

## Handout C: Presidential Pardons Stations

### *Station 1: Washington & the Whiskey Rebels, 1795*



The first ever act of presidential forgiveness came in the wake of an armed rebellion. Fed up with a costly federal tax on distilled spirits, in 1794 a group of whiskey-producing Pennsylvania farmers took to the streets and burned the home of a local tax inspector. The attack came on the heels of several other protests and many politicians—most notably Secretary Alexander Hamilton—argued that it threatened the stability of the newly formed United States.

Faced with the possibility of a widespread uprising, President George Washington reluctantly marched a 13,000-strong militia into western Pennsylvania to quell the rebellion. Some 20 members of the mob were arrested, and two were convicted of treason and sentenced to death by hanging. Desperate to avoid further discontent, Washington chose to pardon both men in July 1795.

Adapted from: History.com, © 2017, A&E Television Networks:  
<http://www.history.com/news/history-lists/7-famous-presidential-pardons>

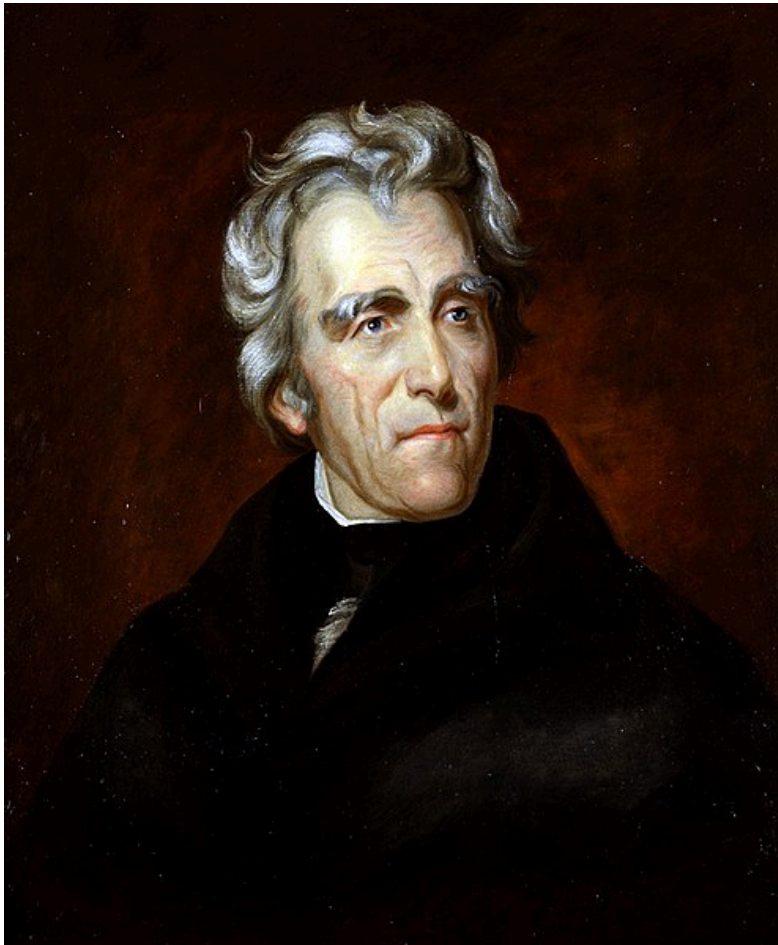
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### ***Station 2: Andrew Jackson Pardons George Wilson***

In 1829, George Wilson and an accomplice received death sentences for murder and robbing mail trains. His accomplice quickly took a trip to the gallows, but Wilson had influential friends in Washington. These friends beseeched Andrew Jackson for leniency on behalf of their friend, and Old Hickory relented. In 1830, he pardoned Wilson for his capital crimes; the mail robber would only have to serve a twenty-year term for his other misdeeds.

It sounds like great news for Wilson, but when authorities presented him with the pardon, Wilson perplexingly refused to accept it.

After much legal back-and-forth, Wilson's case came before the Supreme Court, which ruled that since the pardon was a bit of property, there was no legal way to force Wilson to accept it. Like his accomplice, Wilson was hanged.

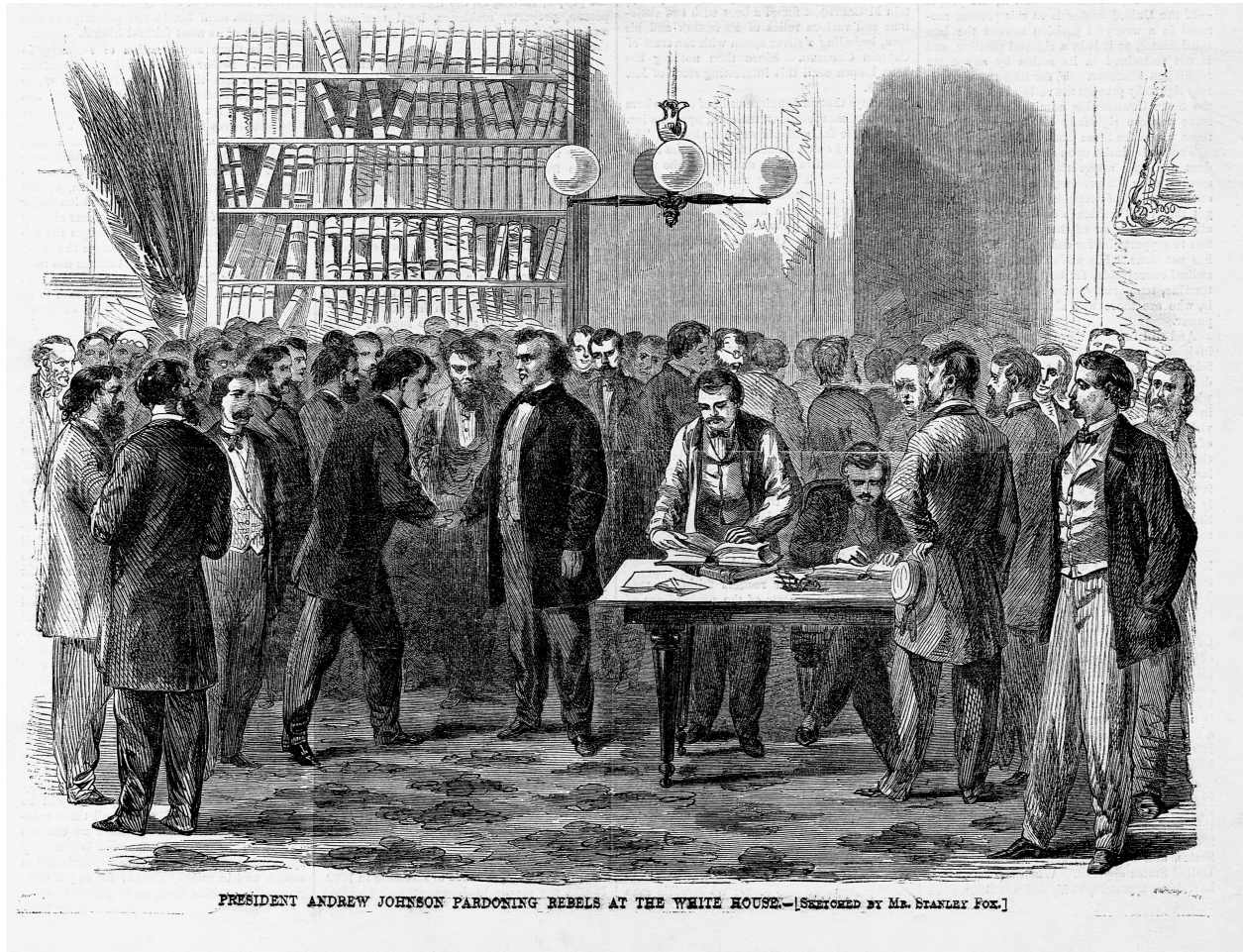


*Adapted From: "11 Notable Presidential Pardons," Ethan Trex, CNN.com:*

<http://www.cnn.com/2009/LIVING/wayoflife/01/05/mf.presidential.pardons/index.html>

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### Station 3: Johnson & Confederates, 1865



The 17th President, Andrew Johnson, took office the day that Lincoln died from gunshot wounds. Johnson had a mixed reputation, having stayed in the Senate as his home state of Tennessee seceded in 1861; he was popular in the North, but considered a traitor by those in the South. After becoming President in 1865, he moved forward on reconstruction. While Congress was not in session, he pardoned Southerners in the Confederate States on the condition that they would take an oath of loyalty to the Union. But Johnson, who grew up poor and had a dislike of the rich and privileged, wouldn't grant blanket amnesty to several classes of Southerners, requiring leaders and wealthy men to obtain their own special Presidential pardons.

**Adapted From: TIME, "The Gift of Freedom," November 25, 2008:**

[http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1862257\\_1862325,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1862257_1862325,00.html)

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### ***Station 4: Ford & Nixon***



Congress had accused [President Ford's predecessor, President Richard] Nixon of obstruction of justice during the investigation of the Watergate scandal, which began in 1972. White House tape recordings revealed that Nixon knew about and possibly authorized the illegal break-in and wiretapping of the Democratic National Committee offices, located in the Watergate Hotel in Washington D.C. Rather than face impeachment and removal from office, Nixon chose to resign on August 8, 1974.

There were no historical or legal precedents to guide Ford in the matter of Nixon's pending indictment. In the end, he decided to give Nixon a full pardon for all offenses against the United States in order to put the tragic and disruptive scandal behind all concerned. Ford justified this decision by claiming that a long, drawn-out trial would only have further polarized the public. Ford's decision to pardon Nixon was condemned by many and is thought to have contributed to Ford's failure to win the 1976 election.

From his home in California, Nixon responded to Ford's pardon, saying he had gained a different perspective on the Watergate affair since his resignation. He admitted that he was "wrong in not acting more decisively and more forthrightly in dealing with Watergate, particularly when it reached the stage of judicial proceedings and grew from a political scandal into a national tragedy."

***Adapted from: "This Day in History, September 8," History.com: <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/president-ford-pardons-former-president-nixon>***

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### **Station 5: Carter & the “Draft Dodgers,” 1977**

Hulton Archive / Getty

Photo from TIME



During his presidential campaign, Carter had announced his intention to pardon those who had failed to register for the draft or left the country to avoid service. In a televised debate with incumbent President Gerald Ford, Carter proposed to implement a blanket pardon, in

contrast to Ford’s more selective clemency plan. Carter interpreted pardon as meaning that what you did, whether it’s right or wrong, you’re forgiven for it. And I do advocate a pardon for draft evaders.to bring about an end to the divisiveness that has occurred in our country as a result of the Vietnam War. On his second day in office, January 21, 1977, he followed through on his promise.

A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Carter served on battleships and submarines for eight years, although he did not see combat. His pardon of draft dodgers enraged veterans and was cheered by amnesty groups. Critics argued that not only would the pardon encourage future draftees to defy the law, it was an affront to the men who served and died during the war.

Carter’s pardon stated that only civilians who were convicted of [violating] the Military Selective Service Act by draft-evasion acts or omissions committed between August 4, 1964 and March 28, 1973 were eligible. The pardon was unconditional and wiped criminal records clean, but it only applied to civilians, not the estimated 500,000 to 1 million active-duty personnel who went AWOL (absent without leave) or deserted during the war. Many supporters of Carter’s decision thought they too should be forgiven by the government in an effort to heal national wounds.

**Adapted From: “This Day in History: January 21,” History.com. <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/carter-pardons-draft-dodgers>**

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### ***Station 6: Carter, Clinton & Patty Hearst, 2001***

Keystone / Consolidated News Pictures / Getty

The granddaughter of publishing titan William Randolph Hearst made headlines in 1974 when an urban guerilla group known as the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) kidnapped her from her Berkeley, Calif., apartment. Two months later the 19-year-old was photographed robbing a San Francisco bank while brandishing an assault rifle — apparently she had taken up her captors' cause. At trial her defense lawyer focused not only on her abuse and the fact that the kidnappers forced her to take part in the robbery, but on the pervasive brainwashing by her attackers that caused her to sympathize with them. The defense didn't work and Hearst was convicted of bank robbery on March 20, 1976. She was imprisoned for almost two years before Jimmy Carter commuted her seven-year sentence and freed her from jail. But it was President Bill Clinton who granted her a full pardon on the last day of his presidency, January 20, 2001.



***Adapted From: TIME, "The Gift of Freedom," November 25, 2008:***

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