its share of condemning of the
fallen President. Yet on September 11 it observed rather
sanctimoniously: "... there is probably nothing Mr. Nixon
could have said that would satisfy those who want to see
him come crawling on hands and knees with a confession of
guilt."118

The disclosure that the White House was considering
pardons for other Watergate participants was greeted by an
uproar of indignation across the country. The Tribune
believed the whole matter had been blown out of proportion
by Ford's critics and, unlike the other newspapers sampled,
responded with sympathy for the new President:

President Ford played his cards very clumsily on the
Nixon pardon—as the public reaction must have told
him. But he doesn't deserve the abuse being heaped
upon him with respect to possible pardons for other
Watergate figures . . . nothing that Mr. Ford or his
aides have said is all that shocking. . . .
We are no more willing than Mr. Ford . . . to say precisely who should get clemency and who shouldn't. But what is clear is that the pardon of Mr. Nixon does not call for the wholesale pardons that Mr. Ford's critics accuse him of considering. 119

The Grand Rapids Press

The Grand Rapids Press at first placed itself and its favorite son, Gerald R. Ford, squarely in the middle of two extreme viewpoints on the Nixon pardon:

A full pardon for Richard Nixon, excusing him from punishment for any crime committed while he was President of the United States. Is it a compassionate act of mercy for a man already humiliated and banished from the most prestigious office in the world or a callous, politically motivated act of expediency by the person who owes his position to the very one he is now exempting from prosecution?

Somewhere between those two extremes stands President Gerald R. Ford and his well-guarded decision, revealed Sunday, to short-stop any federal criminal proceedings against his predecessor. 120

The Press was particularly concerned about the effect of the pardon on the upcoming Watergate trial of John Ehrlichman, H. R. Haldeman and John Mitchell. "Most legal experts had expected any decision by Mr. Ford to be delayed until that jury panel, at least, had been sequestered and thus free of any influence by White House action," the paper noted. "If those defendants, and the former President, cannot be prosecuted, then what separates Sunday's act of mercy from bald, partisan cronyism?" the Press asked. 121

Not one of the newspapers sampled wanted to see a former President sent to jail. In its plain-spoken fashion,
the Press observed that even Nixon's severest critics had to admit that "the thought of indicting and placing a former President on trial . . . was mind-boggling, to say nothing of marching one off to the slammer to make furniture, do the laundry or whatever." 122

Yet, when it came right down to the crunch, the Press was the only paper apparently willing to pay that price to get at the full Watergate story. At least, it was the only paper to even imply as much in its editorial columns:

... If the Ford Administration wants to do the right thing for the American public, which really is more important than doing the right thing for a dishonored President and political ally, it must somehow see to it that the full story of Watergate and Nixon involvement or noninvolvement becomes an open book. . . .

One of the most disturbing aspects of the Ford action is that he has suggested Watergate now can be put aside and, presumably, forgotten, and in order to do this, he proposes drawing a curtain over another criminal inquiry.

It is the very tactic which has been at the root of the massive Watergate corruption, and the public can no longer be expected to put its blind trust in a partisan administration, no matter how promising its integrity.

If a President and his aides did conspire to obstruct justice—clearly a more serious charge than a hotel breakin—than the public must know how and to what extent that conspiracy penetrated the Executive branch and its agencies. That discovery is far more important than a possible incarceration of the former President's person.123

As Gerald Ford's hometown newspaper, the Grand Rapids Press had expressed pride and affection upon his ascension to the presidency. It must surely have been
difficult for the paper to proclaim, just one month later, that "... the public can no longer be expected to put its blind trust in a partisan administration, no matter how promising its integrity." 124

Four days after the pardon, the Press took a "second look" at the situation and came up with an editorial statement that overall seemed to alternately lunge forward and pull back. The Press's assessment regarding the timing was a fairly accurate reflection of the national mood and the editorial opinions expressed by the study sample. It was the only paper that believed Nixon "... should have been afforded an opportunity in a court of law to affirm his innocence." 125 It is ironic that it was Nixon's greatest fan--the Chicago Tribune--which pointed out on September 10 that, "By merely accepting the pardon instead of demanding his right to a trial, Mr. Nixon ... had made a statement of contrition more meaningful than his formal statement." 126

The Grand Rapids Press was also the only paper to draw an extraordinary parallel between the Nuremberg trials in Germany nearly 30 years ago and the Richard Nixon trial, which was preempted by his pardon. After such a dramatic comparison, the paper meekly withdrew and referred to the Nixon pardon as merely "ill advised." The Press's September 12 editorial is excerpted below:

As the dust resulting from President Ford's Sunday bombshell begins to settle, a second look as to why the "full, free and absolute pardon" of Richard Nixon caused such a storm of protest may be in order.
Certainly the element of surprise was a factor. Not only had the public not been conditioned to the announcement, but it had been misled. At his news conference on Aug. 28, Mr. Ford responded to a question concerning the possibility of pardoning Mr. Nixon by saying: "I think it is unwise and untimely for me to make any commitment" until the "legal process has been undertaken."

But more important is another aspect of the pardon's timing. If the polls are an accurate indication, the expectations of a majority of Americans were shattered. That is, while not opposed to clemency for Mr. Nixon at an "appropriate" time, they actually did believe that the judicial process would go forward not for purposes of retribution, but to discover the truth about the extent of Mr. Nixon's involvement in Watergate. And, based on Mr. Ford's testimony at the time of his vice presidential confirmation hearings, they had every reason to believe that the President would respect their desires.

The pardon changed all this. Citing the prospect of difficulty in forming an impartial jury should Mr. Nixon be brought to trial and expressing concern that the Nixon family had "suffered enough," Mr. Ford determined to "firmly shut and seal this book." He did so, however, without permitting the book to be read . . . .

Watergate deserved much more than a pardon that preceded a trial for Mr. Nixon, let alone his indictment. For one thing, the former President should have been afforded an opportunity in a court of law to affirm his innocence . . . to demonstrate that his decision to give up the highest office in the land was, in fact, prompted solely by his belief that he simply had lost the "confidence of Congress."

Almost 30 years ago in Germany there were the Nuremberg trials. While many of that country's leaders were convicted of various crimes and sentenced to the gallows or to long prison terms, this really was not the primary purpose served by those court proceedings. Rather, the exhaustive investigation, research and testimony which resulted in findings of guilt or innocence formed a permanent record which then, today and forever relates what transpired in Europe during this "civilized" 20th Century.

While the nature of the allegations is totally different, Mr. Nixon's indictment and trial also would form a record. In all likelihood, it would reflect the
extent to which the former President failed to keep faith with his oath of office and how those who surrounded him in the highest councils of government abused the Constitution. . . .

No, Watergate is much more than a far-out form of white collar crime. It amounted to a wholesale attack on the Constitution and those institutions and beliefs which, over its 200-year history, this nation has cherished so deeply.

Unlike Nuremberg, however, Mr. Ford's pardoning action precludes the formulation of a complete record of the major living participant's role in these bizarre events called Watergate. Consequently future generations of Americans will be unable to appreciate fully how the Republic--in the eighth decade of this century--assumed for a time the characteristics of a nation much less free. Mercy and compassion aside, Mr. Nixon's pardon was ill-advised.127

Detroit News

The Detroit News--the largest daily newspaper in Gerald Ford's home state of Michigan--was the only one to openly appeal for clemency for Richard Nixon before the actual pardon and the only one to wholeheartedly approve of the pardon after it was announced.

There had been little in the paper's earlier editorials to foreshadow this appeal. The News had called for Nixon's resignation as early as November 4, 1973, the same day as the New York Times. However, three days after the final damaging transcripts were released on August 5, 1974, the News had declared: "...if a grant of immunity from criminal prosecution will hasten Mr. Nixon's departure by one day, the deal should be made and this agony ended."128
But Nixon was long gone from the White House by the
time the News published its August 30 editorial "Why Not
Amnesty for Nixon?" Ford had already been President for
three weeks, and a grant of immunity had not been necessary
to effect the transfer of power.

The August 30 amnesty appeal had reasoned that:
"Americans are not . . . a vindictive people;" Nixon has
suffered enough; further action would be pointless and
cruel; the country has a "new President and a new start;"
let's not "mutilate a broken man." That editorial is
reprinted, in part, below:

The nation should grant amnesty to Richard Nixon.

Since Americans are not for the most part a vindictive
people, President Ford probably reflects national senti­
ment when he says Mr. Nixon has suffered enough and
deserves leniency.

Having tasted blood, a few want to hunt down the wounded
quarry and finish him off for good. That would serve no
purpose except to fulfill a wanton yearning for politi­
cal vengeance.

Justice does not require further pursuit. Mr. Nixon,
chastised, humiliated and stripped of the presidency,
has already been punished many times over. What good
would it do him or society to prosecute him and send
him to jail?

True, other Watergate suspects have gone or may go to
jail (for relatively brief terms). Wouldn't it be
unfair to let their boss go free? No. Mr. Nixon's
underlings are suffering a different but not necessarily
an inequitable or a more severe punishment. None of
them stands to lose as much as the fallen president has
already lost.

If this is a humane society, further action against
Mr. Nixon would be not only pointless but cruel. And
certainly the nation does not need to reenter the
nightmare which, everybody hoped and believed, came to an end with Mr. Nixon's resignation.

... Now that the cancer on the presidency has been cut out, the body politic can function as it should. America has a new President and a new start. Let's forget hatred, malice and revenge and get on with the nation's long-neglected business.

Mr. Nixon should not be prosecuted. If prosecuted, he should be pardoned.

In calling last year for Mr. Nixon's resignation, we said of the shambles he had made of the presidency: Enough is enough. That same remark applies to any further effort to mutilate a broken man.

If this plea for clemency cannot be fully understood, at least it offered two subtle clues which may help explain the News' approval of the pardon 10 days later. In the sixth paragraph, the paper talked about the "nightmare which everybody hoped... [had come] to an end with Mr. Nixon's resignation." This was the mood of the country when Ford became President on August 9, and Ford himself used the very word "nightmare"--"our long national nightmare is over"--in his address to the nation that day.

Perhaps the Detroit News really took Ford at his word. Everyone else wanted to believe him--but the Detroit News, in fact, did. After all, Gerald Ford had been a Michigan congressman for over 25 years. He was known to be a decent, hardworking and honest man. They trusted him. They believed him--and they believed in him. When good old Jerry Ford said the nightmare was over--it was over!

A second clue that may explain the News' editorial position on the pardon is contained in the seventh paragraph:
"... the cancer on the presidency has been cut out ..."
(meaning Nixon is gone). "America has a new President and
a new start." Perhaps the News believed that its favorite
son deserved every break he could get to achieve that "new
start"--and defusing the Nixon problem in a single stroke
was one good way of doing it.

During the fall of 1973, when the nation was reel­
ing under the accumulated effects of the Cox firing, the
missing White House tapes, the 18-minute gap and the world­
wide military alert, the Detroit News had said little that
could have been construed as sympathetic to the embattled
President. The paper did, after all, call for his resigna­
tion on November 4. There was nothing then to presage the
News' compassion for Richard Nixon on August 30, 1974. But
since those tumultuous fall months, the nation had sworn in
its first President from the state of Michigan. Perhaps
the Detroit News' editorialists were compassionate towards
Nixon because now they could afford to be--their man was in!

Two days after the Nixon pardon, the headline on the
News' lead editorial said it all: "A Tough Decision--and
the Right One."

All other newspapers in the study sample had dis­
puted the timing of the pardon. All had agreed that clem­
ency should have been granted after a trial and conviction,
so that the full Watergate story may be known and recorded
for Americans of today and tomorrow.
All others had observed that President Ford was surprised by the public outrage against the pardon. Only the News believed that Ford had expected the "storm of criticism" but still took "the courageous course." 131

A number of papers picked up the image of Ford closing the book on Watergate and complained that he had shut the book before the nation even had a chance to read it. The Detroit News used the same book image, but to a different purpose: Ford had closed the book on a chapter of conflict which had paralyzed Nixon's administration and could have impaired Ford's, too. 132

The News acknowledged that many had opposed the pardon "on genuine grounds of conscience and in the interests of equal justice." But some of the conscience-stricken had a "greater interest in vengeance than in justice," the paper noted. 133

Former Washington Bureau Chief for the Detroit News, J. F. terHorst, who resigned as Ford's press secretary in protest to the pardon, received short shrift from the paper. If the Nixon pardon and the terHorst resignation were both acts of conscience, the News said, then we have here "a conflict of consciences." After a couple of snide remarks about "the passionate expression of conscience," the paper blithely declared that Ford's argument (in behalf of his act of conscience) was the more persuasive. 134

The Detroit News had nothing to say regarding the effects of the Nixon pardon on the disposition of pending
Watergate cases or even the likelihood of ever getting the whole story out, now that the key figure had been pardoned. The *News* editorial of September 10 is reproduced, in part, below:

If anybody had doubted that President Gerald Ford could make tough decisions, the new President disposed of that doubt by his controversial--and, in our opinion, correct--decision to pardon Richard Nixon.

Mr. Ford knew of course that his action would bring a storm of criticism down upon his head. Against this he weighed the basic rightness and the ultimate benefits of this act of mercy and took the courageous course.

First, Mr. Ford has acted to shut the book on a chapter of conflict and political passion that paralyzed the ability of his predecessor to conduct the affairs of state and could have impaired his own ability to do so.

. . . Although his decision may not be popular at the moment and may create difficulties for his party in the November elections, it will enable him, after the first roar of protest, to direct public attention toward the constructive business of government. He has acted to produce domestic tranquility--a constitutional duty just as pressing as that of punishing the guilty.

Second, Mr. Ford has acted to prevent the nation from pursuing a broken man in a spirit of vengeance and hatred which, after the passion had subsided, would have left us all with a sense of shame. After all, do you fire a gun at a man who has already been bludgeoned, flayed and ridden out of town on a rail?

We recognize that many persons oppose the pardon on genuine grounds of conscience and in the interest of equal justice. We also recognize that some have a much greater interest in vengeance than in justice.

Both groups ask: Why punish the underlings and let the boss go? We repeat what we said here once before: Mr. Nixon's underlings are suffering a different but not necessarily an inequitable or a more severe punishment. None of them stands to lose as much as the fallen president has already lost or will suffer as much as he has suffered and will continue to suffer.
One who obviously does not share our point of view is Jerald F. terHorst, who resigned as Mr. Ford's press secretary upon hearing of the President's decision. Though terHorst disagreed with Mr. Ford's action, he hastened to assure the public that the President took his position "in good conscience."

TerHorst, former Washington Bureau Chief for The Detroit News, described his own resignation as an act of conscience, also. We respect that. But we have here a conflict of consciences. Obviously, the passionate expression of conscience is not in itself a final convincing argument.

Simply holding an opinion strongly does not make one's own opinion right and the opposing opinion wrong. In the present case, we happen to think President Ford has argued the case for his act of conscience most persuasively.

The President asked himself whether further punishment of Richard Nixon is more important than mercy, more important than the restoration of national harmony. He answered: No.

We agree. 135

The following day, September 11, the Detroit News expressed serious concern about the "intemperate outbursts" which had greeted Ford's pardon of his predecessor. "A certain amount of righteous indignation is a healthy sign of political awareness," the paper said, "... but there's nothing healthy about being in a constant rage, ready to develop any point of dispute in a crisis. Have Americans fallen into that state of mind?" 136

The editorial is almost an alarmist's view of the "unusual mood of hostility that has prevailed in American life for the past 15 years." The paper interpreted national reaction to the Nixon pardon as an extension of that hostility. To the News, "unreasoning anger... [had] become
... a national habit"--one that could eventually lead to chaos.137

In spite of--or perhaps because of--the paper's solitary view on the Nixon pardon, the News was able to perceive a phenomenon which had escaped the attention of the other seven newspapers: "Politicians who had proclaimed Gerald Ford a "messiah a few days before jumped up and down on him with hobnailed boots," the paper said.138 And most newspapers were right in there doing their share.

The Detroit News' editorial of September 11 is excerpted below:

... Mr. Ford merely made an opening through which boiling anger erupted. The essential condition, the underlying reservoir of hot lava, was there all along waiting for the slightest disturbance to release it.

Lying in ambush from the very start, the New York Times took the opportunity to level an intemperate blast, by way of an editorial which occupied more than a third of a newspaper page, calling the President's action "profoundly unwise, divisive and unjust."

From Wall Street came the enraged cry of Eliot Janeway: "It is a disaster. Ford and Knievel went down at the same time." Booing crowds met President Ford in Pittsburgh with hysterical placards: "Justice died Aug. 8, 1974." Politicians who had proclaimed him a messiah a few days before jumped up and down on him with hobnailed boots.

As proof that the underlying sense of rage is strictly nonpartisan, Sen. Edward Kennedy, appearing Monday in Boston on the plaza of the John F. Kennedy Federal Building, was heckled off the stage and splattered with tomato when he tried to speak on the subject of school bussing. In short, angry dissenters stole his First Amendment rights.

Without going into the history of violence and discord in modern America, we note that all this is the continuation of an unusual mood of hostility that has
prevailed in American life for the past 15 years. That hostility thrust Lyndon Johnson from public life and has made life miserable for many other political figures. Watergate compounded and intensified that mood. Unreasoning anger has become, it seems, a national habit.

It's all very well to talk about the sanctity of dissent. However, dissent without restraint and without perspective--dissent which is touched off by the slightest jolt and which turns every issue into a national, life-and-death political struggle--leads finally to chaos.

It makes leadership difficult if not impossible. Timid leaders are intimidated at once; strong ones are worn down. President Ford, emerging as a strong leader, did what he thought was right with regard to Mr. Nixon despite the angry reaction he knew would occur. But how many such reactions will it take to turn him into a defensive man who hesitates to act lest he stir an uproar?

The country needs a new sense of proportion, a sense that tells it when to discriminate among the issues. Every issue is not a crisis. If Americans act as if each issue is a crisis, they may well create a genuine and permanent crisis for American government.

The Detroit News believed that the angry reactions to the pardon actually confirmed one of President Ford's reasons for granting it in the first place. Ford had stated that

... many months and perhaps more years will have to pass before Richard Nixon could obtain a fair trial by jury in any jurisdiction of the United States ... instead of enjoying equal treatment with any other citizen accused of violating the law, [a former President] would be cruelly and excessively penalized either in preserving the presumption of his innocence or in obtaining a speedy determination of guilt in order to repay a legal debt to society.

On September 12, the Detroit News declared:

... The reaction to the pardon tends to confirm Mr. Ford's judgment. Most critics ignore the possibility that Mr. Nixon could not get a fair trial just as they
ignore the possibility he might be found innocent if tried. Instead, the critics tend to conclude the former president is already guilty and that only a trial is needed to confirm his guilt.

That might be true, of course. But the fact is that under our system a man is presumed to be innocent until proved to be guilty. Actually, Mr. Nixon to this day is innocent. In fact, he hasn't been charged with any crime, although the House Judiciary Committee did accuse him of a number of wrongful acts. But neither the committee nor the House itself is a law enforcement agency.

It is true that in granting Mr. Nixon a full pardon, Mr. Ford himself implied the former president was guilty of a crime or crimes. And in accepting a pardon, Mr. Nixon was by implication admitting guilt. But Mr. Ford took the position the pardon was needed to spare Mr. Nixon and the country the prospects of something less than a fair trial for an accused man. Ford's pardon of Nixon had been an attempt to "bind up the nation's wounds and insure the domestic tranquility," the News recalled. But there were many who didn't want the new President to succeed in his efforts, the paper claimed. Thus followed a cynical and highly partisan rationale for the reactions to the pardon:

... But it ought to be remembered that some people, including the political opposition, don't want him to succeed in this endeavor. The Democrats by and large want to preserve Watergate not only for use in the 1974 elections but in elections far into the future.

So some of the partisan critics—obviously not all—have a political ax to grind in attacking Mr. Ford's decision to pardon Mr. Nixon. If the move succeeds in wiping out the Watergate issue in a few months, it would be beneficial to the country—but not to the opposition party. So some critics are motivated not so much by conviction as by political opportunism.

The honeymoon for Mr. Ford with a Democratic Congress was going to be of short duration, anyway. But the Democrats needed an issue before they broke up the marriage Mr. Ford had proclaimed. Now they think
they've got grounds for divorce—which helps explain their flailing away at the pardon issue.

Mr. Ford knew in advance he was dealing with an explosive issue. He said he took his action for reasons of conscience and compassion and because it was right. So who stands taller at this time: Mr. Ford or his partisan critics?142

In the eyes of the Detroit News, Gerald Ford was a courageous man, even a hero of sorts. If it were indeed true that Ford had anticipated a storm of partisan protest but proceeded ahead anyway, as the News suggested, then Richard Nixon was pardoned not for the greater good of the nation, but for the narrowest of political reasons by the shrewdest and canniest of politicians.
FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER IV

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5"Thanks, We Needed That," Chicago Tribune, September 25, 1974, Sec. 2, p. 4.


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54"Mr. Ford's Priorities," The New York Times, September 16, 1974, p. 34.
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103 The Christian Science Monitor, loc. cit.

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128 "Immunity for Citizen Nixon," The Detroit News, August 8, 1974, p. 6B.
129 "Why Not Amnesty for Nixon?", The Detroit News, August 30, 1974, p. 8B.

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136 "It Leads to Chaos," The Detroit News, September 11, 1974, p. 6B.

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140 "What They Ignore," The Detroit News, September 12, 1974, p. 6B.

141 Ibid.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The ramifications of the country's most serious internal crisis since the Civil War will be felt for generations.

This thesis has shown that Watergate and the plight of the Nixon administration profoundly affected some newspapers' perceptions of Gerald Ford. Editorial response to Ford followed distinct patterns directly traceable to Watergate-related events which transpired during the period under study.

The patterns took shape during the fall of 1973. Though editorial reactions to the unfolding drama differed in their intensity and timing, an interesting phenomenon could be observed among five of the eight newspapers sampled—the five whose initial reactions to the Ford nomination had been cool-to-lukewarm. These papers are the New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, St. Louis Post-Dispatch and Detroit News.

The more horrified and indignant the five papers became at Nixon's actions, the more real appeared the alternatives of resignation or impeachment—and the more plausible the presidency of Gerald Ford. As Nixon's moral
stock diminished, Ford's image improved until the man who was initially received as a "bland mediocrity" came to be seen as a viable alternative to the embattled President.

Reaction to the congressional nomination hearings made it apparent that Watergate had affected the standards by which Ford was being evaluated for office. For as Nixon's position weakened and Ford came to be seen as potentially the next President, Ford was interrogated accordingly by the congressional committee—and evaluated accordingly by the newspapers.

By the time Ford was confirmed as Vice President on December 6, 1973, the five papers that were initially critical or merely lukewarm were praising his strengths and excusing or ignoring his weaknesses.

The three remaining newspapers in the sample—the Christian Science Monitor, Chicago Tribune and Grand Rapids Press—were consistently favorable in their editorial stance toward Gerald Ford, a position unaffected by Watergate-related events.

The same pattern which had emerged over a two-month period in the fall of 1973 was observed in a somewhat compressed form in August, 1974 during Nixon's last four days in office, i.e., the worse Nixon appeared to the editorialists, the better Ford looked until Nixon's blackest hours became Ford's brightest.
Editorial reactions to the transfer of power were predictable, based upon changes in attitude toward Ford the previous fall: The same five papers that had moved from an essentially negative to an essentially positive position toward Ford were indeed glowing with praise after he was sworn in as President. (However, it should be noted that the New York Times and Los Angeles Times were at first hesitant in their response to the new President but quickly climbed on the Ford bandwagon.)

The three papers that had been consistently supportive of Ford during the post-nomination period received his new status with confidence and pride.

The newspapers exhibiting the greatest overall change in attitude toward Ford—from his nomination as Vice President to his confirmation and, ultimately, his ascension to the presidency—were the New York Times, Washington Post and St. Louis Post-Dispatch. These three papers had been the most virulent in their condemnation of President Nixon during the fall of 1973 and they were also the most vitriolic in their reactions to the Nixon pardon.

Those most affected by Watergate appear to have been the more liberal newspapers in the sample and those least affected, the more conservative papers.

The following generalizations can be made about the three liberal newspapers—the New York Times, Washington Post and St. Louis Post-Dispatch. They appeared more
deeply and emotionally involved in the issues and problems of Watergate, were most severe in their criticism of Nixon in fall '73, exhibited the greatest overall change in attitude toward Ford and were outraged by the Nixon pardon.

Almost the converse was generally true of the three conservative newspapers--the Christian Science Monitor, Chicago Tribune and Grand Rapids Press. They appeared to be less emotionally involved in Watergate, were less distressed by Nixon's actions in fall '73, exhibited no change in attitude toward Ford (i.e., were consistently favorable) and were not as upset by the Nixon pardon, although expressing disapproval in varying degrees.

The only anomaly in the study was the conservative Detroit News, the largest daily in Ford's home state. The News had been among the five newspapers that had moved from a negative to a positive stance toward Ford. It had called for Nixon's resignation as early as November 4, 1973 (the same day as the New York Times). There had been little in the News' earlier editorials to portend its later appeal for clemency for Nixon and its subsequent approval of the pardon.

In contrast, Ford's hometown paper, also conservative, was supportive of his nomination, took no editorial stand on resignation or impeachment and disapproved of the Nixon pardon.
The Sample

A most perplexing pattern emerges as one attempts to evaluate the quality of editorial coverage by the newspapers in the study sample. The most intelligent, informed and well written editorials appeared in the very same papers that experienced the greatest overall changes in their attitude toward Ford—the New York Times, Washington Post and St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

The most difficult to fault is surely the New York Times, whose astute and articulate editorials were the most comprehensive and beautifully written in the sample. The Times was the only newspaper to even acknowledge (after the Nixon pardon) that it had only recently been singing Ford's praises. Excepting the Detroit News, the other papers damned Ford as easily as they had praised him. The Times was also the last to relinquish its doubts about Ford and the first to resurrect them.

The Washington Post's deep immersion in its own Watergate investigations appears to have affected the nature and tone of its editorial coverage. Its editorials were, for the most part, painstakingly detailed and emotional pleas. The Post maintained a cautious either-or stance toward the controversial issues of resignation or impeachment. Perhaps the paper was concerned that it had been stamped with an out-to-get-him image and feared that any cries for resignation or impeachment might be construed
as a personal vendetta. Following the pardon, the Post spent nearly as much time restating its case against Nixon as it did responding to the pardon.

The Los Angeles Times had maintained a calm and dispassionate demeanor through all the machinations of the Watergate scandals, but it blew its editorial "cool" after the release of the incriminating June 23 transcripts--and suffered pangs of guilt thereafter. Of the three Nixon supporters that had held out against resignation or impeachment the previous fall, the L.A. Times was the only one to admit that it felt betrayed by Richard Nixon. With an implicit disclaimer of vindictiveness, the paper was the only one to demand that Nixon be denied the lifetime pension and other emoluments granted outgoing presidents.

The L.A. Times' reaction to the Nixon pardon was no more critical--and in some respects less so--than the others, yet the paper felt obliged to explain once again that it was not feeling vengeful toward the former President. None of the other newspapers in the sample had found it necessary to apologize for their editorial position on the pardon.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch lived up to its reputation as an outspoken and progressive newspaper by publishing editorials on subjects essentially untouched by other papers--such as the suspected reasons for the military alert--and by proposing generally unpopular ideas--such as
the possible succession of House Speaker Carl Albert—with courage and vigor.

After the Nixon pardon, the Post-Dispatch appeared to regain its equilibrium well before the New York Times and Washington Post. However, the paper's overall record is marred by its capitulation on a very serious matter—Ford's attempt to impeach Justice William O. Douglas. The P-D had been the only paper in the sample to exhort Congress very explicitly and frequently to fully investigate the Douglas affair. Yet after Ford was confirmed as Vice President, the paper excused his effort as "a misdirected exercise in partisanship rather than evidence of an enduring lack of judgment."

For a newspaper with, presumably, an international orientation, the Christian Science Monitor was surprisingly out of step with the world around it—very much the kindly old patriarch who moralizes a great deal from his easy chair. There was little that could disturb the equanimity or ruffle the dignity of the Monitor. It was slow to grasp the implications of the Nixon pardon and, of the eight newspapers sampled, least affected by Watergate-related events.

The Chicago Tribune was addressing the same issues as the other papers but from a different philosophical framework—and making up the rules as it went along. When convenient from the Tribune's peculiar perspective,
Watergate was either a symptom of the general moral malaise, a "jinx" or a series of "upsetting surprises" in our political life. Most of the paper's observations and opinions were far afield from the rest of the study sample.

The two ex-officio members of the sample—the Detroit News and the Grand Rapids Press—proved to be a surprise and a disappointment, respectively. The surprise was the News' unexpected approval of the Nixon pardon in light of earlier editorial positions. (Nonetheless, the News added an interesting, if anomalous, touch to the study.) The disappointment was the generally poor quality of editorial coverage offered by the Press. However, in all fairness, it should be noted that the Grand Rapids Press is simply not in the same "league" as the other metropolitan dailies in the sample. A far more practical selection would have been the Detroit Free Press, which might have served to counterbalance the News.

Suggestions for Further Study

By changing the composition of the study sample, some interesting variations on the same theme—the effects of Watergate on editorial reaction to Gerald Ford—may be achieved which could provide added insight into the role of the press during the Watergate era. Several alternate plans are suggested below:
(1) A larger sample (minimum of 12) with a fairly even distribution of liberal to conservative viewpoints will provide an opportunity to validate the liberal-conservative patterns which emerged in the present study.

(2) A still larger sample (minimum of 15), having wide geographical distribution as well as political balance, will enable the author to observe any regional differences which may have occurred. The sample could include three newspapers from each of five regions: Northeast, South, Midwest, Pacific Northwest and Southwest.

(3) A comparative study between large metropolitan dailies and small city dailies may net some interesting results in terms of perspective, i.e., "small town" vs. "big city" view of the world.

(4) A sample comprised of nationally syndicated liberal and conservative columnists who appear regularly on Op-Ed pages would provide a second opportunity to confirm the liberal-conservative split in the current results.

Additional information about the role of the press may be gained by changing the focus of the project. The present study, of necessity, skipped over Ford's eight-month tenure as Vice President. It may be of value to determine whether the same patterns of editorial coverage observed during the post-nomination period were sustained while Ford was traveling around the country making speeches and Nixon was manning the Watergate barricades at the White
House. The suggested variations in the study sample may be applied here as well.

It may be possible--and fruitful--to study representative electronic media using the extensive Vanderbilt facilities, however this would materially alter the nature and scope of the study, its goals and methodology. Such a project falls outside the immediate purview of this thesis.
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