

## World of Books



# Ellsberg as the Eye of the Storm

— William Hogan

*"The defendants themselves were symbolic figures, even allegorical characters, for a generation which had changed its mind."*

WHEN Charles Colson, once one of President Nixon's highest-ranking advisers, was sentenced the other day for obstructing justice in the Daniel Ellsberg case, he declared: "The President on numerous occasions urged me to disseminate damaging information about Daniel Ellsberg, including information about Ellsberg's attorney and others with whom Ellsberg had been in close contact."

It is evident in Peter Schrag's in-depth analysis of the Ellsberg case, "Test of Loyalty," that the Nixon White House considered Ellsberg to be the ultimate "enemy" who could become Mr. Nixon's Alger Hiss of 1973 if his public image and credibility were defamed and destroyed.

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A TALENTED observer of the contemporary American scene in such books as "The End of the American Future" and "The Decline of the WASP," Peter Schrag covered the Ellsberg trial in Los Angeles. The core of this engrossing new book is the trial — actually the trial of Ellsberg, Anthony Russo and others in the Pentagon Papers case in which the defendants were charged with espionage and conspiracy.

Ellsberg became the central figure, the onetime Rand Corp. think-tanker who had

copied and made public classified documents which covered American misjudgments, failures, secrecy and deceit in Vietnam. He is analyzed studiously and objectively here, a complicated man with an identity crisis who, from various points of view, was "a traitor, a hero, an ego-tripping maniac, a true believer, a saint, a jet-set playboy, a symbol of whatever might ail or save the nation."

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BUT SCHRAG goes beyond the trial in this analysis of the "rituals of secret government," as the book is subtitled. He traces the national atmosphere which shifted between 1971 when the Papers were first published, and the end of the trial two years later when both the symbols and age had changed. The trial is shown to have been a political prosecution, in which Colson and company were the symbols espionage and conspiracy. Schrag concludes that it was Ellsberg, as much as anyone who set off the chain of events that ultimately led to Watergate, and in that sense "he had something bordering on demonic genius."

Like Woodward and Bernstein's "All the President's Men," this is high political drama. Its climax comes when one of the century's most significant trials is aborted when the burglary of the psychiatrist's office and the alleged White House attempt to bribe the judge became known. An unlikely true story (Simon & Schuster; \$9.95).