

The resignation speech of president richard m. nixon

[Politics](#), [President](#)



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 the Cold War with 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 typical 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 attitude and personality that it would provide.

Facing impeachment as well as the possibility of criminal charges, it is likely Nixon strongly felt the legal implications of any admissions he would make. Whether intentional 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 shoulder 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, including 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 deliberately 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 Roosevelt'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 his family urging him onward, he reluctantly resigns because " the interests of the nation must always come before any personal considerations. " 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 enemy. 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 opposed 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 potential enemy, if it was in his power to do so without accountability.

In retrospect, after thirty-plus years, the document really is, in a sense, Richard Nixon. A career politician, 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, crawling 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 really 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 almost half of his address to extol the virtues and accomplishments of his presidency. Sadly, 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.