

# A "PROVIDENTIAL" PRESIDENT

## GERALD R. FORD AT 100

THE STORY OF AN UNEXPECTED NATIONAL LEADER

BY JIM KRATSAS





*A man's character is his fate.*

—Heraclitus

The 1934 University of Michigan Wolverines football team endured a dismal season, especially discouraging on the heels of back-to-back national championships. The team won only a single game in the fall of 1934.

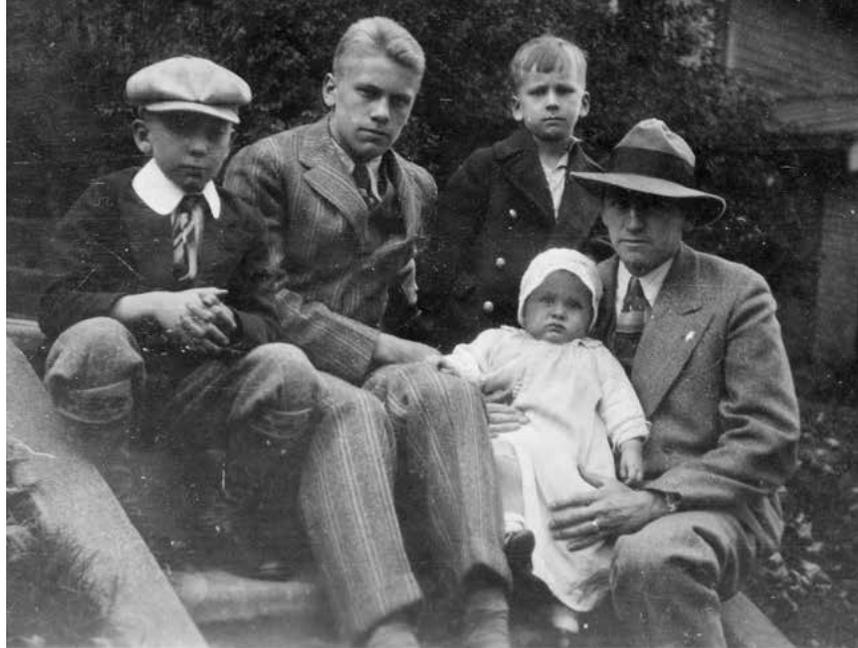
However, it was a victory permeated by racism: A good student and great athlete was benched because of the color of his skin, and a fellow teammate's high principles and character was challenged long before this student-athlete would become President of the United States.

Michigan and Georgia Tech had scheduled a game for the 1934 season. That summer Georgia Tech's legendary coach, Bobby Dowd, requested that Michigan bench its best player, Willis Ward, for the contest because the Southern team would not share the field with a black man.

In trade, Tech offered to bench its premier player. The Michigan athletic director and former coach, Fielding Yost, reached a "gentleman's agreement" with its foe to make sure the game was played by having Ward sit out the game.

This decision did not sit well with the Wolverines. Coach Harry Kipke protested, and Willis Ward's best friend on the team, center Gerald Ford, considered not playing in the game, citing the unjust decision based on the color of Ward's skin. It was a trying time for young Ford, who had waited for three years to start for his school and was now willing to give up a dream to fight a wrong inflicted on his teammate.

President Ford testified before the House Judiciary Committee on October 17, 1974, regarding his pardon of Richard Nixon.



Ford would not have played but for the insistence by Ward that he take the field. Ford heeded Ward's plea, and he and his teammates rose to the occasion. With the team and Ford playing their best game of the year, Michigan walked away with the season's lone win, out-pacing Georgia Tech by a score of 9-2.

While the football contest was settled, racism in America was not.

The landmark U.S. Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education* and a full-throated civil rights movement were still two decades away. Yet a college student from the small town of Grand Rapids, Michigan, understood injustice and took a stand based on principles he would hold for the rest of his life—morals instilled in him by loving parents and the culture of America's Midwest.

### A MOTHER AND SON FLEE TO ILLINOIS

His early life seemed far from promising when he was born in Omaha, Nebraska, on July 14, 1913, the son of Dorothy and Leslie Lynch King. By the end of that same month, Dorothy, with her son, Leslie Lynch King, Jr., fled Omaha to escape the increasingly hostile and abusive King, who had threatened his wife and infant son with a butcher knife.

Fleeing to her parents in Illinois, she soon sued for divorce and moved to Grand

Rapids. In this prosperous little town, Dorothy met Gerald R. Ford, an aspiring businessman, at a church. They fell in love and married. In time, Junior's name became Jerry and then Gerald R. Ford, Jr., a name he wouldn't legally take until he graduated from the University of Michigan.

His mother and stepfather were loving parents who instilled values in young Jerry as well as in his three half brothers, Tom, Dick, and Jim. Selfless parents, they were also strict disciplinarians.

According to Gerald Ford, his parents "had three rules: tell the truth, work hard, and come to dinner on time—and woe unto any of us who violated those rules."

Both Dorothy and Gerald Sr. were active members in their communities, taking part in charitable causes and social and service organizations, in addition to raising their sons. Junior often was upbraided for his hot temper and taught how to control it. His mother gave him a copy of Kipling's poem "If" and told her son to take solace in the poem's message.

### A VISIT THE YOUNG FORD WAS NOT READY FOR

Wonderful parents they were—but not out of the ordinary in Grand Rapids. Ford's biographer, James Cannon, called the President's hometown "a place from which a man can journey far and never leave."

Left: Gerald Ford and teammate Willis Ward in a University of Michigan football team photograph for 1934. Right: A young Jerry Ford (second from left) with his half-brothers and stepfather.

Much has been written over the years about "good old fashioned Midwestern values," and the community in West Michigan embodied those core attributes better than most—the ideas of service, honesty, charity, and community permeate the town's daily life.

"Whenever I can't sleep, I think of Grand Rapids," President Ford remarked in later years.

It was where he became an Eagle Scout (the only U.S. President who earned that achievement), where he excelled at a number of sports (particularly football, with his team winning the 1930 state championship), and where he learned the value of hard work, be it at the Ford Paint and Varnish Company or at Bill Skougis's restaurant, where he flipped hamburgers and washed dishes.

It was at the restaurant where the young Ford "received the first major shock of my life." While working at the register at the hamburger joint, the 16-year-old noticed a man standing by the counter looking at him.

He then approached Ford. "Are you Leslie King?" he asked.

Ford replied, "No."

The elder King said, "I'm your father. You're Leslie King. I'm in town . . . and I

Lt. Gerald R. Ford on the deck of the USS *Monterey* in the Pacific Theater during World War II.

would like to take you to lunch.” When the teenager went outside, he saw King’s brand-new Lincoln with his wife in the front seat. At lunch, Ford kept his composure but seethed when King, getting ready to leave, gave him 25 dollars and told him to buy something for himself, something he couldn’t otherwise afford.

“It was a hell of a shock for a 16-year-old boy,” Ford would later say.

That night was one of the most difficult of my life. I don’t recall the words I used to tell my parents what had happened, but I do remember that the conversation was a loving and consoling one. My stepfather loved me as much as he loved his own three sons. I knew he wanted to help me and how lacking in financial resources he was. Nothing could erase the image I gained of my real father that day: A carefree, well-to-do man who didn’t really give a damn about the hopes and dreams of his firstborn son. When I went to bed that night, I broke down and cried.

Lacking the financial resources to attend college in the midst of the Great Depression, the National Honor Society member and star football player received generous support from the West Michigan community, enough to attend the University of Michigan. He majored in economics, joined a fraternity, and worked part-time jobs, all the while playing football and earning high marks.

### SETTING HIS SIGHTS: YALE LAW SCHOOL

After his senior season, he was offered pro football contracts from the Detroit Lions and the Green Bay Packers. But the allure of pro football shrank in the face of his greater aspiration—he wanted to attend law school, and he set his sights on Yale.

Yale did not admit Ford to its law school, but it did hire him as an assistant football



coach and boxing coach. Ford persevered and during the summer of 1937 took law classes at the University of Michigan to prove to Yale that he could handle the academic workload while maintaining his full-time coaching duties.

Yale relented and admitted Ford to its law school, where he finished in the top third of a class that included future Supreme Court Justices Potter Stewart and Byron White as well as future Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and future Kennedy and Johnson administration official R. Sargent Shriver.

Upon graduation from Yale in 1941, Ford returned to Grand Rapids, where he opened a law firm with his old friend Phil Buchen and set about the practice of law. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and the United States entered World War II, Ford enlisted in the Navy and served in the Pacific Theater during some of the heaviest fighting of the war.

It was this war experience that transformed the young man from an isolationist into an internationalist—much as the rest of the nation had been transformed. No longer

could the United States stand by; rather, the nation needed to assume a leadership role in world affairs.

In 1948 this national change of attitude became an issue in the Republican primary for the congressional seat from West Michigan, a position held by the longtime incumbent and affirmed isolationist Bartel Jonkman, a man who had seemingly lost touch with his constituents.

In a great upset, Ford, with tireless effort and the support of local politicians and Michigan’s influential Senator Arthur Vandenberg, won the Republican primary and then the general election—the first of 13 consecutive victories as the representative of the Fifth Congressional District.

For 25 years, Ford earned high marks for his hard work, attention to detail (especially over budget matters), and his collegiality on both sides of the aisle. He walked the halls of Congress with a young John Kennedy and became friends with Richard Nixon. In late 1963, President Lyndon Johnson asked Ford to serve on the Warren Commission, a

group of seven elected and appointed government officials charged with investigating President Kennedy's assassination.

Ford was a staunch Republican but called many Democrats his close friends. He took to task Democratic Presidents and members of Congress over expenditures or over military matters. He argued with Republicans who proposed what he considered needless spending. He disagreed without being disagreeable; Ford had many adversaries but no enemies.

In 1965, Republican congressional colleagues drafted Ford to run for the House Minority Leader post, which he won and held for eight years. His ultimate dream was to become Speaker of the House, a role he could never achieve unless Republicans won the majority of seats in the House.

### A DRAMATIC CHANGE IN RETIREMENT PLANS

Ford and his wife, Betty, decided that he would retire in 1976 after the 1972 election failed to bring the House a Republican majority.

Circumstances delayed the planned retirement.

During the 1972 presidential campaign, a group of men broke into the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C., attempting to tap or bug the place. The burglars were arrested, and a two-year investigation into the break-in began what became famously known as the Watergate scandal—a scandal that led all the way to the Oval Office and Richard Nixon.

With the Watergate investigation under way, Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned his position in October 1973, amid bribery charges for deals struck while he was governor of Maryland.

Under the provisions of the 25th Amendment (Presidential Disability and Succession) the President nominates someone to be Vice President. Nixon asked leaders from each party to submit names to be the nominee. When the submissions were tallied, Gerald R. Ford was the overwhelming choice. Ford enjoyed the support of both parties, a necessary ingredient for the nomination to be successful.

This was a critical time, as the Watergate investigation uncovered more and more evidence that the President was at least circumstantially involved in a cover-up of the Watergate burglary. The new Vice President might have to assume the nation's highest office if the President was implicated and impeached.

Friends in the Democratic Party endorsed Ford's nomination.

Alan Cranston, a liberal Democrat from California, said upon Ford's nomination as Vice President, "I doubt if there has ever been a time when integrity has so surpassed ideology in the judging of a man for so high an office."

Another member of the Michigan congressional delegation, Democrat Martha Griffith, said, "In all the years I sat in the House, I never knew Mr. Ford to make a dishonest statement or a statement half true or half false."

The Federal Bureau of Investigation dispatched more than 300 agents across the country to investigate the nominee. Ford's

Grand Rapids tailor was asked if he paid his bills on time, and one football player was asked if Ford was a dirty player since he was once flagged for a tackle after the whistle. No stone was left unturned; no lead was too small. In the end, a 1,700-page report unearthed only a rare commodity—an honest politician.

After an intense congressional investigation and hearing, Ford was confirmed as Vice President of the United States in December 1973. Of the 517 members of Congress who voted, 479 cast their votes for him.

It would not be a long vice presidency.

### NOT THE SPEAKER'S GAVEL, BUT A BIGGER CHALLENGE

Nine months later, on August 9, 1974, a somber Ford stood in the East Room of the White House. Nixon had just resigned the presidency, Ford had taken the oath of office, and now the 38th President sought to assure a troubled nation:

The oath I have taken is the same oath that was taken by George Washington and by every President under the Constitution. But I assume the Presidency under extraordinary circumstances never before experienced by Americans. This is an hour of history that troubles our minds and hurts our hearts. . . . I am acutely aware that you have not elected me as your President by your ballots, and so I ask you to confirm me as your President with your prayers. . . . My fellow Americans, our long national nightmare is over. Our Constitution works; our great Republic

“

*... he was the kind  
of President Americans wanted—  
and didn't know they had.*”



#### To learn more about

- Ford's life and his presidency, go to [www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov](http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov).
- Ford's receipt of the Profile in Courage award, go to [www.jfklibrary.org/Events-and-Awards/Profile-in-Courage-Award/Award-Recipients/Gerald-Ford-2001.aspx](http://www.jfklibrary.org/Events-and-Awards/Profile-in-Courage-Award/Award-Recipients/Gerald-Ford-2001.aspx)

[www.jfklibrary.org/Events-and-Awards/Profile-in-Courage-Award/Award-Recipients/Gerald-Ford-2001.aspx](http://www.jfklibrary.org/Events-and-Awards/Profile-in-Courage-Award/Award-Recipients/Gerald-Ford-2001.aspx)

- The transition from Richard Nixon to Gerald Ford, go to [www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/grffATimeToHeal.asp](http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/grffATimeToHeal.asp)



Candidate Gerald Ford stumps for votes in his first congressional campaign in 1948.

is a government of laws and not of men.  
Here the people rule.

Remembering that dark summer of 1974, there was plenty wrong in the country and in the world: Long gas lines, double-digit inflation, increased unemployment resulting in the worst economic time in the 20th century since the Great Depression.

The U.S. Government was supporting a teetering regime in South Vietnam; the Cold War still raged; and partisan bickering between two major parties was intense. As if that weren't enough, the country saw the unprecedented resignation of a disgraced President.

"Aside from Washington, Lincoln and FDR . . . it's difficult to recall a President who took office amid less favorable circumstances," historian Douglas Brinkley wrote. And if the country and the presidency were in dire straits, Ford had the added misfortune of facing a Democratic Congress that couldn't wait for the 1976 election to return a Democrat to the White House.

With the odds stacked against him, Ford persevered.

A prayer from Proverbs, passed on to him by his mother, would be recalled many times as he confronted the nation's ills—"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not

unto thine own understanding. In all ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

Within a week, Ford spoke to a joint session of Congress to lay out his agenda for the work ahead. In his plain-spoken way, he told the legislators, "I don't want a honeymoon with you. I want a good marriage"—a working partnership between the two branches of government based on compromise, not on party lines. He reached out to opponents to put differences aside for the good of the land.

### FORD'S LEGACY: TAKING OFFICE IN TIME OF CRISIS

The great thing about history is that it *does* change. Perceptions of the past transform as our opinions evolve, documentary evidence is unearthed, new studies are published, and emotions wane over time.

There are no better examples of changes to how we view history than the reevaluations of the 43 men who have served as our nation's chief executive. Harry Truman, who left office with the lowest approval rating of the 20th century, is now considered one of our 10 best Presidents, due in no small part to the way he confronted the Soviet threat, his straightforward approach to issues, and his standing up to Gen. Douglas

MacArthur—the same issues that damaged his approval rating while in office.

John Adams, once an afterthought as a Founding Father, has now been granted his proper place among the most important figures in the birth of our nation.

Each President has left a legacy, even William Henry Harrison, who died a month after being sworn into office. As the first chief executive to die in office, Harrison's legacy in part rests with Vice President John Tyler, whose assumption of the presidency confirmed the constitutional transfer of that office.

So what about Gerald R. Ford's legacy?

His presidency was the fifth shortest in history, a term that lasted just under 900 days. He was elected neither Vice President nor President—the only chief executive in our history with that distinction. He succeeded both a disgraced Vice President and President upon their resignations due to scandal.

Watergate was the biggest constitutional crisis since the Civil War.

A President had run roughshod over the Constitution and the law, staining our nation's highest office. Americans at home and abroad were at a low point, maybe the lowest in the 20th century as the combined issues of Watergate and the end of the Vietnam War left the public disillusioned and other nations worried.

Yet in fewer than two years, our country's spirit was buoyed as the United States celebrated its Bicentennial in 1976. Red, white, and blue was the theme everywhere. Fireworks lit up the skies, and the past was celebrated as more museums opened in that year than any other time.

One of Ford's closest friends in Congress was the majority leader, Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, who was speaker from 1977 to 1987 but was the No. 2 Democrat in the House when Ford was still Republican leader. They traded political attacks during the daytime but, when the day was over, displayed a friendship that would last.



Left: President Ford and Representative Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill at the Andrews Air Force Base golf course, September 16, 1974. Although of opposite parties, they maintained good relations. Right: President Gerald Ford with Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev at Vozdvizhenka Air Base, near Vladivostok, USSR, November 24, 1974. Ford continued Nixon's policies of détente.

"God has been good to America, especially during difficult times," O'Neill would write later. "At the time of the Civil War, he gave us Abraham Lincoln. And at the time of Watergate, he gave us Gerald Ford—the right man at the right time who was able to put our nation back together again. . . . [T]he transition from Nixon's administration to Ford's was a thing of awe and dignity."

Presidential historian Richard Norton Smith wrote, "Gerald Ford's presidency was less accidental than providential."

### FORD VETOES LEGISLATION TO HOLD DOWN SPENDING

Three days after assuming office, the new President arrived at the Capitol to address a joint session of Congress.

"My fellow Americans, we have a lot of work to do. My former colleagues, you and I have a lot of work to do. Let's get on with it." Ford's first priority was the economy. To him, inflation was "domestic enemy number one."

He immediately gathered economists to assess the issue; he trimmed government spending and anything else that might get this drain on the economy under control. Within

18 months, inflation was reduced by half, and the jobless rate was down. He began the idea of deregulation to encourage free enterprise rather than stifle it. By the end of his term, telephones and airlines were affected by the marketplace rather than the government.

Ford also tackled government spending, vetoing more bills in his 30 months in office than Ronald Reagan did in eight years. Legislation with tacked-on, special projects was his favorite target. He trimmed government spending yet was compromising enough to put aside his desire to cut taxes. By his last day in office, the economy was in better shape than it would be for the next six years.

In the Cold War, Ford continued détente with the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, begun by Nixon. He developed a warm relationship with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and traveled to China, moving ahead the process of the U.S. recognition of China, which came to fruition under Jimmy Carter.

Ford's greatest Cold War achievement centered on his decision to go to Helsinki, Finland, in 1975. There the leaders of Western and Eastern Europe signed the Helsinki Accords,

which made human rights a bargaining chip in any negotiation between the Warsaw Pact Nations and the other signatories.

Jimmy Carter later said the Helsinki agreement was one of the most important pieces in bringing down the USSR and communism in Europe. No longer could an East Germany or Soviet Union ignore the public outcry from America over how those nations treated their citizens.

Yet Ford's own party railed against the agreement. The right wing of his party lambasted the move as a sellout to the Soviets; the *Wall Street Journal* wrote, "Jerry Don't Go." But Gerald Ford felt it was the right thing to do, saying, "I would rather read that ["Jerry Don't Go"] than headlines all over Europe saying, 'United States Boycotts Peace Hopes.'"

### THE VIETNAM WAR: WINDING IT DOWN

As immediate and troubling as the Cold War and the nation's economy were, they paled in comparison to the deep wounds to the country's psyche left by Watergate and the Vietnam War.



*Left:* President Ford in the Oval Office during the massive evacuation from Saigon in April 1975. He pushed for the rescue of Americans and Vietnamese despite the risk to his career. *Right:* President Ford rings the ship's bell of the USS *Forrestal* during Operation Sail in New York harbor, commemorating the Bicentennial, July 4, 1976.

Eleven days after being sworn in, Ford began the healing process by offering conditional clemency for the 50,000 draft resisters who had fled to other nations rather than serving in what they believed was an unjust war. This action was in sharp contrast to the hard-line stance of Nixon, who offered no remedial sympathy for the young men who had broken the law.

What makes Ford's action all the more notable is where he chose to announce his plan. He went before no liberal forum where it would be applauded but instead announced his plans in front of an audience that would be the toughest to persuade—the national convention of the VFW.

But that was Ford. He never took the easy path; he confronted his would-be critics head on.

Less than a year later, the final chapter in our country's involvement in Vietnam was being written. The North Vietnamese army launched an offensive against the South, aiming to crush what remained of the opposing army. The U.S. military brass advised Ford that hundreds of millions of dollars of military aid would be needed to help South Vietnam hold on, but Congress refused to provide funds. The decision doomed South Vietnam, and its populace panicked, especially those who supported U.S. efforts.

Ford would not abandon those Vietnamese sure to face reprisals. Ford ordered around-the-clock evacuation of refugees late in April 1975, and he did this at great risk to his political career—there would not be wide acclaim for the success of the evacuation, but should more American troops be lost, the blame would be placed squarely on his shoulders.

Yet he was adamant that we should rescue as many as we could, especially the most innocent of all—the many young orphans who populated South Vietnam. Over several days, Americans and Vietnamese were evacuated as a despondent America watched the drama unfold on television.

To Ford, it was “as low a point in my administration as any.” One hundred twenty thousand refugees had been saved, but they had no place to go—Thailand and other Far East nations refused them.

Ford requested aid from Congress to help the refugees find homes in America. Again Congress balked, but this time Ford would not be denied, and after a long struggle, many refugees came to the United States. He personally contacted friends across the nation to help settle the refugees, and this is why so many Vietnamese settled in his hometown of Grand Rapids.

## BRINGING CLOSURE TO WATERGATE

Ford's most lasting legacy was the healing of the country. Vietnam and Watergate were bad enough on their own, but to have both at the same time left Americans doubting themselves, their government, and their nation.

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said that Ford “saved the country. In fact, he did it in such a matter-of-fact way that he isn't given credit for it.”

Kissinger added, “Ford's lack of ego became part of the healing process after Vietnam and Watergate. He carried off one of the most complex assumptions of authority with such apparent ease, and he established his brand of leadership at home and abroad with such remarkable speed that it came to be forgotten how close to chaos Watergate had brought us. Other Presidents were to receive the credit for winning the Cold War.”

Kissinger continued, “But I am certain the time will come when it is recognized that the Cold War could not have been won had not Gerald Ford, at a tragic period of America's history, been there to keep us from losing it.”

Historian Walter Isaacson underscored Kissinger's assessment when he wrote,



Left: President Ford, First Lady Betty Ford, and daughter, Susan, walk their dog at Camp David in August 1979. Opposite left: Senator Edward Kennedy and former President Gerald Ford after Ford received the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award, 2001. Opposite right: The President and his staff watch election returns in the Oval Office on November 5, 1974.

“Either by luck, happenstance, or divine grace the nation’s constitutional process had come forth with an unexpected President who was right for the moment.”

The healing of the nation could not have occurred if Ford hadn’t had the courage to put his political capital in harm’s way. Ford’s approval rating soared during his first month in office. He was open and candid, and he became close to the media. He made himself available to all of them—an abrupt about-face from previous administrations. He probably could have carried that approval rating all the way to an election victory in 1976.

Yet Ford knew that the country needed to move forward, but it couldn’t as long as the Watergate issue and Richard Nixon’s fate continued to dominate the public discourse.

One month after taking office, against the

advice of many of his advisers and certainly to the detriment of his own popularity, Ford granted a full and complete pardon to Nixon for all offenses he committed while President.

“I know this is going to be harmful, from a political standpoint, but it doesn’t matter; it’s the right thing to do,” Ford said. Thousands of angry calls, telegrams, and letters flooded the White House. Newspapers across the land raked Ford over the coals. Democrats, and many other Americans, believed a deal was made before Nixon resigned. And Ford’s own press secretary and friend, Jerry terHorst, immediately resigned.

The firestorm that ensued was expected, but not its intensity. Ford had decided that 200 million people needed to move forward, but they could not until the problems of one man were gone. Ford believed he had

an obligation to history, but history had no obligation to him.

Years later, Bob Woodward, one of the *Washington Post* reporters who covered the Watergate scandal and a vocal critic at the time of Ford’s pardon of Nixon, wrote:

What at first and perhaps for many years looked like a decision to protect Nixon was instead largely designed to protect the nation. Watergate was a poison that would not go away. . . . The only way out of the Watergate atmosphere was to move fast, to short circuit the process. Preoccupation with Nixon’s fate could have continued for years.

History would prove Ford right. In 2001, Ford received the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award from the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation.

At the award ceremony, Senator Edward Kennedy, the younger brother of President Kennedy, praised Ford for making “a courageous decision, one that historians now say cost him his office, and he pardoned Richard Nixon.”

Kennedy also admitted: “I was one of those who spoke out against his action then. But time has a way of clarifying past events, and now we see that President Ford was right. His courage and dedication to our country made it possible for us to begin the process of healing and put the tragedy of Watergate behind us. He eminently deserves this award, and we are proud of his achievement.”

### FORD MAKES HISTORIC VISIT TO EXPLAIN PARDON TO CONGRESS

In the wake of pardoning Nixon, Ford was baffled by the arguments of his critics who failed to see that by accepting the pardon,



Nixon actually confessed his guilt. Ford could not understand why his critics could not see the same.

Ford's courage was doubly illustrated by the congressional fallout from the pardon. The Democrat-controlled Congress wanted to launch hearings to determine whether a deal was made.

In one of the boldest moves by any President, Ford, against every adviser's protestations, agreed to testify before the House Judiciary Committee. It was the first time since Lincoln that a sitting President had testified before Congress. Furthermore, he went before Congress with no advisers or lawyers—alone, with no notes, no briefing book, and no fear. The hearing was short, and the congressional investigation stopped.

It has been the norm for Presidents to issue pardons at the end of their terms when the political fallout would be nil. Ford by contrast pardoned Nixon at the beginning of his presidency when the consequences would be the greatest. Ford's bid to win the presidency in his own right came up short, no doubt because of the lingering effects of the pardon. In 1976, he narrowly lost to former Georgia governor Jimmy Carter in his bid to win an elected term.

An 895-day presidency had come to an end, but its influences still reverberate today.

The greatest tribute came from his successor. Carter's first words upon being sworn

in as President were: "For myself and for our nation, I want to thank my predecessor for all he has done to heal our land."

*Washington Post* columnist David Broder wrote the day Ford left office, "In an odd, inexplicable way the truth has begun to dawn on people in the final days of Gerald R. Ford's tenure that he was the kind of President Americans wanted—and didn't know they had."



Gerald R. Ford passed away in late December 2006. For the next week, pundits and historians praised the 38th President of the United States even as the nation mourned his passing.

President Ford's obituary in the *New York Times* noted his greatest achievement when it said: "Mr. Ford deserves to be remembered for more than a pardon. Marking the end of a national nightmare is no small thing."

Per Ford's instructions, when his body was flown in Air Force One back to Grand Rapids for burial, the plane made a pass in Ann Arbor over Michigan Stadium, where Ford played football with the Wolverines and Willis Ward. And when the plane landed in Grand Rapids, the University of Michigan marching band played not only "Hail to the Chief" but the university's hymn and its fight song.

Gerald R. Ford, Jr., was home. **P**

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library (Ann Arbor, MI) and Museum (Grand Rapids, MI) provide a wealth of information about the life, career, and administration of the 38th President of the United States.

This article also drew from the *Public Papers of the Presidents: Gerald R. Ford* and *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford* (New York: Harper Row, 1978).

Secondary sources used in the drafting of this article include: James Cannon, *Time and Chance: Gerald R. Ford's Appointment With History* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994); David Hume Kennerly, *Extraordinary Circumstances: The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford* (Austin, Center for American History, 2007); Douglas Brinkley, *Gerald R. Ford* (New York: Times Books, 2007); Thomas O'Neill with William Novak, *Man of the House: The Life and Political Memoirs of Speaker Tip O'Neill* (New York: Random House, 1987); and Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982).

Also referenced is *Black and Blue: The Story of Gerald Ford, Willis Ward and the 1934 Michigan-Georgia Tech Football Game*, a Brian Kruger and Buddy Moorehouse Film.



#### Author

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