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Mr. Nixon Looks to the South

President Nixon's biggest troubles are within his own Republican Party, whose members are half scared to stand with him and half scared not to do so. His biggest potential assets are Southern Democratic senators; and thus is the world of politics turned upside down.

For upon the ultimate decision of these latter—who still run the Senate in any real crunch—depends the outcome of the long crisis of Watergate. If—but only if—so many as half a dozen of the top Southern patriarchs become convinced of Mr. Nixon's innocence they will do more than break any congressional drive to impeach him. Like him or not personally, they will throw about him a mantle of protection at once as real as steel and as gossamer as a moonbeam. And the end of it, granted all these circumstances, will be that even the current public demands for his resignation will begin to die out.

How can so few do so much? First, the Southerners can approach this affair like detached judges on the bench—as indeed some of them have literally been in their past careers. Second, none of them is touched by a milli-

gram of the mud flying about Watergate. However unfairly, a speck or two will stick to every Republican senator—not excluding those who now flee in such open panic from any Watergate infection at second hand.

Third, the Southern fellows are incomparably more attached to the traditional order of things than is any other sectional group in the Senate. Similarly, they are far more repelled by any prospect of the overturn of any government at the top, no matter who may currently be at its head. In this way, they are similar to the more old-fashioned establishment Tories in England.

Fourth, Southern senators have long historical memories and not a one of them has forgotten a trauma of a hundred-odd years ago. This was the unjust impeachment—that is to say, indictment—by the House of President Andrew Johnson of Tennessee and his subsequent acquittal in the Senate by a single vote.

Fifth, Southern senators are of all politicians the most resistant to—and distrustful of—ready public clamors, such as the current "Impeach Nixon"

telegrams. As a group they are affronted, whether they say so or not.

All this is a way of saying that the least noticed of President Nixon's current conferences with men from Capitol Hill to plead his case was by any measure far the most important of them all.

This was the quiet little meeting with seven Democratic senators, six of whom sit at the very summit of Senate power. James Eastland of Mississippi runs the Senate Judiciary Committee, which oversees the courts of the United States. John Stennis of Mississippi runs the armed forces, so far, that is, as Congress does. Ditto, Stennis and the CIA. Russell Long of Louisiana runs, so far as the Senate is concerned, the tax and trade policy of the United States. John McClellan of Arkansas runs its appropriations. John Sparkman of Alabama is a senior of seniors on practically everything. Harry Byrd Jr. of Virginia is a special symbol of integrity. James Allen of Alabama is a newcomer, but is well within the lodge of those who on the somber issues set the tone of the United States Senate.

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