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## The Removal of Mr. Nixon

**A**BOUT SIX MONTHS ago, at a time when there was a sudden burst of demands for President Nixon's resignation, we observed in this space that neither the time nor the circumstance was right. We stated then that an overwhelming case could be made for the President's removal from office, but that the case for resignation was not necessarily stronger than the case for allowing the impeachment process to proceed, and that events would doubtless clarify the issue before long. It struck us then, as it does now, that if the President were to resign it would be vital that the public be provided persuasive evidence of the case against his continuing to serve in office.

When the most dangerous variation on the theme of resignation was advanced—namely Sen. James L. Buckley's proposal that the President step down in an aura of innocence and without any publicly agreed upon findings one way or the other—we took particular issue with it. Today we are witnessing what might seem to be a replica of last November's outcry. However, events have in fact gone a considerable way toward resolving last fall's unsettled questions. There is now in the public domain, by Mr. Nixon's own hand, a documentary record of presidential misconduct and moral failure which transcends political lines and ideological differences among the public. Testimony to this development may be found in two editorials we have excerpted elsewhere on this page today. What they are testimony to is the fact that Richard Nixon, by virtue of the records he himself has furnished of his performance in office, has managed to alienate profoundly important parts of his constituency—those elements, in fact, who have first call on his consideration and the most acute grounds for disappointment. To the best of our knowledge and belief, as they say on the witness stand, nobody has ever accused either the Chicago Tribune or the Omaha World-Herald of being liberal, elitist or Eastern Seaborn in its outlook—let alone of being all three at once.

The conclusions that have been reached by these two newspapers, and by others who have been among the President's most stalwart supporters, are important for two reasons. One is that they show signs of fulfilling one prerequisite of the President's removal from office under circumstances least likely to divide the country and create huge reservoirs of public acrimony, suspicion and dispute: This prerequisite is that his own constitu-

ency not feel that the President has been removed by a vengeful, partisan and unjust political opposition. The second reason that these conclusions are important is that they are firmly founded on an acknowledgement of presidential wrong-doing, as distinct from being used only on some amorphous sense that he has been unjustly robbed by others of his capacity to lead.

Where we would differ with the Chicago Tribune's appraisal is in its apparent conclusion that the transcripts recently released by Mr. Nixon, damning as they are, constitute a sufficiently complete or coherent statement of the case on which the President's removal must rest. Moreover, what is missing from the Tribune's recommended solution, as it is in the case of most of those who have raised their voices for the President's resignation, is any provision for the manner in which he would leave office and its aftermath for him. Vice President Agnew, if we may be a bit crude about the transaction, bought himself (and the office he had in fact disgraced) a little necessary dignity in exchange for an official public presentation of the particular charges he would have had to answer had he not resigned. The President's case is different in some important respects—the experience of removal or resignation of a man from the presidency is by nature bound to be more traumatic, and the relatively simple format for bargaining does not exist in this case.

Still, the basic ingredients are there and there are enough interested and honorable parties who have some claim to a role and some authority in these affairs to negotiate a proper outcome. That outcome, it seems to us—and we are specifically thinking of something short of the result of a fully played out impeachment process—would have roughly to provide the following elements: Some form of indemnification of the President as a private citizen, some formal presentation of the reasons for his leaving office, and some acknowledgement, if only tacit, by Mr. Nixon of his acceptance of both parts of the arrangement.

One thing is certain: The pressures will increase for his removal; the revelations will multiply, and the constituency will grow. Mr. Nixon's presidency is beyond recovery. That is what the transcripts—and the public reading of them—have made plain. The question is no longer whether he should be removed from office, but how and when he will go. And the answer, in large measure, is up to him.