

—if they were ever aware—that being articulate is not the same as having analytical skill, which Ford had in abundance. For a national leader, courage and devotion to principle are, in any case, the more important qualities.

Ford was well aware of his relative lack of suavity and, unlike the modern political leader, was not embarrassed to admit it. “I am not one of those oratorical geniuses,” he said to me on the telephone on January 15, 1975. “There is no point in my trying to be one. I just have to be myself.”

Ford reacted to the seemingly inexhaustible volume of challenges without either self-pity or doubt about the good faith of his political adversaries. Ford viewed his role not unlike that of a doctor ministering to a patient just recovering from a debilitating illness. He therefore resisted demands for heroic posturing and prescribed a regimen of building and conserving strength. Ford thought it essential to prove to the American people that crisis and confrontation were a last resort, not an everyday means of conducting policy.

Ford displayed personal goodwill to friend and foe alike. At times, I thought his apparent equanimity excessive, especially when his reluctance to impose penalties made resistance to presidential authority appear free of risk. In retrospect, I have come to appreciate Ford’s self-restraint, for it gradually drained the American political system of its accumulated poison and created the conditions for the restoration of faith in American institutions.

This unflinching sense of the national interest enabled Ford in his 29 months in office to navigate his country through a series of crises that could have filled a two-term presidency. Other Presidents were to receive the credit for winning the Cold War. 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 point of America’s history, been there to keep us from losing it.

Henry Kissinger served as Gerald Ford’s Secretary of State. These remarks are adapted from his just-published memoir Years of Renewal.

THE “ANTI-CLINTON”

By James K. Glassman

As President Clinton gave his testimony in the Lewinsky scandal, I was thinking about Gerald Ford. Like Bill Clinton, he is a graduate of Yale Law School, but the similarity ends there.

Ford came to mind because I had heard him speak twice in recent months. A remarkable man, he can still hold his own with the intelligentsia from the think tanks. Having turned 85 last July, he looks 20 years younger, with clear blue eyes and the stature of the football star he once was. At one of those talks, he made a broad tour of the horizon, discussing the economy, the performance of Congress and—a subject to which he warmed—the coming election.

Ford is an optimist. He has the proper degree of wonder as he looks at the world: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the budget surplus, the spread of prosperity. He laments the passing of a more congenial politics, but he will not criticize the perpetrators of today’s more contentious process. Despite what must have been a difficult life, with his wife’s addiction and breast cancer, he seems a happy man, but most of all, a real adult—in striking contrast to the current occupant of the White House.

I also believe that Ford was a great hero. His pardon of Richard Nixon was a necessary and courageous act. It spared the nation a terrible ordeal—the trial of an ex-President—but it cost Ford the 1976 election, an outcome he certainly could have predicted.

He did the right thing and took the consequences. Again, can one say that about Bill Clinton?

Larry King recently asked Ford to comment on the Clinton scandals. “There’s no question,” Ford said, “the White House...has been undercut and damaged.... It’s sad because the White House, historically, is looked upon as the epitome of integrity and leadership.” Indeed, in an age in which military threats have diminished and the economy rolls ahead (under Fed chairman Alan Greenspan, who was Ford’s top economic advisor), the most important function of the President is to serve as the



Tony Orlando and Betty Ford dance the bump.

symbol of national honor and strength and decency.

In that function, Clinton has clearly failed.

The Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans issued a report not long ago based on a survey of young people aged 14 to 18. When asked “which category their role model would be from,” less than 1 percent of all teens now pick a political leader (and that 1 percent is split between foreign and American leaders).

Is it really surprising that no more than one teenager in 200 saw Clinton as a role model? I only wish more young Americans could see what a plain but dignified leader looks like, talks like, and acts like. Like Gerald Ford.

James Glassman is the Reader’s Digest-DeWitt Wallace Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. A different version of this article was published in Intellectualcapital.com.

A DISSENTING VIEW

By Joseph Sobran

To conservatives, as a rule, Presidents look better in retrospect. Another way to put this is that every President tends to

Alan Greenspan

make his predecessors look better than they did while they held office. Many conservatives now revere Harry Truman, of whom they (like most Americans) held a low opinion while he was in the White House. More recently, they have softened on George Bush and even Jimmy Carter. Some of them even praise Franklin Roosevelt, their ancestral enemy.

They also look back fondly on Dwight Eisenhower, though they much preferred Robert Taft in 1952 and "Ike" was the choice of then-powerful Northeast liberal Republicans. William Buckley predicted that if Eisenhower got the 1952 GOP nomination, he would not only win the White House but consolidate the New Deal, making its social programs virtually impossible to repeal thereafter. This turned out to be all too true. And in the same way, Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford consolidated Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. Republicans now talk of "saving" Social Security (FDR's brain-child) and Medicare (Johnson's progeny), the two greatest triumphs of what they used to call "creeping socialism."

A couple of years ago, adapting Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan's famous phrase, I observed that Bill Clinton had "defined presidential deviancy down." Others have picked up this expression since then. But though Clinton has deviated more spectacularly than any previous chief executive he has effected no structural changes of the magnitude of the New Deal and the Great Society; his bad character hasn't been translated into any permanent institution. He has merely proven successful in seducing women and Republicans.

We shouldn't be misled by the trick of perspective that makes earlier Presidents look comparatively good. Often the harsh judgments of their contemporaries are correct. Conservatives deemed Gerald Ford an ineffectual President during his brief tenure. And so I believe he was.

As House Minority Leader and President, Ford offered little resistance to the agenda of the free-spending liberal Democrats who controlled Congress because he had no principled objections to that agenda. Like Robert Dole and George Bush, he was temperamentally

In 1975, when the bottom appeared to be falling out of the economy, President Ford summoned me to the Oval Office. He wanted to know if I thought the economy would stabilize reasonably soon or if drastic action would be required as others had counseled. Instinctively, he was disinclined to take large government action.

I told him I believed still fragmentary evidence indicated that the nation was suffering from an inventory recession that should soon stabilize, and likely reverse its downward spiral. Ford accepted my critique and resolved not to support any of the numerous corrective initiatives (some of them ludicrous) that had been submitted for his review.

It was easy for me to recommend this course of action since he asked a factual question and requested an informed response. I simply presented the evidence. For the President making the final decision it was harder. But Ford never vacillated, despite severe criticism. Ultimately the economy came back sharply.

Jerry Ford made acting on policy look easy. Steadfast consistency was his hallmark. He kept his word. He never wavered.

—Alan Greenspan, currently head of the Federal Reserve, was chairman of President Ford's Council of Economic Advisors.

FORD WAS ALARMED BY PRINCIPLED CONSERVATIVES AND DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THEM.

opposed to most of the liberal agenda, but only until it was enacted. After it passed, he accepted it as a given. He lacked both the will and the imagination to try to repeal it because he lacked a philosophy by which to criticize it.

Gerald Ford was actually alarmed by principled conservatives. He didn't understand them, much less sympathize with them. In 1980 he warned that Ronald Reagan couldn't win the presidency because

his views were too extreme. Even now Reagan's victory has taught him nothing, and he regards the Republicans' conservative wing—especially the anti-abortion elements—as an alien force that will bring the party to defeat.

President Ford has never recognized that the United States, since the New Deal, has undergone a second revolution, in which a Constitution that was meant to establish a limited, federal government, confined to a few specified powers, has been perverted into an instrument of limitless, centralized government. The great practical mission of conservatives is to restore the Constitution. Non-conservative Republicans too often make constant incremental surrenders to the Leviathan state as it usurps countless powers never delegated through the Constitution.

There can be no more strategic mistake than to allow liberals to write the rules of this game. Conservatives only began to correct it during the Reagan years, when Reagan nominated Antonin Scalia and Robert Bork to the Supreme Court. But to this day there has been no real follow-up, let alone a Republican "revolution" to repeal the Roosevelt Revolution. In that crucial respect, the Republican Party remains much more the party of Gerald Ford than of Ronald Reagan.

Joseph Sobran is a nationally syndicated columnist.



Squeaky Fromme

Archive Photos

Daniel Patrick Moynihan

GOOD INSTINCT

By Donald Rumsfeld

Presidents in our country lead by consent and persuasion, rooted in trust, not by command. Fortunately, President Ford brought with him some extraordinarily valuable attributes: an instinctive honesty, straightforwardness, and openness. His character did much to restore confidence in government during that terribly difficult period in our country's history.

He made many good decisions on the big issues. For instance, the President made a clear commitment that a long decline in defense spending had to be reversed, and that we needed to maintain the deterrent power necessary for the U.S. to be able to contribute to peace and stability in the world. It was not a popular position, but he worked hard on this problem and won.

At his inauguration, President Carter turned to the departing President Ford and said simply, "For myself and our country, I want to thank my predecessor for all he has done to heal our land." Gerald Ford accomplished these things, in large measure, because of the kind of human being he is.

Donald Rumsfeld was Secretary of Defense in the Ford administration.

DANGERS VETOED

By Carla Hills

For 29 months, Gerald Ford successfully led our country, beset by a weakened economy, through its most serious constitutional crisis. Political turmoil at home and the oil crisis engendered in the Middle East had the nation reeling. Labor costs were rising, federal revenues were falling, inflation hit double digits, interest rates soared, and unemployment was climbing.

Candid, open, and direct, President Ford made the tough decisions. He brought strong-willed individuals into his administration and demonstrated his willingness to expose his ideas to inde-

Question: You worked in the administrations of four Presidents. Does one of them stand out?

Moynihan: Well, the one you had to love was Gerald Ford. He's just such a good man. And talk about how life isn't fair! Remember when he was running for re-election and he kept seemingly bumping his head on airplanes? I mean, here's a man who's a genuine athlete. It looked like he stumbled around. He didn't stumble at all.

—Senator Moynihan served as U.N. ambassador under President Ford.
This exchange is drawn from a 1998 interview by Richard Meryman.

pendent thinking. I have vivid memories of his ability to debate issues openly and reach expeditious decisions. And his decisions were always guided by principles—not polls.

He knew that inflation could destroy the American dream for average working Americans. He was convinced that excessive federal spending was making their circumstances worse. In his first State of the Union address, he told Congress that he would veto bills promoting excessive spending, and this he did over and over. Remarkably, 54 of his vetos were sustained in a hostile Congress, indicating the correctness of his decisions.

I recall one bill that would have authorized the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development to reduce interest rates on home mortgages for middle-income families by making payments that would effectively limit the homeowner's payment to 6 percent interest. Needless to say, the costs of this bill were huge—as was its popularity. President Ford immediately saw the dangers, however, and he vetoed it without hesitating. The President believed that our nation must live within its means, and time and again he brought Congress along.

Carla Hills served as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development in the Ford administration.

OF ETHICS AND FLINCHING

By Barber Conable

I served in the House under Gerald Ford for almost ten years, and when he was chosen as Vice President there was nothing I wanted to add or subtract

from his public or private character to fit the country's need. From Gerald Ford you always got exactly what you expected; he was a direct, decent human being who could not be flattered beyond his limits and who knew how to accomplish what was needed within those limits. He invited diversity of viewpoint and debate as a necessary preliminary to decision—not because he was indecisive, but because he knew the nation depended on him to be thoughtful, dependable, and honest.

When I was a freshman congressman in 1965, Ford's family needed a new puppy, and I gave him a young golden retriever from a litter of my brother's dog. He insisted in return on paying \$100 into my campaign fund, teaching me a lesson about accepting valuable gifts as a public official. I was struck by his concern about ethics and appearances.

In my second term, he explained to me that Republicans had to take the lead in changing the mindless operation of the seniority system in setting committee assignments. We made the needed changes within our Republican caucus, and the Democrats adopted the same rule two years later.

When events catapulted him into a wounded presidency, he did what was necessary, even when it would be politically damaging. He did not expect, and did not receive, mercy from the hostile Congress born of Watergate. But he did not flinch in doing his executive duty.

Barber Conable, former president of the World Bank, represented a congressional district in upstate New York for ten terms.