The Presidency and the Constitution

In early February 50 technicians spent three chaotic days transforming the Library's public events area into a television production studio. From all reports the results were worth the effort. On February 5 the Library was the scene of an eight hour taping session of "The Presidency and the Constitution," an engrossing program that may prove to be some of the year's most satisfying television. Thirty of America's most distinguished citizens were there, taking part in a freewheeling debate that confronted a range of troubling constitutional issues.

Based on a law school technique, "The Presidency and the Constitution," employs hypothetical conditions to show how tough decision-making can be. Sixteen participants arrange themselves around an inverted U-shaped table, where they assume roles roughly equivalent to the jobs they do or did in real life. (Gerald Ford took the role of president, Dick Cheney played his chief of staff, and Philip Buchen his counsel.) The panelists are led, by stages, into a difficult but believable situation by a moderator, who paces back and forth firing provocative questions, all the while bearing in on his celebrated panel. A Congressional participant in an earlier program was clearly shaken by this form of encounter therapy. "I suppose I half expected it to be just another panel discussion," he said, "academic and low-key. I was wrong." Program creator and producer Fred Friendly has an explanation for the gritty questioning, "Our job," he explains, "is to make the agony of the decision-making process so intense it can only be escaped by thinking."


The first of three cases taped at the Library, "The President, the Congress, and the Making of War," was moderated by Yale President Benno Schmidt, Jr. The fictitious case offered by Mr. Schmidt concerned Mohammed Aliy, leader of strategically located Allistan, a country bordering Russia. An important and stalwart friend of the United States, Aliy has been accused of gross irregularities during a recent election. As the story unfolds, panelists must decide how to respond to this friendly "strongman," whose rule grows more harsh as internal resistance spreads. Participants are compelled to consider Aliy's demands for U.S. assistance to suppress these domestic disturbances, demands that accelerate to include lethal military hardware. In addition to President Ford and his advisors, Philip Buchen and Dick Cheney, respondents included Attorney General Edwin Meese, Senators Alan Cranston and Orrin Hatch, General Alexander Haig, Dan Rather, Judge Abraham Sofaer of the State Department, Lloyd Cutler, and former CIA Director Stansfield Turner.

The basis for discussion may be hypothetical but the cases are grounded in reality. The moderator's script, a rough outline really, is meant to jolt the participants by making them face unpleasant situations and painful choices. It usually makes for a provocative, high energy discussion. The Allistan case ran 3½ hours, 45 minutes over schedule.

After lunch at the University's Slusser Art Gallery, moderator Arthur Miller, professor of law at Harvard, presented the second hypothetical. "The President, the Budget, and Separation of Powers" concerned incoming President Arthur Smith, who has promised the American public he would rid the nation of its crippling $200 billion deficit. President Smith's budget reducing prospects,
Museum Community Activities

For the fourth consecutive year, the Ford Museum and the World Affairs Council of Western Michigan will sponsor the well-received "Great Decisions" lecture series. All lectures are scheduled for Monday evening at 7:30 p.m. in the auditorium. The program is open to the public and free of charge.

March 23: "The Pacific Basin"
March 30: "South Africa"
April 6: "Foreign Investment in the United States"
April 13: "Pakistan and Afghanistan"
April 20: "Dealing with Revolution"

During the Christmas holidays over 100 school children, aged 6 to 11, attended a Museum workshop where they learned to craft Christmas ornaments. The decorations were patterned after those used by First Lady Betty Ford to trim the White House tree in 1975. The children each made a few decorations with one going on the 16 foot Douglas Fir in the Museum lobby.

Research Funds Awarded

At its fall meeting the Grants Award Committee decided in favor of funding six applicants. Recipients and their topics are:

Robert M. Hathaway [Central Intelligence Agency] "Britain and America in the Post War World."
Joseph J. Hogan [Robert Gordon’s Institute of Technology, Scotland] "Presidential Legislative Liaison Through the Congressional Budget Process."
Ronald F. King [Cornell] "Tax Incentives and American Democracy."
Brigitta Loesche-Scheller [Zurich] "Legacy of the War on Poverty."
Richard A. Lover [Vilanova] "New York City Financial Crisis"

The trustees of the Earhart Foundation of Ann Arbor again voted a gift of $12,000 to the Gerald R. Ford Foundation, specifically for the grant-in-aid program. The Earhart trustees have assisted the grants program since its inception in 1982. Trustee Thomas Kauper of the University of Michigan Law School is serving as chairman of the grant screening committee. New members of the committee are Trustee Lawrence Lindemer and Professor Gerald Linderman of the Michigan history faculty.

Historic Passports To Go On View

In observance of the bicentennial of the Constitution and in recognition of individual rights, the Library is mounting an exhibit, "Freedom to Travel." Comprised mostly of documents, the display will trace the evolution of the passport from early colonial times through the 20th century.

Beginning with wampum, (used as safe conduct for Indian couriers between tribes), the exhibit will include Revolutionary and Civil War passes and early diplomatic passports. The Library of Congress is lending the passport issued Thomas Jefferson and signed by the unfortunate Louis XVI. Several types of protection certificates furnished to American seamen between 1790 and 1815 will be shown. Possession of this certificate of citizenship by a sailor was intended to protect him on the high seas from British Navy "press gangs."

One segment of the exhibit will be devoted to passports of famous people, among them Isadora Duncan, Ernest Hemingway, Douglas MacArthur and a very young John Kennedy, going abroad in 1935.

Don Wilson reports that 13 institutions are providing material, including the Massachusetts Historical Society, Department of State, American Red Cross, and Michigan's Bentley Library and Museum of Anthropology. The National Archives and Presidential Libraries are also assisting. "Exhibits of this scope and variety are possible because other historical institutions are happy to share their most valued documents." Wilson said.

The new exhibit and a special archival presentation will be featured at a Library Open House to be held on Sunday, April 26, 1987, from one until four o'clock.

Editor
William J. Stewart
Photography
Richard L. Holzhausen
Design, Staff Assistance
Paul Conway

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Continued

Panelists soon learn, are more illusory than anyone believed. Serving Smith as his budget and economic advisors, the panelists must consider the options, ranging from bleak to melancholy.

To his advantage, President Smith is the beneficiary of a good deal of expert advice. President Ford and the Attorney General were on hand to counsel him as were economists Alan Greenspan and Alice Rivlin. Congress weighed in with recommendations from Senators Hatch, Nancy Kassebaum, and Warren Rudman and Representatives Charles Rangel and James Jones. Sam Donaldson of ABC News was attentive to Smith’s dilemma as was James Davidson of the National Taxpayers Union.

The final segment, presented in a slightly different format, was devoted to proposed changes in the Constitution. Attorney General Meese and Senator Hatch participated in their third seminar of a very long day. Senator Kassebaum and Representative Rangel joined the panel along with Chancellor Alexander Heard of Vanderbilt, Judge Arlin Adams, and Anthony Lewis of the New York Times.

“The Presidency and the Constitution” is scheduled for transmissions on PBS in May. Five segments will be aired, including two taped at the Carter Presidential Center with President Carter a participant. Check television listings in May. You don’t want to miss it.

The program and a dinner the evening before at the Law School was sponsored by Columbia University Seminars, in association with The University of Michigan, and with the assistance of the Gerald R. Ford Foundation.
The First Lady’s Office Files

In August, 1974, Betty Ford became First Lady under abrupt and unnerving circumstances. Like her husband, she did not seek the office she assumed on August 9, 1974, and, in the beginning, she seemed a reluctant occupant. Yet 2½ years later knowledgeable observers would acclaim her as one of the three or four most active First Ladies in American history. Mrs. Ford earned the public’s esteem as well. During a period of rising public debate about the role of women, Betty Ford spoke out for her view of what First Ladies can and should do. “I tried to be honest; I tried not to dodge subjects. I felt the people had a right to know where I stood.”

During most of our national history the First Lady’s place was quite clearly defined. She was wife, mother, a hostess — quite, comforting presence. The American public liked their First Ladies that way and, presumably, so did the presidents. But in recent years the First Lady has changed and so has public perception of her duties, a transformation in which Betty Ford had a pivotal role. She spoke her mind, made commitments, bestirred us to action and became, in the process, an important figure in her own right.

How does a First Lady turn ambition and desire into substantial results? What kind of staff support is available to her? By 1974 the ceremonial and public demands on the First Lady had become so variegated and complex that before everything is processed. Significant portions are available now, however, including the files of Sheila Weidenfeld (press secretary), Frances Kaye Pullen (speechwriter), Elizabeth O’Neill (correspondence), and Nancy Chirdon and Carolyn Porembka (personal secretaries). The files of Patricia Lindh and Jeanne Holm of the White House staff also contain material on Mrs. Ford’s activities. Additionally, parts of the First Lady’s public reaction mail is ready for the researcher.

Active and outspoken, Betty Ford was immediately visible and soon controversial. Among those things that mattered most to the new First Lady were the arts and “women’s issues,” abortion, child welfare, more women in public life, and the Equal Rights Amendment. Mildly put, all were topics bound to excite discussion and correspondence. Mrs. Ford’s advocacy of ERA was a case in point. Her position on the women’s rights bills generated over 25,000 letters and cards which reflected the full spectrum of opinion. When the history of the women’s movement is written these letters should be consulted.

Nothing Mrs. Ford said or did in the White House would match the tumult provoked by her “60 Minutes” interview when she said how she might respond to a hypothetical love affair by daughter Susan. The cascade of mail, some 50,000 pieces, was decidedly against the First Lady. “You are no lady,” stormed an Indiana woman, “first, second, or last.” While there was a great deal of angry mail it was not an accurate barometer of public sentiment. A Lou Harris poll, a scant six weeks later, gave Mrs. Ford an 80% approval rating, characterizing her as “one of the most popular wives of a president to occupy the White House.” Accurate or not, this mail and her other issue mail compels scholarly attention for what it tells us about social attitudes and conflicts of the 1970’s.

As First Lady, Betty Ford fulfilled a unique responsibility. The definitive evaluation of how she managed that responsibility ultimately rests with the historians. Their judgments will depend, in large part, on the documentary record, a record that is preserved and available in the Gerald Ford Library.

I am in debt to Karen Rohrer for her generous assistance in preparing this article. Karen’s more detailed essay is scheduled to appear in the summer issue of Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives.
The Advancemen
Come to Ann Arbor

During 1986 the Library accessioned
the collections of three advance men,
Robin Martin and Frank Ursomarso,
both previously reported, and, in
December, the papers of Byron "Red"
Caveney, head of President Ford's Ad
vance Office. The White House Ad
vance Office made preparations for all
presidential travel, both within the
country and abroad. According to the
"Manual for Advance Represen-
tatives," the advance man was solemnly
charged with making every presiden
tial trip and speech "appear to be an ef
fortless success." In reality their task
was anything but effortless.

When George Washington took to
the road on presidential business he went
on horseback with one or two aides and
no reporters. Surely there are moments
when every modern president yearns
for those simpler times when he might
imitate Jefferson and walk the capitol
city unattended and undisturbed.

Cavaney and a ten-man team were in
town two weeks beforehand to meet
to people and reconnoiter the Grand
Ballroom of the Palmer House, site of
the speech.

Three days before the event, wiring
and electrical outlets were checked,
telephone and wire service tickers installed,
and media access arranged. Transport
specialists secured motorcade vehicles
and plotted routes while security
cleared everyone who might come in
contact with the President. Cavaney's
team bore such diverse responsibilities
as seating platform guests, issuing press
releases, having the right people in
the right places, and parking airplanes and
helicopters. Additionally, an ad-

"A quite routine presidential appearance." The
Fords being greeted by Chicago Mayor and
Mrs. Daly, July 11, 1975.

vancement might find himself detailed
to such uncommon tasks as determin-
ing "the angle of sun at arrival time"
or ascertaining the financial health of
the host hotel. And if all this wasn't
duty above and beyond, the advan-
ceman was expected to "gladly"
give all the credit to the local people.

The donated Caveney papers consist
of 13 cubic feet of case files for indi-
vidual events, domestic and overseas,
and five cubic feet of administrative
records. The case files, for trips be-
tween October, 1974 and November,
1976, contain memoranda, draft
schedules, passenger manifests, maps,
diagrams, seating charts and printed
miscellany.

Former Presidents Ford and Carter at
the recently-opened Carter Presidential
Center, where they cohosted the con-
sumation, "Reinforcing Democracy
in the Americas."

The two day meeting in Atlanta,
November 17-18, attracted more than
a dozen current and former presidents
and prime ministers from South
America and the Caribbean. A major
theme of the discussions was the
desirability of forming a council of
former heads of state to examine and
speak out on such issues as elections
and human rights abuses in Latin
nations. Other ideas to emerge included
messaging out a better plan for Latin
nations to deal with their huge debts; and
steps to strengthen civilian control of
the military.

Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter in Atlanta.
Emory University
A Glad Awakening

Betty: A Glad Awakening, by Betty Ford with Chris Chase, is now in the bookstores. A selection of the Literary Guild, it is being serialized in Good Housekeeping, New Woman and the Detroit Free Press. Mrs. Ford is undertaking a ten city promotional tour beginning February 25 and ending April 7 in Detroit. Betty: A Glad Awakening may be ordered through the Museum sales desk ($16.95, postpaid), 303 Pearl St., NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504.

"The Betty Ford Story," a two hour David Wolper/Warner Brothers Television motion picture, was seen March 2 on ABC. Based on the former First Lady's bestselling autobiography, The Times of My Life, the film starred the Oscar and Emmy nominated actress, Gena Rowlands. Josef Sommer, a veteran of Broadway, films, and television costarred as President Ford.

Gerald R. Ford Foundation

1000 Beal Avenue
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109