

President Gerald R. Ford's handwritten reflections, 1977 or 1978

Scanned from the collection **Gerald R. Ford: Materials from the writing of *A Time To Heal*** at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library

While writing his autobiography, *A Time to Heal* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), President Gerald R. Ford composed a series of personal reflections on twenty-seven topics. What makes these documents so unusual is not only their introspection but also their form. President Ford recorded these observations by hand, writing in blue ball point on his favored yellow writing tablets. He did not expend time and energy to polish and edit his writing, apparently planning to do so when incorporating them into the book. Therefore occasional spelling or grammatical errors or incomplete thoughts appear.

For each reflection the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library has scanned President Ford's handwritten document and added a Library-produced transcription below to aid in reading the reflection.

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Richard Nixon's place in history

Contemporary historians write in one atmosphere which inevitably involves personal observations of people & events, including their own preferences & prejudices. Historians after ~~the~~ ^{the} era can be more analytical & objective and traditionally give a more balanced picture of the players & the scene in. Will future historians write differently of RN? The opportunity to stand back, looking at the whole rather than at one or more event, looking at ^{major} decisions ^{& speeches} rather than a press conference comment may give future historians the freedom to make some pages of the RN era look better, ~~and~~ other pages more understood & others more disappointing.

To write for the future about a friend of 30 years & events one lived is most difficult. My own political career coincided roughly with RN's. His began two years earlier in 1946 when he answered an advertisement of those seeking a Congressional opponent for a liberal Democrat. He volunteered & won as an idealistic believer in the American economic & political system. My own commenced in 1948 with a similar dedication to our American way and U.S. leadership abroad. Our friendship began in January 1949 on the floor of the House of Representatives when I was sworn in as a member of the Congress. For most of the next three decades our political paths crossed many times & our friendship grew. His career was always more visible & dramatic than mine, both the ups & downs, with the possible nomination as V.P. & ascension as Pres.

In the case of a friend one likes to think & write about the achievements and the good qualities on which a friendship is predicated. One of the strongest ties of our relationship was the fact that we came from middle America, from families that suffered adversity during the depression in contrast with those who were born with a silver spoon in their mouth. We respected one another because we knew each had come up the hard way economically & politically. We enjoyed each other because we had similar interests in what most average Americans like, football, baseball & other athletic contests. Our families were similar, a wonderful wife and fine children. We understood & respected each others ambitions in politics, his for the Presidency, mine to be Speaker of the House. Our personal friendships was strengthened by the strong dedication to certain domestic policies at home & U.S. leadership abroad.

This friendship I hope does not blur my perspective as to what history will record of R.N. as a person or what will be noted as ^{his} accomplishments or failures. R.N. has a brilliant mind ^{and} a great sensitivity to the public's ^{political} mood and a unique ability to analyze ^{and act decisively on} foreign policy issues. Big decisions on matters at home & abroad were his cup of tea. On such matters he did extremely well - his talking average was excellent. He abhorred details. Didn't like to be bothered & rather enjoyed pushing them off on his subordinates. The big picture was his role & he played it well. As a knowledgeable reader of history & the

(3)

great characters on the scene he desperately wanted to achieve both for his country + himself.

With all his ^{political} experience before the public, both in speaking & in press conferences, where he did very well one would assume he was a self confident extrovert. In truth he was shy, in some respects a loner. His platform capabilities were the result of his recognition that to succeed on the political arena he had to train himself to do a good job before the public. His fierce determination, his ambition, his able mind resulted in a ~~fast~~ public political capability to achieve national office.

Most of us have personality quirks or flaws that seldom surface. They are controlled or are never exploited by others. R. N. was a terribly proud man & he detested weakness in himself & in others. In private, seldom if ever in public, he would speak disparagingly of those he felt were soft or expedient. He never thought of himself as one in this category. His attitude & actions vis-a-vis Watergate reflect this paradox. His pride & public toughness plus his detest for those who were weak in moments in peril overcame his family taught traits of right & wrong. Within all of us we have a pulling & pushing of parts of our character & personality. In R.N.'s case the flaw in a brilliant mind temporarily - June 1972 - overcome his upbringing & his judgment. Once the course was set his pride & disgust with weakness compounded the problem.

Historians reading the first 20 years of RN's political career will find scarcely a hint of dramatic foreign policy moves he would initiate upon becoming President. Until 1970 RN. by word & action was a tough hardliner against the Peoples Republic of China & the U.S.S.R.. From 1946 to the second year in his Administration the RN. clip file will show among the famous sketches debate with Khrushchev and many pro-Taiwan and anti-Mao speeches. Those incidents in his career will be footnotes on the pages of history. The headlines and substance will involve his grand strategy to move from the cold war with the Soviet Union to détente best exemplified by SALT I, the joint space effort, and the numerous cultural and technical exchanges. Historians will forever speculate how this "cold-war warrior of the 50's & 60's" could move ~~with~~ so smoothly & dramatically to a policy of many agreements & accords with the U.S.S.R.. The consensus will be that he saw the big picture in a world strategy. The new ties with the Soviet Union were possible because the leaders in the U.S.S.R. were deeply concerned with developments in the PRC, especially with Mao & Chou's growing antagonism toward a former friend & ally.

On the other side of the coin RN, as President, will receive high marks for his initiative with the PRC. He spotted a meaningful distrust & fear ^{of the Soviet Union} on the part of Mao & Chou - the long standing border

dispute was real, the mistreatment of Mao in the 60's ~~was~~ was not forgotten and the danger of Soviet hegemony in the Pacific Basin was constantly on their minds. Like a skilled surgeon R.N. moved to take advantage of this new development in PFC & Soviet relations.

The result was a recognition in the Capitals of the world that the U.S. was the diplomatic master in the international scene. The prestige of the U.S. catapulted to the peak despite the tragic setback in Vietnam.

Aside from the tremendous new leverage U.S. had achieved in U.S. - USSR & U.S. - PFC relations 21st century historians will discern the dramatic shift in attitudes on the part of Western European allies & third world nations. American involvement in Vietnam had undercut our prestige & leadership role worldwide. Criticism was frequent and hard to take. Many old friends & neutrals were drifting to the Soviets & to some extent to the PFC. R.N.'s initiatives at the highest levels with Brezhnev & Mao defused this trend & created a new foundation for U.S. action on broad international fronts.

Domestically, RN's pages of history will not have the glitter of his foreign policy initiatives, although a number of the reforms he sought at least laid the ground work for subsequent action by his successors in the White House & later Congresses.

Welfare reform had been a growing political issue & for good reason. Since the depression of the 1930's well intentioned politicians had added one welfare layer on top of another so aid to the poor, the disabled & the aged were overwhelmed with social workers and bureaucratic red-tape and the taxpayer was swamped by soaring costs. In 1970 RN met this complex and highly emotional issue head-on by proposing to scrap virtually all existing welfare programs & substituting in their place his Family Assistance Program. With the help of then Congressman William Mills, Chairman of the House Committee on Ways & Means, it passed the House of Representatives twice, once in 1970 & again in 1971. In each instance the U.S. Senate refused to act because of a coalition of Senate liberals who believed the benefits were too restrictive & Senate conservatives who condemned the payments as too generous.

It is interesting to note that the rhetoric used by President Carter to promote his welfare reform package is nearly identical with the words, phrases &

arguments of R.N.. At this writing the details of the Carter proposal have not yet been spelled out but the same obstacles are raising their ugly head in the Congress & elsewhere. Cost to the U.S. Treasury is a major factor. The work requirement is another. The contributions, ^{& control} by state & local units of government, if any, will be an issue. The vested interests such as the social worker lobby will be a problem. Whatever the fate of the Carter proposal, R.N. deserves credit for his broad initiative toward meaningful & constructive welfare reform.

Since the mid-1950s there has been a multiplication of categorical aid programs from the federal government to states, local units of government & to individual cities. The motives have been good, a need existed in most cases but method of delivery was costly in tax dollars, inefficient because of bureaucratic layering and inflexibility, and dangerous in that it put too much control in the hands of Washington & undermined local control. R.N. recognized the weaknesses of categorical grants & the strength of the bloc grant approach. He grabbed the ball with a proposal to substitute a bloc grant program in aid to cities in place of the 7 traditional programs of urban renewal, model cities & 5 others. With the outstanding support of Tom Sec of HUD, James Lynn Congress enacted a bloc grant program entitled the

Community Development Act which consolidated the 7 categorical grant programs into one with a hold harmless feature for 3 years. The results have been a phenomenal success. Sec. of HUD Louis Blum in 1976 showed that the time for processing a city's application for funds was reduced from 8 months to _____. The pages in a city application were reduced from _____ to _____.

This illustration should be the best witness that the bloc grant approach is sound in concept - it saves time, takes dollars & gives greater control & discretion at the local level. This stimulated me to address to the Congress in 1977 four additional bloc grant programs. Congress didn't respond favorably despite the "mess charts" and other sound arguments but the bloc grant program, a Nixon initiative is right, it's time maybe be here, + if so RN deserves the credit.

School desegregation, because of U.S. Supreme Court decisions, was an emotional issue by 1969, not so much in the south but growing more so in northern industrial cities. The RN Administration produced the first comprehensive report with specific recommendations for a more even-handed approach of both federal aid to help local school districts. The Nixon Administration was castigated by extremists

9

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