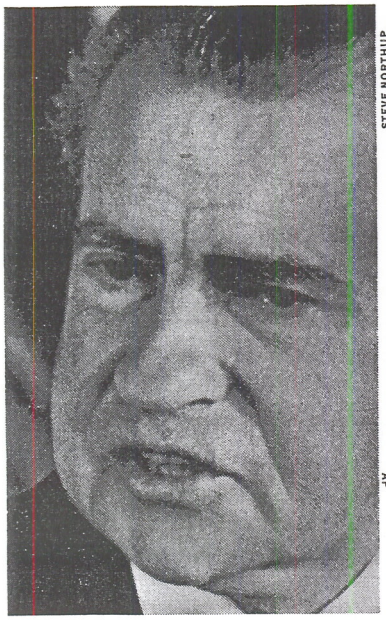
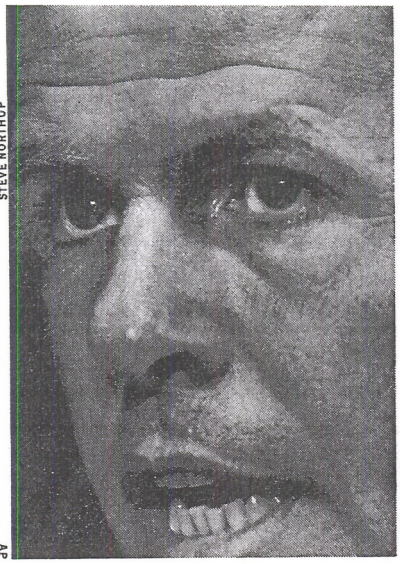
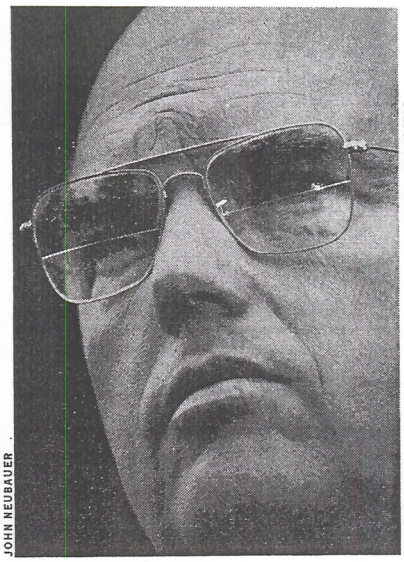


RICHARD NIXON



STEVE NORTHUP AP

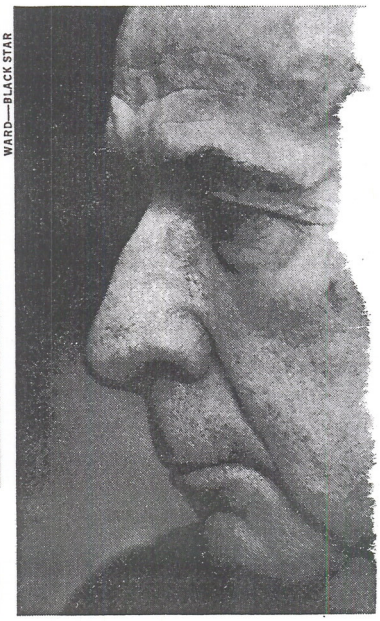
H.R. HALDEMAN



JOHN NEUBAUER

JOHN EHRLICHMAN

BOOKS



WARD—BLACK STAR

JOHN MITCHELL

Post-Mortem: The Unmaking of a President

HOW THE GOOD GUYS FINALLY WON
by JIMMY BRESLIN
192 pages. Viking. $6.95.

U.S. v. RICHARD M. NIXON
by FRANK MANKIEWICZ
263 pages. Quadrangle. $8.95.

THE LAST NIXON WATCH
by JOHN OSBORNE
213 pages. New Republic. $7.95.

WATCHMEN IN THE NIGHT
by THEODORE C. SORENSEN
167 pages. M.I.T. Press. $8.95.

BREACH OF FAITH
by THEODORE H. WHITE
356 pages. Atheneum–Reader's Digest Press. $10.95.

Rushed, flawed, repetitive, sometimes contradictory, the first wave of post-Nixon Watergate books is now in full flood. The question is: Do the writers have anything much to say that Americans really want to hear? The answer is a qualified yes. Some new nuggets of Nixonian intrigue rise to the surface. Diverse perspectives are offered on the men around the President—Mitchell, Haldeman and Ehrlichman—on precisely what brought Nixon down, and on how the Government and press have been affected. Most notably, these books provide small, sharp, almost novelistic insights into the personal struggles —some devilish, some inspiring—of individuals caught up in the scandal.

Rootless Outsider. Watergate is too recent to permit calm interpretation. Yet four professional President watchers and one street-wise verbal brawler with a police reporter's eye and literary style to match, have dared to look back in anger or regret. Perhaps because Americans are weary of grandiose pronouncements, it is the writers who think smallest who seem most worth reading. Jimmy Breslin's book, which bristles with anecdotes and is embellished with Irish blarney, is the best of the lot.

Of the other four writers, Theodore White, author of *The Making* of many Presidents, including Nixon, is the only one to offer a total read for anyone who wants to wallow in Watergate. He skillfully retells the whole story of the President's fall, even dealing with his character as a rootless outsider who bitterly resented social slights offered him by men like Eisenhower and Rockefeller. Most important, White's book includes an absorbing day-by-day account, based on personal interviews, of what the President and the men around him—especially General Alexander Haig and Lawyers Leonard Garment and James St. Clair—were doing during the final weeks of the crisis. For some days, White says, Haig was in fact the country's "Acting President" as he maneuvered to help bring about a resignation, while the moody Nixon veered between defensive anger and despair.

White sometimes seems trapped between his gift for swift narratives and his fondness for sweeping analysis. Quite properly, he assails Nixon for his "true crime: he destroyed the myth that binds America together ... the myth that somewhere in American life there is at least one man who stands for law, the President." Yet he overpraises Nixon's non-Watergate presidential actions at home and abroad, even to the bombing of Hanoi and the Cambodia "incursion." White is also dealing in vapors when he contends that the press turned wrathfully upon Nixon because its "chief public enemy," Spiro Agnew, "had been spared the shame and public guillotine of impeachment."

Theodore Sorensen's spare but sprightly volume focuses on a much narrower question: What now for the presidency? In the wry, graceful prose that lent class to the speeches of President Kennedy, Sorensen clings unfashionably to the liberal yearning for strong Presidents. Yet he admits that Kennedy, too, was error-prone and hobbled by the federal bureaucracy and congressional fief. Because "the power to do great harm is also the power to do great good," Sorensen would have his President strongly accountable to an aroused press, Congress, the courts and above all the people. On the grounds that the qualities now necessary to win elections are less and less likely to produce a good President, Sorensen also includes some criteria for judging a presidential candidate in mid-campaign. Among them: a sense of humor and delight in the give and take of politics, an ability to take criticism, admit mistakes and choose campaign aides who are more or less open in dealing with the press.

Politically Doomed. John Osborne and Frank Mankiewicz approach the story from a different point of view. Osborne is a veteran independent journalist, and his book consists mainly of reprints from his fine "Nixon Watch" columns in the *New Republic*. They demonstrate once again how perceptive Osborne was in sensing ahead of the rest of the press that the President was politically doomed and that Nixon's psychological stability was doubtful. Osborne's most memorable material is a discussion of the almost Queeg-like attention to petty detail that characterized Nixon's White House work habits long before Watergate. (He ordered log books to be kept on which White House paintings drew praise from visitors, and spent hours poring over inventories of the hundreds of cuff links, ashtrays and copies of *Six Crises* that were given out.)

Frank Mankiewicz is a journalist and lawyer—as well as former campaign manager for George McGovern—and he makes an insistent point: it was not the press that brought Nixon down, but the law—respect for it and for the kind

of step-by-step preparation and pursuit that due process requires. Mankiewicz is especially sharp at pointing out the lies and equivocations of Nixon's TV statements and press conferences.

Jimmy Breslin shows the bias of a clubhouse politician who understands the fast fix and the low squeeze; still he has nothing but disdain for any high flyer who thinks he can corrupt and deceive a whole nation. Last summer Breslin had the productive and pleasant idea of guzzling and gabbing regularly with a savvy fellow Irishman: Democratic House Leader Thomas P. ("Tip") O'Neill (TIME cover, Feb. 4, 1974). It is Breslin's theory that those Washington politicians who create around them the "illusion of power" (like "beautiful blue smoke rolling over the surface of highly polished mirrors") often end up by acquiring real power and making things happen. O'Neill, whose duties as majority leader carry no defined authority, knew this. According to Breslin, he craftily manipulated mirrors and wafted subtle smoke on Capitol Hill to set the congressional impeachment bureaucracy into uncheckable motion.

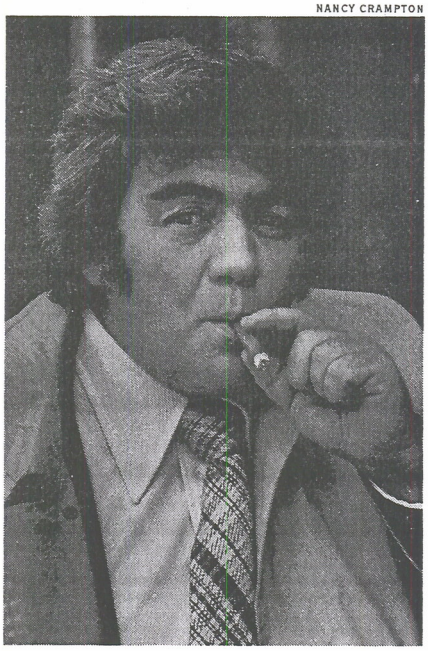
Beyond the Pale. As Breslin tells it the story is fascinating. O'Neill first realized that Nixon had gone beyond the political pale when he learned that Democratic businessmen in trouble with federal agencies were being clubbed into becoming Democrats for Nixon in 1972. The experience of George Steinbrenner, owner of an Ohio shipbuilding firm and part owner of the New York Yankees, was the eye opener. Steinbrenner had been a stalwart Democratic fund raiser during the 1968 campaign. Soon he was being investigated by IRS, and the Justice Department. "They are holding the lumber over my head," Steinbrenner told O'Neill when Tip asked him for contributions for McGovern in 1972.

Breslin describes how Steinbrenner was advised by a former Nixon law partner, Tom Evans, to see Herbert Kalmbach, Nixon's personal attorney. Speaking euphemistically about Steinbrenner's agency troubles, Kalmbach warned: "You do a lot of business in Washington; you would do well to get with the right people." Kalmbach suggested that Steinbrenner should give $3,000 to each of 33 Nixon committees and $1,000 to another. Total: $100,000. Steinbrenner did just that. After he reluctantly became a Democrat for Nixon, his Government troubles faded (though he later received a fine for illegally using corporate funds as political donations). When O'Neill heard Steinbrenner's story, he knew he was in the presence of a "plain, old-fashioned goddamned shakedown." Thereafter, he began saying of Nixon, "This fellow is going to get himself impeached."

In early 1973, well before the Ervin committee hearings, O'Neill told Speaker Carl Albert to prepare for impeachment proceedings. "Not being a lawyer," Breslin writes, "O'Neill did not know that he was using such terribly unsure methods as instinct, a little anger and a boxcar full of common sense. Soon the word was getting back to O'Neill, mirror fashion: impeachment was in the wind. Slyly, O'Neill labeled such talk "premature." He did not want a hasty vote that Nixon would probably win; once the facts were marshaled, he was sure the votes would be there.

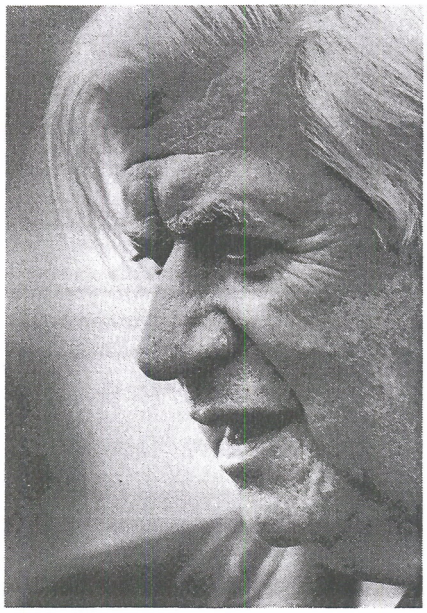
Impeachment Timetable. After the October 1973 Saturday Night Massacre, in which Archibald Cox and William Ruckelshaus were fired and Elliot Richardson resigned, O'Neill and Albert quietly channeled the impeachment inquiry to Peter Rodino's Judiciary Committee, even though the House had not voted to do so. More smoke. Without any authority, O'Neill pushed Rodino into speeding the selection of an impeachment counsel, then into setting an impeachment timetable. John Doar was selected as counsel. O'Neill brandished pro-impeachment polls and the timetable at Congressmen. More mirrors.

NANCY CRAMPTON



JIMMY BRESLIN
A plain, old-fashioned shakedown.

With some literary license, plenty of overblown prose but considerable underlying accuracy, Breslin relates how Doar's staff compiled all the details of Nixon's activities after the Watergate break-in on index cards—an original and six copies. The cards were then organized into various files and shuffled about on desks until patterns began to emerge. Every time Nixon inhaled, Breslin writes, "somewhere in the file cabinets, seven cards would breathe with him." It was the cards, for instance, that convinced Doar's staff that Nixon was lying as early as June 20, 1973—three days after the Watergate burglary and arrests. The presidential staff had assembled that day for the first time since



BILL PIERCE

"TIP" O'NEILL
Smoke signals and mirrors.

the scandal broke—yet Nixon publicly insisted he had never asked his aides about it. No way. Moreover, 18½ minutes of a Nixon talk were erased. Breslin concludes: "Anybody with any sense in the White House knew who had erased the tape. Nixon had." Breslin quotes a diehard Nixon aide, Dean Burch, as being in total agreement.

Fatally Honest. Breslin also turned up a previously undisclosed—and disheartening—Nixon taped conversation. Rodino had heard it with dismay, and got his committee's ranking Republican, Edward Hutchinson, to agree to its suppression. It was too inflammatory and too divisive. "The Italians," Nixon told John Ehrlichman, "they're not like us ... They smell different, they look different, act different ... The trouble is, you can't find one who is honest." To his sorrow, the President ran into not one Italian, Rodino, but a second, John Sirica, who from Nixon's point of view was fatally honest.

How the Good Guys Finally Won also provides new examples of the tenacity that Nixon's people displayed in fighting to avoid impeachment—in this case a desperate White House effort to link Rodino with New Jersey racketeers. First, White House aides tried to peddle this claim to Washington newsmen. Worse yet, Jeb Stuart Magruder, the Nixon sycophant who had already gone to prison piously repenting his Watergate lies, tried to curry pardonable favor behind bars. Magruder emphatically denies the story, but according to Breslin, Magruder approached former New Jersey Congressman Cornelius Gallagher, who was serving time for income tax evasion, when both were in the Allenwood, Pa., prison farm. "Peter Rodino is going to be wiped out," Magruder is quoted as telling Gallagher. "If you could help, that's all we need. And then you would be out of here clean with a

pardon." Gallagher apparently gave no information on Rodino, but passed the word to friends in Washington about Nixon's tactics.

None of the books conclusively answers the lingering Watergate question: How could so many clever men around Nixon profess to believe him long after most of the press and public found his story incredible and his claims of protecting the presidency a self-serving fraud? Breslin, perhaps unfairly, contends that Texan Charles Alan Wright, Nixon's constitutional expert, simply learned too late that "when the client is a liar and you believe him, he takes you down with him." Osborne doubts that Nixon's third lawyer, St. Clair, was ever as naive about the President's guilt as he seemed. White, quoting another Nixon lawyer, Leonard Garment, offers the most plausible clue. "There was this wishful non-knowingness," Garment recalled. "We didn't want to get together and put all the pieces together. We were afraid of what we might find out."

Bitter Mystery. Though the moral side of Richard Nixon's tragedy may still be regarded as a bitter mystery, the mechanical steps that led to it are perhaps easier to explain than these books suggest. He never thought a President could be forced to yield those damning tapes. He apparently believed that the big lie, repeated often enough from the sanctity of the Oval Office, would prevail. He never understood the Coxes, Doars, Jaworskis, O'Neills, Rodinos and Siricas of this nation. They were too "different." ■ Edward Magnuson

Best Sellers

FICTION

1—The Moneychangers, *Hailey (1 last week)*
2—Centennial, *Michener (2)*
3—The Dreadful Lemon Sky, *MacDonald (3)*
4—A Month of Sundays, *Updike (7)*
5—The Promise of Joy, *Drury (4)*
6—The Seven-Per-Cent Solution, *Meyer (6)*
7—Something Happened, *Heller (8)*
8—Black Sunday, *Harris (5)*
9—Lady, *Tryon (9)*
10—Spindrift, *Whitney (10)*

NONFICTION

1—Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders, *Bugliosi with Gentry (2)*
2—The Bermuda Triangle, *Berlitz (1)*
3—The Ascent of Man, *Bronowski (5)*
4—Here at The New Yorker, *Gill (3)*
5—Total Fitness, *Morehouse & Gross (4)*
6—When I Say No, I Feel Guilty, *Smith (7)*
7—The Bankers, *Mayer (8)*
8—Total Woman, *Morgan*
9—The Pleasure Bond, *Masters & Johnson*
10—You Can Get There from Here, *MacLaine*