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CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE

THE PRESIDENTIAL APOLOGY: LESSONS FROM TRICKY DICK AND SLICK WILLY

SUBMITTED TO
PROFESSOR ANDREW BUSCH

AND
DEAN GREGORY HESS

BY
MEGAN MORRIS

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Introduction: Learning from the Past

Harry S. Truman once said, "Put them on the defensive and don't ever apologize for anything."[1] This came from the president who gave the order to drop atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Presidents have always been among our national heroes. For most of our nation's history, our idealized view of the Chief Executive has perpetuated an unrealistic perception of infallibility. Of course, the truth is that presidents have always made mistakes. Over the course of one man's term in office countless plans will fall through and things will go awry. Yet, the presidential apology is a relatively recent concept. From Washington to Obama, the gap of separation between the president and the people has shrunk dramatically. The more people learn about their president, the more human he becomes to them.

To err is human and apologizing is a natural second step for most people. But, for the proud men who seek our nation's highest public office apologizing can be difficult. There is still so much prestige associated with the office that admitting a mistake is not something a president looks forward to and is not always what the public wants to hear. Deciding what to apologize for is the first step. A president would never accomplish anything if he spent his tenure appeasing angry citizens' demands for repentance. Presidents must recognize the proper timing of an apology. The manner in which they apologize must fit their personal style but also accommodate the expectations of their audience. They may speak for themselves or bolster their apology with statements from their press secretaries, lawyers, colleagues, friends, and loved ones. Sometimes, silencing their critics is a priority. Other

[1] Harry S. Truman, "Apologize Quotes," Brainy Quote, http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/apologize.html (accessed April 16, 2012).

times, it behooves presidents to let their attackers talk themselves into a grave. A variety of tools help presidents deliver their apologies: press conferences, radio addresses, testimony before Congress, memoirs, and more. With so many questions for presidents to consider, the task of apologizing is really an art.

This thesis examines the art of the presidential apology through two case studies: Nixon's Watergate and Clinton's Lewinsky-gate. These presidents were both plagued with scandals in their second terms that exploded in the public spotlight. For all their similarities, the mistakes were handled quite differently. Nixon and Clinton began damage control exactly the same, by denying the claims made against them. That strategy eventually had to give way to something else. Clinton chose to apologize profusely and repeatedly. Finding a verbal apology from Nixon is like spotting a polar bear in a snowstorm. Their unique styles beg the question: Is there more than one road to forgiveness? The following pages tell the stories of only two presidents who have been called on by their country to apologize, but the goal is to extrapolate lessons learned from these examples and offer a window into the future of the presidential apology.

It is hard to isolate the necessary variables in comparing Watergate to Lewinsky-gate to see where the largest difference was. There were many. Not least of all, the original mistake. Watergate was a robbery followed by a cover-up. Lewinsky-gate was sexual deviance followed by a cover-up. John Zogby believes that "Americans place a great value on the stability of the institution of the presidency and are not willing to jeopardize it for sexual indiscretions."[2] But what the public is and is not willing to forgive depends heavily on

[2] Renshon, Stanley A. "'The Polls': The Public's Response to the Clinton Scandals, Part 1, Inconsistent Theories, Contradictory Evidence," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (March 2002): 175, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27552372?origin=JSTOR pdf (accessed April 13, 2012).

what the media makes of it. The relationship between the president and the press has evolved over time and each individual president has had his own unique experience with the press corps.

When Woodrow Wilson had a stroke in 1919 that paralyzed the left side of his body reporters said he had a nervous breakdown but would be back working soon. No corrections were made to the story for four whole months.[3] This obliviousness is characteristic of the distance in the president-press relationship at that time. FDR had a cozy relationship with his flock of reporters. The press refrained from revealing more information than he wanted them to and never quoted him directly simply because that was his request.[4] In an arrangement contemporary presidents can only dream of, he dictated the conditions of the relationship. Respecting the privacy of President Eisenhower and his family, the press reported on his "digestive upset" in 1955, a euphemism for a heart attack.[5] Television added a new dynamic to media relations and the handsome Kennedy reaped the benefits. He was the first president to give live televised press conferences. Having a few close reporter friends, Kennedy generally got good ink from a press that was only just learning how to be antagonistic.[6] LBJ courted the press by sending military aircraft to fetch journalists for dinners at his ranch.[7] This brand of schmoozing was not Nixon's strength. Ordering wiretapping and FBI investigations of many of them was his way of waging a "virtual war against the press."[8]

Given the rapid expansion of the press over the years, it is no surprise that their

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[3] Howard Kurtz, *Spin Cycle: How the White House and the Media Manipulate the News* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), xvii.
[4] Ibid. xvi.
[5] Ibid. xvii.
[6] Ibid. xvi.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Kurtz, xvii.

relationship with the White House has undergone changes. This means best practices for an apology are also subject to change. Of course, each president is different and the mistakes future presidents will be asked to apologize for will be unique. This thesis can offer lessons to future presidents not only by providing two examples of apology roadmaps, as demonstrated by Nixon and Clinton, but also by identifying an evolutionary aspect to the art of the presidential apology. What can be learned from the apologies of Nixon and Clinton?

The different results they achieved with their reputation recovery efforts are due to several factors. For, as many similarities their cover-ups had, so many things about 1998 were different from 1974. Presidential apologies of the future must take into account not only the nature of the mistake, but the public's interest in that mistake, the state of the economy, which party controls congress, and the personality of the press as well as the president. This is why Nixon and Clinton's apologies are comparable only to a certain extent. No two presidential apologies are the same.

Nixon: What Apology?

On August 9, 1974 Richard Milhous Nixon became the first U.S. president to resign from office. Today, he still holds the distinction of being the only president to do so.[9] What were the events that led up to such a dramatic historical focal point? How did the country respond? How is Nixon judged today? These questions drum up a dizzying array of facts, the kinds of things revealed in committee hearings, interview transcripts, and polling statistics. But, the facts are inseparable from their counterparts - the intangible, immeasurable, powerful emotions that the Nixon presidency evokes. The aspect of Nixon's presidency this chapter focuses on is neither his scandal nor his legacy, but rather, the crucial hinge between the two; his apology, or, as we may later judge, the absence of one. First, however, it is necessary to lay out some of the facts of the political scandal of the '70s – Watergate.

Watergate, in its simplest form, was a botched robbery. One night in 1972 a few men broke into and bugged Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate Hotel, the scandal's eponymous epicenter, in the nation's capital. The culprits on the ground were from the Committee to Re-Elect the President. The man they wanted re-elected – Richard Nixon. This break-in was not an isolated incident but rather one of many "dirty tricks" the committee and Tricky Dick himself would soon become known for including money laundering, illegal fund-raising, forging government documents, illegal wiretapping, and

[9] Harry Jeffrey, and Thomas Maxwell-Long, *Watergate and the Resignation of Richard Nixon: Impact of a Constitutional Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2004), 15.

more.[10] The committee took a no-holds-barred approach to winning.[11] When the story broke in 1973 Watergate took on a life of its own that went far beyond a break-in at Democratic headquarters. The media has a knack for linking issues with other related issues, and when the issue at hand justifies the word "scandal" the controversy spreads like a bad rash. America was glued to the TV in the summer of '73 watching the drama unfold. Once it was traced all the way up to the president himself no one could characterize Watergate as merely a petty break-in.[12]

Richard Nixon was a fighter. Despite the relentless negative news coverage that eventually swung public opinion, which in turn eroded his political base in Congress, he did not go down easily. He dubbed his efforts to fend off impeachment and garner public support his "last campaign."[13] Until three Republican leaders paid a personal visit to the White House to tell him a strong majority in the House, including many Republicans, was set on impeachment, Nixon had not allowed himself to seriously consider resigning.[14] His go-down-swinging attitude may have caused him more trouble than if he had acted with humility. Deny, deny, deny, was the modus operandi for the Nixon White House. It would have behooved Nixon to heed the First Rule of Holes: When you are in one, stop digging. But the fighter, politician, and proud man in him refused.

Nixon defended himself against cries of misconduct by addressing his audience directly fairly often – more frequently than the presidents who have come after him and have had to defend themselves against similar claims. Today, it is more common to

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[10] Jeffrey, 19.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid. 12.
[13] Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang, "Polling On Watergate: The Battle For Public Opinion," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (April 9, 2012): 530-47, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2748470 .
[14] Jeffrey, 15.

speak through a press secretary, who serves as a shield for the president. This figure can take abuse and tough questioning in place of the president. He deflects criticism using his intelligence and crafty oratory as well as the ultimate tool – claiming ignorance. Maybe Nixon would have made it through Watergate less bruised and beaten if he had utilized human shields. Tricky Dick fooled people for a long time, but his cunning answers as well as flat out lies caught up with him in the end. Even still, his command of evasive double-speak is impressive albeit morally reprehensible in the eyes of many.

In his May 22, 1973 statements on the Watergate investigations he says: "I have specifically stated that executive privilege will not be invoked as to any testimony concerning possible criminal conduct or discussions of possible criminal conduct, in the matters under investigation. I want the public to learn the truth about Watergate and those guilty of any illegal actions brought to justice."[15] Retrospectively, these few seconds of speech were riddled with hypocrisy. He did end up trying to hide behind a cloak of executive privilege. He was involved in a cover-up that hid facts about Watergate from the public. It was the exception rather than the rule for those convicted of illegal actions in the Watergate scandal to be formally punished. The most glaring example is Nixon himself who resigned, presumably before the House got the chance to impeach him, and was quickly pardoned by President Ford. There was no opportunity for him to have been found guilty in the legal sense. Tricky Dick lived up to his nickname by slipping out of politics without formal reprimanding. Although some people were looking forward to convicting him and forcing him out of office, most Americans (eight out of ten) approved of his self-imposed

[15] Richard Nixon: "Statements About the Watergate Investigations," Nixon, May 22, 1973, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3855. Hereafter cited as Nixon, May 22.

retirement.[16]

Further along in his statement, he attempts to justify the recently uncovered "plumbers unit," a Special Investigations Unit implemented to stop "security leaks and to investigate other sensitive security matters."[17] This unit demonstrated Nixon's paranoia and near-obsessive desire for secrecy. Nixon overused national security as a justification for many of his actions as president, especially during Watergate. The public came to resent it. Devotion to secrecy can be an important trait for presidents to have, but a reputation for secrecy works against presidents once the public grows suspicious of what they have done with their privacy. Regardless of their political leanings, socioeconomic class, or any number of additional factors that can be used to segment the U.S. population, 95 percent of all Americans in 2003 deemed presidential straightforwardness, honesty, and a willingness to take responsibility for actions to be either very or extremely important.[18]

Another entertaining element of the May 22 statement is Nixon's attempt to turn a negative – illegal, unethical campaign activities – into a positive:

> It was to help ensure against any repetition of this in the future that last week I proposed the establishment of a top level, bipartisan, independent commission to recommend a comprehensive reform of campaign laws and practices. Given the priority I believe it deserves, such reform should be possible before the next Congressional elections in 1974.[19]

It is remarkable that he thought he could take credit for campaign reform rather than own up to his flagrant violations of rules already in place regarding ethical campaign practices. Since

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[16] Lang, 530.
[17] Nixon, May 22.
[18] Political Leadership Survey, Oct, 2003, Retrieved Apr-13-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.
[19] Nixon, May 22.

the 1950s, Nixon had been steadily building up his reputation as a "partisan mudslinger."[20] He was already attempting to capitalize on Watergate as a platform for political growth while investigators and journalists were only at the proverbial tip of the Watergate iceberg. Not only was he attempting to get off scot-free, he thought he was under the delusion that he could come out of it with an improved legacy. If he truly believed this, it indicates extreme arrogance on his part. It was this approach that fueled journalists, who smelled corruption, to keep following their noses and bring Nixon down to the lowest of lows before letting him go.

The lies continued throughout that summer. By August of 1973, the press's relentless questioning had taken a toll on him. In an August 5 statement he showed the first sign of cracking under demands that he own up to mistakes. He was able to say that he gave information that was "incomplete and in some respects erroneous. This was a serious act of omission for which [he took] full responsibility."[21] It was a far cry from an apology. Rather, it was an acknowledgement of his fallibility. Nixon was still in the business of influencing how the public absorbed Watergate-related information:

> The second point I would urge is that the evidence be looked at in its entirety and the events be looked at in perspective. Whatever mistakes I made in the handling of Watergate, the basic truth remains that when all the facts were brought to my attention, I insisted on a full investigation and prosecution of those guilty. I am firmly convinced that the record, in its entirety, does not justify the extreme step of impeachment and removal of a President. I trust that as the constitutional process goes forward, this perspective will prevail.[22]

Nixon's story can be condensed into five words: "It is not that bad!" His approach was to downplay the scandal's importance. He seemed to believe that plenty of former presidents

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[20] Jeffrey, 18.
[21] Richard Nixon: "Statement Announcing Availability of Additional Transcripts of Presidential Tape Recording," Nixon, August 5, 1974, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Projec*t, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4320. Hereafter cited as Nixon, Nixon, August 5.
[22] Ibid.

had acted similarly but the press had held them to a different standard.[23] Even as his story began to unravel, the president tried his best to come up smelling like roses. The speech is lacking in any sort of admission of impeachable crimes. It comes across as though he expects a future apology from his persecutors. The sentiment is that, soon, everyone will come around to his side and see things as he does. He aligns himself with the American people saying he wants the truth more than anybody. The reality is that he contributed to the cover-up. His incredulity in the matter was a well-established theme by that point. In an August 15, 1973 statement he says point blank: "I had no prior knowledge of the Watergate operation," as well as "I took no part in, and was not aware of, any subsequent efforts to cover up" the Watergate break-in.[24] The "Smoking Gun" tape of June 23, 1972 would later prove he lied about the latter claim. The tape proved Nixon's direct involvement with the cover-up. It records him considering claiming the break-in was crucial to national security and putting a stop to the investigation.[25]

In the process of retrieving the facts about Watergate, tape recordings of the president were turned over to the public and judged. They damaged Nixon's image. Even when he was not saying something incriminating he came across as "confused, indecisive, and lacking in any concern for the public interest." The tapes also revealed his proclivity for profanity, which did not do him any favors.[26] Once he retired from office he battled in the courts to prevent thousands of hours of additional tape from going public.[27] Because he eventually

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[23] Jeffrey, 159.
[24] Richard Nixon: "Statement About the Watergate Investigations," August 15, 1973, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3935.
[25] "Excerpted Watergate-Related Conversations," Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/excerpts/watergate.php (accessed April 13, 2012).
[26] Jeffrey, 13.
[27] Ibid. 20.

failed in this aim, he only lengthened his period of embarrassment and misery. Several lessons can be learned from the Watergate scandal and Nixon's fall from grace. One of which is that punishment on a presidential scale should be approached like a Band-Aid; getting it over with quickly hurts but drawing it out is excruciating. John F. Kennedy's press secretary, Pierre Salinger, boldly speculates: "If in the first two or three days of the Watergate story, Richard Nixon had gone on television and said, 'I made a stupid mistake' . . . and he fired a couple of people, Watergate would have never happened."[28] His analysis probably oversimplifies the solution. It sounds more suitable for a different time in U.S. history. Nevertheless, the core of his idea – that if he had taken full responsibility in an expedient manner, things would have been much better for Nixon – is probably accurate.

After fighting tooth and nail for over a year to clear his name and move past Watergate, his resignation speech came on August 8, 1974. The speech is emotional but in no way a surrender; apologetic at times but hard to label as an apology. Considering the frequency with which he had hushed rumors and shot down demands that he resign, the decision to exit must have taken a lot out of him. He had told everybody that as long as he was physically able, he would hold on to his job. The unique circumstances surrounding the final stage of his presidency prevented him from keeping that promise. Addressing the nation for the last time as president must have been a bitter moment for Nixon. In the following paragraph he bumps up against a full apology but backs away:

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[28] Horstman, Barry M., "Bay of Pigs Press Strategy Ruled Out for Reagan: Media: Relations with journalists have become more adversarial since the Kennedy Administration. Press secretaries have had to change their tack," Los Angeles Times, January 8, 1990, http://articles.latimes.com/print/1990-01-08/news/mn-85_1_press-secretary (accessed March 1, 2012).

> 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 in the best interests of the Nation.[29]

Instead of going for it completely, he gives a qualified apology and never specifically says what he did wrong.[30] It would not have been hard for his rivals at the time to find numerous faults with the speech. For one, his reasons for resigning were practical, political even, instead of heartfelt and shame-driven: "I no longer have a strong enough political base in the Congress to justify continuing the effort," he states matter-of-factly.[31] Instead of the mea culpa moment Americans craved, his language indicates a fierce desire to fight for "personal vindication."[32] Another detail that could have gotten under his adversaries' skin was that he thanks his supporters, those who "joined in supporting [his] cause because they believed it was right."[33] To them, he pledges his eternal gratefulness. He also has a message for those whose support he did not have: "Let me say I leave with no bitterness toward those who have opposed me."[34] It is unlikely his adversaries needed or wanted his blessing. This line reveals arrogance on his part by appearing to take the high road by forgiving them, even when they feel he is the one who should beg for their forgiveness. In the line, "let us all now join together . . . in helping our new President succeed for the benefit of all Americans," the underlying message is that he believes the public did not want him to succeed.[35] Nixon believed people were out to get him.

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[29] Richard Nixon: "Address to the Nation Announcing Decision to Resign the Office of President of the United States," Nixon, August 8, 1974, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Projec*t, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4324. Hereafter cited as Nixon, August 8.
[30] Jeffrey, 2.
[31] Nixon, August 8.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

Not only were his critics deprived of the apology they were looking for, they got an earful of Nixon expounding his legacy. "We have ended America's longest war," and "unlocked the doors that for a quarter of a century stood between the United States and the People's Republic of China," and "begun the process of limiting nuclear arms," and gained hundreds of millions of friends in the Middle East, and improved relations with the Soviets.[36] Stuffing the speech with his accomplishments could have distracted listeners from the shameful reason for his early exit from office. Nixon felt validated pointing out his successes to the public at a time when he believed they were too blind to see them without his help. It was almost as though he had trouble understanding why people were even bothered by Watergate when the U.S. faced so many other issues that were more pressing by his estimation. A secondary theme in handling the scandal, behind "It was not that bad!" was "But I did a lot of good, too!"

Working a Theodore Roosevelt quote into the resignation speech, he makes himself out to be a heroic figure: "'If he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly.' I pledge to you tonight that as long as I have a breath of life in my body, I shall continue in that spirit." Nixon's enemies saw him in a different light and did not want him to flaunt his fighting spirit. On the contrary, they preferred he go away for a very long time. In what his enemies may have judged a conceited move, he wraps up the address by reiterating his hopes for his legacy: "Peace among nations . . . This, more than anything, is what I hope will be my legacy to you, to our country, as I leave the presidency."[37] For the Americans who did not think he created peace within his own country, it was jostling to hear him boast about the peace he created on a macro scale. The second-to-last line is also a head-scratcher: "To have served in

[36] Nixon, August 8.
[37] Ibid.

this office is to have felt a very personal sense of kinship with each and every American."[38] Kinship was an interesting word choice considering the abject animosity some Americans felt towards him at the time he uttered it. Kin means family. This could have come across as a final attempt to gain the nation's sympathy, as he was fully aware of the criminal charges stacking up against him. He may have hoped that Americans would feel hesitant about punishing someone who was kin to them.

Despite most Americans not returning Nixon's feeling of kinship, Nixon did get some brotherly love from his successor, Gerald Ford, in the form of a pardon. The pardon came a month after Nixon's resignation speech. Ford justified his unpopular decision by saying the work of the nation had to come first but could not so long as we remained distracted by Nixon and Watergate. We would be unable to meet our "challenges if we as a people were to remain sharply divided over whether to indict, bring to trial, and punish a former President, who already is condemned to suffer long and deeply in the shame and disgrace bought upon the office he held" he explained. "Surely, we are not a revengeful people," he chided, tugging at our conscience.[39] Citizens strongly opposed the pardon, perhaps because it is customary to forgive people only after they admit they were in the wrong. When Ford came into office, he had the support of 71 percent of Americans for the way he was handling his job. After pardoning Nixon, his approval rating plummeted to 50 percent. Only 38 percent thought Ford was right to grant the pardon.[40] Years later, Ford would reflect back at the public anger towards the pardoning with puzzlement. While he thinks he ought to have stressed that

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[38] Nixon, August 8.
[39] Gerald R. Ford: "Statement and Responses to Questions From Members of the House Judiciary Committee Concerning the Pardon of Richard Nixon," October 17, 1974, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4471.
[40] Jeffrey, 130.

acceptance of a pardon equates to admitting guilt, he still "thought there would be greater forgiveness."[41] Forgiveness of both Nixon and Ford – for pardoning the "crook" – took longer than some people expected. As late as 1982, the nation was still divided over whether or not Ford acted correctly. An evenly matched 46 percent of Americans stood on both sides of the issue with eight percent undecided.[42] Finally, in 2002, a poll showed that 59 percent had come to believe Ford was actually in the right for pardoning Nixon.[43]

The audience for Nixon's resignation speech was not left with the impression that he was admitting to wrongdoing even though accepting a pardon "carries an imputation of guilt."[44] In fact, this was a technical point Congressman Hogan of the House Judiciary Committee harped on in his questioning of President Ford. The committee's express purpose was to "review the facts and circumstances" surrounding the pardoning decision. Ford gave Hogan clarity: "The acceptance of a pardon, according to the legal authorities – and we have checked them out very carefully – does indicate that by the acceptance, the person who has accepted it does, in effect, admit guilt."[45] Nixon never publicly acknowledged this feature of the pardon. It may be legally accurate but it did not sit right with Americans who believed that Nixon was guilty of obstruction of justice and lying to the nation.[46] Was it possible for someone to admit guilt if they did not actually *say* anything to that effect? Silence speaks volumes but it is also a form of cowardice. Americans were not in favor of letting Nixon off the hook so easily regardless of what the legal implications of accepting a pardon were.

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[41] Jeffrey, 138.
[42] Gallup/Newsweek Poll, Jun, 1982, Retrieved Apr-12-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.
[43] ABC News Poll, Jun, 2002, Retrieved Apr-12-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.
[44] Jeffrey, 129.
[45] Ford
[46] Lang, 531.

Time factored into the decision to pardon Nixon. Selecting a jury and holding a trial would have taken a very long time. Would it have been worth it? By denying the people's base desire to see Nixon suffer, Ford may have saved the people a lot of drawn-out suffering too. Another point that came to light in this committee meeting was that maybe the president's fragile health served as a reason why he was not obliged to give Americans an apology. Ford believed "that prosecution and trial of the former President would have proved a serious threat to his health."[47] It is less common to demand an apology from someone we pity. If everyone had adopted Ford's pity approach, Americans would have buried the Watergate hatchet long ago despite his missing apology.

Americans found it difficult to rally around a new president who was one of Nixon's "staunchest defenders during Watergate almost to the bitter end."[48] Although the people were not necessarily sold on Ford's decision to pardon Nixon, his willingness to explain his decision making processes in a meeting with the House Judiciary Committee demonstrated an openness and commitment to transparency that was a complete turnaround from everything the Nixon presidency was known for. It gave Americans a chance to learn their new president's opinion on executive privilege: It should be exercised "with caution and restraint." But still, he showed empathy for Nixon by saying:

> "I respect the right of executive privilege when it protects advice given to a President in the expectation that it will not be disclosed. Otherwise, no President could any longer count on receiving free and frank views from people designated to help him reach his official decisions.[49]

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[47] Ford
[48] Lang, 531.
[49] Ford

We were already learning and changing as a result of Nixon's mistakes. This raises the question: Can we thank Nixon for his mistakes? Even without a satisfactory apology, we can attribute to Nixon the ushering in, out of necessity, of a new age of transparency in government. Post-resignation, Nixon took extreme care to avoid the public eye for about three years.[50] Then, in May of 1977, when British television host David Frost tempted him with a handsome sum of cash and a chance to set the record straight in front of a huge T.V. audience, he came out of hiding. These were the famous Frost/Nixon interviews. Although Nixon intended these sit-downs to serve as a political recovery, they did no such thing. This is the closest to a proper apology Nixon ever came. Throughout the interview series, Nixon took on an apologetic tone but refused to "get down and grovel on the floor."[51] The interviews proved that the saga was not over.

Nixon had some new and interesting contributions to the discussion surrounding his resignation. He appeared shockingly aloof when he told Frost flatly, "When the president does it that means it is not illegal."[52] For viewers who were already disillusioned with his presidency, this statement likely exacerbated that feeling. He continued to hide behind the term "national security," a habit that did not garner him much support while he was still struggling to maintain the Office and was not going to in 1977 either. Frost pushed Nixon to describe his motives and actions using a stronger word than what he had been using, "mistakes."[53] Nixon appeared detached from reality when he asked, "What word would you suggest?" Feeling cornered by Frost's line of questioning, Nixon vacillated between

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[50] Jeffrey, 15.
[51] Ibid. 16.
[52] The Guardian, "Great Interviews of the 20th Century," The Guardian, http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2007/sep/07/greatinterviews1 (accessed February 13, 2012).
[53] Ibid.

conceding points and maintaining his story. One of his admittances: "I said things that were not true . . . And for all those things I have a very deep regret." Still, he held that he "did not commit in [his] view, an impeachable offense." He extended his answer by declaring, in what would become a memorable line, "I have impeached myself."[54] He believed that resigning was equivalent to voluntary impeachment. Eventually, Nixon talked himself into an emotional state and made his largest concessions:

> I let down my friends, I let down the country, I let down our system of government and the dreams of all those young people that ought to get into government but will think it is all too corrupt and the rest. Most of all I let down an opportunity I would have had for two and a half more years to proceed on great projects and programs for building a lasting peace. . . Yep, I let the American people down. And I have to carry that burden with me for the rest of my life. My political life is over.[55]

In that answer, the emotional floodgates opened, his humility shone, the façade came down, and Nixon appeared a defeated man. He poured his heart out on camera and shared with the American people the true story of how his dreams had slipped through his fingers like sand. Present in that moment were the unmistakable emotions of guilt and sadness. That televised moment sounded a lot more like the apology America had sought for so long than any of his other statements. At least 44 percent of Americans said they felt more compassion for Nixon after the interviews with Frost.[56] Still, for some Americans, the glaring omission of a proper apology will always stand out. Humorist Art Buchwald once jokingly wrote of Nixon's "apology": "Sure he's sorry. Did you not hear him say he was sorry he did not burn the tapes?"[57]

It takes time for the full story of a scandal to come out. Healing and forgiveness also

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[54] The Guardian
[55] Ibid.
[56] Jeffrey, 160.
[57] Ibid. 22.

come with time. Americans seem to appreciate full disclosure. Decades after Watergate, people were still trying to piece together the puzzle of who knew what, when. In 1996 people were able to hear the bulk of the "abuse of governmental power" tape recordings with their own ears upon their emancipation from national archives. There have been five such tape releases, the most recent batch in 2002, which included the "smoking gun" conversation. When tapes were first released from the archives only people who traveled to the National Archives in Maryland could hear them. This policy has since changed, allowing tapes to be copied and broadcasted.[58] Having access to such incriminating evidence may actually help Nixon's legacy. The more people know about Watergate, the easier they find it to process the facts and move on.

The media's role – from when the story first broke, through his denial and resignation, to the Frost/Nixon interviews, and coverage of his death in 1994 – cannot be understated. They retain their importance by having a hand in his posthumous reputation as well. For instance, it is customary for the media to attach the "–gate" suffix to each new presidential scandal.[59] Some accuse the media of kicking Nixon out of office and trampling on his legacy. Nixon fought hard to win the battle of public opinion but, seeing as he was losing, he tried to downplay the significance of polls. Setting the precedent of resigning just because he "happened to be low in the polls," he told the press on March 15, 1974, "would forever change our form of government."[60] Nixon tried his best to control the public opinion polls, but the way polls are articulated to the public is under media control. For example, a

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[58] Mike Ahlers, "Nixon 'Smoking Gun' Tape Released,": CNN Politics. http://articles.cnn.com/2002-02-28/politics/nixon.tapes_1_white-house-tapes-nixon-talks-secretary-john-b-connally?_s=PM:ALLPOLITICS (accessed April 9, 2012).
[59] Jeffrey, 25.
[60] Lang, 532.

columnist can either say, "Less than half the U.S. favors Nixon's exit," or make the headline read, "Only a slim majority opposed to impeachment."[61] It is undeniable: The media shape public opinion. They can choose to ignore some polls and highlight others. Out of the 38 Gallup press released between September 1973 and July 1974, only about one in four made the evening news on at least one network.[62] "Polls do not speak for themselves but are subject to journalistic judgment. News values help determine which questions pollsters ask, which findings are reported, and when and how they are reported."[63] This has huge implications for any public figure who finds himself in hot water, is trying to deny culpability in a scandal, wants their apology be accepted, or is trying to salvage a favorable legacy. According to pundits, since Watergate the media has become more aggressive and Americans have become more cynical about politics. Maybe the media shed more heat than light on the particulars of the scandal, provoking Nixon to counter their claims instead of crafting an apology. From the point of view of the Nixon camp, the bloodthirsty media owed Nixon an apology.

Criticizing the media's part in Watergate is fair game. But it takes two to tango. Nixon did not treat the media as well as they would have liked. When he first became president, he tried to oust the press corps from the West Wing, their home since 1901. A case could be made that Nixon brought his media woes upon himself by waging war against these powerful forces. Although the media excelled at keeping Nixon in the spotlight – he was on the cover of *Time* magazine more than any other person in the second half of the twentieth century – he was not good at keeping up his end of the relationship: No president since

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[61] Lang. 541.
[62] Ibid. 542.
[63] Ibid. 541.

Hoover had given so few press conferences. In hindsight, Nixon expressed that he wished he had given more.[64] But, did he regret these missed opportunities because he would have liked to set the record straight and been more forthcoming or because he believed he could have succeeded in duping everyone if he had sought greater exposure to the press? Having noticed Nixon snubbing them, journalists felt justified in responding with tough questions and serious investigating. It may have looked to Nixon like the media was overreacting to Watergate, but the truth is, frustration over Vietnam had been building for years.[65] Maybe it was wrong that some of that frustration and anger was not directed at Johnson and Kennedy. Unfortunately for Nixon, that is not how it played out. Animosity between Nixon and the press could have molded Nixon's attitude towards offering a statement of apology.

TV had only emerged as a "dominant political force" a decade before Watergate.[66] Given how its power has grown over time, Nixon's TV audience for the Frost/Nixon talks, which was a chance to apologize, was larger than the TV audience during his exposure. If Watergate had occurred a few decades earlier, would the American people have even demanded an apology from him? A strong case could be made that the answer is no. Conversely, if it had happened today, in a 24-hour news cycle, Nixon would have felt even more heat for his not-quite apology.[67] Today's news-saturated, scandal-loving public would be less likely to tolerate that type of feeble response. Nixon's presidency signaled the turning point when Americans became emboldened enough to demand outright apologies from their leaders.

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[64] Jeffrey, 117.
[65] Horstman
[66] Richard J. Ellis and Michael Nelson, eds., *Debating the Presidency: Conflicting Perspectives On the American Executive*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2010), 68.

[67] Ellis, 68.

The bottom line is that the media did not make him commit his crime(s) and they did not prevent his lips from uttering a sincere, complete, unqualified apology. No matter how powerful we make the media out to be, it is ultimately the president who wields the power to take responsibility for his actions. Also, the president is armed with tools to circumvent an unfavorable press. Nixon's memoirs, first printed in 1978, are quite extensive. Anyone judging Nixon's proper place in history has available to them his own handcrafted, lengthy book of memories. These pages confirm the notion that the president knew nothing about the break-in prior to it happening. He learned of it by reading a small article in the Miami *Herald* while he was on vacation in the Bahamas.[68] He shares with readers his shock: "It sounded preposterous: Cubans in surgical gloves bugging the DNC! I dismissed it as some sort of prank."[69] He adds to the believability of his lack of involvement by writing how he couldn't even muster enough concern about the situation to check the morning paper the next day: "The Watergate break-in was still the farthest thing from my mind."[70]

He includes lengthy diary passages to solidify his story and prove that he has consistently told the same story over the years. The diary entry from June 18, 1972 reads: "I simply hoped that none of our people were involved for two reasons – one, because it was stupid in the way it was handled; and two, because I could see no reason whatever for trying to bug the national committee."[71] He sandwiches these remarks between talk of his long swims in the ocean and how nice his Father's Day was. Depicting Watergate as a trivial issue strengthens his story: "Watergate was an annoying problem, but it was still just a minor one

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[68] Richard Nixon. *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 625. Hereafter cited as Nixon, RN.
[69] Ibid. 626.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid. 627.

among many." Readers gain sympathy for Nixon because he appeared to be frantically searching for answers and seemed oblivious to the mess Watergate would become. The memoirs present Watergate as a nightmare that blindsided the president instead of a nightmare caused by the president. The early memoir passages on Watergate reveal that the whole incident left him truly puzzled. His confusion has the effect of distancing him from the muck of Watergate and adds to the image that he had nothing to do with the scandal. The third theme of Nixon's Watergate emerges in those pages: "I was a victim!" He had long played the victim card. In his 1974 State of the Union Address he let on to the personal hurt he was feeling: "Now, needless to say, it would be an understatement if I were not to admit that the year 1973 was not a very easy year for me personally or for my family."[72] His memoirs delve more deeply into these feelings.

Above all, he always portrays himself as a good natured man searching for truth: "I was suddenly confronted with the one thing that I had most wanted to avoid: White House involvement in Watergate. I told Gray emphatically to go ahead with his full investigation."[73] Nixon's memoirs were a useful tool with which he molded his legacy. An apology was nowhere to be found in his voluminous reflections. He excuses himself for how he publicly handled the ordeal, saying "Watergate had gone too far for me to be able to dispel it in one speech."[74] His word choice is telling of his attitude. If he could have, he would have liked to drive off the Watergate questions but he was not necessarily interested in engaging with concerned Americans in a meaningful dialogue on the subject. Acknowledging that the

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[72] Richard Nixon: "Address on the State of the Union Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress," January 30, 1974, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4327. Hereafter cited as Nixon, State of the Union.
[73] Nixon, RN, 650.
[74] Ibid. 948.

American people felt wronged by him is perhaps a kissing cousin of the apology, but there is no substitute for the real thing. He writes: "My actions and inactions during this period would appear to many as part of a widespread and conscious cover-up. I did not see them as such. I was handling in a pragmatic way what I perceived as an annoying and strictly political problem."

His memoirs do seem thoughtful though. It appears as if he spent a great deal of time reflecting on this chapter of his life and thought critically about what went wrong: "I have sometimes wondered whether, if we had only spent more time on the problem at the outset, we might have handled it less stupidly."[75] Nevertheless, he maintains the "It was not that bad!" theme and continues to deflect blame: "I never doubted that that was exactly how the other side would have played it."[76] He also plants blame on the media for all the hurt they caused with their aggressive approach to Watergate. Their attacks put severe stress on key White House figures and their families. "Now, with Watergate, there was talk of suicide," he writes referring to Martha Mitchell, the Attorney General's wife. For better or worse, this is how Nixon chose to narrate his story, as a victim. So, the media is powerful but not all-powerful, so long as a president lives long enough to publish his side of the story. Henry Kissinger, once Nixon's National Security Adviser and Secretary of State, predicted that history would judge Nixon a great president. Nixon told him, "That depends, Henry, on who writes the history."[77] Nixon wrote nine of his ten books after his departure from public office, ensuring him some control over how history would judge him.[78]

Just as the media shaped the public's opinion on all things Watergate, Watergate had

[75] Nixon, RN, 646.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Jeffrey, 139.
[78] Clinton, Remarks.

an equally influential impact on the media. It gave birth to the investigative reporting craze. It glamorized the work of uncovering Executive Branch secrecy. It was not just the story that newspaper reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein uncovered that got attention. The reporters themselves, who wrote a book, which was adapted into a hit movie starring Robert Redford, gained a level of stardom.[79] Watergate altered Americans' image and expectations of reporters.

Woodward and Bernstein earned praise and celebrity for trusting Deep Throat, a source whose identity was a mystery to the general public until 2005. Their blind journalistic faith has come under little criticism despite recent findings that they believed too much of what Mark Felt, also known as Deep Throat, leaked to them. Felt was the number two man at the FBI under L. Patrick Gray. Woodward had always assured us that Deep Throat was simply a civil servant who cared deeply about protecting the office of the presidency that Nixon was destroying with secrecy and lies, but Felt's actions were actually motivated his personal agenda. He wanted Gray's job. Nixon passed him over for the top job one month before the Watergate break-in, so when the controversy began to descend upon Nixon, Felt was only too happy to contribute to the mess.[80] Nixon knew the scandal was fueled by rats within his Washington, D.C. People he expected to be on his team leaked information and turned on him. This stinging knowledge had to have served as a strong apology deterrent.

Felt believed, knowing how much Nixon loathed leaks, that if he secretly and strategically leaked information to the press, Nixon would trace them back to the FBI and blame Gray – and fire him. His promotion plan did not work out but he did succeed in

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[79] Jeffrey, 21.
[80] Glenn Garvin, "The Profound Lies of Deepthroat," *Miami Herald*, February 14, 2012. http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/02/14/2639954/the-profound-lies-of-deep-throat.html (accessed April 9, 2012).

making life difficult for Nixon. Felt did not always leak truthful information either: Information was often varying degrees of inaccurate. Some now chastise him for failing to leak some critically important information. Felt was not the pure, innocent, champion of truth and justice Woodward and Bernstein had us believe and history portrayed him as for a long time. He was also a hypocrite. He shone a light on the Watergate burglary while he himself directed "black-bag jobs," or, burglaries, against anti-war groups.[81] Nixon's campaign hanky-panky was done to ensure that he would retain his job at the top of the chain of command. Felt was also motivated by his hopes of gaining the top spot at his place of work. Nixon was right; sometimes people do have it in for the president. He had anticipated these attacks: On his fifty-ninth birthday he counseled himself in his diary to "stay above the battle and not be buffeted by ups and downs in the polls and by the inevitable political attacks" that awaited him in 1972.[82] There is a saying from Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*: "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't after you." It suits this scenario well.

If the public had known Deep Throat's identity, they could have guessed at his motives and discredited some of the media's attacks on Nixon just as they would come to distrust Kenneth Starr's investigation of Clinton during Lewinsky-gate. Even once Deep Throat's identity was revealed, people were unsure of how they felt about his role in history. A Gallup poll found 44 percent believed he changed history for the better. Thirty-five percent think he did not change the course of history. Twelve percent believe he actually changed history for the worse.[83]

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[81] Garvin
[82] RN, 541.
[83] Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll, Jun, 2005, Retrieved Apr-10-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html. Hereafter cited as June Poll.

The 44 percent probably fall into the camp that values transparency in government and thought he epitomized dedication to truthfulness. They thank him for exposing Nixon for who he really was. The 12 percent probably see his behavior as conniving and underhanded. Maybe they recognize that he exposed damaging lies along with truths. Maybe some of them think ignorance is bliss, or that what they did not know could not hurt them. Deep Throat can be made the goat for ruining the days of presidential hero worship once and for all. The 35 percent who view him as a non-factor in history either believe the information would have come out some way or another even without Deep Throat or do not place much historical significance on Nixon's Watergate years.[84] If the latter is true, Nixon's missing apology becomes even less of an issue.

It seems like the overarching message this poll delivers is that a large portion of Americans liked the idea of exposing wrongdoing. Americans are in favor of bringing grievances to light, a most of us do not enjoy being fooled. This is why Nixon was lambasted. Nevertheless, Deep Throat was never, and is still not, regarded as a national hero. In 2005, only 39 percent answered that he was a hero. Just over half, 51 percent, believed he was not.[85] Deep Throat serves as a lesson to all those who think about exposing scandal to set a leader's downfall into motion. These people, if they have a case, will succeed in directing shame and hatred towards their target. But, if their parallel goal is to elevate their own status they will not succeed. Turning another man into a villain does not transform you into a hero. Your popularity may slide and your target could earn a reputation as a victim. Large portions of the population still do not know all the facts regarding President Nixon's role in the Watergate cover-up. On the other hand, Felt's side of the story seems pretty easy to sum up.

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[84] June Poll
[85] June Poll

It is easier to believe that Nixon had better intentions than Felt, which is another reason why an apology was not a necessary capstone to the Watergate fiasco.

Looking at his resignation speech and transcripts from interviews with Frost, it becomes clear, Nixon was not a natural at the art of apologizing, if one can call it an art. Although his public apologies were, under the rosiest of evaluations, a day late and a dollar short, or, more realistically, non-existent, Nixon was determined not to exit the scene a loser. He worked diligently to reestablish himself as a significant contributor to U.S. policy. One way he kept his hat in the arena was by offering advice to other U.S. presidents when they solicited his help, and even when they did not. He wrote several books on international relations. His foreign affairs expertise continued to be a hot commodity in think tanks for many years after his time as president. He visited China as a civilian and returned in 1981 to lead the American delegation to Egypt.[86] Nixon employed a vast array of strategies in his campaign to mend his image. He put in the necessary time to regain his footing as an expert in foreign policy and diplomacy.

Talk is cheap. Actions speak louder than words. In the U.S., these idioms are repeated ad nauseam. If we believe the words we say, a written or spoken apology from Nixon suddenly seems of miniscule importance. Nixon's actions following his resignation were motivated by his desire to promote peace and see America succeed. These actions could have served as his apology. Nixon scholar Harry Jeffrey believes he succeeded in rebranding his legacy and affirms that he will be largely remembered for his foreign affairs expertise. Plenty of positive memories will forever be associated with Nixon: The end of the Vietnam War, China's "entry into the community of nations", and the desegregation of U.S. public

[86] Jeffrey, 16.

schools.[87] Jeffrey also posits that Nixon will be recognized as much for these feats as for trite sound bites such as "follow the money," "expletive deleted," and "What did the president know and when did he know it?"[88] In a way, it is fitting that Nixon never delivered an official apology because there is no official way for Americans to grant him forgiveness. The best form of forgiveness would be to evaluate his presidency on the whole, accomplishments and failures alike. One obvious reason a president may want to or feel pressure to apologize is approval. During the Watergate summer, Nixon's approval ratings dropped precipitously. Scandal can send politicians for a loop. Nixon was easily re-elected for his second term but forced out of office just 18 months later.[89] In January of 1973 he rode a wave of popularity that manifested itself in a 67 percent approval rating.[90] In early January of the following year that number was an emaciated 23 percent.[91] Despite Nixon's efforts to redirect the nation's attention to his strengths and the myriad other issues at hand, he could not escape the malaise of Watergate. Just days before he resigned in August of 1974, his approval rating was 24 percent.[92] It is possible that if he had delivered an apology at any time during this period, his numbers would never have dipped so low. However, it is more likely that there was a "point of no return," meaning, if Nixon had been forthcoming and apologized before a certain date he could have avoided resignation, but if the apology came after that date he would have been

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[87] Jeffrey, 16.
[88] Jeffrey, 13-21.
[89] Lang, 531.
[90] Gallup Poll (AIPO), Jan, 1973, Retrieved Apr-12-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.
[91] Gallup Poll, Jan, 1974, Retrieved Apr-12-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.
[92] Gallup Poll (AIPO), Aug, 1974, Retrieved Apr-12-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.

doomed to the same fate. Nixon, nor anyone else, had any way of guessing when that fulcrum point might have been, which is why apologizing is closer to an art than a science.

About 18 years have passed since Nixon's death. Now, there are no more chances for Nixon to apologize. However, there are neither due dates nor expiration dates on expressions of forgiveness. Were Americans too hard on Nixon while he was alive? He did after all resign from office. Why did that unprecedented action not count as a mea culpa? No one can even know for certain that the House would have impeached him or that the Senate would have turned an impeachment into his removal from office.[93] It makes the United States sound like a vindictive nation if the reason Nixon was disdained until his death was because he robbed Americans of the satisfaction of formally stripping him of his office. Over and over again, he was forced to eat crow. It was not enough to chase him out of office. It was not enough to punish his political compatriots, friends, and family for their ties to him.[94] It was not enough to smear his scandal all over pop culture (Famous bands, including James Brown and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young have incorporated it into their songs).[95] It was not enough to trace every future government scandal, perceived or real, back to Nixon by attaching "-gate" to its name, or coin "Nixonian" as a synonym for Machiavellian.[96] In these ways, our collective national thirst for revenge appeared insatiable while Nixon was alive.

Polls remain useful barometers for monitoring the climate of forgiveness. The story they tell is that American's have not completely forgiven Nixon yet. Not surprisingly, a 2006

[93] Jeffrey, 90.
[94] Ibid. 25.
[95] Ibid. 23.
[96] Ibid., 25, 166.

poll showed 65 percent of Americans disapprove of the way he handled his job as president.[97] A comparable percentage believes his actions during Watergate warranted his resignation.[98] Nevertheless, the future looks bright for his legacy. When Americans were asked in 2009 how Nixon will go down in history they were almost evenly split. Forty-seven percent said average or above. Only 48 percent had him at below average or poor. It is almost an even split.[99] Those numbers are surprisingly good for the man who, arguably, stirred up the greatest White House drama of all time. Gerald Ford was only capable of beginning a healing process that needed time.

Nixon has the benefit of leaving behind influential friends who can continue to walk us down the path of forgiveness. Several dignitaries, including the five living presidents at the time attended his funeral in 1994.[100] However, there were also some notable people missing from the throngs of mourners. Barry Goldwater and former attorney general William B. Saxbe boycotted the funeral.[101] Even with time, forgiveness is never guaranteed. Watergate was never mentioned by name during the service.[102] President Clinton delivered poignant remarks and sent a clear message: We are indebted to the man. Clinton made sure no one had forgotten Nixon's work on cancer research, environmental protection, and foreign policy. Clinton evoked memories of a Nixon who envisioned a strong America and worked hard to make that vision a reality. Clinton spoke positively of Nixon's fighting spirit: "He

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[97] Gallup Poll, Jun, 2006, Retrieved Apr-11-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.
[98] ABC News Poll
[99] Gallup/USA Today Poll, Jan, 2009, Retrieved Apr-11-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.
[100] Jeffrey, 139.
[101] Ibid. 161.
[102] Maureen Dowd, "THE 37th PRESIDENT: THE OVERVIEW; Nixon Buried on Note of Praise and Reconciliation." *The New York Times*, April 28, 1994, http://www.nytimes.com/1994/04/28/us/37th-president-overview-nixon-buried-note-praise-reconciliation.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm (accessed April 11, 2012).

would not allow America to quit the world."[103] Clinton presented Nixon in a positive, but not unrealistically rosy, light.

Clinton tipped his hat to Nixon for his persistence, acknowledging his struggle "working his way back into the arena he so loved."[104] He urged Americans to "remember President Nixon's life in totality. He essentially made a plea on Nixon's behalf to let go of Watergate "once and for all," as Nixon would have put it, when he said, "May the day of judging President Nixon on anything less than his entire life and career come to a close."[105] As Clinton delivered this advice, he was likely pondering his own life and legacy. While it would be another four years before Lewinsky-gate blew up, Clinton had already been through his share of scandal and knew what it was like to suffer publicly at the hands of political nemeses. It is not hard to imagine Clinton feeling more than an inkling of fellowship with the man he was eulogizing. He either hoped that some future president would offer a similar sentiment at his funeral, or that America would lower the bar for his own presidential performance, or that by the time he passes away the nation will have learned how to be more forgiving.

Of course, just because Clinton said favorable things like, "his entire country owes him a debt of gratitude" and "on behalf of a grateful nation," does not mean the entire nation actually felt this way.[106] However, it is reasonable to assume that his remarks represented sentiments of the nation at large. Additionally, his eulogy could have convinced some people who were still critical of Nixon at the time of his death to consider forgiveness. By the

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[103] William J. Clinton: "Remarks at the Funeral Service for President Richard Nixon in Yorba Linda, California," April 27, 1994. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb/edu/ws/?pid-50052. Hereafter cited as Clinton, Remarks.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.

conclusion of his funeral service, Nixon had been pardoned by not one but two presidents. Clinton had the easier task of pardoning him posthumously, which attracted far less controversy than Ford's pardon, which came on the heels of Nixon's resignation.

There is more good news for Nixon's legacy. As everyone knows, good things take time. Americans are a nostalgic people who look back on history through a forgiving lens. We have a tendency to glorify our past leaders. Like a good wine, fondness for a former president improves with time. Think of how George Washington, Mr. "I cannot tell a lie" was turned into an almost godlike hero. The same thing goes for the beloved and multi-monikered Honest Abe, The Great Emancipator, The Liberator, Uncle Abe. Dead presidents have monuments built in their name. Look at the National Mall and Mount Rushmore. In our capitalist society, perhaps the ultimate homage to a former president is to put his face on U.S. currency. The more time that passes, the greater our appreciation for these figures becomes. The message is clear: Time heals all wounds. We are a forgiving nation.

Furthermore, we are capable of looking at the big picture. While it is easy to take a myopic view of the Nixon presidency and judge him on Watergate alone, Americans do not operate on this simplistic mindset. When asked which holds more historical importance, lessons from Watergate or Nixon opening up communications with China, only 21 percent said Watergate.[107] Close to two thirds of those polled in 2002 believed Ford made the right decision in pardoning Nixon.[108] This is for a president who, by most accounts, never completely owned up to his Watergate role or gave a legitimate apology. This suggests that, when it comes to a president's legacy, a proper apology is not a necessary element to being

[107] Fox News/Opinion Dynamics Poll, Jun, 2002, Retrieved Apr-11-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.
[108] ABC News Poll

seen in a favorable light. However, presidents are caught up in each other's shadows. We have no one to compare them to except their predecessors. A poll taken in the mid '70s put Nixon in a tie with President Warren G. Harding, known for the Teapot Dome scandal, as the worst president in the nation's history.[109] In 2000, polled Americans ranked him the worst president out of all the post World War II presidents.[110] Nixon will not be hated and vilified until the end of time but he will always serve as a benchmark regarding immoral presidential behavior.

There is an undeniable evolutionary aspect to all of this. Presidents learn (or fail to learn) from their predecessors' mistakes and how they dealt with them. Each mistake they make alters, either slightly or drastically, the political landscape, character of the media, and collective mindset of the American people. Myriad variables shape a president's image over time. The great unknown is what future presidents will do. It is only natural for the mistakes made by all of Nixon's successors to force us to rethink our view of Nixon. Maybe the next president of the United States will mess up in such a grand fashion he will make Watergate look like a minor faux pas. Disregard their stump speeches - the only thing every new president is sure to contribute to the office is a new mistake (or several). To err is human. This truism, proven time and time again, has produced a citizenry with a healthy skepticism regarding politics. Forty-six percent of Americans in 1999 were able to say that Watergate was "just politics – the kind of thing both parties engage in."[111] In other words, Watergate was not out of the ordinary. This strengthens the case that Nixon never needed to make a

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[109] Jeffrey, 24.
[110] Gallup Poll, Feb, 2000, Retrieved Apr-11-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.
[111] Gallup Poll, Aug, 1999, Retrieved Apr-11-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.

grand apology.

Nixon scholar Thomas Johnson contends that Nixon "did rehabilitate himself in the sense that he gained acceptance and restored esteem for his accomplishments among journalists and the political elite."[112] The general public's animosity has also faded over the years. That being said, Watergate will never be forgotten. Only half of the expression "forgive and forget" is realistic for Richard Nixon. Nixon's final effort to solidify a favorable place in history is the phrase on his tombstone: "The greatest honor history can bestow is the title of peacemaker."[113] Nixon wanted to be remembered not as someone who inflicted wounds, but rather someone who healed them. The epitaph encourages America to make peace with Watergate. With Richard Nixon laid to rest, can the same be said for Watergate? Not quite. "One year of Watergate is enough," Nixon said, inaccurately, in his 1974 State of the Union Address.[114] The truth is, it will always remain a part of this nation's collective memory. However, like all memories, Watergate has and will continue to soften over time. The lesson of Watergate then, is that an apology is not required from a president who erred in order for him to be granted significant forgiveness. Time - not an apology – is most crucial to the process of forgiveness.

[112] Jeffrey, 139.
[113] Dowd
[114] Nixon, State of The Union.

Chapter 2: Clinton: An Apology For What?

In 1995, the White House hired several interns for the summer, as per usual. Only one of them would stir up a national drama that exploded in the public eye in 1998. Monica Lewinsky was this intern. During the federal government shutdown of '95, President Clinton had his first "inappropriate encounter" with Ms. Lewinsky.[115] They repeated similar behaviors on several occasions between November and April of that year, until she was transferred to a job at the Pentagon.[116] Their sexual encounters didn't become public until 1998. The American public absorbed countless sensational headlines as Clinton's sex life was put on full display and impeachment charges loomed large. On February 12, 1998, the Senate acquitted Clinton on articles of impeachment. The perjury charge failed to pass by 22 votes. Obstruction of justice came up 17 votes short.[117] Clinton had to fight two battles simultaneously to salvage his dignity. One was in the formal arena; the other, in the public eye.

The set of media outlets that exposed and covered Lewinsky-gate was different from the media landscape that existed during any previous presidency. Tabloids and talk show hosts, and internet gossip websites engulfed the scandal. The "new media" differs from the old school of media by letting more varied contributors shape the news. For instance, an internet blog lets anyone with access to a computer the chance to offer their two cents. An interested talk-radio fan can call in and broadcast his or her views regardless of expertise on the issue. The new news formats cater to highly opinionated Average Joes. The modern

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[115] Bill Clinton, *My Clinton* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 773.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid. 845.

president's missteps will not be reported by the traditional media elite and consumed by the average citizen. They will be defined by a hybrid of traditional sources and the average citizens themselves. The audience members have been given audiences of their own. Therefore, how a president's apology is judged is more in the people's control than ever before.

This "new media," as Diana Owen calls it, has a talent for transforming political matters into entertainment.[118] As such, they framed Clinton's problem as a sex scandal. This earned the TV ratings, the internet hits, the tabloid swipes at the checkout counter. Owen accuses the media of trivializing the situation by boiling it down to sex. Comparatively few Americans paid any sort of attention to the actual impeachment trial – a not so steamy, C-SPAN event. Given the media's coverage Lewinsky-gate, most people categorized it as a sex scandal instead of a significant political event.[119] Its importance was diluted by treating it like any other TV soap opera. The case could be made that the new media made Clinton's mistakes look smaller and more trivial than they were.

Clinton's press secretary, Mike McCurry, benefited from being able to discredit claims against the president when they came from tabloids because they are seen as less credible than other news sources. It is easier to brush off their allegations because they are not considered serious journalism. The relationship between Clinton and the tabloids was somewhat symbiotic. Clinton's team was able to downplay the importance of their negative claims and the tabloids were able to build their credibility by covering the political arena. Clinton's scandal elevated the status of tabloids on the journalism totem pole, if only for a

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[118] Diana Owen, "Popular Politics and the Clinton/Lewinsky Affair: The Implications For Leadership," *Political Psychology* 21, no. 1 (March 2000): 162, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3792069 (accessed April 13, 2012).
[119] Ibid. 162.

short time. They gained unprecedented clout when their attention grabbing stories served as sources for several "legitimate" news publications including *The Washington Post*.[120]

Talk radio is another member of Owen's new media. Talk radio was not around to ridicule the Bay of Pigs invasion in Kennedy's day. It was a major source of news and entertainment by the time Clinton was knee deep in lies. Those who listened to talk radio, Rush Limbaugh listeners in particular, had negative attitudes toward Clinton during this time.[121] The good news for Clinton was that American's were getting their news, or more accurately, entertainment, from a bevy of sources. Some, like Larry King viewers and *People* magazine readers, had a more favorable view of the president.[122] People's attitudes toward the president are due in part to the media outlets they look to. Because the public realized that the issue was being exploited for its sensational appeal, they found it easier to separate the personal from the political in Clinton's case.[123]

Clinton navigated the new media with skill. He was not a Nixon, declaring war on the press. He recognized media as a powerful force. Acknowledging the power of the press is a form of respect. When asked whether the Lewinsky story would overshadow Clinton's 1998 State of the Union address, he tactfully responded, "Well, I hope not. But you guys will have to make that decision. The press will make that decision."[124]

Clinton's apology was multi-fold and accepted by most people either immediately or in just a few years. But before he got to apologizing, he played an impressive game of cat and mouse with the accusations. His modus operandi, not unlike several of the men who had the

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[120] Owen, 164.
[121] Ibid. 174.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid. 175.
[124] William J. Clinton: "Excerpt of a Telephone Interview With Morton Kondracke and Ed Henry of Roll Call," Clinton, January 21, 1998, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/we/?pid=56091. Hereafter cited as Clinton, Excerpt.

job before him, was to dodge, twist, and deny wrongdoing. Clinton's most powerful tool for fixing his situation once the allegations started flying was his use of a spokesperson. Unlike Nixon, who spoke for himself far too much for his own good, Slick Willie, as he was called, addressed the nation himself when he needed to but relied on press secretaries when he could. The beauty of a press secretary is that he can claim ignorance in many situations where the president cannot. The press secretary role was pivotal in how the Lewinsky case played out. "McCurry had not asked the president himself if he had been banging the intern. That was not his role; he was not a reporter or an investigator. His job was to repeat whatever facts or assertions the lawyers had approved for public consumption."[125] Whether the press secretary's duty is to keep the nation informed or to protect the president can be debated, but McCurry did a better job at the latter.

The modern White House press secretary must balance telling truth telling and promoting transparency with protecting the president. These responsibilities sometimes contradict each other. The press secretary does not consider it part of his job to pry into the president's life and learn everything the president knows, has ever done or thought about. Nor is it his job to guess at these things. For instance, when Clinton stated that he did not have an improper relationship with his former intern, Monica Lewinsky, the press obviously had several follow up questions about his ambiguous phrasing. McCurry told reporters at the press briefing, "I'm not going to parse the statement."[126] He created distance between himself and the president. "I did not write the statement," McCurry could honestly say. Clinton was

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[125] Howard Kurtz, *Spin Cycle: How the White House and the Media Manipulate the News* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), x.

[126] William J. Clinton: "Press Briefing by Mike McCurry," Clinton, January 21, 1998, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=48182. Hereafter cited as Clinton, Press Briefing.

in control of the information floodgates. He could share with McCurry anything he wanted the media to know so it would reach the public. Information Clinton did not disseminated he would deliberately not share with McCurry. McCurry kept some questions at bay by making it clear to reporters his personal views did not count.[127]

Ambiguity is of paramount importance when attempting a cover-up. McCurry's refusal to clarify the president's statements frustrated his reporter audience. And, as Clinton was well aware, the tendency is to want to kill the messenger; not the man who supplied him with the message. McCurry was an especially stalwart shield who never gave way to reporters' incessant demands. Amidst their firestorm of questions he could appear cool and aloof, but that is a far better alternative to appearing flustered. "You can stand here and ask a lot of questions over and over again," he told them frankly, but they were going to "elicit the exact same answer" every time.[128] At times, he stonewalled them. The spokesman role is like that of an attack dog. The president could never get away with being that feisty. Engaging in the kind of back-and-forth snappy dialogue press secretaries do would be deemed highly un-presidential. While McCurry was required to do plenty of talking because of the sheer number of questions hurled at him once the Lewinsky matter burst onto the scene, his appreciation of the less is more approach to rhetoric should be noted. "I think that speaks for itself," was one of his favorite lines. He wanted to avoid talking himself into a grave (and taking the president with him) at all costs.

Another tactic he used was speeding their questioning along. He could expediently brush off attacking questions. He could also take on a tone of arrogance and condescension that the president could never get away with. "Look . . ." he repeatedly began his answers,

[127] Clinton, Press Briefing.
[128] Ibid.

talking down to questioners. “The President has made it clear,” he would continue, tiredly. McCurry had plenty of rhetorical tricks up his sleeve. Saying repeatedly that you have made things clear does not make it true. The American people are probably better judges of that. The brush off tactic and the minimizing tactic are kissing cousins. When McCurry was asked on January 21, 1998 if the president was prepared to cooperate with an impeachment investigation, he told the interrogator: “There’s no reason that I know of to think that we’ll be dealing with something like that.”[129] This was either poor forecasting or expert minimizing. Placing the Lewinsky story in a global context made it look smaller: “Sometimes foreign countries look at the American political system and incidents like this and do not really understand why we do this to ourselves.”[130] Some people found it easier to forgive Clinton knowing it would never make the front page in most foreign countries.

McCurry played the part of the president’s shield, attack dog, and his biggest fan: “I speak for Bill Clinton, the world leader,” he told reporters, showing allegiance and deference to the president. This quote perfectly demonstrates how having other people speak for you allows you to stay up on a pedestal. A spokesperson has the effect of elevating the status of the president. It sends the message: The president is an important and busy man. He has no time for these ridiculous questions. McCurry once told the press briefing crowd, “Look, it’s been five years and there have been distractions of various types from time to time, and the President keeps on working on what he was elected to work on.”[131] It is not presidential, apparently, to pay attention to allegations like the ones made against Clinton. Rather, keeping a busy schedule and maintaining focus on work is proper presidential behavior. Appearances

[129] Clinton, Press Briefing.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Clinton, Press Briefing.

are often more important that the truth of the matter. Clinton appearing busy and unperturbed by allegation during this time was a crucial part of Americans seeing him in a positive light. After his 1999 State of the Union Address, which proposed a list of new initiatives, he had his highest ever job approval rating.[132] People like a president with a full plate. Counter intuitively, Americans unofficially require presidents to deny wrongdoing before fessing up to it. Answering all our questions and putting each and every allegation to rest as soon as it pops up is beneath what people expect of their president. He should be too busy with other matters to care about what reporters stir up and people gossip about.

However, the public only wants this to an extent. Nixon demonstrated how this approach can be taken too far. Publicly portraying a strong desire to "focus on the work at hand" as Clinton told interlocutors, did not work for Nixon. Americans do not care strongly about what other important work there is to be done if they believe their president is lying to them about an issue of national importance. The difference between Clinton and Nixon is that Americans were not sure how wide and deep Watergate went, but they were fairly certain that Lewinsky-gate was a simple sex-scandal issue.

McCurry shielded the president impressively, but the real verbal gymnastics came from Bill Clinton himself. Clinton had to answer Lewinsky related questions on PBS's "News Hour" with Jim Lehrer on January 21 1998. The claim: Clinton encouraged Lewinsky to commit perjury by asking her to lie about an affair they had. Clinton renamed what Lehrer wanted to label an affair as an improper relationship. The phraseology was designed to confuse his audience like smoke and mirrors. Clinton, armed with the power of the title of leader of the free world, was able to speak down to Lehrer a bit: "Well, I think you know

[132] Clinton, 844.

what [no improper relationship] means. It means that there is not a sexual relationship, an improper sexual relationship, or any other kind of improper relationship." His answer was not straightforward; he appears to have used "improper sexual relationship" as a qualifier for the first part of the sentence. Lehrer pressed: "You had no sexual relationship with this young woman?" Clinton slickly responded by changing tense: "There *is* not a sexual relationship – that is accurate" (emphasis my own).[133] Clinton would later use his memoirs to apologize for the trickery he used in this response.[134] The ignorance card is usually played by spokespeople but Clinton tried it out as well: "Look, you know as much about this as I do right now," he told Jim Lehrer. It was obviously not true, but this was one instance where it was preferable for the president to look like an out-of-the-loop know-nothing than an in-the know scumbag.

Just as McCurry did an expert job delegitimizing allegations, so did Clinton. He told Lehrer: "My experience has been, unfortunately, sometimes when one charge dies, another one just lifts up to take its place."[135] The idea that people will always be out to get the president is true – it just happened to not be the whole truth this time. Clinton and McCurry employed identical language in telling the press that things were "very clear." Clinton was also purposefully vague when he wanted to be. Declaring the allegations are not true, for instance, makes him sound sure of himself, but does not specify which allegations were not untrue. The blanket denouncement was inadequate because several different allegations were flying around at any given point. Another method that confuses an audience is speaking in negatives. This is why Clinton, when asked to describe the nature of his relationship with Ms.

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[133] William J. Clinton: "Interview With Jim Lehrer of the PBS "News Hour"," Clinton, January 21, 1998, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency/ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=56080. Hereafter cited as Clinton, Interview.
[134] Clinton, 775.
[135] Clinton, Interview.

Lewinsky, said, "I think it's important for me to make it clear what it is not. And then, at the appropriate time, I'll try to answer what it is."[136] He got away with completely reframing the question.

Clinton was just as good as McCurry in hurrying up his questioners: "I cannot just ignore the fact that every day that passes is one more day that I don't have to do what I came here to do. And I think the results that America has enjoyed indicates that's a pretty good argument for doing what I came here to do," he told Lehrer.[137] It is almost as if he was holding America's prosperity over everyone's head. Giving off the impression that he was an extremely busy man he tried to make Americans believe that it was unfortunate for energy devoted to this petty nonsense to be diverted away from meaningful issues. Clinton spun all the negative attention by telling Lehrer, "You know, it made a lot of people mad when I got elected president. And the better the country does, it seems like the madder some of them get."[138] As if to say, people always try to bring down the successful, and he has been very successful. He delegitimizes his accusers by saying, some people are just jealous. Nixon also hinted at his problems being symptoms of partisanship and the unfortunate result of people being out to get him. Despite Slick Willy's skill at deception or telling half truths or finding loopholes – whatever one calls it – even he could only do so much of it before succumbing to flat out lying. Telling Ed Henry, "the relationship was not sexual," for instance, was a flat out lie.

Eventually, Clinton moved past his drawn-out denying stage and entered the apology zone. On August 17, 1998 Clinton delivered what could be called his apology speech. In this

[136] Clinton, Excerpt.
[137] Clinton, Interview.
[138] Ibid.

brief address, he candidly explained his actions and his regret for those actions. Acknowledging the tough times he had put people through, he urged the nation to heal. His apology could be criticized because he highlights the difference between what is legal and what is moral: "While my answers were legally accurate, I did not volunteer information" he says of his testimony.[139] A more genuine apology would have omitted the legal safety net aspect. He goes on to say, "At no time did I ask anyone to lie, to hide or destroy evidence, or to take any other unlawful action."[140] The appearance of the legality of his actions was one of his major concerns. This line is also reminiscent of Watergate. Clinton wanted to distance himself from a Watergate-like situation as much as possible. Clinton continues his speech saying, "I misled people."[141] "I lied" would have been a more powerful statement because Americans want a president who refrains from lying and misleading. Clinton gives several explanations for why he lied about the affair, but offers no explanation for the affair itself.

Half way through the apology speech he transitions from explaining what he had done and why to asking Americans to let go of their obsession with the story. "This has gone on too long," he says. At this point, he personalizes the issue and works his faith into the story by telling his audience," Now this matter is between me, the two people I love most, my wife and our daughter, and our God." Incorporating God was a smart way to gain sympathy. "Even presidents have private lives," he reminds the country.[142] But, is this true? Many people would argue against it. He delivers a few more lines about how private life is delineated from public life and closes with a request: "And so, tonight I ask you to turn away

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[139] William J. Clinton: "Address to the Nation on Testimony Before the Independent Counsel's Grand Jury," August 17, 1998, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb/edu/ws/?pid=54794. Hereafter cited as Clinton, August 17.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Clinton, August 17.

from the spectacle of the past seven months, to repair the fabric of our national discourse, and to return our attention to all the challenges and all the promise of the next American century."[143] Presidents are often entrusted with the task of repairing or healing the nation. A legitimate question some people might have had was whether Clinton could heal the nation he had hurt or if it was a more fitting job for a successor. For instance, when Nixon hurt the nation, he left Ford with the task of healing it. The perfectly crafted speech follows a logical order, beginning by looking back at what he had done, followed by what he and his family needed at the present, and closing with a look forward into "the next American century."[144] The speech itself was short, but the apology, as all presidential apologies tend to be, is never-ending. He will always be asked about this chapter of his life and always have to offer some apologetic remarks when it is brought up.

The fact that he gave a real apology speech sets him apart from Nixon, but Clinton vacillated back and forth between apologizing and attacking. He could not afford to simply apologize and prepare to be treated like a villain: Impeachment loomed on the horizon. So, he had to keep his guard up against his attackers. Clinton was serious about keeping impeachment at bay by creating separation between what he did and what Nixon had done. On September 11, 1998 he let his lawyer, David Kendall, loose so he could harp on the several distinctions. Again, this was an effective use of letting other people speak on his behalf. "This is not a news story," Kendall told America, finally putting a foot down after the media's long and exciting field day with Lewinsky-gate.[145] "The President has acknowledged

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[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] William J. Clinton: "Press Briefing by Mr. David Kendall and Mr. Charles Ruff," September 11, 1998, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=48375.

his personal wrongdoing," he tells us just in case there was any confusion about whether or not Clinton had taken responsibility and apologized.[146] "In short, this is personal and not impeachable," stated Kendall.[147] This was a clearly not a Watergate Part II. He reiterated Clinton's claim that he never asked anyone to lie – again, a big difference from Watergate, a scandal Americans saw as a grandiose web of lies to cover up wrongdoing by many people. "The president did not commit perjury, he did not obstruct justice, he did not tamper with witnesses, and he did not abuse the power of his office."[148] After letting the media control the people's opinions for so long, it was time for Clinton's representatives to tell his side and snap the country out of sensationalism and back to reality. Clinton, who enjoyed a positive relationship with the media, put Kendall in front of the microphone to put them in their place. He condemns the way they have pried into the president's private life, saying it "exeed[ed] any legitimate justification."[149] Essentially, there is a difference between exposing the truth and digging for thrilling details.

Details, thrilling and mundane, would come out in the months and years ahead. Clinton himself provided a voluminous source of details in what could be called the sequel to his apology – his book. Memoirs are yet another medium for the Presidential apology. These personal writings can tell the president's side of the story in his own words and are generally popular sellers. Clinton reached a large audience with his book, but most Americans, 61 percent, saw the book as "an attempt to make himself look better and settle some scores with

[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.

his political opponents."[150] It sounds like by the time *My Life* was published in 2004, Americans were no longer looking for an honest apology from him, and those who were knew that, realistically, his book was not going to be their source. Nevertheless, the book offers great insight into the mind of the former president.

"When 1998 began, I had no idea it would be the strangest year of my presidency, full of personal humiliation and disgrace . . . and, against all odds, a stunning demonstration of the common sense and fundamental decency of the American people."[151] This is how he primes his readers for the Lewinsky-gate portion of his presidency. He is grateful to his pardoners, the American public. Playing the victim and thanking Americans who saw the ordeal play out is smart. He presumes their forgiveness, which may have the psychological effect on his audience of believing that they truly have forgiven him: "My best Christmas present that year were the expressions of kindness and support from ordinary citizens."[152] As the saying goes, you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. So, although he could have shown anger at the public for encouraging the media's feeding frenzy on his personal life, he expresses his gratitude to the people who stood by him and gave him strength. He realizes that in presidential scandal, the American citizenry as a whole serves as judge and jury. The book is full of psychological tricks. "The darkest part of my life was in full view," he says.[153] By saying we witnessed and saw the entire episode of his worst moments, he forces us to believe that if we could tolerate him at his worst we should think pretty highly of him as a president. He tells us that this episode was the worst – rock bottom. This statement

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[150] Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll, Jun, 2004, Retrieved Apr-13-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.
[151] Clinton, 771.
[152] Ibid. 833.
[153] Ibid. 771.

impedes us from speculating that there was any worse part of his presidency. It is a good strategy for protecting a legacy.

He also used the book as a medium for attacking his attackers. Independent Counsel, Kenneth Starr, got a lashing. Clinton describes Starr as "thin-skinned" and "willing to use the power of his office against anyone who criticized him."[154] Clinton was able to go on the offensive because he knew most Americans were on his side on this matter. Even early on in the investigation, February of 1998, only 26 percent of Americans thought Starr "was conducting an impartial inquiry."[155] Their feelings appeared justified when Sam Dash, Starr's ethics advisor, resigned that November.

The juxtaposition of Starr and Clinton is an effective tool. Clinton makes it clear: His apology is for the American people, not his attackers; not Kenneth Starr. This is clear in the tone he takes in the following passage:

> Now Starr was willing to put all that at risk – to investigate not espionage, or Watergate-like abuses of the FBI, or Iran-Contra-like willful defiance of the law, but whether I had given false answers and encouraged Monica Lewinsky to do the same in response to questions asked in bad faith, in a case that had been thrown out of court because it had no merit in the first place."[156]

This fits into the "What I did was not that bad!" theme of the apology

He revisits his testimony in the memoirs too and expresses regret: "I believed every word I said, but my anger had not worn off enough for me to be as contrite as I should have been."[157] Seven out of ten Americans saw or heard at least some of his testimony.[158] After being assaulted with questions from Starr's lawyers all day, he had less than four hours to

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[154] Ibid. 779.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid. 796.
[157] Clinton, 803.
[158] Renshon, Stanley A. "'The Polls': The Public's Response to the Clinton Scandals, Part 1, Inconsistent Theories, Contradictory Evidence," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (March 2002): 181, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27552372?origin=JSTOR pdf (accessed April 13, 2012).

recover before delivering his apology speech.[159] The speech came off well partly because of the tough questioning he had endured just prior. In a poll taken immediately after his testimony people regarded the proceedings as prying and unnecessary. An overwhelming majority, 80 percent, believed that the investigation had not been worth all the trouble it had caused.[160] Those who heard him being forced to answer uncomfortable questions about matters they regarded as private in a very public setting agreed that Clinton was also a kind of victim. The way his memoirs tell the story, his own staff felt more outrage at Starr for going after Clinton than Clinton himself. Bob Rubin, Secretary of the Treasury, told him: "There's no question you screwed up. But we all make mistakes, even big ones. In my opinion, the bigger issue is the disproportion of the media coverage and the hypocrisy of some of your critics."[161] Hence, going after Starr in his memoirs had no risk. Defaming Starr's reputation could only improve Clinton's.

For some readers, *My Life*, exposed a world of D.C. politicking they did not know existed. It is full of dirty tricks and people who wish for your failure. Even though the nation as a whole was not leaning towards impeachment, the Republicans, who controlled Congress at the time, were going to try anyway: "Because we can," explained Newt Gingrich.[162] By pointing out the numerous things working against him, Clinton's memoirs have the effect of making his apologies seem superfluous, almost as if he went above and beyond what was required of him as a president who made a mistake. "I almost wound up being grateful to my tormentors:" he tells readers, "they were probably the only people who could have made me

[159] Clinton, 802.
[160] Renshon, 181.
[161] Clinton, 810.
[162] Ibid. 824.

look good to Hillary again."[163] He believed that his personal flaws were less of a threat to the stability of the government than the viciousness of his political nemeses. Lines like this one drove home the Clinton as victim theme, proving Nixon was not the only president who could use the claim to his advantage. It was an effective strategy for them both.

Clinton's memoirs delivered what Americans craved – a peek into his home life.

> "I stonewalled, denying what had happened to everyone: Hillary, Chelsea, my staff and cabinet, my friends in Congress, members of the press, and the American people. What I regret the most, other than my conduct, is having misled all of them. Since 1991 I had been called a liar about everything under the sun, when in fact I had been honest in my public Life, and financial affairs, as all the investigations would show. I was embarrassed and wanted to keep it from my wife and daughter. I did not want to help Ken Starr criminalize my personal life, and I did not want the American people to know I'd let them down. It was like living in a nightmare"[164]

By being candid about his emotions of embarrassment and torment during the ordeal he humanizes himself and gives Americans gratification that he was indeed hurt by all of this. He talks about the agony of letting down his daughter, an emotion any parent can relate to. He is completely human and vulnerable in the eyes of his readers who get the sense that he lied to the public because he wanted to protect his loved ones, Hillary and Chelsea in particular, by keeping it under wraps. Everyone can empathize with this motive. Being privy to the president's motives for wrongdoing helps the public forgive him. Part of why Nixon's forgiveness process was so drawn-out was that he let details of Watergate escape at a glacial pace. America had to wait until 1977 for the Frost-Nixon interviews and another year for his memoirs to come out.

Clinton's apology also had religious tones. He repented to God and shared this spiritual element of his apology and rehabilitation with readers of his memoirs. He asked

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[163] Clinton, 846.
[164] Ibid. 775.

three pastors to counsel him, read scripture with him, talk with him, and pray with him at least once a month.[165] "Even though they were often tough on me, the pastors took me past the politics into soul-searching and the power of God's love," he explained in *My Life*.[166] His spiritual penance played out publicly at the time, for Clinton was known as a religious president. He famously announced at his 1998 annual breakfast with religious leaders, "I have sinned."[167] As opposed to Nixon, who was stingy with apologies, Clinton was as generous as they come, rarely missing an opportunity to speak of regret and ask for forgiveness.

It is easier to accept someone's apology when you feel they have learned their lesson. This is not synonymous with punishment. One poll revealed 64 percent of Americans in 2000 believed impeachment was punishment enough and the matter should have been dropped after that.[168] So, yes, punishment is an important element of the presidential apology, but it does not have to be a huge ordeal. Many would probably characterize Clinton's actual punishment a slap on the wrist. The effect on him was not profoundly devastating. The unofficial punishment of public shame and humiliation affected him far more seriously. But, it is not the people's intent to hold this shame over a former president's head forever. America might seem cruel in the heat of the moment, but the passions of the people cool over time. Eventually, we all just want to move on.

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[165] Clinton, 810.
[166] Ibid. 811.
[167] Ibid. 810.
[168] CBS News Poll, Aug, 2000, Retrieved Apr-13-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.

By 2000, over two thirds of the country was begging for us all to move on and end the matter completely.[169] Going beyond forgiveness and neutrality, a portion of the public (36 percent) had a favorable enough view of him in 2008 to like the idea that if Hillary won the presidential election it would mean Bill Clinton would be back in the White House.[170] In fact, faced with the hypothetical situation of a run-off between Hillary and Bill for president in 2008, 36 percent would have voted for Bill over Hillary, a candidate who came close to winning her party's nomination.[171] Overall, we prefer Bill to his wife even though she has never been accused of extramarital affairs or lying under oath or impeached. It is remarkable. There is something to be said for Slick Willy's knack for twisting situations to work in his favor and winning people's support.

The apologies have continued to flow from Clinton's lips, making him more and more likable as the years roll on. A 2000 public opinion poll showed the nation was split over whether or not Clinton should have been charged with a crime and put on trial after leaving office given that he intentionally gave false testimony regarding his relationship with Monica Lewinsky. A slight majority, 51 percent, was against bringing him up on charges.[172] In 2001, 57 percent gave a flat out no to the question of whether or not he should be indicted.[173]

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[169] Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll, Aug, 2000, Retrieved Apr-13-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.

[170] Princeton Survey Research Associates International/Newsweek Poll, Apr, 2008, Retrieved Apr-13-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.

[171] FOX News/Opinion Dynamics Poll, Mar, 2008, Retrieved Apr-13-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.

[172] ABC News/Washington Post Poll, Aug, 2000, Retrieved Apr-13-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.

[173] Fox News/Opinion Dynamics Poll, Jan, 2001, Retrieved Apr-13-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html. Hereafter cited as Fox News.

Clinton explained, "I tried to walk a fine line between acting lawfully and testifying falsely, but I now recognize that I did not fully accomplish this goal and that certain of my responses to questions about Ms. Lewinsky were false."[174] Sixty-seven percent of Americans interpreted this statement as an admission of lying.[175] Thus, it is another apology of sorts.

According to a 2012 poll 88 percent of Americans believe Clinton will go down in history as an average, above average, or outstanding president.[176] Only 12 percent of those polled said he would be regarded as a below average or poor president.[177] The only president who outranked Clinton in the outstanding category, 69 to 60 percentage points, was Ronald Reagan.[178] When asked to think about his biggest failures, the American people will put his affair and "setting the wrong moral tone for the country" at the top of the list.[179] But while this particularly memorable negative tops the charts when it comes to mistakes, it does not mean that it overshadows his success as president. By 2003, only 26 percent of respondents said they were still bothered by the Lewinsky controversy of late '90s. Forty-eight percent said they were never really bothered even at the time it was going on.[180] In hindsight, the public's ambivalence should have been easy to see. Ten days after Lewinsky story broke his approval rating actually rose slightly to 72 percent.[181] News about Lewinsky-gate was more sensational than hard hitting, the kind of news that can make the present a living nightmare

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[174] Fox News.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Gallup Poll, Feb, 2012, Retrieved Apr-13-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.
[179] NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll, Dec, 2000, Retrieved Apr-13-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.
[180] Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll, Jun, 2003, Retrieved Apr-13-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.
[181] Clinton, 778.

for a president but lacks the power to destroy his reputation in the long run. The nation was not as torn apart by the matter as they had been during other periods of presidential trouble.

Many factors contributed to the easy forgiveness the country offered Clinton: The nature of his mistake, the ferociousness of his attackers, the prosperity of the nation under his leadership, and the thoroughness and his apology. Not to mention his persuasiveness. Additionally, Clinton knew how to stay cool, calm, and collected under pressure. This was a man who kept a rock that Neil Armstrong had brought back from the moon on the Oval Office coffee table. "You see that rock?" he would ask people when discussions got heated. "It's 3.6 billion years old. We're all just passing through. Let's calm down and get back to work."[182] He knew how to keep things in perspective. When he apologized for Lewinsky-gate, he hoped the American people would know how to do the same. The most appealing element of the apology he offers in his memoirs is vulnerability. He lets down his guard and allows himself to be at the complete mercy of America: "Do I have regrets? Sure, both private and public ones, as I've discussed in this book. I leave it to others to judge how to balance the scales."[183] He empowers Americans with the right to judge his legacy as they see fit.

[182] Clinton, 952.
[183] Ibid. 95.

Conclusion: Time Heals All Wounds

One reporter asked Clinton's lawyer, David Kendall: "You say that, 'if answers are truthful or literally truthful, but misleading, there is not perjury as a matter of law, no matter how misleading the testimony is or is intended to be.' I wonder if a president ought not be held to a higher standard in your estimation?"[184] If people started expecting more candor from the head of the Executive Branch their desire for transparency could prevent future presidents from committing the type of errors Clinton and Nixon made. Conversely, it could have the effect of only making presidents more vulnerable to being vilified in the media once they do make mistakes. Either way, there is no consensus that Americans demand more honesty from the president as time passes. In fact, the reverse may be true.

Clinton *did* have an inappropriate relationship with "that woman" and he lied about it repeatedly. He lied under oath and obstructed justice. Would we tolerate this type of behavior from a loved one, a boss, or a leader in any other industry? There is something special about the Office of the President that makes us bend the rules and change our expectations. We are so in love with the power of the office that we are reticent to take it away from an individual without strong reasons for doing so. If questioning a president's integrity was ever a reason for removal from office, those days are gone. Watergate opened up the floodgates for presidential misbehavior, making everything that might have been invisible during previous presidencies hyper-visible from Nixon until now. The public, having been exposed to many instances of presidential wrongdoing, has grown slightly jaded. Now, there is a part in every American that expects the worst. Thanks to the events that played out in the 1970s, we now

[184] William J. Clinton: "Press Briefing by Mr. David Kendall and Mr. Charles Ruff," September 11, 1998, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=48375.

have a less idealized and more realistic view of presidents. A 1998 poll confirms "the public has become more realistic and accepts that political leaders should be judged on job performance, not on personal life," with 65 percent agreeing with that statement.[185] Contemporary and future presidents have Nixon to thank for that.

Clinton wrote in *My Life*, "I believed my personal flaws, no matter how deep, were far less threatening to our democratic government than the power lust of my accusers."[186] Playing the victim is probably an effective strategy in most presidential apology situations. It closely aligns with the "What I did really was not that bad!" theme. Americans in 1998 went along with this theme: Eighty-five percent agreed that "other presidents [besides Clinton] have had equally bad private lives."[187] When Nixon made the claim that other presidents had done similar things with their power, America did not believe him. It took time for people to adopt the belief that politics is a dirty world. During the Eisenhower years, 75 percent of Americans thought the federal government could be trusted to so the right thing "just about always" or "most of the time."[188] By 1998, the same percentage believed the opposite – the government could not be trusted to do the right thing.[189] From the mid-twentieth century until now the U.S. has transformed into a nation of skeptics. Instead of having exorbitantly high hopes and being let down time after time, Americans have opted to lower the bar for presidents. What other explanation could there be for why we supported Clinton even when half of the population believed the country was "seriously off on the wrong track" in January

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[185] Stanley A. Renshon, "'The Polls': The Public's Response to the Clinton Scandals, Part 1, Inconsistent Theories, Contradictory Evidence," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (March 2002): 173, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27552372?origin=JSTOR pdf (accessed April 13, 2012).
[186] Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 847.
[187] Renshon, 176.
[188] Ibid. 177.
[189] Ibid.

1998?[190] One can extrapolate from the Nixon-Clinton comparison that expectations for presidents are not what they once were.

Americans are capable of distinguishing between personal shortcomings and professional ones. In Nixon's case, the public felt his dishonesty bled into his job performance. Nixon believed, and tried to convince the electorate, that he was doing a good job as president. He was the one looking forward to getting on with his job. The American people dwelled on the matter and decided they did not want him to continue carrying out his duties. They worried about the state of the union with Nixon at the helm. These fears were absent from Clinton's presidency even during the Lewinsky excitement. A key to success in surviving political controversy is to make the distinction between performance and ethics. In this department, Clinton achieved the success that eluded Nixon.

Part of why Americans treated Clinton less harshly than Nixon was because Clinton's foibles did not come as a complete shock. When the secret life of Nixon was revealed – the profanity people heard on the tapes, for instance - some people's image of the president was completely changed. Clinton's image, however, was a bit slimy from the get-go. Voters who sent Clinton to the White House were disappointed with his embarrassing behavior and child-like aversion to coming clean, but part of what some voters felt was self-directed shame. You reap what you sow. People had long doubted Clinton's ability to tell the truth. For those who knew about the Gennifer Flowers ordeal, his fidelity had already been called into question.[191] How he avoided the draft during Vietnam was also curious.[192] His story about experimenting

[190] Renshon, 179.
[191] Ibid. 172.
[192] Ibid. 173.

with marijuana puzzled and amused Americans as well.[193] Slick Willy was a name he made for himself long before Monica Lewinsky entered the picture.

Clinton's silver tongue accompanied by his hand-shaking-baby-kissing prowess carried him a long way. The lesson politicians may have learned from Lewinsky-gate is: If what you lack in ethics can be made up for with political skill, your job is secure and your legacy safe. Even at the height of the scandal Clinton's approval rating was at 65 percent.[194] This is a percentage some presidents only enjoy in their honeymoon period. Americans felt this approval despite believing he was a dishonest man. A meager 35 percent would actually call him honest and trustworthy.[195] This reveals the public's ability to separate the man from the job. Few were under the illusion that Clinton's dishonesty was quarantined to informal settings only. An 86 percent majority believed he had lied under oath, and 63 percent believed he had obstructed justice.[196] These not only sound like things unbecoming of a president but completely counter to everything the president should do. While 59 percent of Americans felt in 1998 that obstruction of justice was an impeachable offense, there was some confusion over the matter: Twelve percent were in complete disagreement and 26 percent thought there was grey area, saying "It depends."[197] Obstruction of justice was exactly what Nixon was being investigated for before he was pardoned, and the general public had no qualms with impeaching him. The discrepancy could be attributed to the changing times. The president's job description appears to have been tweaked and relaxed

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[193] Renshon, 173.
[194] Ibid. 170.

[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid. 175.
[197] Zogby's Real America Poll, Jan, 1998, Retrieved Apr-15-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.

since the ‘70s. The country had already lived through one near-impeachment without gratification, so a segment of the population was averse to dragging another president through the same hell. Putting a president through the ringer was not as satisfying or productive as Americans may have expected it to be.

Hypocrisy is at the heart of every scandal. It is what distinguishes an easily forgivable foible from a painful, drawn-out affair. Astute reporters looking for a good story tried to highlight hypocrisy in the Lewinsky case where possible. Here is one such reporter’s question to Clinton’s press secretary, Mike McCurry:

> Mike, in the 1992 campaign, the Clintons discussed their marriage and the problems in their marriage with probably more openness than any presidential candidate ever had in history. Many in the public interpreted that, those conversations that they had then, as an implicit pledge that whatever problems they had in the past there would be no future extramarital involvements.[198]

It is an interesting angle, that previous candor would have the effect of making the current affair that much more deplorable to Americans. What could also make Lewinsky-gate worse in the eyes of some Americans was that it happened in the tail end of his second term. Voters had already shown their faith in him not once, but twice, by showing up at their polling places in droves. He had lulled people into a false sense of trusting him. The electorate felt betrayed after supporting him for so long. The fact that this character flaw had exploded so late in the game made some people wonder what other flaws and failures they had during his tenure as president. The same betrayal existed when Watergate came to light because Nixon, who had touted election reform, was already on his second term as president. By 1972 people thought he could be trusted. If presidents are going to make mistakes, and they are, it works to their benefit if they commit them sooner rather than later so as not to betray people’s trust

[198] William J. Clinton: “Press Briefing by Mike McCurry,” January 23, 1998, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency/ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=48183.

in such a devastating manner. Mistakes made in the infancy of one's tenure can be relatively painless to recover from.

Given the early similarities between how Clinton and Nixon each dealt with their respective scandals, it is surprising that their approval ratings were not more identical. They both wanted to focus the public's attention on the real work ahead of them. They both claimed they wanted to get to the bottom of things and fully cooperate with investigations. They both stressed that they never asked anyone to lie. But, the reality of the situation was Clinton's mistake fell into a drastically different category from Nixon's, and the country was in a very different place than it was in the '70s – a remarkably good place, economically. Going into 1999, the stock market was at an all-time high[199] and the nation had not seen such low levels of unemployment during peace time since 1957.[200]

One piece of advice for presidents who will make mistakes, although following this advice is not in their control, is to commit them while the economy is thriving. One point Jim Lehrer brought up in his interview with Clinton, and the polls reflected it, was that people approved of his performance as president even though they may not have regarded him highly as a person.[201] As previously discussed, this indicates that Americans are capable of separating the personal from the political. But, we are more capable and willing to do this when things are going extremely well for the country. In fact, not even Clinton himself genuinely believed that one could be president and successfully compartmentalize the private self from the political self. "I came here to spend my time, do my job, and go back to my

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[199] Clinton, 838.
[200] Ibid. 842.
[201] William J. Clinton: "Interview With Jim Lehrer of the PBS "News Hour"," January 21, 1998, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency/ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=56080. Hereafter cited as Clinton, Interview.

life," he told Lehrer, implying that the president does *not* have a life while serving in office.[202] It was a blessing for Bill Clinton, and the American people at large, that his troubles emerged while the U.S. was enjoying a period of economic prosperity. It gave him a cushion for the fall he was about to take. President Nixon would have had an easier time with Watergate if the economy was better. The United States is money-driven place. The economy is always towards the top of the list of reasons to vote. It brings people to the polls. A 2012 survey showed that 91 percent of voters ranked the economy as either very or extremely important in influencing their decision to vote for the president.[203] A president's actions speak louder than his words, but when money talks it speaks the loudest.

Each presidential term is effected by his predecessor's. Presidents often talk of inheriting problems, and pundits comment on presidents riding out waves of success that should actually be attributed to their predecessors. The current president sets the tone for the nation his successor will inherit. Each presidential scandal makes the people lose a little bit more trust in government – certainly the Office of the President. We may be growing more judgmental with each inauguration. However, we soon forgive the president who erred in a past administration and refocus our angst and distrust on the man currently in office. This might explain why a 2007 poll showed that 51 percent of Americans trusted President George W. Bush less than former president Clinton. Only 33 percent thought they could trust Bush more than Clinton.[204] Then again, this poll might reveal more about what we trust the president with. We did not trust Clinton, but we also did not deeply care about what he might

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[202] Clinton, Interview

[203] Gallup/USA Today Poll, Feb, 2012, Retrieved Apr-15-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.

[204] CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll, Jan, 2007, Retrieved Apr-13-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.

be lying about. We could, perhaps, empathize with a man who wanted to keep the private from the public and used lying as a means to achieve this. Maybe people perceived that President Bush was lying to them when more important matters were at stake. Mistakes are never judged in a vacuum and apologies are rarely original. Accordingly, it behooves a presidential hopeful to be a good student of history.

Muckrakers who start out searching for one scandal often uncover other ones in the process. Details from one scandal are conflated with similar instances and so multiple blend together. Just as Watergate took on a life of its own that went far beyond a break-in to Democratic headquarters, Lewinsky-gate thrust Clinton's entire sex-life into the public eye. Gennifer Flowers, who made allegations in the early '90s that Clinton and she had sexual relations, was given extra time in the spotlight when the Lewinsky story came along.[205] Future presidents should consider themselves warned, if they have any skeletons in their closet, one scandal has the potential to shine a light on all of them. So, an apology may have to incorporate several reasons for regret.

The debate over how bad Nixon's actions were in Watergate became very important to the debate over how bad Clinton's actions were in Lewinsky-gate. How comparable were these situations? The Clinton camp tried its hardest to create separation from Watergate, saying they were nothing alike. They claimed Clinton's transgressions were minor and Nixon's actions were deplorable. The Republican House majority that impeached tried to say there was no difference. They couldn't say that what Nixon did was not that bad, but they were willing to bring Clinton down to Nixon's level of shame. Comparing presidents to their predecessors is a natural evaluation tool. But, the circumstances truly were different. Many

[205] Clinton, 384.

differences can be accounted for variation in structural factors, but a large part of why Nixon and Clinton achieved different levels of forgiveness was due to their personalities. Clinton came across as warm and gregarious while Nixon had a reputation for standoffishness. Likeability is probably the biggest factor of forgiveness that was not touched upon in this thesis.

Whatever the differences in Nixon's and Clinton's apologies, they both escaped the limelight eventually. Just as Gerald Ford believed, "Surely, we are not a revengeful people."[206] Time does heal all wounds. We also discover, from comparing Nixon and Clinton that there is no one-size-fits-all presidential apology. They each approached their apology opportunities differently. The manner in which a president approaches any apology is determined by several factors. Nixon and Clinton both had cover-ups for atone for. The way a president can apologize for a personal matter is very different from how he tackles an apology for policy decision that backfired. An apology also has to fit its apologizer. Presidents are constantly being called upon to offer apologies. Their critics are numerous. The public is demanding. The media is relentless. Presidents will continue to make mistakes and offer their own twists on the presidential apology, and some of these apologies will be better received than others. The only constant will be the forgiving character of the nation in the long run. Knowing what we know now about presidents who endure public hatred and disgust for their mistakes, we can offer a simple line of encouragement to all future presidents who will, undoubtedly, have to combat crises of their own: This too shall pass.

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[206] Gerald R. Ford: "Statement and Responses to Questions From Members of the House Judiciary Committee Concerning the Pardon of Richard Nixon," October 17, 1974, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4471.

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