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Author Speculates On Watergate's

WASHINGTON (AP) — It is doubtful that the full story of the Watergate scandal would have been the unmaking of President Nixon's re-election in 1972, although his landslide margin probably would have been narrowed, writes author Theodore H. White.

On the other hand, White says in "The Making of the President—1972," had he es-

caped the taint of Watergate entirely, Nixon might have rolled up a margin no candidate could ever approach.

Dealing with the scandal that unfolded months after the election, White writes:

"At best, Richard Nixon, however magnificent his management of American power abroad, is guilty of gross negligence in management of the power of the White House at home ...

"At the worst, which his enemies and friends debate at the moment, he would be found guilty of a specific crime, 'misprision of justice'."

Such a charge would cover misconduct by a public official,

or the active or passive concealment of a felony.

The book, fourth in White's quadrennial series of presidential campaign histories, concentrates on the politics of 1972, when the dimensions of the Watergate affair were not clear.

Indeed, White tells of a 2½ hour conversation with Nixon on March 17, 1973, but says he did not raise the question.

"Four days later were to begin those revelations and charges which were to shatter his confidence in himself, the nation's confidence in him, and raise for everyone who writes of American history or politics those unavoidable questions:

"Would he go down in history

as the President of Peace or the President of Watergate? Had the President of the United States broken the law? What were the limits of power for the office and the man?"

"But I raised none of those questions that Saturday afternoon; they did not, at that moment, seem relevant," White reports. "We were talking about what he had learned of the Presidency, the nature of the job ..."

Speculating about the election-day impact of Watergate, White says that without the wiretapping raid on Democratic headquarters, and published charges of White House involvement, Nixon's margin

Election Impact

might have been increased by three or four million votes.

"... His stunning 61-38 victory might have gone as high as 65-35, for a record that might never again be approached in American two-party history," White says. "The Watergate affair blew that opportunity.

"Contrariwise—had the full story of the Watergate scandal and its companion fund-raising scandals been thoroughly exposed during the campaign, Nixon's margin would probably have been diminished to that of most ordinary candidates who run in the 55-45 area of choice," he writes. "But it is doubtful that in 1972, given the moods,

emotions and public issues of that year, George McGovern or any other Democrat could have been elected."

White's history of the 1972 campaign offers new glimpses of the candidates and their attitudes. Among them:

—On election day, flying back from California, the President said the outcome "was decided the day McGovern was nominated. The question after that was only how much. McGovern did to his party what Goldwater did."

—Sen. Thomas F. Eagleton of Missouri told McGovern before being dropped from the vice presidential nomination that the ticket couldn't win without him.