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How Nixon Took Atlanta

by James Reston

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It is not only that the arts of publicity and advertising are being used in politics - they always have been - but that the blacker arts of espionage and sabotage are now being employed to confuse the people and harass and vilify the opposition..

This used to be common in the gutter politics of the Democratic big city machines. The new thing now is that it is being organized and mechanized by men in the service of the President of the United States, and turned into a form of political and psychological warfare.

To see how the level of political morals is declining, all you have to do is go back to Richard Nixon's 1952 "Checkers" speech about his so-called "secret fund." "I have a theory," he said then, "that the best and only answer to a smear or to an honest misunderstanding of the facts is to tell the truth . . . I am sure that you have read the charge that I, Senator Nixon, took \$18,000 from a group of my supporters. Now was that wrong?"

He emphasized that this was a moral and not a legal question. "Because," he said, "it isn't a question of whether it was legal or illegal. That isn't enough. The question is, was it morally wrong?"

But now, there are not only charges but evidence of vast sums of hundreds of thousands of secret funds being passed through Mexico to the Republican National Committee, agents of the committee burglarizing and bugging the Democratic headquarters, fake letters being written on Ed Muskie's stationery to make him look like a bigot, strange telephone calls in the middle of the night to white voters asking them to vote Democratic because the Democrats have been good to the black people.

This is not just gutter politics but guerrilla war, and it is not only wrong but illegal. But President Nixon does not follow the principle of Senator Nixon in the Checkers speech.