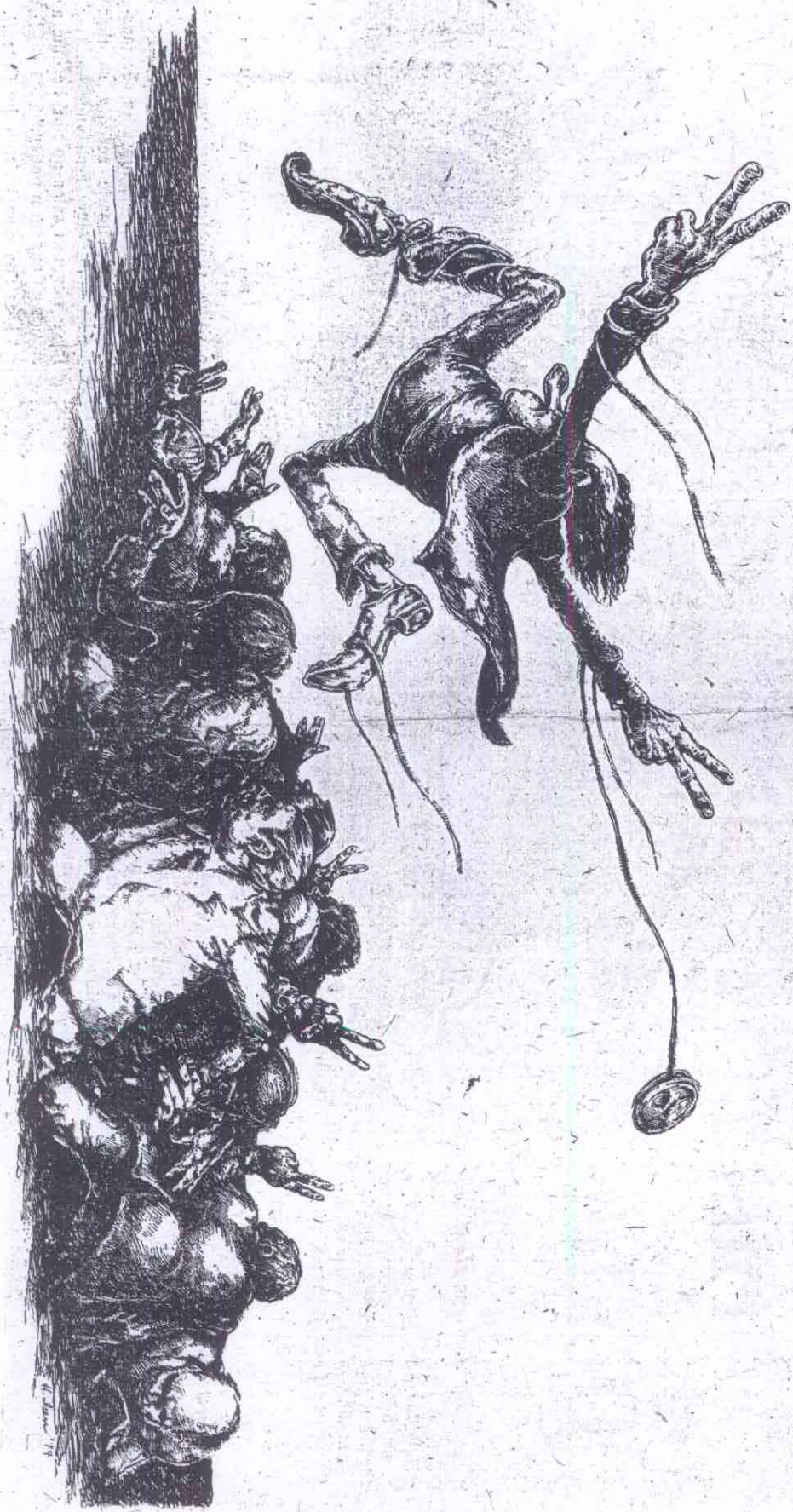


Per sketch

The Presidency: Old Ways and New



By Lou Cannon

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LONG BEFORE Richard Nixon's downfall, the scandals of his administration had stained many of the men in whom he placed his closest trust and confidence.

No other President in American history has seen as many of his aides indicted, dismissed or otherwise disgraced. No other political leader has raised up as many people from political obscurity only to see them brought down in the fullness of their power.

Nineteen persons once associated with the White House or with Mr. Nixon's reelection campaign have been convicted or have pleaded guilty on such charges as perjury, bribery and obstruction of justice. Six others face trial on similar charges.

Alistair Cooke has written that Mr. Nixon has "an absolutely eerie gift for choosing shabby people." But the truth is more complicated than that. He also chose good people and then ignored

weren't really. Maybe we were loyal to the idea of loyalty itself."

Another ex-aide says: "The guys who yielded themselves to Nixon most completely were the ones who were most damaged by him. Mitchell became a mockery of the law, Haldeman an alter ego of the President, Ziegler an extension of Nixon who was no help to him."

Of all the President's men, it was H.R. Haldeman who yielded himself most completely.

"I do what the President wants me to do," he once said to an aide. "That's why it works."

Today Haldeman is under indictment for three counts of perjury, one count of conspiracy to obstruct justice and one count of obstruction of justice.

The last act of Mr. Nixon that sealed his removal from office—release of the damaging June 23, 1972, transcript—

also demonstrated Haldeman's own intimate involvement in the Watergate coverup. In a sense, the release of this transcript meant that Mr. Nixon, in his last week in office, was taking down his once-described "finest public servant" with him.

The transcript also showed the oneness of the Nixon-Haldeman approach to the problem of keeping the Watergate burglary concealed. It demonstrated what convicted former White House aide Jeb Magruder had written in his autobiography, "An American Life," when he said that Haldeman's major flaw was that he "lacked any independent vision that might have helped Nixon avoid mistakes."

"The Indispensable Man"

ONE MAN WHO tried to provide this vision, at least for a time, was Mitchell, the New York bond attorney, who befriended Mr. Nixon when he

Nixon Men: Betrayed By Loyalty

them or neglected their counsel. And he chose others who were good and bad and then followed their worst advice.

They are together now, these once and former friends, in sadness and defeat. Bob Finch, never mentioned in the Watergate transcripts, who withdrew from the California governorship race at a time when polls still showed him ahead. Herb Klein, loyal to Nixon for a generation, who last week learned that the President had casually described him in private as "absolutely, totally unorganized" and a person who "just doesn't have his head screwed on." John Mitchell, drinking heavily in the privacy of his lonely room and contemplating the fate of the President who once wrote him a letter describing Mitchell as "one of those rare men" who was indispensable.

"We thought we were loyal to our President, our leader, to the boss," says one aide looking back at a life devoted to Richard Nixon. "Maybe we

was a fish-out-of-political-waters with the prestigious Mudge, Rose and Guthrie law firm in New York. Mr. Nixon, according to friends, did not feel comfortable there. He was an outsider, a Westerner, a non-Establishment lawyer who never quite felt welcome at the best homes, the most exclusive parties.

"Mitchell treated him with the respect he needed and deserved," says a friend. "Nixon felt close to him as a human being."

This feeling showed in Mr. Nixon's public utterances and in his private ones.

"He is my closest adviser, as you know, on all legal matters and on many other matters as well," Mr. Nixon said of Mitchell on May 22, 1969. "I would say that I don't know of any man in the administration whose views on the law are closer to mine than Attorney General Mitchell's."

In February, 1972, the President wrote

By Harold Isen for The Washington Post

Mitchell a private letter expressing the same sentiments on a broader scale.

"In my 25 years in public life I have found there are very few indispensable men," the President wrote. "In the campaign of 1968 and in our first three years you have been one of these rare men. My only regret is that you are also the indispensable man to run the campaign of 1972."

In the end Mitchell was destroyed by his indispensable loyalty.

"For a ruined man, he's holding up very well," an associate told Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, as they recount it in "All The President's Men." "He's resigned to the likelihood that he's going to jail. He can't go out because of the press . . . He just sits in his apartment all day watching television or working on his defense. He hits the sauce every once in a while, but nothing serious. He's still got all his marbles."

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Mitchell grew to hate the other men who had been close to the President, but there is no evidence that he feels anything other than loyalty to Mr. Nixon himself. And this same loyalty burned bright among the old friends outside the tight inner circle, the Finches and the Kleins and the others who believed in Mr. Nixon's innocence to the end.

When Finch was asked last week about Mr. Nixon's confession that he had approved of the Watergate cover-up as long ago as June 23, 1972, he was unable to speak.

"I'm just dumfounded," he said in a voice that was barely audible.

"One for All"

WHAT MADE these men so trusting? That is the question that historians who seek to explain the dynamics of the Nixon administration must come to answer.

"We were one for all and all for one," says a veteran of Mr. Nixon's first

campaign against Democratic Rep. Jerry Voorhis. "None of us knew anything about politics and we approached it like it was the team's big game."

Most of Mr. Nixon's early aides, however, did not remain in politics. Men like Murray Chotiner were capable of telling Nixon off—in the four-letter language at which both men proved adept—when they did not agree with him.

"Even after Dick became vice president we were capable—at least some of us—of saying to him, go screw yourself," says one of these ex-aides. "It is no wonder that he shucked us off gradually and replaced us with younger men."

Most of the old crowd had a dim view of the new men.

"Nixon wanted to have people around him who were his own temper-

ament and who would do pretty much what he wanted them to do," says Earl Adams, his law associate in Los Angeles in the early 1960s. "But loyalty is more than doing what someone wants you to do. The truly loyal person will tell you when you're going to do something wrong."

The Watergate transcripts are barren of any such concern. They show a President preoccupied with maneuver and with his own political safety, a President who cynically describes John Dean as "a loose cannon," Mitchell as a man who won't mind the store, Charles Colson as a man who talks too much.

Perhaps it would be a mistake to base all judgments on these tran-

scripts. The loyal Nixon friends remember the kindnesses that the public never saw—the telephone call when a loved one was stricken, the bouquets left for secretaries, the private, handwritten letters of thanks. One old friend remembers how Mr. Nixon took time out from the Vietnam negotiations to phone and cancel a dinner invitation, then invited him and his wife down to San Clemente a few weeks later.

Loyalty to What?

BUT THE TRANSCRIPTS provide the vital clue to what was missing in the "one for all and all for one" relationships in the Nixon White House. The loyalty extended to nothing except Richard Nixon.

"What, after all, is the difference between a Haldeman man or a Mitchell man?" once asked Nixon aide Stephen Hess. "Was it issues like welfare or food stamps or starving people? . . . That's the troubling thing as you think about it. What the hell did they stand for?"

What they stood for, in a word, was the notion of "loyalty." Ideological disagreements were considered a sign of naivete, an inferior yardstick to John Ehrlichman's what "will play in Peoria." When a principled dispute on issues occurred the offenders—such as "liberal" Patrick Moynihan, or "conservative" Arthur Burns—were soon shipped elsewhere.

In this atmosphere, an accusation of

disloyalty became a charge of heresy. Small wonder that men like Colson interpreted any disagreement with their wildest schemes as disloyalty to the President himself. Those who had no stomach for this game or no inner need to demonstrate that their loyalty knew no bounds were shunted aside, as were Finch and Klein. "Loyalty to loyalty" had taken over.

It did not, in the end, prove to be enough of an anchor. When the going became toughest, Richard Nixon gave less loyalty than he inspired. The men who stayed with him—the Haldemans, the Ehrlichmans, the Colsons—climbed to the highest rungs of power and had the farthest to fall. Lacking independent distinction, they had nothing left to sustain them when loyalty to Nixon proved insufficient as an ideal. They shared the fruits of power with their President. He has now come to share their ruin.