

# [The resignation speech of president richard m. nixon](https://assignbuster.com/the-resignation-speech-of-president-richard-m-nixon/)

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The Nixon era of American history will be considered one of the most tumultuous times the nation has faced. Elected in 1968, Nixon was faced with a nation divided by the War in Vietnam, racial tension and economic disparity. International tensions were no less; Communist China was a great unknown enemy and theCold Warwith Russia seemed on the verge of turning into a “ hot” and potentially nuclear conflict at any moment. Six years later, following the infamous break-in at the Watergate Hotel and facing impeachment, Richard M. Nixon delivered his resignation speech on August 8, 1974.

His speech is clearly a primary document necessary for understanding Nixon and his perspective on himself as well as on the Watergate fiasco. Obviously Nixon did not have a generous amount of time to prepare the speech, such as he would have with a typi-cal State of the Union address. It is also likely he wished, in retrospect, to have more time to craft a finer product. Nonetheless, he realized the magnitude and uniqueness of the document, although at the time he probably did not realize the candid insight into his atti-tude andpersonalitythat it would provide.

Facing impeachment as well as the possibility of criminal charges, it is likely Nix-on strongly felt the legal implications of any admissions he would make. Whether inten-tional or not, his speech gave strength to his detractors who considered him the deceitful “ Tricky Dick”. Few if any of his supporters, much less detractors, expected him to shoul-der any blame for the illegal activities and cover-ups. The closest he could come to an admission of wrong-doing carried a self-serving caveat: “ I regret deeply any injuries that may have been done in the course of the events that led to this decision.

I would say only that if some of my judgments were wrong, and some were wrong, they were made in what I believed at the time to be the best interest of the nation. ” Later revelations brought about through the White House Tapes would indicate Mr. Nixon had other interests, in-cluding his own political survival, in mind as well. Nixon took the approach of being a wounded warrior giving up a just cause “ for the good of the country”.

He does not refer to the act or use “ impeachment”; rather, he calls it “ the constitutional process” and although he “ felt strongly” to see it through, he incongruously declared “ to do otherwise would be unfaithful to the spirit of that deliber-ately difficult process and a dangerously destabilizing precedent for the future. ” He claims he has “ never been a quitter” and had always “ taken heart” in Theodore Roose-velt’s “ man in the arena” speech, and quotes it in its entirety. It would be nothing short of delightful to hear Teddy Roosevelt’s response.

He claims he “ preferred to carry through to the finish whatever the personal agony it would have involved” and despite hisfamilyurging him onward, he reluctantly resigns because “ the interests of the nation must always come before any personal considera-tions. ” Therefore, he believes he can take credit for making the nation better: “ I hope I will have hastened the start of that process of healing which is so desperately needed in America. ” In other words, America has me to thank for removing the noose around the government’s neck which I so carefully knotted.

Nixon was known as a man who often forgot his friends but never forgot an ene-my. Therefore it was pleasant to see his reformation: “ And to those who have not felt able to give me your support, let me say I leave with no bitterness toward those who have op-posed me, because all of us, in the final analysis, have been concerned with the good of the country, however our judgments might differ. ” Once again, later revelations would indicate Nixon was beyond bitterness, and fully capable of destroying any real or poten-tial enemy, if it was in his power to do so withoutaccountability.

In retrospect, after thirty-plus years, the document really is, in a sense, Richard Nixon. Acareerpolitician, he was indeed a fighter from his days in Congress to facing off with Premier Nikita Khrushchev at the U. N. while Eisenhower’s Vice President. As president he shut down a ghastly war he inherited in Vietnam and took it upon himself to open relations with China and strengthen relations with the Arab states. Yet there was Tricky Dick, craw-fishing to the nation, claiming “ some judgments were wrong”, but you know, I did it because I had the nation’s interests at heart.

Truly a man of complexity and contradictions, his “ rehabilitation” with the American public took years, and he never re-ally reached the “ senior statesmen” rank more easily carried by Jimmie Carter and even Gerald Ford. No doubt anyone in his position would like to go back and redo such a unique and pivotal document. In today’s political arena even a finger-wagging “ I did not have relations with that woman” Clinton, himself a veteran of “ the constitutional process” can find rapid “ rehabilitation”. One wonders whether some judicious and non-exculpatory editing on Nixon’s part would have hastened his recovery.

Ending his presidency as no predecessor had, Nixon found it necessary to use al-most half of his address to extol the virtues and accomplishments of his presidency. Sad-ly, it sounds hollow, as “ if no one else will tell you I left the world a better place, than I will”. In essence, it is a very sad document indeed, and Nixon supporters at the time felt the sting of humiliation and the disgrace of a remarkable hero while his opponents could point to his final words as president as a fitting memento of a failed and bitter man. His final speech helped place him in history in a way he never could have imagined.