

A Long Road To Nixon's Last Crisis

I had recognized from the time I became a member of the Committee on Un-American Activities, and particularly after my participation in the Hiss case, that it was essential for me to maintain a standard of conduct which would not give my political opponents any solid grounds for attack . . . "Even when you are right they will give you a rough time," I have said. "When you happen to be wrong they will kill you."

—“Six Crises”

He always knew what to say, but the question was how closely he listened to himself. During his quarter-century in politics, Richard Nixon's actions often stood in jarring contradiction to his high-blown rhetoric. Reading “Six Crises,” his ghost-written autobiography, in the light of Watergate and his resignation points up the immense gulf between his endless pieties and the harsh reality of his tragically flawed career.

In all apparent sincerity, Nixon could preach law and order even as he and his aides were breaking the law. He could boast that his Cabinet was free of yes-men and then reduce the Cabinet to unprecedented impotence. In the midst of the Watergate cover-up, he could righteously declare: “What really hurts in matters of this sort is not the fact that they occur . . . What really hurts is if you try to cover it up.” In a moment of unintended irony, Nixon's first Attorney General, John Mitchell, once advised: “Don't watch what we say; watch what we do.” The President would have been safer the other way around, for when Congress and the American people finally learned what Richard Nixon had done, his Presidency came to an abrupt and squalid end.

Nixon's detractors called him amoral; his friends explained that he was “problem oriented,” not “ideology oriented.” Whatever the explanation, his record was the most paradoxical in U.S. political history. He was a seasoned Red-baiter who in the crowning achievement of his life opened a historic door to the Communist world. He was a *laissez-faire* free-enterpriser who suddenly announced “I am now a Keynesian,” and espoused wage and price controls in an effort to lick inflation. There was much to applaud in Nixon's remorseless abandonment of outdated positions. But at its worst his pragmatism degenerated to the philosophy, expounded by Jeb Stuart

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Wally McNamee—Newsweek

A last hurrah, 1973: Mistrustful even of his own success

Magruder at the Ervin committee hearings, that the end, whether national security or re-election, justified the means—including repeated violations of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

ALWAYS THE OUTSIDER

Historians and psychologists will debate for decades the causes of Richard Nixon's downfall, and the full answer may never be known. But there are hints in several well-documented Nixon traits: an opportunism that sometimes overwhelmed common decency, a penchant for solitude that gave his subordinates a shockingly free hand, an unrestrained aggressiveness in fighting a legion of real and imagined “enemies.” Above all, perhaps, Nixon was a born outsider, despite his cultivation of rich and influential men. When he had climbed to the very pinnacle of American society, he remained, in his own view of himself, an outsider still—distrusted, unloved and

misunderstood. Only months after his landslide victory in 1972, he complained to White House counsel John Dean: “Nobody is a friend of ours. Let's face it.”

The judgments on Nixon's policies will likely be as mixed as the views of his personality. At home, the Nixon Administration took a largely revisionist stance, trying to dismantle Lyndon Johnson's flawed Great Society and replacing it with such lower-key devices as revenue sharing, which returned some Federal money and power to the states. Solicitous of his “Silent Majority,” Nixon opposed such controversial activities as busing to achieve racial integration in the schools. He also cut back on health and education programs, and offered the black minority little more than what one adviser called “benign neglect.” And although Nixon presided over the landing of men on the moon, he ultimately failed to solve—indeed, aggravated—a more



Crowning achievement: On his epochal visit to China in 1972, Nixon meets with Chairman Mao Tse-tung

UPI

down-to-earth problem: the surging inflation that threatened to undermine U.S. prosperity.

Foreign policy, however, was always Nixon's strong suit, and there, with the brilliant help of Henry Kissinger, he wrote himself a distinguished page in history. In Vietnam, he ended America's longest war (although his critics said he was too slow about it). He achieved real détente with the Soviet Union and lifted Washington's twenty-year quarantine of mainland China. Even as Watergate intruded on his time and authority, he and Kissinger arranged a truce in the Middle East and started Israelis and Arabs on the path to accommodation. A price was paid for these gains. Key allies—Japan and the NATO countries—were ignored and affronted during Washington's fixation on Russia, China and the Middle East. And the White House showed a woeful lack of interest in international economic and monetary affairs, contributing to a worldwide financial malaise that is now approaching the crisis point.

Nonetheless, Nixon's diplomatic triumphs were real. But equally real were Watergate and all the other scandals. Judging by the public record, Nixon ran, quite simply, the most corrupt Administration in U.S. history.

When he himself was finally chased from office, more than a dozen of his former associates had already been convicted of or had pleaded guilty to a vast array of crimes. Among them was a former Attorney General, Richard Kleindienst, and Nixon's handpicked original Vice President, Spiro Agnew, who had pleaded no contest to tax evasion. More Nixon aides, including two former Cabinet officers, were under indictment.

The Watergate burglary itself was only a petty chapter in the saga of corruption. The subsequent cover-up had warped America's system of justice and tinged some of the country's most important institutions, including the FBI and the CIA. The President's purveyors of "dirty tricks" had tarnished the political process. His "plumbers" had violated personal freedoms—in many cases for no valid reason, despite the claims of "national security." In the pursuit of political "enemies," the White House also attempted to subvert the Internal Revenue Service.

THE EDUCATION OF A POLITICIAN

In addition, the Administration was remarkably helpful to some giant corporations run by the President's friends and campaign contributors. And there were even hints of personal speculation—money and jewels that may have stuck to the President's fingers, houses that were in fact embellished at taxpayers' expense and income taxes that were drastically underpaid until an uproar arose. In his farewell address last week, the only specific reason Nixon gave for his resignation was a loss of political support, but once again his rhetoric was out of touch with reality.

An attack always makes more news than defense . . . You cannot win a battle in any arena of life merely by defending yourself.

Nixon's political style was set during his first campaign, in 1946, by Los Angeles lawyer Murray Chotiner, a hard-nosed political tactician. In essence, Chotiner's technique was to isolate a real or contrived weakness in an opponent's

record and attack it relentlessly. The Communist menace was not yet the consuming issue it was to become, but Chotiner thought it would do. Thus, Nixon charged that his respected opponent, Rep. Jerry Voorhis, was a dupe of the U.S. Communists. There was no foundation for the charge, but Voorhis never recovered from this onslaught, and Nixon was elected to Congress.

The same tactics were employed in his 1950 race for the Senate against Rep. Helen Gahagan Douglas. Terming her "the Pink Lady," Nixon and Chotiner distributed 550,000 pamphlets, printed on pink paper, linking Mrs. Douglas's voting record with that of New York Rep. Vito Marcantonio, an outspoken Communist sympathizer. What the Nixon camp did not mention was that he himself had sided with Marcantonio on many issues and that Mrs. Douglas had opposed Marcantonio by supporting anti-Communist legislation. Nixon won nearly 60 per cent of the vote, and a small California newspaper tagged him with the enduring nickname, "Tricky Dick."

The Hiss case brought me national fame. But it also left a residue of hatred and hostility toward me—not only among the Communists but also among substantial segments of the press and the intellectual community.

Nixon's attacks were not confined to opponents in political campaigns. A lucky assignment to the House Un-American Activities Committee during his freshman term brought him his first chance for national prominence. He was sitting in a HUAC hearing one day in 1948 when a Time magazine senior edi-

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tor and former Communist courier named Whittaker Chambers murmured the name of Alger Hiss, a former State Department official under Roosevelt and Truman, as a Communist spy.

Hiss, a polished and influential member of the Eastern Establishment, coolly denied ever having known Chambers, much less having been a Communist himself. But despite Hiss's credentials—or perhaps because of them—Nixon pursued the case relentlessly. Eventually he brought it to the melodramatic conclusion of the “pumpkin papers”—State Department documents allegedly stolen by Hiss and later hidden in a hollowed-out pumpkin on Chambers's farm—and in 1950 Hiss was convicted of perjury.

In the flush of success, Nixon denounced Hiss as “the archtraitor of our generation,” and for good measure he pinned the traitor's label on Harry Truman, Secretary of State Dean Acheson and Adlai Stevenson. Years later, Truman was still fuming: “Nixon is a shift-eyed, goddamn liar.” More elegantly, Stevenson declared during his run for the Presidency in 1952 that “Nixonland is a land of slander and scare, of sly innuendo, of a poison pen and the anonymous telephone call, and hustling, pushing and shoving—the land of smash and grab and anything to win.”

I won my share of scholarships, and of speaking and debating prizes in school, not because I was smarter but because I worked longer and harder than some of my more gifted colleagues.

Richard Milhous Nixon was born on Jan. 9, 1913, in the tiny farming community of Yorba Linda, about 20 miles east of Los Angeles. He was the second son of Frank Nixon, a prickly, outspoken Jack-of-all-trades, and Hannah Milhous, a strong-willed and pious Quaker. Most of the time, the Nixons lived on the edge of poverty. Richard had to work at odd jobs and earn scholarships to put himself through nearby Whittier College and Duke University law school.

Nixon was weaned on the humiliations that haunt life's underdogs. At Whittier College, he languished on the football bench for four years. After graduating from Duke, he set his heart on a job with a prestigious Wall Street law firm, but he was brushed off there, and when he lowered his sights to the FBI, he lost out again and returned to the modest practice of law in Whittier.

Even his courtship of Thelma Catherine Ryan (nicknamed “Pat” by her Irish-American father because she had been born on the eve of St. Patrick's

Day) had its moments of indignity. Occasionally he would drive her into Los Angeles and wait for her while she had a dinner date with someone else. But Dick and Pat were cut from the same bolt of cloth; both poor, they became self-made persons. “People from humble circumstances,” Mrs. Nixon once observed, “can through sheer hard work go up the ladder.” They went up together, but neither of them ever forgot where they came from or what they had endured.

Thinking back to Franklin Roosevelt's devastating remark in the 1944 campaign—and now they are attacking poor Fala—I decided to mention my own dog Checkers. Using the same ploy as FDR would irritate my opponents and delight my friends, I thought.



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‘Of course, if I had the top job I'd act differently’

Less than six years after his election to Congress, Nixon was named Dwight Eisenhower's running mate with the promise that he would help to “clean up the mess in Washington.” But soon the senator was in a mess of his own. Early in the campaign, it was revealed that a group of Nixon supporters had set up an \$18,235 fund for him. Opponents called it a “slush fund”; Nixon insisted that it was for political and campaign expenses, not for his personal use. As pressure for Nixon's resignation grew, Eisenhower remained silent, waiting for his running mate to prove himself as “clean as a hound's tooth.”

The result was an astounding speech—and a landmark use of television in politics. Nixon defended the fund and

detailed his own modest assets as proof of honesty. “I should say this, that Pat doesn't have a mink coat,” he declared. “But she does have a respectable Republican cloth coat, and I always tell her that she would look good in anything.” He did own up to accepting one gift—Checkers, the cocker spaniel beloved of his daughters Tricia and Julie. The audience swamped the Republican National Committee with “Keep Nixon” messages, and Eisenhower told Nixon: “You're my boy.”

In a losing campaign, only the candidate is responsible for the tactics that led to defeat.

Nixon began his 1960 Presidential campaign with a slight lead in the polls over John F. Kennedy. But perhaps because of his past successes with Voorhis and the Checkers speech, Nixon unwisely agreed to debate Kennedy on television. The first debate was a disaster. Badly made up and ill at ease, Nixon fared poorly, as much in terms of style as of substance. The election was a squeaker; JFK won by a mere 118,000 votes of nearly 69 million cast.

Almost as though to prove that his defeat had not been an accident, Nixon miscalculated again in 1962, challenging Edmund G. (Pat) Brown for the governorship of California. He lost, and in a remarkable morning-after tirade he renounced any further political ambitions. “You won't have Nixon to kick around any more,” he told reporters, “because, gentlemen, this is my last press conference.”

FAREWELL ADDRESS

He misspoke himself, of course. For the next six years, Nixon toiled diligently in the political wilderness, campaigning for Republicans across the country and loyally supporting the kamikaze candidacy of Barry Goldwater in 1964. After the rout of Goldwater conservatives Nixon became, once again, the Republican heir-apparent. In 1968 he was back in the comfortable guise of the attacker, lashing out at Hubert Humphrey's legacy from Lyndon Johnson—the failures of the Vietnam war and of the Great Society. The outcome was another paper-thin margin, but this time the decisive votes went to Nixon. At the outset, his style in office seemed admirably matched to the nation's mood. After the turmoil of the LBJ era over the Vietnam war and the fight for civil rights, Nixon's lower voice was welcome.

A leader must do more than count noses of his advisers. He should consider their opinions, but he must always re-

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member that it is his responsibility to make decisions—not theirs.

Although he professed great affinity for the common man, Nixon lacked the common touch; confronting antiwar students at the Lincoln Memorial, he could think of nothing better to talk about than football. At times, the President became a virtual recluse, screened from the view of even his Cabinet by a Prussian wall of self-assertive aides, notably chief of staff H.R. (Bob) Haldeman, domestic counselor John Ehrlichman and his closest confidant, John Mitchell.

The Nixon entourage mirrored the President's own ambivalence. One principal speechwriter, Raymond Price, was the voice of sweet reason; the other, Patrick Buchanan, pitched the political hardball. Men like Melvin Laird and William Rogers rubbed elbows with manipulators like Charles Colson. Press chores were assigned to reasonable men like Herbert Klein—and to propagandists like Ronald Ziegler and Ken Clawson. The "good guys" often clashed with the "bad guys," and more often than not the less scrupulous advisers prevailed.

What was really at stake was that admitting Red China to the United Nations would be a mockery of the provision of the Charter which limits its membership to "peace-loving nations."

Nixon's first important task was to wind down the war in Vietnam, and many Americans were under the impression that he meant to do it quickly. But it developed that the new President planned instead to remove American troops gradually while preserving at least the form of an independent South Vietnamese Government. The troop cuts and the introduction of a draft lottery effectively muffled the antiwar movement, although the invasion of Cambodia in 1970 provoked demonstrations on college campuses, including that of Kent State University in Ohio, where four students were killed by National Guardsmen.

On Vietnam, as with other issues, Nixon tailored his policies to reassuring the "new Republican majority" in Middle America. He promised to review the controversial conviction of Lt. William Calley in the My Lai massacre case. In May 1971 he applauded the unwarranted arrest of antiwar demonstrators in Washington. And when Daniel Ellsberg tried to inform the American public about the causes of U.S. involvement in Vietnam by leaking the Pentagon papers to the press, Nixon attempted—unsuccessfully, in the end—to block their publication.

By then, the peace talks were on in Paris, and whenever they faltered, Nixon turned on the pressure, bombing Cambodia secretly and pasting Hanoi and Haiphong at Christmas 1972. "Peace with honor," as Nixon saw it, finally came three months after the 1972 election. And when U.S. prisoners of war re-

turned from North Vietnam in better-than-expected shape last year, the nation was exuberant. Yet as Nixon left office last week, the fighting among the Vietnamese was still going on.

WATERGATE ACROSS THE SEA

The Administration's peacemaking efforts had more rapid success in the Middle East, and led to a Presidential tour of the area last June that marked Nixon's last full-scale triumph. Meanwhile, the ice had been broken with China and Russia. The immediate results of the China visit in February 1972 were less tangible than symbolic. The three Soviet summit meetings produced solid progress

I doubted if any official in Washington had greater, more sincere respect for the press corps than I, or had tried to be more fair in his treatment of them.

Throughout his Administration, Nixon waged an intermittent feud with the press. In 1969 he sent forth Spiro Agnew to do battle with the media. With newsmen figuring prominently on the official "enemies list," some journalists' phones were tapped, others were subjected to tax audits and CBS's Daniel Schorr was investigated by the FBI—allegedly because he was being considered for a White House job.

As the 1972 election approached, the



To peace: A toast with Soviet chief Leonid Brezhnev at the first summit, 1972

on trade, and some on arms limitation. But even in diplomacy there were curious lapses. A \$1 billion wheat sale to Russia benefited only the Soviets and a few U.S. grain companies, and added measurably to the speed of U.S. inflation.

At home, Nixon's economic and social policies were marked by a search for whatever could work. He abandoned conservative economics in favor of wage and price controls in an unsuccessful attempt to curb inflation. He dismantled such "Big Government" operations as the Office of Economic Opportunity, and in an effort to cut spending for social purposes he vetoed dozens of Congressional bills and impounded the funds when his vetoes were overridden.

men around Nixon stepped up the pace of their illegal activities against a wide range of foes. Although Nixon seemed to have the election all but won, the White House set out to discredit the stronger Democratic contenders with dirty tricks. They also amassed a huge campaign war chest of \$60 million, much of it in illegal contributions from corporations. Their preparations had reached fever pitch by June 17, 1972, when five burglars from the Committee for the Re-election of the President broke into Democratic headquarters in the Watergate.

Lawyers in politics need non-lawyers to keep them from being too legalistic, too unimaginative.

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

The President and many of the men who helped cook up Watergate and the other acts of sabotage must have known what they were doing; they were lawyers, though hardly legalistic ones. After June 17, they threw themselves into a frantic cover-up, trying to hide the activities of the White House "plumbers" and dirty tricksters, the Ellsberg burglary and the subsequent attempt to influence the judge presiding over his trial. There was also a long list of suspect dealings with giant businesses headed by Nixon friends and campaign benefactors—including ITT, which pledged \$400,000 preced-

\$120,000 had been spent on LBJ's home); some of the money, moreover, went for no valid "national security" purpose but did enhance the value of Nixon's property. The President also vastly underpaid his income taxes, mainly because of improper deductions for the gift of his Vice Presidential papers to the nation. A Congressional committee found that Nixon owed \$476,431, and the IRS ruled, charitably, that he had merely been negligent in preparing his returns—though possible fraud charges have not yet been entirely ruled out.

There were signs, too, that illegal cam-

tapes still threatened him. Then the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that Nixon would have to hand over the tapes of 64 conversations to special prosecutor Leon Jaworski. Some of the President's advisers finally listened to those tapes and discovered what Nixon himself had neglected to tell them—that the cover story wouldn't "play in Peoria," or anywhere else.

Looking back, I think I can understand how [Chambers] must have felt. His career was gone. His reputation was ruined. His wife and children had been



Behind the White House wall: Nixon confers with aides Bob Haldeman, Dwight Chapin and John Ehrlichman, 1970

ing a favorable antitrust decision, for example, and a dairy-industry group that pledged \$2 million to the Nixon campaign just before an increase in milk-price supports was granted.

Once a man has been in public life for any period of time, his interests and ambitions change. Naturally, he wants and needs enough income to take care of his own and his family's needs. But acquiring money and property, as an end in itself, has no appeal for him.

Many of the Nixon scandals and cover-ups impinged on basic principles of American democracy, including free elections and equal justice. But almost as disturbing were the excesses involving the President's own pocketbook and real estate. While Nixon was becoming a near millionaire in office, the government spent up to \$17 million on his homes in Key Biscayne and San Clemente. The sum was staggering (only

campaign contributions may have found their way into the hands of Nixon's family and friends—in particular a \$100,000 payment from billionaire Howard Hughes. And on Mrs. Nixon's 60th birthday in 1970, the President gave her a \$5,650 pair of diamond and platinum earrings; most of the money for the purchase, investigators have charged, came from "laundered" campaign funds.

Hiss, a lawyer himself, had made the fatal mistake no client should ever make—he had not told his own lawyer the full truth about the facts at issue.

Richard Nixon repeated his claims of innocence so often and so ardently that he may well have ended up sincerely believing them. But the day of reckoning could not be postponed forever. Many of the advisers who had helped him "stonewall" in the past had already left for jail cells or courtrooms across the country, and the remaining White House

humiliated. But all this would not have mattered to him if the cause for which he had taken those calculated risks had some chance to prevail.

Richard Nixon left office with as much grace as he could muster and as much face as he could save. He talked of goals achieved and of the national interest. But what principles did the 37th President stand for? What were the hopes and causes and ideals that extended beyond his own ambitions? At one time or another, he had espoused almost every worthy principle, often repeatedly. But in practice he violated enough of them to make all of his protestations suspect. The constants in Richard Nixon's character as a public man were, rather, suspicion, aggressiveness, secrecy, insecurity, loneliness and a bitter resentment. Whatever he may have done to his fellow citizens in betraying their highest trust could hardly be worse than the scars on his own spirit.