

Richard Nixon: For the Record

RN: *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*.
Grosset & Dunlap. 1090 pp. \$19.95

By ELIZABETH DREW

IN HIS MEMOIRS, Richard Nixon is struggling—as, by his own testimony, he has struggled so much of his life—against great odds. Once more, as he sees it, the odds have been imposed by the biases and political motivations of others. This time his struggle is for the way he will be viewed in history, and, as has been his practice all along, he gives it a good fight. But history is safe.

Still, for all of this book's predictable flaws, it is an interesting, sometimes even absorbing account that cannot be dismissed. Nixon is a major figure in our history, and here he gives us his own version of the years in which he dominated our national life—astonished us, frightened us, put us through things we had never dreamed we would go through. And when he is talking about matters other than those leading to his resignation from office, he offers material that is important to the historical record.

Autobiography under any circumstances is an imperfect medium: human nature inclines the author to self-edit and sanitize. But it is the function of historians to lay various accounts side by side. People with any detached interest in a period have sense enough to understand these things. Of course, Nixon takes, as is his custom, great liberties with the truth. When he comes to the subjects of Watergate and his impeachment, he is caught in a web that he long since wove and is as misleading and self-serving as is to be expected. But even the flaws of this book help to tell the story; the story of an individual whose mind worked in a certain way. It would be interesting to read the story of Richard III from Richard III's point of view. It would have been illuminating to have had an account by Andrew Johnson of his ordeal. If we want to understand World War II, we read Winston Churchill and Albert Speer, and also *Mein Kampf*.

In his telling of his own story, Nixon uses familiar devices: he distorts the record; he suggests that everyone is picking on him and that powerful elements would never give him a fair shake; he argues that what

he did others before him had done. Even, in the early part of the book, as he tells the story of the "Checkers speech," he points out that Franklin D. Roosevelt "had ridi-

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culed his critics by saying they were even attacking his little dog Fala, and I knew it would infuriate my critics if I could turn this particular table on them." The book's prose is pedestrian, but we already know that Richard Nixon is not Winston Churchill. Some of it reads as if it were written by a committee. This is not a searching book, and by now there is no reason to expect Nixon to provide one. We know he does not have a searching mind. We are in the presence of a mind obsessed with the "opposition" and absorbed with tactics. We are in the presence of a man who can say, apparently with a straight face, that upon becoming president he held Sunday religious services in the White House in order to avoid the "exploitation of religion." We are dealing with a man who recorded in his diary after he returned from his second inauguration's round of balls: "It is obvious that we have to get across more of what Rossiter has called 'affability.'" We are in the presence of so

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much transparent and belabored deception that there is little danger this book will be swallowed whole, except by those who wish to take it that way. We are in the presence of Richard Nixon.

The first portion of the book, covering his early life and the initial stages of his career, is rather flat, and one begins to wonder if Nixon, after all he has been through—and now isolated—is worn out. But when he gets to his last fight, the juices start to flow. In the opening section, Nixon does remind us about his college hero, "Chief" Newman, the football coach, who used to say, "Show me a good loser, and I'll show you a loser." In his retelling of some of the first important events of his career—the Hiss case, the "Nixon fund" and the question of whether he would remain on the 1952 Republican ticket, the "kitchen debate," the attack by a mob in Caracas—he has muted his tone and we lose the bite and self-revelation in these stories as he told them in *Six Crises*. He tells of his efforts to restrain Joseph McCarthy,

some undetermined purpose); in the case of North Korea shooting down a United States Navy plane ("we were being tested, and therefore force must be met with force"), where Nixon, with Henry Kissinger's concurrence, according to Nixon, was inclined to retaliate against a North Korean airfield but decided instead to launch a second round in the secret bombing of Cambodia. This bombing, Nixon tells us, was referred to within the inner circles as a "Menu": the first round was "Operation Breakfast"; the second was "Operation Lunch." Nixon writes that after the Bay of Pigs he advised President Kennedy to go back into Cuba and to get involved militarily in Laos as well. Given this background, Nixon's calling of a worldwide military alert during the Middle East war in October, 1973, in the turbulent days after Archibald Cox was fired, was consistent with his instincts. In attempting to justify his approval of CIA support for opponents of Salvador Allende in Chile's 1970 elections, he distorts the record of his predecessors, he distorts events in Latin America after Allende was elected, and then he mentions the coup that overthrew Allende without also

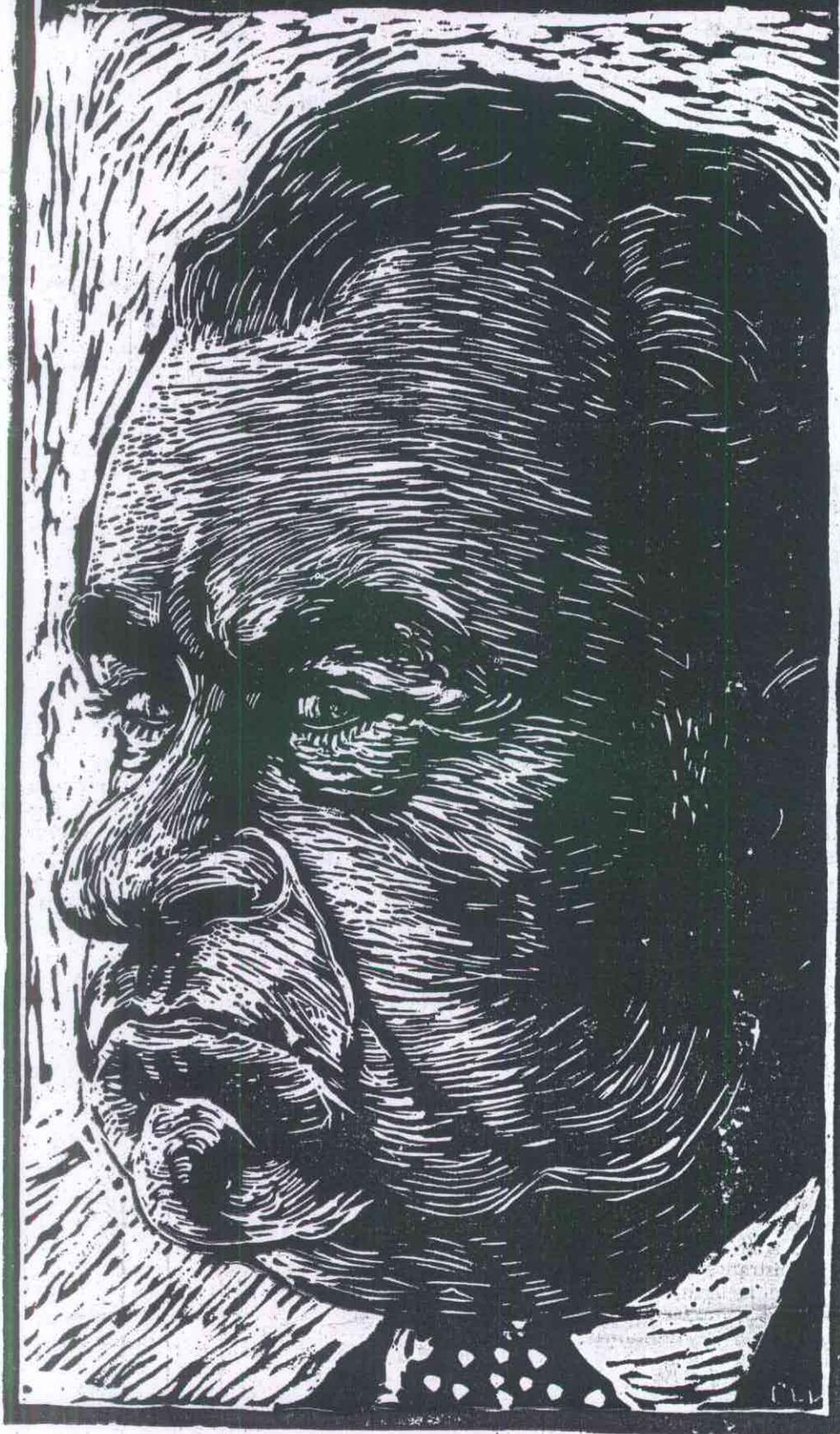
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without, still, any apparent comprehension of what McCarthyism was all about. He makes clear, and understandable, the origins of his bitterness toward the Kennedys.

In describing the foreign policy of his presidency, there is a good bit that is of interest and useful: his explanation of his pursuit of an "honorable" peace in Vietnam and the demonstration of his belief, paralleled in his approach to his greatest domestic crisis, that one more punch would fix it; his ac-

counts of his conversations with Mao and Chou En-lai during his first trip to China; his own view of the importance of detente and of securing a comprehensive arms control agreement, the first one, between the United States and the Soviet Union. In much of what he writes about foreign policy, the picture comes across of a somewhat trigger-happy man whose impulse was to apply force: in Southeast Asia; in the India-Pakistan war (when, among other things, a naval task force was sent to the Bay of Bengal for

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Woodcut by Carlos Llerena-Aguirre for The Washington Post

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mentioning that the United States had some role in it.

Human nature is not one-dimensional, and we see in this book that Nixon had his humane side: that he understood Lyndon Johnson's disappointment and depression in his last years; that he was sensitive enough to write a note to Thomas Eagleton's son after Eagleton was dropped from George McGovern's ticket; that he had strong bonds with his family, particularly his daughters.

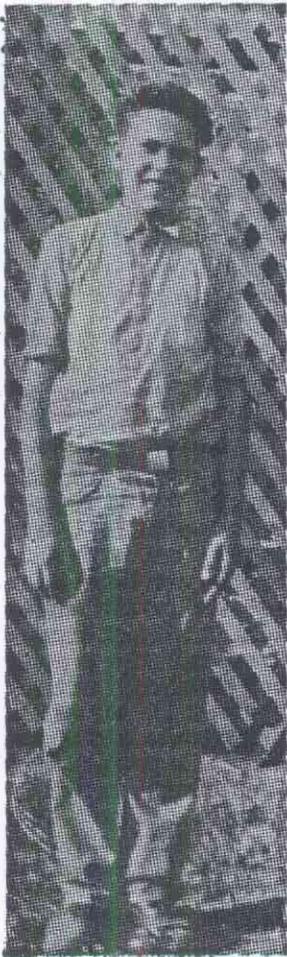
We also see the mean-spirited politics. Nixon tells of his appropriation of "the social issue" and of the symbol of the flag (in which others cooperated by letting him appropriate it). We see the Nixon who can write off the opposition to his appointment of Clement Haynsworth and G. Harrold Carswell to the Supreme Court as simply "partisan," who can deny that he used race as an issue in his 1968 presidential campaign. He speaks blithely of the "hardhats" who beat up demonstrators in New York in 1970 and were then invited to the White House. He can bring himself to say that in his reactions to the antiwar movement, "I was sometimes drawn into the very frame of mind I so despised in the leaders of that movement." But he reaches for nonexistent justifications for his actions and refuses, or fails, to see when he has crossed the line. He once more justifies the program of wiretapping directed from the White House by suggesting that the taps were required in order "to find the source of national security leaks," but adds that he "cannot reconstruct the particular events that precipitated each of them" and also comments, "Unfortunately none of these wiretaps turned up any proof linking anyone in the government to a specific national security leak." He equates the extra-legal actions his administration took to deal with demonstrators and opponents of the war with Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus during the civil war, and with Franklin Roosevelt's internment of Japanese-Americans. He asks, "What is the law, and how is it to be applied with respect to the President in fulfilling the duties of his office?" He answers by talking of the necessity of "emergency measures to meet emergency situations" and cites a quotation from Thomas Jefferson that hardly appears to fit Richard Nixon's concept of an "emergency."

The pattern of misleading accounts reaches its greatest intensity, of course, when Nixon comes to the sub-

ject of Watergate and impeachment. Here he is trapped in so many untruths already told that he has left himself little choice but to perpetuate and elaborate on them. But the greatest problem with his version of these events is larger than the collection of deceptions: it is his failure to come to terms with what the whole thing was about. Perhaps he cannot; perhaps he still does not know. He selects pieces of it and explains them away and suggests that much of what he did had been done by previous presidents. This exercise is like—as Lawrence Hogan (R-Md.) suggested during the House Judiciary Committee impeachment proceedings—"looking at a mosaic and going down and focussing in on one single tile in the mosaic and saying, 'I see nothing wrong in that one little piece of this mosaic.'" It is true that there had been wiretapping and bugging in previous administrations and that law-enforcement agencies had conducted break-ins before, that political use had been made of the Internal Revenue Service. But there was no precedent for the agglomeration and number of misdeeds: for the degree of abuse of intelligence-gathering and law-enforcement agencies and the attempt to place them under the direct political control of the White House (the Huston plan); for people in the pay of the White House directing a break-in at the office of a citizen's psychiatrist. Nixon does not mention that his White House was the kind of place that encouraged the drawing up of "enemies" lists and studies of how to "screw" those enemies; he does not talk about shaking down businessmen for campaign contributions or the calls on network executives, not just by White House aides but also by advertisers warning the executives to be cautious in their coverage of the administration; he does not see the picture that outsiders saw of a systematic attempt to check every institution that could check the White House; he does not talk about the attempt, for a while successful, to bring the bureaucracy—through Fred Malek, an aide to H.R. (Bob) Haldeman—under the strict political control of the White House, an attempt that had shattering effects. He does not mention, and probably does not understand how people felt about, the spectacle of a man in the pay of the White House donning a red wig and going across the country to visit Dita Beard, the former ITT lobbyist. He does not see why all of this took on the aspects of a protracted horror movie. He does not comprehend the

things that led some sensible people to begin to wonder whether the 1972 election might be the last one. Therefore, he is incapable of understanding what followed.

He is correct that there was a heightened atmosphere in Washington as these events began to come to light, but he seems to have no sense of what caused it. He is correct that the press competed to tell the story, but he overlooks how much went undetected for how long. He seems continually amazed at the negative reaction to his



Photographs from the book: (left) Richard Nixon in 1927; (above) campaigning in Philadelphia in 1968 (UPI photo); poster of Nixon's congressional campaign for California's 12th District

administration's lies and evasions once the story of Watergate began to break and it began to become clear how many lies and evasions there had been. He presents himself as the injured one. He is incensed, for example, that others did not accept at once that two "missing" tapes were not "missing" but were in fact "nonrecorded conversations." In this case, the White House may have been telling the truth—but it was too late.

As for the Watergate break-in and cover-up itself, his own reconstruction of the events is, as Nixon was at the time, absorbing all the while that it is maddening. This is, after all, one of the most dramatic stories in our history, and there is drama in reading of these strange events as told by the central figure. (Nixon at least does not, as Haldeman did in his book, spin hallucinatory theories.) We watch, once more, as the main figures circle each other, setting and trying to avoid traps. We see Nixon's attempts to persuade us of: his professed unconcern (contrary to what others have told us) on the day that the news of the break-in appeared in the papers; his elaborate and unconvincing explanation of the erased 18½ minutes of conversation with Haldeman on June 20th, three days after the break-in; his account of the conversation on June 23rd, the tape of which hastened his departure from office, in which it was agreed that the CIA would be instructed to tell the FBI to stay away from certain parts of the investigation. Nixon tells of when, in May, 1973, CIA memoranda of that conversation came to his attention (it would be more than another year before, having run out of escape routes, he made the conversation public), "I was certain that the motive could not have been as transparently political as it looked." He writes, "I asked [Haldeman] whether he could recall even the slightest hint of political concern in calling in the CIA. He said he was positive that there had been no political concern whatever." Yet earlier, in

describing the first day after the break-in, he had written, "I saw Watergate as politics pure and simple." Sometimes he doesn't bother to pretty things up: Nixon never seems to wonder why campaign-contribution checks were being cashed in Mexico. Sometimes he seems to tell us more than he intends: He writes of the "good news" relayed to him by Haldeman in June of 1972 that "the FBI still had no case on Howard Hunt." He adds, "We knew that he had been at the scene, but they did not." We see him setting up the rationale that the Cubans had engineered the break-in because they were so alarmed at the possibility that George McGovern might be elected and expressing his satisfaction that "the Cuban explanation for the break-in was still holding." He blandly asserts that he did not interfere with the Justice Department's investigation, yet we know that he told Henry Petersen, the head of the Justice Department's criminal division, "You have got to maintain the Presidency out of this" (this was one of the matters that most disturbed the members of the House Judiciary Committee), and he himself tells us that in April, 1973 "I called Petersen and told him not to give me any information from the grand jury unless he specifically thought I should have it."

His equivocal statements also say a lot: Of the break-in into the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, he writes, "I do not believe I was told about the break-in at the time," and he also goes on to say, "but it is clear that it was at least in part an outgrowth of my sense of urgency about discrediting what Ellsberg had done." He says that despite John Ehrlichman's insistence that he told Nixon about the break-in after the fact, "I do not recall this . . . but I cannot rule it out." He is still sufficiently muddled about the meaning of the Fourth Amendment to add that had he been told about the break-in beforehand he would not necessarily have considered it unthink-

able. We read him, again, instructing Dean to write "a complete statement, but make it very incomplete." We see, once again, the president of the United States saying after learning that a former White House aide had lied to the prosecutors, "I suppose we can't call that justice, can we?" and wondering whether it is too late to "go the hang-out road." (Nixon is obliged to deal with the material on the tapes that have been made public.) One is struck again, in reading all this, that he never asked, *What is going on here?* He asserts that he wanted to get the matter aired before a grand jury, or appoint a special prosecutor, but others resisted. We are given still more explanations, which do not really explain, about his own role in the payment of funds and promises of clemency to the group that was indicted for breaking into the Watergate. (He does not discuss the fact that Haldeman was indicted and convicted for perjury on this subject.) In the middle of it all, there is Spiro Agnew, being forced to resign and asking Nixon if he could arrange for him some foreign assignment or a consulting job with a corporation.

We go through the drama of Nixon's listening to the tapes, realizing that he is trapped. We watch him struggle still, suggesting that the prosecutors, the Judiciary committee, the Republicans who finally gave up on him, were being "political." We read—and here we get back to the Nixon of *Six Crises*—his notes to himself as the denouement approaches: "Act like a winner"; "I intend to live the next week without dying the death of a thousand cuts . . . Cowards die a thousand deaths, brave men die only once." We see him outlining his final choices to himself: "My natural instincts welled up and I turned the paper over and wrote on the back: 'End career as a fighter.'" And on he goes, grippingly, to that final, painful scene in the East Room and then his departure in the helicopter—still not understanding why. □

The Two-Million Dollar Man

By LEONORE FLEISCHER

A JOKE IS GOING AROUND the book business now: If you're busted for crime in high places and allowed one phone call, don't call your lawyer, call your agent. Once they yelled "Get me Giesler"—now it's "Get me Swifty Lazar."

In the fall of 1974, Howard Kaminsky, president of Warner books, a mass-market paperback house, announced to his employees that he had just signed a deal with former president Richard M. Nixon for the worldwide publishing rights to Nixon's memoirs. Our reaction (I was an editor at Warner then) was swift, virtually unanimous and outraged. Nixon had ripped off every man, woman and child in America, we shrieked, he'd come away scot-free with a pardon, and now we, Warner Books, were giving him money?

When the actual advance leaked out, outrage turned to anguish. This sum, a breathtaking \$2 million, was denied vigorously for months, but the denials died down eventually and the figure passed unchallenged into the history books and is now acknowledged as "substantially correct." Two million dollars for Nixon? When Warner had acquired *All the President's Men* for reprint, it had shelled out a mere \$1 million—should crime pay twice as much as the uncovering of crime?

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LEONORE FLEISCHER covers the New York publishing scene for Book World.

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What's more, our colleagues at other houses couldn't resist. All day long, our telephones would tinkle with angry, gleeful taunts: "He'll never write the book, you know, he'll take the money and run." Or, "He'll never live to write that book. He's dying of phlebitis, and he's got only weeks." Or, "How could you let it happen?" As though any of us carried the muscle to stop it. We Warner liberals had fallen on hard times, unconvinced by Kaminsky's arguments that the book would have validity as a historical document and that Warner would not take a bath.

Thus we found ourselves in the schizoid position of having to defend to the outside world, out of loyalty to the house and to Howard, a purchase that most of us personally condemned and repudiated. We walked around for weeks with reproachful eyes, while Kaminsky lost some of his characteristic ebullience and developed certain defensive postures and utterances, almost reminiscent of RMN himself.

How come the company that bought the book—Warner—was not the company that first published it? Also, how come a mass-market paperback house and not a well-known hardcover house acquired the Nixon memoirs in the first place?

"In August of 1974," remembers Howard Kaminsky, "I was in the country for the weekend and Bill Sarnoff called me up there. [William Sarnoff is chairman of the board of Warner Books.] Frank Wells [president of Warner Brothers] had been chatting with Irving Paul 'Swiftly'

Lazar and Lazar mentioned that he was the agent for the Nixon memoirs. Wells phoned Sarnoff and Sarnoff called me—that was on Saturday—and we hopped a plane to the coast on Sunday, had our first meeting with Lazar on Monday and had it all wrapped up by Tuesday evening. I didn't get to meet Mr. Nixon until his birthday the following January, Super Bowl day. The contracts were very complicated and it took a couple of months for them to be executed and signed, so the announcement was postponed. We bought worldwide publishing rights—hardcover, softcover, everything.

"Mr. Nixon became very ill right after we signed him, and we were naturally very concerned. But the contract stipulated that if anything happened to him, the material would be ours and the family would help us put it together, so I always felt we'd have a book. The first thing I saw was a section of about 187 pages, dealing with his last weeks in office. I thought they were very moving, and I knew then that we were O.K."

Then began Warner's campaign to lay the other publishing rights off for enough money to justify their enormous advance to the author. "The first important sale we made," continues Kaminsky, "was the deal with *The New York Times* syndicate—they became partners with us in some of the worldwide first serial rights. The deal with Grosset [Grosset & Dunlap are the publishers of the hardcover edition now on sale] was made about a year and a half ago. Robert Markel [editor-in-chief of Grosset & Dunlap] became editor of

record for the memoirs, but they also had a couple of copy editors, David Frost [no relation] and Nancy Brooks, who lived out there, staying at the San Clemente Inn from July until March. Bernie [Bernard Shir-Cliff, editor-in-chief of Warner Books] and I also went out, did a lot of reading, made suggested cuts, but the real editing was done by Grosset's Frank Gannon, working intensively with the manuscript from beginning to end.

"We're selling the foreign rights very aggressively now because we have a book—we had nothing to show before." So far, rights have been picked up by Alain Stanke in France, Teleboek in the Netherlands, and W. H. Allen in Great Britain. Rights have also been sold to Japan, and interestingly enough, there will be both an Arab-language and a Hebrew edition.

"I never had any doubt that there would be a book," states Howard Kaminsky today. "The only thing that scared me at one time was Nixon's health. The first draft was a million and a half words long, and we wound up publishing a book of 500,000 words. And everything—names, dates—had to be checked and double-checked. He was sidetracked for a while by the Nixon-Frost interviews and by legal problems, so it took about a year longer than I'd figured. . . .

"I saw Mr. Nixon about four months ago, and he looked fine and felt fine." Was he optimistic about the book, about its reception and the reviews? "He was . . . uh . . . guarded." □