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The Corruption of Power

WASHINGTON — I have no idea how many Americans genuinely believe that the most intimate aides of the President, or the top-most officials of the organization set up to reelection the President, could be involved in burglary, political espionage and sabotage without the President being aware of the dirty work.

Millions of Americans automatically assume innocence on the part of the Chief Executive, given the public's gullible propensity for conferring something just short of sainthood on their chosen leader.

I WANT TO BELIEVE that Mr. Nixon has been betrayed by his disciples — that the bugging, the burglary, the payoffs, the hush money, the lying coverups, were all the work of over-exuberant assistants who couldn't entertain even the notion of losing the power and perquisites that had been theirs for four years.

But to believe that, some inner logic keeps telling me, is akin to believing that Henry Kissinger romped off to strike a deal with the Chinese Communists without President Nixon knowing a thing about it.

I make my judgment on the basis of four and a half years of first-hand knowledge as to how the topmost levels of government work. When J. Edgar Hoover was bugging the hotel rooms and tapping the telephones of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, who got the first titillating copies of the bugging transcripts, the juicy summaries? President Lyndon Baines Johnson.

Can you imagine those Waterbuggers digging up any dirt, or interesting "intelli-

gence," on George McGovern or Hubert Humphrey or Larry O'Brien or George Wallace without sharing it with the party chief, the man whose tenure in the White House was at stake?

Okay. I'll accept the reality that pride in the office would make most Americans retch at the thought of indicting the President of the United States as a burgling tap-per. Nor is there any precedent for indicting a President for perjury just because his press secretary lied for almost a year.

I'll even accept the reality that this namby-pamby Congress wouldn't even think of trying to impeach the President—despite the arrogant invitation to do so by Atty. Gen. Richard G. Kleindienst.

Don't you ever forget that, but for a mere handful of newspaper people who put honesty and truth ahead of White House dinner invitations, or even their own physical well-being, you would never have known about the most sinister corruption of our presidential election processes in the nation's history.

ALL THE EVIDENCE suggests that Mr. Nixon abandoned the 10-month-long cover-up after he heard that Jeb Stuart Magruder had "sung," giving first-hand evidence tying the President's closest aides to the very plotting and execution of the Water-gate crime.

The sad but old lesson here is that while power corrupts, a thirst for absolute power corrupts absolutely.