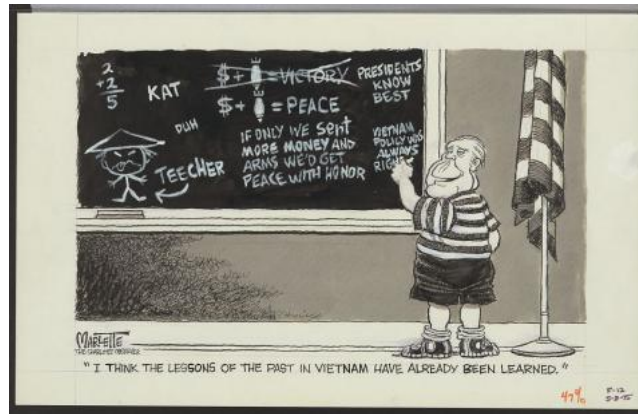




After President Nixon resigned, Vice-President Gerald R. Ford became America's 38th President.

Because he had been appointed as Vice President, Ford took office as Commander-in-Chief without standing for a national election.

One of the first major things Ford did, as President, was to pardon Richard Nixon (on September 8, 1974). As a result of that presidential pardon, no legal action could be taken against Nixon for any alleged wrongdoing regarding the "Watergate Break-in" and its ensuing cover-up.

Although President Ford thought that pardoning Nixon was the best thing for the country—to allow a deeply divided nation to heal—not everyone agreed with him (or his reasoning).

Another of Ford's major decisions troubled many people. He decided not to open an investigative inquiry into any aspect of the Vietnam War.

Americans were upset, among other things, that after so many years of combat—and so many American casualties—South Vietnam fell to the North Vietnamese in April of 1975. The last telegram, sent from the American embassy in Saigon, was President Ford's order that all American personnel had to evacuate from Saigon.

Images of that evacuation—including people hanging on to helicopters in desperate attempts to leave Saigon—made it very clear that America had lost the Vietnam War. Why not investigate what had gone wrong?

Once again, however, President Ford believed that the country—which was still deeply divided—would not benefit from such an inquiry.

Doug Marlette, a political cartoonist, took aim at the President for this decision. His drawing, of Ford as a young boy, reveals many inaccurate answers which the lad has written on the blackboard.

Perhaps those obviously incorrect answers should call into question Ford's judgment regarding an investigation into Vietnam?

The Library of Congress, which maintains a copy of this political cartoon—which Marlette published in the *Charlotte Observer* on May 8, 1975—provides [commentary about it](#):

Editorial cartoon shows President Ford as a schoolboy who has filled a blackboard with erroneous information including a math sum showing 2 plus 2 equaling 5, a drawing showing \$ plus bombing equals victory crossed out and replaced by \$ plus bombing equals peace, the statements "If only we sent more money and arms we'd get peace with honor," "Presidents know best," and "Vietnam policy was always right."

Ford says, "I think the lessons of the past in Vietnam have already been learned."

In April 1975, two years after the last American ground troops left Vietnam, South Vietnam fell to the Communists. In his first news conference after the fall of Saigon, Ford rejected the idea of a Congressional investigation, saying it would be "divisive" and it was now time to "focus on the future."

The cartoonist reflects the position of many Americans who saw Ford's position as a betrayal.

When President Ford stood for election in 1976, he was defeated by Jimmy Carter. Despite this disappointing defeat, he did not regret the decisions he had made on issues which he realized could harm his own political future:

I only did what I thought was right. (Quoted by John McCollister in *God and the Oval Office: The Religious Faith of Our 43 Presidents*, at [page 142](#).)

To this day, people dispute whether those decisions were, in fact, "right."

Click on the image for a better view.

Credits:

Image, described above, [online via the Library of Congress](#). Part of the "Art Wood Collection of Cartoon and Caricature" at the Library.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Gerald-Ford-Lessons-of-the-Past-in-Vietnam>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Gerald-Ford-Lessons-of-the-Past-in-Vietnam>