

# SEChronicle 'Nixon vs. Nixon: An Emotional Tragedy'

By Herbert Mitgang

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THE INSIGHTS of psychoanalysis and the hard facts of history have resulted in a relatively new approach to biography called psychohistory. Because delving into the mind to offer explanations about motives and actions is not an exact discipline, psychohistory is a controversial subject, an art as much as a science.

Sigmund Freud analyzed Leonardo da Vinci; Erik Erikson wrote pioneering psychobiographies in "Young Man Luther" and "Gandhi's Truth," and Walter Langer analyzed behavior in "The Mind of Adolf Hitler," all accepted as classic works.

Now comes another book, "Nixon vs. Nixon: An Emotional Tragedy," that is causing much comment about its methods, its subject and its author.

The author is Dr. David Abrahamsen, an internationally respected psychoanalyst and authority on criminal behavior, who is a Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association and of the New York Academy of Medicine. The New York psychoanalyst has written a number of books, including "Our Violent Society" and "The Murdering Mind." This new book has been published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

In an interview about "Nixon vs. Nixon," Abrahamsen explained that he applied orthodox Freudian analysis methods to his "patient" though he never literally put him "on the couch." According to Abrahamsen, an aide at San Clemente had informed him that "You would be high on the

list to interview President Nixon," but no session was ever granted.

Asked if professional ethics were an inhibiting factor in proceeding with an analytical study without actually talking to Nixon, Abrahamsen said:

"Yes, it was one of the things that held me back for a time because I did not have enough information about Mr. Nixon's early childhood. But later I obtained the needed data from members of his family. I also had available the daydreams and fantasies in his own book, 'Six Crises,' which revealed the man in his own words.

"Even when the subject is not available for examination, analysis of the inner man is possible," Abrahamsen explained. "In fact, second-hand material can sometimes reveal more than patients themselves. I spoke to many of his associates. In addition, there were also his revealing conversations recorded on the White House tapes."

Abrahamsen said his work was not a conventional biography, but a study of the emotional development of a man who became President, then left the office as a result of actions that caused both a personal and national tragedy.

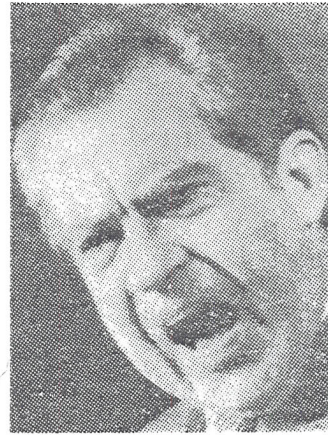
Abrahamsen believes that the former President suffered from a serious ailment that he calls "a character disorder." Nixon had "a great neurotic disturbance" and became "a self-absorbed paranoid," according to the psychoanalyst.

He contends that Nixon was incapable of rationally discharging his responsibilities and that his White House

decisions were based on his own disturbed "personality needs" rather than facts.

Why did not the President destroy the incriminating tapes? In his last days in the office, Abrahamsen says, Mr. Nixon "unconsciously sought failure."

To construct his portrait, Abrahamsen said, he has spent many hours talking to Nixon's closest associates, schoolmates, and family members other than Mrs. Nixon and their daughters. These included the novelist Jessamyn West and her brother, Merle West, sec-



AP photo

NIXON

ond cousins, who offered information about the troubled Milhous family and about Nixon's problems as a youth.

As part of his study, Abrahamsen also obtained sensitive information from Nixon's aunt, Rose Oliver Marshburn, sister of his mother, Hannah, and her husband, Oscar Marshburn. From them and from others, who would talk only anonymously, Abrahamsen concludes:

"Richard Nixon's mother

meant more to him emotionally than anyone else, except himself. But as he was frustrated in his relationship with his mother, his great love objects became his narcissistic self and his ambition. In politics, he gratified both. Politics provided the outlet for his infantile oral and anal drives — talking and controlling."

Abrahamsen says that Nixon conveyed a double image that amounted to a subpersonality. He was friendly yet abrupt, self-absorbed yet argumentative — a man of two minds.

"These two Nixon postures are often found in introverted, schizoid and secretive people," Abrahamsen observes. "Nixon's behavior could be described as a character disturbance, and one of no small order. It lasted since early childhood and reflected an unusual range of acting-out activities. Collectively, his was not normal behavior."

To avoid accusations of one-sidedness and to round out the image of his subject, Abrahamsen spoke to a number of Nixon's admirers, including Roy M. Cohn, the New York lawyer who was an aide to Sen. Joseph McCarthy, and Robert Finch, a cabinet member and longtime political adviser.

Cohn reported that Nixon was "one of the most suspicious men I have ever met in my life — suspicious of everybody and everything." Finch told Abrahamsen that when he saw Nixon in April, 1975, the former President simply said, "We made some mistakes." What surprised Finch was that Nixon never said, "I made a mistake."

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