

The One & Only Nixon

By WILLIAM V. SHANNON

WASHINGTON, Sept. 21—When Richard Nixon ran for the Presidency four years ago, he benefited from the political equivalent of the statute of limitations.

It was tiresome, everyone agreed, to keep bringing up all that old stuff about how Mr. Nixon distorted Jerry Voorhis's record in 1946 or how he and Murray Chotiner smeared Helen Gahagan Douglas as pro-Communist in the Senate campaign in 1950.

Since Joe McCarthy was in his grave, did it really matter any more all the nice things Mr. Nixon used to say about him or that he borrowed and refined so many of his techniques?

So it was that in 1968 the newest of the many new Nixons was allowed to strike a statesmanlike pose. Voters forgot his brutal misdeeds of the 1940's and 1950's.

But, of course, veteran politicians rarely alter their characters or their convictions. Like the rest of us, they are what they are and can hardly begin being much different at age 55. So Mr. Nixon has been the kind of President that everything in his earlier career had foreshadowed.

Mr. Nixon was elected on a "pledge" to end the war, but voters might have done better to recall that in 1954 he had urged American intervention to save the French in Vietnam and that as recently as 1967 he was saying that Vietnam was "the cork in the bottle of Chinese expansion." We might then have been able to foresee that under Mr. Nixon another 20,000 Americans would die in Vietnam, that today the Paris peace talks would still be stalled, that more bombs than ever would be falling on Vietnam and that the war would still be on the front pages.

Or consider character assassination. In 1952, Mr. Nixon denounced the members of the Truman Administration for their failure to stand up to Communist China. He described Governor Stevenson as "Adlai the appeaser . . . who got a Ph.D. from Dean Acheson's College of Cowardly Communist Containment."

In 1969, the same Mr. Nixon sent Vice President Agnew out to defame Averell Harriman. In 1972, he sent H. R. Haldeman, his White House chief of staff, on a television interview show to say that Senator Edmund Muskie and other critics were "consciously aiding and abetting the enemy"—a very slight paraphrase of the constitutional definition of treason.

Then he had Herbert Klein, his Director of Communications, characterize Mr. Muskie as "bolting beyond the bounds of criticism and dissent."

Having orchestrated this smear campaign, Mr. Nixon naturally then came forward, wringing his hands, and said, "I do not question the patriotism or the sincerity of those who disagree with my policies to bring peace. . . ."

In 1956, Vice President Nixon took partisan credit for the Supreme Court's school desegregation decision. It had, he said, been achieved under the leadership of "a great Republican Chief Justice, Earl Warren."

The man who made that remark became the President who has turned every Supreme Court vacancy into a political field day. When the Senate quite properly refused to confirm G. Harrold Carswell of Florida for the Supreme Court, President Nixon distorted a question of personal incompetence into "an act of regional discrimination."

"I understand the bitter feeling of millions of Americans who live in the South," Mr. Nixon declared, presumably hoping to profit from any "bitterness" he could whip up.

In his first national campaign in 1952, Mr. Nixon was shown to be the beneficiary of a secret \$18,000 fund subscribed by a clique of Southern California businessmen. Twenty years later, he begins this campaign as the beneficiary of a secret \$10-million fund subscribed by wealthy donors whose names he refuses to divulge.

Mr. Nixon entered political life with political lawyer Murray Chotiner as his gray eminence. In 1956 a Senate investigation showed that Mr. Chotiner was engaged in influence peddling. He seemed to recede into the background, and, in 1958, Mr. Nixon told Stewart Alsop, "It was a tragedy that he [Chotiner] had to get involved in the kind of law business that does not mix with politics."

Tragic or otherwise, when Mr. Nixon arrived in the White House so did Mr. Chotiner. He is busy in Washington today practicing the "kind of law business" he always has, doing secret political chores for the President and acting as a conduit for hot political money from the dairy lobby and other special interests. With him in the Nixon entourage are a number of other political fixers, wiretapping hatchmen and propaganda peddlers, as seedy a crowd as ever surrounded any Chief Executive.

In the 1950's, young Mr. Nixon was imitating Joe McCarthy and playing for the McCarthyite vote. In the 1970's, mature President Nixon is imitating George C. Wallace and playing for the Wallaceite vote.

Four more years?