

# White House Vigil: A Footnote to History

By LINDA CHARLTON  
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Aug. 8—They were gathered in clusters at the White House fence today, as they did on Pearl Harbor night in 1941, and again in 1963 when the Kennedy was body of President brought home from Texas, and on a Saturday night last fall after the bloodless "massacre" in the Justice Department.

The Talk  
of  
Washington

To some who observed the patient, shifting group of perhaps 200 people standing in the light, fitful rain, it seemed a death watch. But if there were few there who had come to praise Richard Nixon, there were only a few more who had come to bury him. It was simply a chance to be a footnote to history.

Daniel Gray teaches history to fifth and sixth graders in Glendale, Calif., so he took up a position near the Northwest Gate at noon today. "I want to be here and say I was there when the President resigned," he said. "I'll be able to tell my kids that I was there."

Ken Rinzer of Paterson, N.J., a history major at Georgetown University, was more nearly vindictive. "I don't want him to resign," Mr. Rinzer said of Mr. Nixon, "he gets away Scot-free."

## 'Pray for Him'

What did he hope to see as he hung on the wrought-iron fence staring toward the pillared portico, beyond the soaring fountain and the banks of scarlet geraniums? "Not a thing," he replied with a grin, but he added that he had no intention of leaving.

"All I can tell them is to pray for him—he needs to get saved," said Mary Vasquez, who was one of a sizeable number of Jesus people passing quietly through the crowd with their evangelical message and literature.

Traffic on Pennsylvania

Avenue, already slowed by the rains, came almost to a halt as cars tarried in front of the mansion while their windows were rolled down and cameras were thrust out into the drizzle. Some people on the sidewalk had cameras, too, and others had transistor radios.

Bernadette Mahlmann of Wayne, N.J., had been there for two hours with her camera. "I'm just waiting for anybody to come out," she said, adding that she thought she had snapped a picture of Secretary of State Kissinger in his car.

It was Sylvain Levi's first day in this country, and there he was, standing in the rain in front of the White House. "C'est un jour important," the French student said simply, as if it was self-evident why he was there.

## Content With the Outside

James and Lois Rollinson have been camping these last two weeks, and had not seen a newspaper during that time until they arrived in Washington this morning. They had wanted to see the inside of the White House but were delayed by traffic, so they had to be content with the outside, and the crisis, and the crowds, and the television cameras, and the comings and goings. "At least we're here during this," said Mrs. Rollinson.

said 18-year-old Judy Rollinson with a sigh and a faintly shame-faced grin.

There were more cars than usual in the White House driveways, many of them because of a routine ceremony. And some of them might have been there because it was nearly impossible to get through by telephone; the White House lines were busy from morning on.

Out on the sidewalk, under the expressionless gaze of White House guards in their vivid orange raincoats, a dialogue of sorts trailed through the afternoon between a man wearing a sandwich board—

"Thank you Mr. Nixon," it said on one side; "Good luck, Mr. Nixon," on the other—and groups of bemused dissenters.

## Thanks for Watergate

"I'm thinking him for the Watergate—what an education he's given us," the placarded man explained in a tone that left his meaning in doubt.

"To have good, you don't necessarily have to have bad first," a young man asserted.

A little boy in a soggy felt Confederate hat scampered in and out of the circle of onlookers.

A dark young man with a heavy accent asked a young woman in blue jeans, "Will he go to jail?" She smiled patiently and replied: "We don't know. They might think that is enough."

Mrs. Meda Ellis of Wichita, Kans., was hoping for a glimpse, and a snapshot, of Vice President Ford. As for Mr. Nixon, she remarked: "I hate to see him give up. Most other Presidents have had other things, they just haven't uncovered them."

That was also the feeling of Floyd E. Artrip, a 73-year-old cabdriver for more than 30 years who said: "You don't get to the top in politics without going through a lot of crooked stuff. But this'll make these politicians a little more honest, maybe."

## 'The End of Watergate'

Mr. Artrip said that every passenger in his cab had something to say about what he called "the end of Watergate," and he even thought there had been "kind of a lull" in traffic in the late morning, before the word came of Mr. Nixon's television address.

But if it was nearly business-as-usual at the White House—the daily tours went on schedule—it also was business-as-usual in other parts of the capital. In the cluster of small shops in the Watergate office and apart-

ment complex where it all began, they were selling the Watergate coloring book, Watergate mugs (imported from Britain, with a ladybug on them), and other memorabilia. And they were selling perfume and espresso and embroidered pillows and other luxuries, too.

Paul Solomon, who works in a boutique called the Patchwork Table, had his transistor beside him at the cash register, listening to the murmurs of crisis. But he said: "Customers don't seem to be as concerned—they're to go on."

## At the Archives

In the semicircle of documents that record the nation's beginnings at the National Archives, the crowd shuffled in near-silence, peering into the lighted cases, stopping briefly to look at the faded, nearly illegible Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

"What's that pink stuff?" a small boy asked of his parents, pointing to the attesting seals on the report of the South Carolina electors in the first Presidential election in 1789. Next there was the letter from the temporary president of the Senate informing the winner, George Washington, of his "unanimous election," and saying that he hoped this would be "considered a pledge of affection and support" from "a free and enlightened people."

Even this did not seem to arrest the moving line on this 2,026th day of Richard M. Nixon's Presidency. And, a few documents back, 9-year-old Derick Tolliver of Detroit puzzled over the Sept. 14, 1786, report of the Annapolis convention.

"That's history," his mother, Mrs. Jearline Tolliver, told him. "And today the President may resign and you can tell your children." That, she said, will be history, too.



The New York Times/Mike Lien

People gathered outside the White House gates yesterday as reports spread that the President would resign

8-9-74 NYT