

It is a remarkable thing when an entire country changes its mind

Andrew Jackson, once almost universally admired as a personification of refreshing democratic values, now is considered a prosecutor of genocide. Ulysses Grant, once portrayed as a shiftless drunk and political dunce, is a symbol of generosity and prudence. Woodrow Wilson, once hailed as the idealist of his age, is considered a racist. Dwight Eisenhower, once disparaged as a presidential mediocrity principally interested in his putting game, is remembered for putting America on a strong footing for the coming decade of the 1960s.

But the most remarkable transformation of the modern age may involve a president in office a mere 17 months and the controversial step he took at the end of his first month — a decision that arguably cost him his presidency but might have helped the country recover after two years of Watergate-related strife.



DAVID M. SHRIBMAN

Sunday is the 50th anniversary of a Sunday that began in infamy, Gerald Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon.

The general reaction was summed up by Washington Post reporter Carl Bernstein in a call to his reporting colleague Bob Woodward: "The son of a bitch pardoned the son of a bitch."

The Ford approval rating, at 71% at the end of his first week in office in the middle of August, fell to 60% just after the pardon in September, then to 50% by month's end — en route to 37% in the following January, according to the Gallup Poll.

Seven years later, the country was evenly divided, with 46% supporting the pardon and 46% opposing it. By 1986, 39% still opposed the pardon, but a majority (54%) approved.

Jimmy Carter earlier criticized the pardon, saying in July 1976 that he would not have pardoned Nixon "until after the trial had been completed in order to let all the facts relating to his crimes be known." Six months later, he began his inaugural address with this sentence, which didn't mention the pardon but spoke of the result Mr. Ford hoped it would provide:

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

Senator Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts immediately branded the pardon "the culmination of the Watergate cover-up." A quarter-century later, the committee awarding the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum's Profiles in Courage Award received a high school student's essay arguing Ford was an exemplar of political courage.

Two committee members, David Burke, the former CBS News president, and David McCullough, the presidential historian who through biographies of John Adams and Harry Truman single-handedly changed the nation's view of them both, said the student was onto something. Paul G. Kirk, former chairman of the Democratic National Committee and later a senator, resisted. Kennedy was hesitant but finally came around. Ford was presented with the award in 2001.

"I finally was OK with it, and had a conversation with President Ford, who said that this was redemption and satisfaction," said Kirk. "I saw his pride in vindication."

Ford wrote in his autobiography that the Nixon pardon "wasn't motivated primarily by sympathy for his plight or by concern over the state of his health," adding, "It was the state of the country's health at home and around the world that worried me."

The country, at first, didn't buy his argument. "If Ford can be faulted, it's how it was done, and how it was packaged," said Richard Norton Smith, the author of 2023's "An Ordinary Man: The Surprising Life and Historic Presidency of Gerald R. Ford." "Ford felt twinges of sympathy for Nixon. He believed Nixon's health, both physical and mental, was impaired. He thought there was only one way to get Nixon off his daily schedule and, critically important, to change the story in the media."

Ken Khachigian, a longtime Nixon aide, said Ford succeeded in that goal. "The wailing about the pardon would last only so long, but, while [Nixon critics still] had Nixon to kick around, it was as a long-distance appetizer, not an on-site feast."

John Robert Greene, a retired Cazenovia College historian who was one of the first scholars to examine the papers for his 1995 book, "The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford," was a college-age critic of the pardon.

"But when I got into Ford's papers, I found that the negotiation was more about getting rid of the tapes and papers that still filled the White House," he said. "Ford wanted that stuff out of there. But most important, every press conference since he became president was consumed by questions about Nixon. It was beating at him. He didn't think he could do anything as president unless he pulled the Band-Aid off the wound and pardoned him."

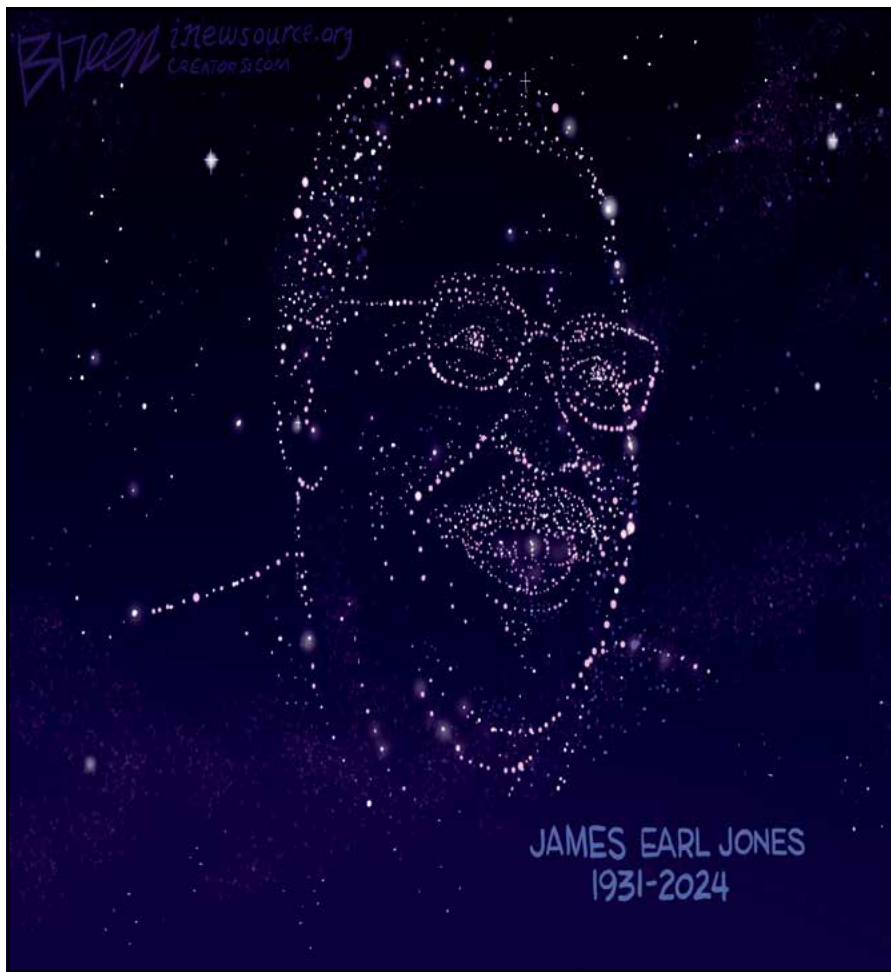
Then there is Timothy Naftali, the first director of the federal Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, who felt the pardon was premature. "But I respect Ford and what he tried to achieve," he said. "It would have been useful for the public to see a criminal indictment, though I know enough about the story to understand that it was unlikely."

Presidential son Steve Ford also changed his mind. Speaking at a 2009 Kennedy Library retrospective on the Ford presidency, he said, "I raised my hand when this whole thing came up and said, 'Dad, you know, people are going to kill you. They're going to crucify you. You can't do this. I mean, Nixon, he was wrong.'"

Then he added a poignant reminiscence. "I remember sitting with him and talking. And he explained that a president was like a father of a family and had to lead a family. And I remember him looking at me. I caused a lot of problems in my household. He looked at me and he said, you know, 'Steve, if I prosecuted you for everything you did to divide our family ... carried it out to the letter of the law, our family would be ripped apart. But I, as your father, give you grace and mercy at times for the betterment of the family.'"

The grace and mercy eventually reached Bob Woodward, on the other end of the "son of a bitch" phone call from Carl Bernstein. In a July 2014 Washington Post panel, he called the pardon "an act of courage." The country had come around.

DAVID M. SHRIBMAN is the former executive editor of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.



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Letters to the Editor

Has Harris mastered the political flip-flop?

To the Editor:

The political climate is always entertaining to watch. Vice President Harris said in her first CNN edited interview: "her values had not changed." However, her policy views have changed from her time as a Senator to her presidential bid in 2020. Harris has shifted to securing the border and building a border wall, but as a Senator, Harris vowed to block any funding for Trump's border wall and said, "Trump's border wall was a waste of taxpayer money." She is endorsing the flawed Senate border bill while dismissing House bill HR2 as a realistic border security bill. Does Harris know the President can close the border, by executive order, without Congress?

Harris is now OK with gas vehicles and fracking for oil, but Sen. Harris was a co-sponsor of the Zero-Emission Vehicles Act of 2019. This policy was an electric vehicle mandate, which eliminated new gas vehicles by 2040, and would have crippled the oil industry.

In 2019, Harris proposed a government-mandated gun buyback plan, forcing gun owners to sell their AR15-style guns to the government.

Harris, with zero business experience, is proposing price controls on businesses. The now-moderate Harris co-sponsored Medicare For All and endorsed The Green New Deal estimated to cost families as much as \$6,500 per year.

She supports unrestricted abortion and campaigns for tax increases.

Harris cast the tie-breaking vote to pass the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act, estimated to add \$800 billion to the federal budget.

Harris's leadership ability is questionable with a staff turnover rate of 92% in her first three years as vice president. The Harris campaign plan is to read from the teleprompter, avoid answering reporter questions about her record, and try to convince you she is now a moderate. Unfortunately, the uninformed voter may believe it.

The world was safer and the U.S. economy was much better under the Trump policies. The November vote is about policy, not personality. Pray for our nation and the future of your children.

Mike Campbell
Avilla

Vote for candidates based on their stance on issues

To the Editor,

I would like to encourage voters to select political candidates based upon stance on crucial issues, not subjective emotions.

Read the party platforms to understand their policies.

The 27-page Republican platform is transparent. Donald Trump and JD Vance are transparent candidates, too.

The 91-page Democrat party platform is more difficult reading. It employs language obscuring an unpopular leftist agenda. Kamala Harris is not a transparent candidate, either.

Past behavior is a strong indicator of future behavior, however.

Harris was a liberal San Francisco Democrat politician and US Senator.

She encouraged the 2020 riots and promoted donations to the Minnesota Freedom Fund, which freed both violent and nonviolent offenders.

Harris' running mate, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, signed a bill to place tampon machines in boys' restrooms of Minnesotan public schools.

During the George Floyd rioting, Walz delayed

National Guard intervention for three days. This led to massive destruction in Minneapolis. His inaction set the tone for Democrat-run cities nationwide.

Important policies to consider include abortion, the economy, immigration, crime and policing, education, gender ideology, parental rights, the family, race relations, foreign policy, bureaucratic corruption, gun ownership, energy, environmental affairs, civil liberties, globalism, the military, Social Security/Medicare and the Supreme Court.

I will cover the first three issues in this letter.

Abortion — Republicans at the national level are deplatforming abortion due to the Dobbs decision. I am not happy with this. However, it is consistent with Dobbs.

I encourage Christians to vote Republican despite this disappointment.

The Democrat position on abortion is much worse. Democrats demand nationwide abortions at taxpayer expense. I anticipate they will intensify persecution of pro-lifers, too.

Additionally, I anticipate Trump will pardon pro-lifers unjustly imprisoned for alleged violations of the FACE act.

Economy — Democrats pursued policies significantly increasing our national debt and providing our nation with few benefits.

Biden admitted recently the Inflation Reduction Act was deceptively named. It increased and did not reduce inflation.

Harris diverts blame for their inflationary spending to others. She blames inflationary food prices on greedy food producers and grocery chains, which have modest, non-exploitative profit margins.

Increased petroleum prices resulted from the Biden/Harris policies that reduce domestic petroleum production. Domestic petroleum production did not keep pace with demand. Widespread inflation from increased reliance upon more expensive, non-domestic petroleum was the result.

Petroleum is a component of many goods and services, including fertilizer and transportation.

Harris' solution is price controls on food, which do not work and lead to shortages.

Trump promises to increase domestic oil production. This, in turn, will lead to lower prices across the board.

Immigration — The borders are essentially open. Border officials are instructed to accept virtually all asylum claimants into the nation.

The vast majority of asylum claims are fraudulent. Democrat leadership intends to use immigration to change the American political landscape.

Representation in the House and electoral college is determined by total population, regardless of citizenship. Increased immigrant population in blue states provides them with more representation.

Subsequent amnesty would yield predominantly Democrat voters, too.

Finally, leftists want decolonization of America.

Decolonization involves increasing the minority population to deplatform the majority population.

Borders define where national principles and ideals are practiced. The left hates American principles and ideals, derived largely from Western Civilization and Christianity. Open borders are diluting our national character, and not for the better.

I have no issue with sustainable, selective immigration of vetted individuals at a reasonable rate. America is experiencing disruptive behavior through Biden's open border policies, though.

A more detailed version of this article with links to the Republican and Democrat platforms is available on my blog at christiannewsjunkie.com (no hypkens).

Robert Sparkman
Rome City

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