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End of the Nixon Administration?

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Thanks to those electronics experts who analyzed Mr. Nixon's doctored tape—the one with the 18-minute erasure—the end of the Nixon administration is predictable.

The unanimous report by the experts should give an irresistible momentum to the drive for impeachment. The report told us the essential facts about the tape, and enables us to infer crucial things about Mr. Nixon's White House.

It is appropriate and useful that the fatal blow came in a dry-as-dust technical report, utterly lacking political coloration.

Mr. Nixon's men have tried to portray his continuing Watergate troubles

is this: the repeated manual erasures could not have been an accident.

We know the erasure happened after 1 p.m. October 1, when the machine that did the erasing arrived new at the White House. The White House itself says that from October 1, only Mr. Nixon and four close aides had access to the tapes.

The White House now urges Americans not to jump to conclusions about this. But the inescapable conclusion jumps at Americans.

It is that sometime on or after October 1 someone at or near the top of the White House, someone among five people with access to the tapes, destroyed subpoenaed evidence. This was another crime on behalf of a continuing cover-up:

This dictates a second common sense conclusion: whoever did this did it because he or she—or they—believed that it was better to commit the crime than to let Judge John Sirica hear what Mr. Nixon and Mr. Haldeman said about Watergate just three days after the break-in.

Because these conclusions are so inescapable, the Watergate drama has moved into a deadly third stage.

The first was the "presumption of innocence" stage. At that point the question was: Is there any reason to believe that Mr. Nixon was involved in the Watergate coverup?

But soon the rush of events worked an ineluctable change, bringing on the "White Queen" stage. The Queen, you may recall, bragged to Alice in Wonderland that she could believe six impossible things before breakfast. In the "White Queen" stage the ques-

tion became: What are all the difficult things you must believe in order to believe Mr. Nixon is innocent?

At first one just had to believe that Mr. Nixon ran the most slipshod White House imaginable. Some of his employees and some of his campaign funds got involved in a "third rate burglary."

Later you had to believe that Mr. Nixon was kept in the dark and then lied to by his most trusted aides, including two of his few close personal friends, Mr. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman.

Then you had to believe that Mr. Nixon was refusing to release the tapes because he cared more about an abstract principle (presidential confidentiality) than about clearing his name and sparing the nation further Watergate trauma.

But now, thanks to six anonymous electronics experts, we know too much. We know that there is corruption in the precincts of the Oval Office.

And, of course, we really know more than that.

We know who was operating in and around the White House when the cover-up began 19 months ago. And we know that Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Colson, Dean, Strachan, Porter, Caulfield, Ulasewicz, Mitchell, Stans, Hunt, Mardian, Segretti, Liddy, Kalmbach, McCord, Chapin, Gray and Magruder are gone now.

So now we are in the impeachment stage, and the question is: Of all the significant men who were around the White House when the cover-up began, who is still there providing the continuity in this on-going cover-up?

One name springs to mind.

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as the work of inflamed Democratic partisans. But no political enemy has said anything as damning as was said by the electronics experts.

The erased conversation was between Mr. Nixon and H. R. Haldeman, his chief-of-staff, three days after the Watergate break-in. The experts identified the precise machine on which the tape was erased. They demonstrated that someone erased the tape by hand, using the machine's keyboard controls. This "someone" erased it piece-by-piece, in at least five, and probably nine efforts.

The experts scrupulously refrained from drawing any conclusion. But the grinding logic of their demonstration