RICHARD NIXON AT AGE 14

CUMMINGS—PRENTISS

AS A COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYER

WHITTIER COLLEGE

HIS BIRTHPLACE IN YORBA LINDA, CALIF.

UPI

THE NIXON YEARS

DOWN FROM THE HIGHEST MOUNTAINTOP

There is one thing solid and fundamental in politics . . . the law of change. What's up today is down tomorrow.
—Richard M. Nixon

Few men could make that statement with more authority than the 37th President of the United States. Richard Nixon's career in American politics was a drama marked by breathtaking climbs to what he often called the "mountaintop," followed by precipitous plunges to the depths. Not many of his fellow citizens loved him. Many respected and admired him. Perhaps just as many hated him. He labored under the handicap of being mysterious without being fascinating. His supporters saw him as shrewd enough to win elections and capable enough to run an efficient centrist-conservative Administration that would save the country from radical or liberal excess. To his enemies, he was devious and dangerous, a man without principle, a hungry Cassius who sought power at any cost. However one felt about him, he became a seemingly permanent fixture in American politics, yet always somehow an outsider.

Though Nixon did not register to vote until he was 25, he was a Congressman at 33, a Senator at 37, Vice President at 39—and an apparent has-been at 47. In a spectacular comeback, he fought his way to the presidency eight years later. He won re-election with the greatest number of popular votes in the nation's history. Then, barely a year later began an inexorable process that devastated his presidency. At the age of 61 he came down from the mountaintop for the last time.

Nixon moved into the White House at an extraordinary moment in American history, toward the end of a decade when the nation had been more troubled and divided than at any time perhaps since the Civil War, certainly since the Great Depression. The Viet Nam War had severely shaken the country's sense of being a morally superior power as well as its belief in its invincibility. The '60s brought deeply troubling questions about the meaning of a good life centering on economic growth and prosperity, about traditional morals, rules and values.

A Fighting World

At such a time many hoped that the new President would bring reconciliation and unity, that he would radiate a kind of healing quality. Nixon saw the opportunity—"Bring Us Together" became his slogan. But he was never capable of the vision and magnanimity to make good on it.

Others hoped that he would simply put the troublemakers, the radicals, the hippies, the blacks, in their places. But even the haters realized, however dimly, that this would not be enough.

So the best hope for Richard Nixon as President was that he might heal through competence; that a pragmatic, efficient leader with access to the best brains—so one imagined at the time—would give the U.S. a new start.

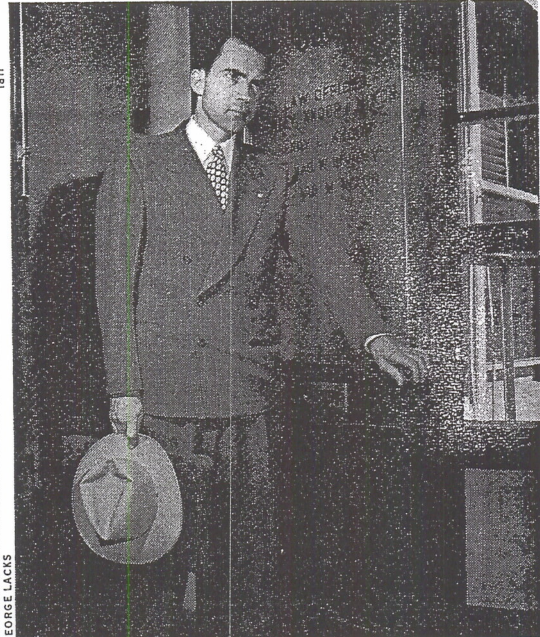
In many respects, Nixon came close. Indeed, he achieved some things that will outlast his disaster. But ultimately he destroyed himself through the tragic flaws in his personality—most notably, perhaps, a frequent inability to face or tell the truth.

Nixon's public life began 28 years ago, and since then, legions of political commentators, barroom sages, Freudian analysts and psychohistorians have attempted to fathom his inner workings.

He was ill at ease with most people, even politicians; his closest friends were taciturn, self-made men who shunned the spotlight. These were principally those two rich entrepreneurs, Bebe Rebozo and Robert Abplanalp. "I'm an introvert in an extravert profession," Nixon said—a formula that itself may have been a stratagem of concealment. When confronted with a crisis, he became more secretive than ever, withdrawing into seclusion and arriving at a decision with relatively little outside advice. Sternly self-controlled ("I have a fetish about disciplining myself"), he was stiff in public and rarely relaxed in private. As Author Garry Wills maintained in *Nixon Agonistes,* Nixon erected this "wall of decorum in dress and manner" so that he could "fend off the world, avoid participation in it."

Perhaps Nixon did so because he saw the world as a fundamentally hostile place and life as an almost uninterrupted series of crises. In the words of James David Barber, chairman of

AS A NAVY LIEUTENANT


A YOUNG LAWYER IN WHITTIER, CALIF.

A CONGRESSMAN, EXAMINING CHAMBERS' "PUMPKIN FILM"

Duke University's political science department and author of *The Presidential Character:* "Nixon lives in a fighting world; his writing and speaking are full of the imagery of combat. He sees himself as forever engaged in battles, hit by 'terrible attacks,' in virtual hand-to-hand combat."

By seeing himself under permanent siege, he conjured up even more enemies than he actually had. In the face of criticism, he was inclined to retaliate savagely, living under constant temptation to show up his enemies, to "get them" before they got him. After his 1972 triumph, when New York *Times* Columnist James Reston asked whether Nixon's smashing re-election would lead to reconciliation with his enemies, a White House aide replied: "The President does not want to make peace with his critics. He wants them to admit publicly that they were wrong."

In Barber's view, Nixon's greatest fear was "public exposure of personal inadequacy." While he often proclaimed his relish for combat, he seemed to dread it at the same time; it was as if defeat would mean, as it did for the King of the Wood in Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough,* a sentence of death. It was his efforts to prevent the exposure of his Administration's failings that ultimately undid him.

In one of the press conferences in his last year, Nixon said: "I have a quality which I guess I must have inherited from my Midwestern mother and father, which is that the tougher it gets, the cooler I get." Many who knew him well doubted that claim. They saw, or thought they saw, rage and consuming bitterness beneath the façade. But he did display amazing endurance and (with a few lapses) a remarkable public calm during more than a year of savage attacks and adversity.

He often invoked his Midwestern heritage. His mother, Hannah Milhous, was an Indiana Quaker whose family, celebrated in Jessamyn West's novel *The Friendly Persuasion,* moved to Whittier, Calif., at the turn of the century. His father, Francis Anthony Nixon, was an Ohio Methodist with only six years of formal education who left his job as a trolley-car operator in Columbus and drifted to Southern California in search of warmer weather. After Frank married Hannah in 1908, he was barely able to scrape by as a citrus-fruit farmer, grocer and gas-station owner. A neighbor described Frank Nixon as "brusque, loud, dogmatic, strong-willed, emotional and impatient." Some who were troubled by Richard Nixon's apparent rootlessness, that strange plastic quality of speech, thought and behavior that somehow failed to suggest the traces of a home town or a home region, blamed this phenomenon on California, often seen as a state of uprooted migrants and shallow or phony culture. That analysis was unfair to California. Whatever it was that made Nixon seem so oddly awkward and synthetic must be looked for in himself.

Hardscrabble Atmosphere

Richard, one of five sons (two died at early ages), grew up in a hardscrabble, contentious atmosphere. He was a gifted student who finished second in his class at the Quaker Whittier College and a less gifted football player who regularly warmed the bench. In later years, he was to recall his coach's advice: "You must get angry, terribly angry about losing. But the mark of the good loser is that he takes his anger out on himself and not on his victorious opponent or his teammates." Nixon learned only half the lesson, and all his life took his anger out on his opponents as well as himself.

At Duke Law School, where he earned the nickname "Gloomy Gus" for his cautious, pessimistic, Depression-bred outlook, Nixon finished third in his class. Unable to land work with a major New York law firm (he also tried the FBI), he returned to practice in Whittier, where he met Thelma Catherine ("Pat") Ryan, who taught shorthand and typing at the local high school. They were married after a two-year courtship and set up housekeeping in an apartment over a garage.

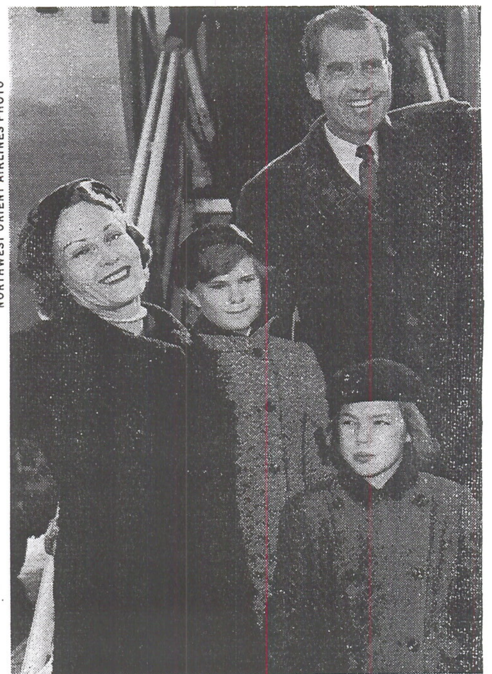
After Pearl Harbor, Nixon served in Washington with the tire-rationing unit of the Office of Price Administration, a job that gave him a lasting distaste for economic controls. Entering the Navy as a lieutenant (j.g.), he left as a lieutenant commander. He served as a supply officer in the South Pacific, learned poker well enough to win regularly, and developed a colorful vocabulary. He gave up the poker, but his swearing became something of a legend.

Nixon was thrust into politics in 1946 when a group of Southern California Republicans urged him to challenge five-term Democratic Congressman Jerry Voorhis. His prospective sponsors first wanted to know whether Nixon was in fact a Republican. "I guess so," he replied. "I voted for Dewey." Voorhis was an earnest liberal, but Nixon managed to suggest that he was a dangerous left-winger by linking him to

UPI

WEEPING DURING 1952 CAMPAIGN

PLAYING WITH DOG CHECKERS



NORTHWEST ORIENT AIRLINES PHOTO

CAMPAIGNING WITH FAMILY IN 1958

GEORGE SILK

DEFENDING HIMSELF IN 1952 TV SPEECH

the radical California Political Action Committee (PAC).

Voorhis was indeed supported by PAC, but by the more moderate National Citizens PAC and not, as Nixon implied, the California group. Nonetheless, that deliberate confusion plus Nixon's undeniably vigorous campaign gave him a 16,000-vote victory. He was on his way. Before his first term was out, he had become a national figure for his role in the investigation of the attractive, patrician Alger Hiss as a former Communist courier. The House Un-American Activities Committee was ready to abandon its probe, but Nixon persevered until a plainly damaging case had been made against Hiss, largely on the witness of Whittaker Chambers, a brilliant and enigmatic writer and editor who, before he joined TIME in 1939, had been a Communist for 15 years.

Investigative Doggedness

The affair stunned the nation and earned Nixon the enduring enmity of large segments of the U.S. intelligentsia. Emotional revisionists now argue that if Nixon lied in the Watergate affair, his role in the Hiss case was suspect as well. There is no evidence to support that logic. While the country undoubtedly overreacted to the Communist threat, Nixon cannot be faulted for his persistence in the Hiss case, which he pursued with the same investigative doggedness that his own accusers were to demonstrate in Watergate. Later, Nixon wrote in his autobiographical *Six Crises* that what had hurt Hiss most was not what he had done but that he had lied about it. It is a judgment that may well apply to Nixon himself.

Unchallenged for re-election in 1948, Nixon raised his sights in 1950 and ran for the Senate against Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas, a former actress. It would be, he said, a "rocking, socking campaign." That was putting it mildly. Nixon issued a "pink sheet" showing that Douglas and Vito Marcantonio, a Communist-lining Congressman from New York's East Harlem, had cast 354 identical votes in the House. A lot of others had voted with Marcantonio on many issues, including Nixon, who sided with him 112 times out of roughly 200 votes. Still, the tactic earned Douglas a label that stuck: "The Pink Lady."

Two years later, at the age of 39, Nixon was nominated to be Dwight Eisenhower's running mate on the G.O.P. ticket. In *The Making of the President 1960,* Theodore White quoted a Republican strategist as explaining: "We took Dick Nixon not because he was right-wing or left-wing but because we were tired, and he came from California."

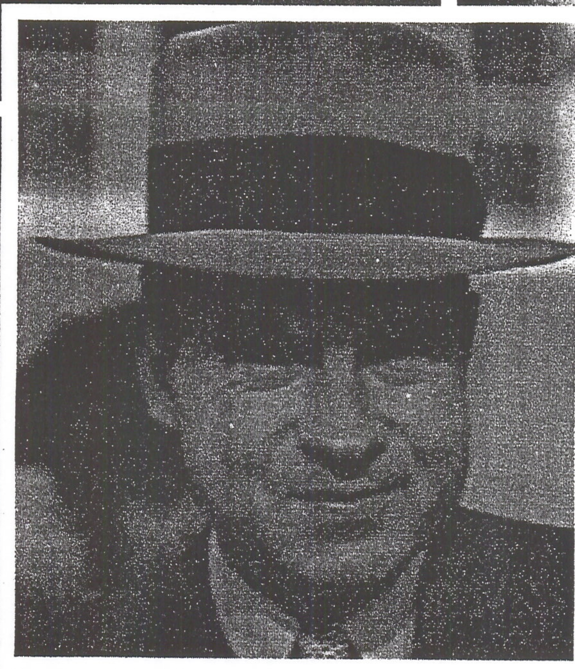
In the midst of the campaign, Nixon came very close to political oblivion. News stories disclosed that California businessmen had raised an $18,000 fund to ease Nixon's financial burden. With Ike on the verge of dropping him, Nixon proved equal to his first real crisis. On radio and television, he insisted that the fund was used for political and not personal expenses, that he was a man of modest means whose wife did not wear mink but "a respectable Republican cloth coat," and that, yes, there was one gift he was going to keep—a black and white cocker spaniel named Checkers. Though many found "the Checkers speech" full of cant and treacly sentimentality, the flood of favorable telegrams persuaded Eisenhower to execute a smart about-face. "You're my boy," he told Nixon.

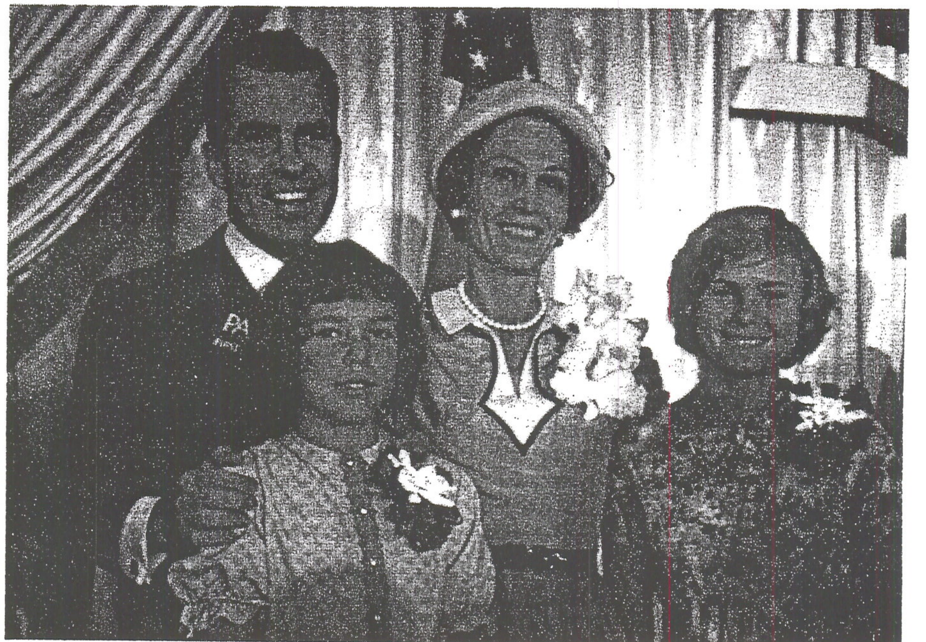
On the campaign trail, Nixon gave the whole U.S. a good look at the sometimes ugly cut-and-thrust style he had developed in California, freely tossing about phrases like "Adlai the Appeaser" and "Dean Acheson's College of Cowardly Communist Containment." Nobody was to rise to such alliterative heights again for 17 years, when Nixon's own Vice President ("Nixon's Nixon," as Eugene McCarthy called Agnew) started talking about "nattering nabobs of negativism" and the like.

A Near Thing

As second-in-command, Nixon often served as Ike's emissary at home and abroad, tending to G.O.P. matters and visiting nearly threescore foreign countries; on one such trip, Nixon was in real danger when a Communist-led mob in Caracas besieged his car, smashed its windows and covered him with spittle. When Ike was felled by a heart attack in 1955, Nixon handled himself with dignity and caution. He conducted Cabinet meetings from his own chair, not Ike's, during the President's illness.

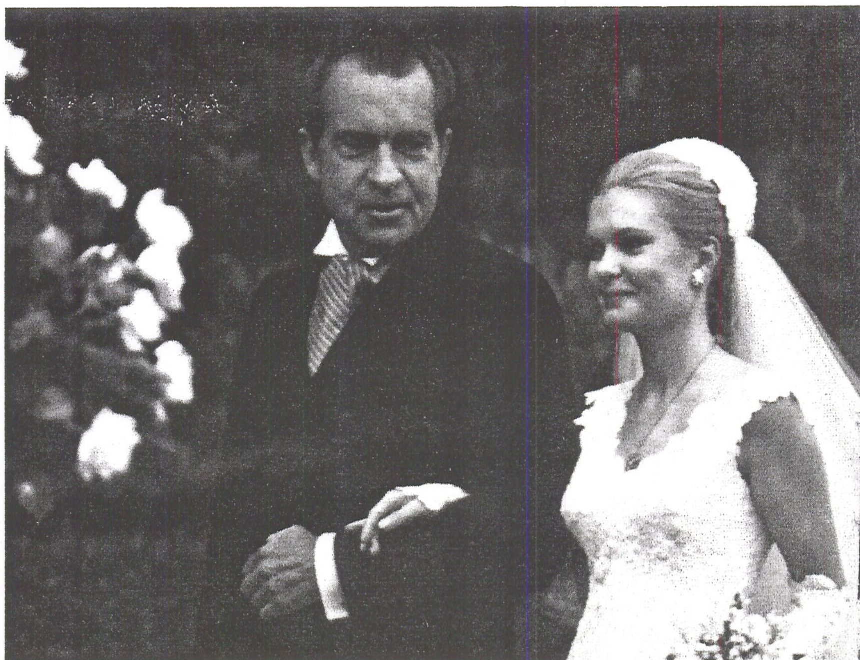
Though Eisenhower called Nixon "the most valuable member of my team," it was a poorly kept secret that he considered his Vice President "too political," too unimaginative, too much a man without real roots, to fill the top job. He even made a stab at keeping Nixon off the ticket for a second term. But Nixon rallied grass-roots Republi-

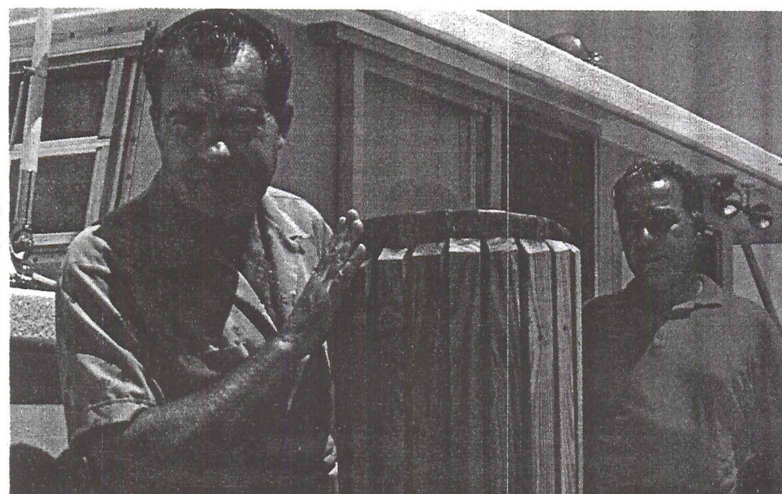




Some moments to remember, clockwise from top left: Nixon sharing a victory wave with Ike after 1956 election; Pat at a tea in her honor in San Francisco, 1956; Julie listening to her voice on father's Dictaphone, 1958; with Pat and daughters Julie and Tricia at the 1960 G.O.P. Convention in Chicago; playing the piano at his Key Biscayne retreat in 1968. Center: Vice President Nixon, in 1955, sporting a rare hat

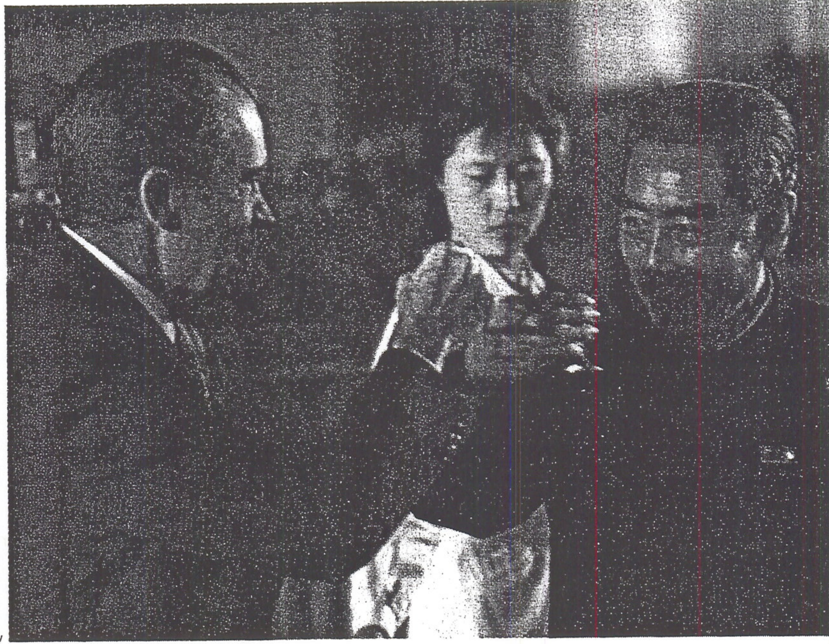
HANK WALKER—LIFE; LEONARD MCCOMBE—LIFE; WALKER; WALKER; ARTHUR SCHATZ—LIFE; CENTER: WALKER

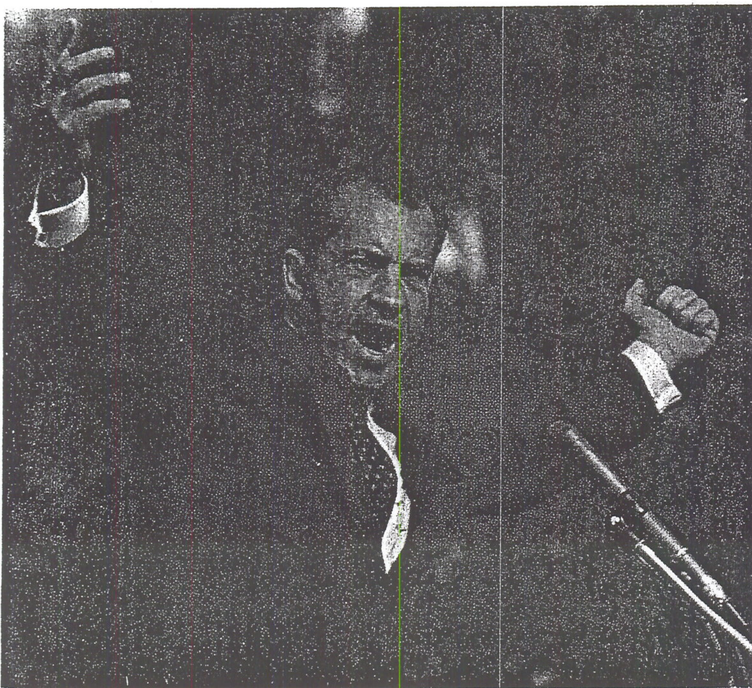




Nixon in happier times, clockwise from top left: with Julie at her 1968 wedding in New York; with Tricia at her 1971 wedding in the White House Rose Garden; talking to Khrushchev in Moscow, 1959; at Pakistan embassy with Pat, 1955; with Bebe Rebozo on Rebozo's houseboat, 1970; welcoming Churchill to Washington, 1954

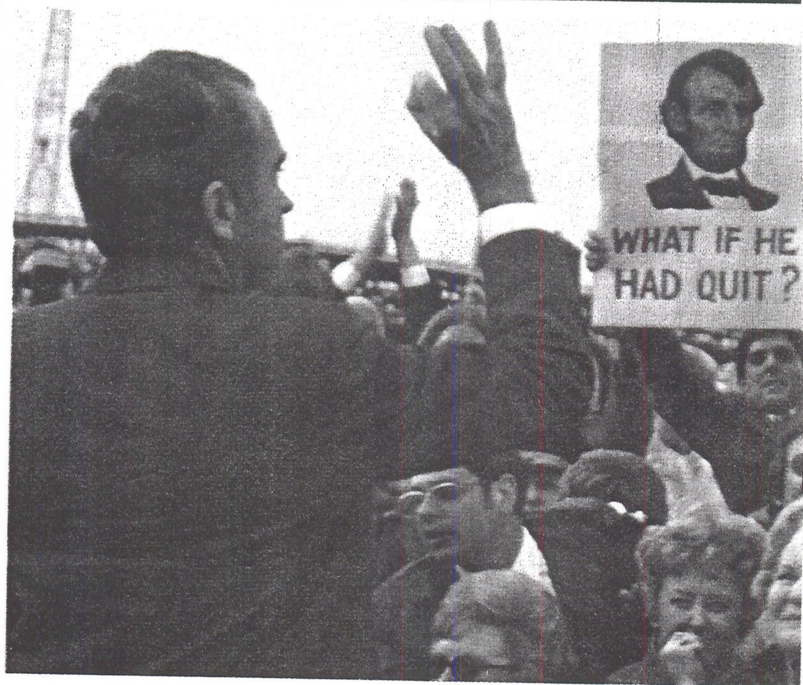
BOB PETERSON; CO RENTMEESTER—LIFE; HOWARD SOCHUREK—LIFE; GEORGE SKADDING—LIFE; ARTHUR SCHATZ—LIFE; GEORGE SKADDING—LIFE





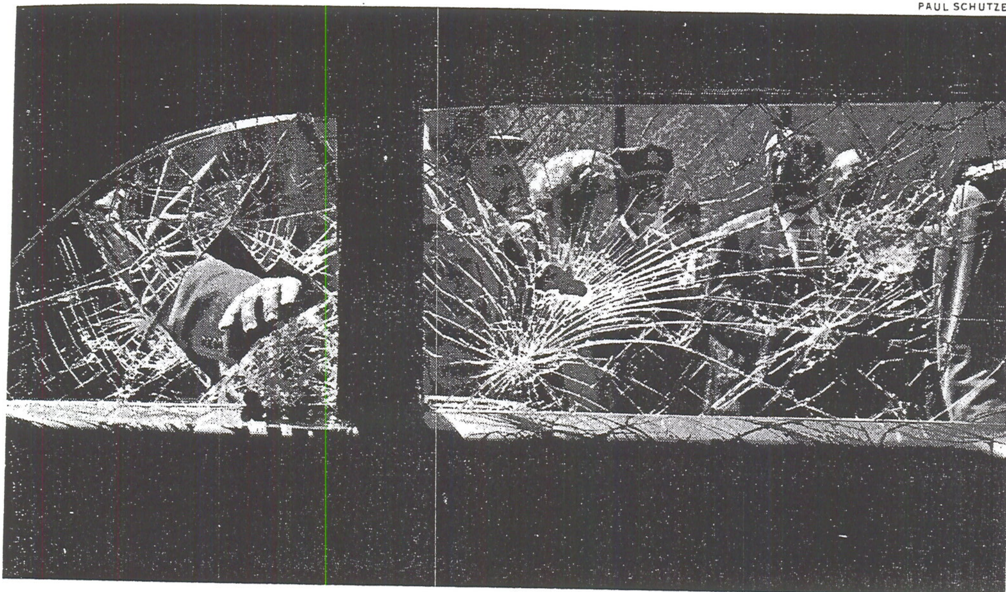
Days of triumph, clockwise from top left: Nixon acknowledging cheers with Agnew at 1972 G.O.P. Convention; toasting Chou En-lai in Peking, 1972; with Sammy Davis at 1972 convention; campaigning in 1968; huddling with Brezhnev in Moscow, 1972

KEN REGAN—CAMERA 5; JOHN DOMINIS—LIFE; KEN HEYMAN; MICHAEL MAUNEY; HARRY BENSON



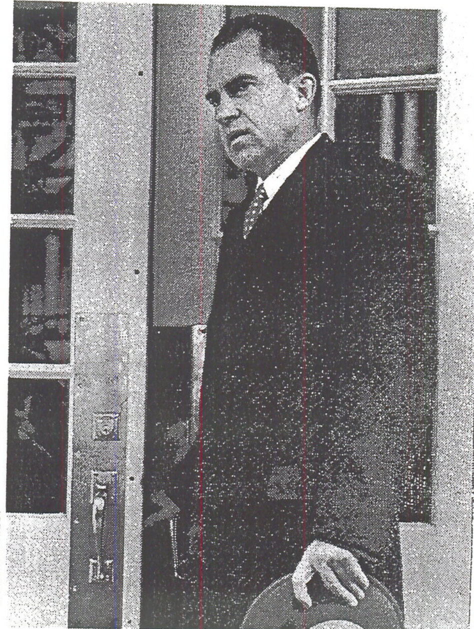
Clockwise from top left: Nixon strolling with John Mitchell at Washington National Airport during 1968 campaign; with G.I.'s in Viet Nam in 1969; exhorting supporters at Huntsville, Ala., in February 1974; with Pat on Great Wall of China, 1972.

ARTHUR SCHATZ—LIFE; SCHATZ; DIRCK HALSTEAD; JOHN DOMINIS—LIFE



PAUL SCHUTZER

SMASHED WINDOWS ON NIXON'S CAR AFTER ATTACK BY CARACAS MOB IN 1958



ROBERT KELLEY

AT WHITE HOUSE AFTER IKE'S 1957 STROKE

can support and Ike abruptly caved in.

He did, however, hurt Nixon—inadvertently or otherwise—just as the 1960 presidential campaign was about to get under way. Asked whether any major Nixonian ideas or policies had been adopted during the past eight years, Ike said: "If you give me a week, I might think of one. I don't remember."

The four televised debates with Kennedy damaged Nixon more. Particularly in the first confrontation, Nixon appeared tired, edgy and stiff; his makeup was a disaster. Overall, the debates did much to project the image of Kennedy as a smooth, graceful aristocrat with the easy manners of wealth and good schooling. In contrast, Nixon suggested a sweaty sense of social inferiority. Nixon had much in his favor—eight years of national, highly visible experience; Kennedy was a Catholic, very young, a rich man's son. The election was a near thing. Kennedy won by only 113,000 votes out of 68.8 million.

Seeking a new political start, Nixon challenged the popular Edmund ("Pat") Brown for the governorship of California in 1962, but was beaten by 300,000 votes (out of 5,850,000). Fatigued and haggard, Nixon mounted a podium at Los Angeles' Beverly Hilton Hotel the following morning and, to the astonishment of the assembled newsmen, lashed out angrily at them. "Just think how much you're going to be missing. You won't have Nixon to kick around any more because, gentlemen, this is my last press conference."

The 37th President

In the wake of that embarrassing demonstration, almost every commentator wrote that Nixon was politically washed up. He moved to Manhattan, which seemed to strip him of a power base but actually propelled him into the heady world of big law and big money. Said Nixon: "Any person tends to vegetate unless he is moving on a fast track."

As a $200,000-a-year law partner and the seigneur of a posh Fifth Avenue apartment, Nixon was soon jetting all over the world, touching base with statesmen and politicians. Most important, speech-making and fund-raising favors for G.O.P. candidates and committeemen from Florida to California won him liens on votes to be cast at future nominating conventions.

In 1964 Nixon gave full support and substantial time to Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign. He knew Goldwater had no chance, but his efforts in a lost cause won Nixon the gratitude of G.O.P. conservatives and helped to convince all of the party's factions that it would take a centrist—not a man at either extreme—to win the next presidential election. In 1966 Nixon barnstormed so energetically for Republican Congressmen and Governors that an irritated Lyndon Johnson labeled him a "chronic campaigner."

In 1968, to refute those who said that he was a born loser, Nixon entered six presidential primaries, won them all and sailed into Miami Beach with the nomination virtually wrapped up. His selection of "Spiro Who?" seemed a spur-of-the-moment thing, but Nixon had already rejected big-name possibilities like Nelson Rockefeller and Ronald Reagan and had said of Agnew: "You can look him in the eye and know he's got it." More important, Agnew was acceptable to South Carolina Senator J. Strom Thurmond, and Nixon owed Thurmond a favor for keeping the Dixie delegations in line during the balloting for the presidential nomination.

Nixon was mightily assisted by the disarray of the Democrats and their ghastly Chicago convention. With much of the nation grown weary of constant turmoil and incessant criticism from within, Nixon vowed that he would listen to "the voice of the great majority of Americans, the forgotten Americans, the non-shouters, the non-demonstrators, that are not racists or sick, that are not guilty of the crime that plagues the land." It was a clear call to the great "Silent Majority."

For all its timeliness, it almost failed. Despite a deficit in the polls of nearly 15% at the outset of the campaign, despite the defection of blue-collar Democratic votes to George Wallace, Hubert Humphrey nearly closed the gap. Some analysts contend that he would have won if Lyndon Johnson, who was anything but helpful to his Vice President, had halted the bombing of North Viet Nam a few weeks, instead of a few days, before the campaign ended. As it was, Nixon became the 37th President of the United States by a bare seven-tenths of 1% of the popular vote. It was only slightly larger than the margin by which he had lost the presidency in 1960.

The Cause of Peace

From the first he was an almost reclusive President. He surrounded himself with a zealous, jealous palace guard and made himself virtually inaccessible to all but a handful of advisers. He had no fewer than nine separate offices to work—or hide—in. His contacts with Congress were infrequent and before long the White House and the Hill were at sword's point.

It quickly became clear that what Nixon most enjoyed was the plot and play of diplomacy. In his first Inaugural Address he said: "I shall consecrate my office, my energies and all the wisdom I can summon to the cause of peace among nations. After a period of confrontation, we are entering an era of negotiation."

His foreign policy accomplishments were remarkable, beginning with the stroke of good judgment in appointing Henry Kissinger his chief international adviser. Despite occasional flare-ups of imperial rhetoric, he and Kissinger in ef-

HORST EBERSBERG

WITH FAMILY & FRIENDS AT 1958 BARBECUE

HANK WALKER

DEBATING WITH JOHN F. KENNEDY IN 1960

fect redefined America's role in the world. They saw that the U.S. no longer was able, as it had been in the essentially abnormal period of World War II and its aftermath, to solve problems singlehanded, to carry the globe on its shoulders. They considered the U.S. still the world's most powerful country, but one that would have to negotiate, operate and maneuver from more modest and more realistic assumptions.

The rapprochement with Peking was a bold reversal of a longstanding and ultimately unrealistic U.S. policy that recognized the isolated Chiang Kai-shek regime on Taiwan as the legitimate regime of China and treated the Chinese Communists, who had ruled the country since 1949, as a regime of outlaw usurpers. By the late '60s anyone who was President might well have wished to make the change, but perhaps only a Republican President with impeccable anti-Communist credentials could have carried it off.

Doubts About Détente

Détente with Moscow was less dramatic, but given the nuclear realities, more important. It was in part, of course, a consequence of the China initiative, though Nixon and Kissinger were never crude in playing off the Chinese and Soviets. Another factor that on the surface, at least, made the Russians more tractable was their need for Western trade and technology, and the long deferred demands inside the Soviet Union for a better life.

Some second thoughts about détente set in on both sides. In the U.S. there was much concern about Soviet backing of the Arab states against Israel and the limitations on emigration of Soviet Jews. There was anxiety about the apparent Soviet determination to press ahead with vast armament programs so that a SALT agreement with regard to offensive weapons remained in serious doubt. The 1974 summit produced only limited gains on that front.

On the other hand, détente finally paid off in the Middle East. The Russians had seemed ready to exploit every anti-U.S. opportunity in the area and, in particular, massively armed Syria. But after the Yom Kippur War, they played second fiddle to Kissinger's spectacular effort for peace and saw their own influence decline. The changed U.S. attitude toward the Arabs, from blind backing of Israel to what Nixon had described as a more evenhanded policy, was among the most important of all of Nixon's foreign policy accomplishments.

Throughout all of this there occurred a weakening in the alliance between the U.S. and Western Europe, caused partly by U.S. diplomatic failures, but mostly by new power relationships in the world and by the Europeans' own disarray and weakness. Eventually the Nixon Administration and the new governments in Western Europe seemed to be working out a sounder relationship.

From the U.S. point of view, one reason détente with Peking and Moscow was so important was that it was indispensable to ending the Viet Nam War. Though the Soviet Union and China kept supplying the North Vietnamese, they sat still for the notorious Christmas 1972 bombing of Hanoi and the mining of Haiphong. In the end they backed a negotiated settlement. Nixon and Kissinger managed to pull out U.S. forces and retrieve the American prisoners. Perhaps it was not "peace with honor" (certainly not peace for Viet Nam), but they achieved something that had seemed impossible for years: a U.S. departure that could not be called a sell-out of the non-Communist regime in Saigon.

Was it worth the price—and did the price really have to be paid? Debate will continue for years over whether the American role in the war could not have been ended considerably sooner on much the same terms as finally resulted. During the four years that the negotiations were under way, 15,000 American servicemen died in Indochina (of a total of 46,000 since the war began in 1961) and 100,000 were wounded (of 300,000).

As the Viet Nam War wound down, the campuses and ghettos cooled; the riots after the Cambodian invasion and the killings at Kent State were the last major eruption. Quiet set in partly from sheer exhaustion and also because violence promised to bring ever diminishing returns under the Nixon Administration. This must be counted as one of his major accomplishments, even if some of the methods used were deplorable.

In its determined effort to discourage dissent, the Administration often ignored civil rights and tried dubious legal tactics. It arrested 12,000 demonstrators during the 1971 May Day protest in Washington, then released most of them without charges (only 79 were convicted). It staged several costly, time-consuming conspiracy trials. Most were ultimately thrown out of court.

Record at Home

The key to Nixon's domestic program was his remark, "Simply throwing money at problems does not solve anything." It could have been the start of a truly innovative and intelligent reform movement—and it may yet prove to be so. Nixon's own accomplishments were mixed.

To decentralize the functions that had begun flowing to Washington from the cities and states 40 years earlier, Nixon proposed the creation of a "New Federalism." He recommended that it be brought about by means of a six-point program which he overbilled as "the

ATTACKING PRESS IN 1962

RALPH CRANE

MOURNING 1962 LOSS IN CALIFORNIA

BOB GOMEL

RELAXING WITH PETS IN NEW YORK APARTMENT IN 1964

New American Revolution." The only part of the plan to be enacted in full, however, was a five-year, $30 billion revenue-sharing scheme to funnel federal tax money back to cities and states, thereby giving them greater discretion in spending on local needs.

Tinkering with Controls

Nixon's most promising domestic proposal was shaped by Daniel P. Moynihan—before he, like so many others in the Administration, drifted away (Moynihan went off to an ambassadorship in New Delhi after his pet programs were gutted; Housing Boss George Romney quit in discouragement; Interior Secretary Walter Hickel was sacked for, among other things, criticizing the U.S. invasion of Cambodia; and, of course, Attorney General Elliot Richardson and his deputy William Ruckelshaus became victims of the "Saturday night massacre"). It would have replaced the present chaotic welfare system with a new family-assistance program. Many liberals criticized that scheme as providing insufficient money, but it was a major step in the right direction. Nixon unfortunately abandoned it, along with several other proposals, only partly because of a hostile Democratic Congress. Because he did not sufficiently back some of his own schemes, he became the leading counter-revolutionary of his own revolution. Only recently, however, he advanced a new Health Care Insurance scheme—short of what the Democrats proposed, but widely acclaimed as a breakthrough toward sensible national health care.

Nixon's greatest policy failure was the domestic economy—something nobody would have expected from a President with strong links to the business community. He dramatically abandoned his strongly proclaimed orthodox principles, went in for deficit financing, and in 1971 imposed wage and price controls. These did help restrain inflation for a while, but there followed a period of indecisive tinkering with controls, decontrols and semi-controls before returning to no controls and declarations of faith in the free market. The situation was aggravated by the pumping up of the money supply in the election year 1972, and then in 1973 by the energy crisis, for which the Administration had been woefully unprepared. The country faced a truly alarming inflation rate, higher than anything the U.S. had known in peacetime; while much of it had to do with international factors beyond U.S. control, it represented, aside from Watergate itself, the Nixon Administration's worst failure. By midsummer 1974, the Administration's only policy was to suggest that slower growth and budgetary restraint, even at the cost of some rise in unemployment, would eventually reduce inflation. To be sure, not many businessmen or economists, liberal or conservative, had much else to suggest.

On the crucial issue of race, Nixon's record was unpleasant. The best that can be said for him in the social area is that he lowered the unrealistically high expectations that had been stirred up by Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. This was an act of realism that was needed in the U.S. Nixon probably expressed an overwhelming majority feeling in his firm opposition to busing: eventually his Supreme Court, presided over by Warren Burger, dealt busing a severe blow by ruling Detroit's cross-district busing unconstitutional.

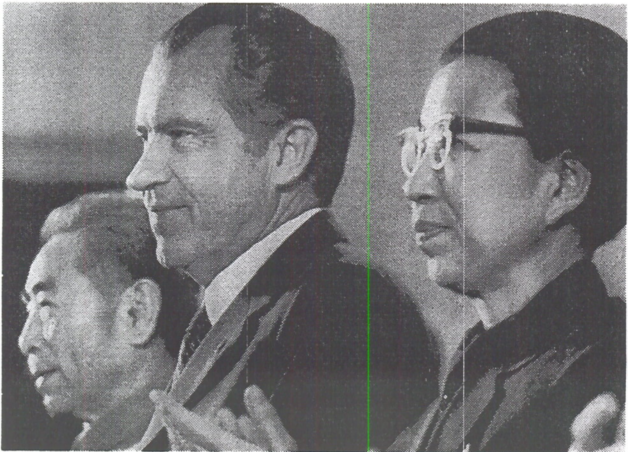
But Nixon consistently failed to appeal to the better natures of American citizens; he gave undue aid and comfort to the narrow and mean-spirited. Acutely conscious that middle- and low-income whites alike were resentful of the special efforts that were being made to ease the plight of America's 20 million blacks, Nixon adopted a hands-off approach. His textual justification, wrenched out of its context, was Moynihan's statement that "the time may have come when the issue of race could benefit from a period of benign neglect." Moynihan was saying not only that the issue had been "too much talked about" but also that other minorities (Indians, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans) were not getting enough attention. In any case, to many blacks, "benign neglect" seemed distinctly malign.

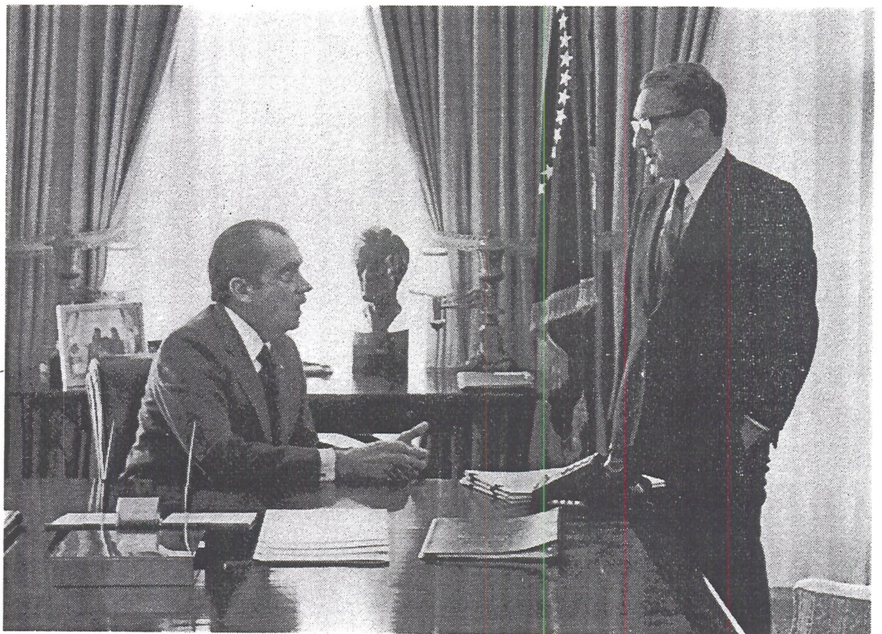
Ideological Flexibility

By the time of the 1972 election the radical "threat" to American society, always exaggerated, had largely spent itself. But Nixon chose to run against the 1960s—against radicalism, excess, permissiveness—a strategy in which he was greatly aided by McGovern's ill-considered and irresponsible economic schemes, and by the vaguely "revolutionary" slogans put about by some of his wilder and woollier supporters.

To the very end, Nixon defied anal-

CONFERRING WITH MAO TSE-TUNG IN PEKING


WITH CHOU EN-LAI AND MAO'S WIFE, MME. CHIANG CHING


AT HIS DESK IN THE OVAL OFFICE WITH HENRY KISSINGER

ysis. The reason columnists, like auto manufacturers, almost annually proclaimed the emergence of "a new Nixon" lay partly in his remarkable opportunism. Few politicians have ever preached the verities of work ethic, law and order, anti-Communism and the rest with such fervor while so thoroughly readjusting their private dogmas to deal with events. Like an Elmer Gantry intransigent in the pulpit, Nixon knew all about sin and situational ethics in the political streets. The ideological flexibility that allowed him to embrace China and Russia, a guaranteed annual income, and wage and price controls, always troubled conservatives.

Until Watergate, on the other hand, liberals half believed that Nixon's new incarnations meant a pattern of growth. They disliked him, but they also tried to perceive over the years a man successively shucking off his earlier gut-fighting instinct, his narrow anti-Communism, becoming more tolerant, more statesmanlike, more "presidential." Then Watergate descended, and it seemed to embody all of the worst tendencies of his career—a conniving secretiveness and manipulation, suspicion and vindictiveness, a harsh instinct for guerrilla politics. The Nixon of Watergate behaved, in the memorable phrase of the late Stewart Alsop, as if he were waging war, not politics. Some of Nixon's defenders excused this as an overreaction to the radical threat of the '60s. But the record shows that this kind of paranoia was present in Nixon long before. His Watergate record suggested a serious failure to understand the boundaries of the democratic process.

Nixon was occasionally capable of eloquence; he could be graceful and witty in some informal settings. Yet too often his rhetoric had a fatally inauthentic sound. As Garry Wills wrote, "There is a genius of deflation that follows Nixon about"—a talent for bathos. Too often he confused moral leadership with attitudinizing, with public relations gambits. He was preoccupied with technique—above all, the technique of winning elections—and possessed too little interest in the larger questions of what an election is all about.

Two Levels

John Mitchell said in 1969: "Watch what we do, not what we say." More than most politicians, Nixon tended to operate on two distinct levels: 1) the psychologically necessary level of rhetoric and 2) the frequently contradictory level of action—the place where "real life" and "hardball" politics occur. It is no wonder that Nixon's public words often fell with the thump of oversimplification and overstatement. He relied on the event itself, "what we do," as a corrective to the falsifications of his own language, or else he found his freedom in the ideological blur between the two. He would give some constituents the rhetoric and some the policy.

Such discrepancies reinforced a sense of Nixon as a man not so much engaged in sophisticated *Realpolitik* as somehow divorced from the real world outside his own crisis-ridden mind. The gap between public and private man was startling. Any leadership implies a certain amount of theater, but anyone who has read through the White House transcripts now and then feels himself in the presence of the unfrocked Wizard of Oz. The decisive, articulate, superbly managerial Nixon seems stuttering, vague, lost and occasionally almost bullied by his subordinates—unless one accepts Rutgers Professor Richard Poirier's thesis that in those conversations the President was shrewdly trying to feel out his lieutenants about how much they knew. Britain's conservative *Daily Telegraph* had another theory: "The sordid clique which he brought into the White House and with which he talked in a sleazy and obscenely vulgar style entirely absent from his talks and contacts with others seems to have corroded part of his character."

One of the enduring mysteries of Watergate, of course, will be why Nixon did not simply destroy the White House tapes the instant their existence became known, later pleading national security considerations. From the beginning, Nixon's handling of Watergate has been marked by a clumsiness, sometimes an outright incompetence, that has been startling in a man with a previous reputation for shrewdness and intelligence. He consistently misjudged or underestimated the impact of the scandals—as if they were a malevolent illusion summoned up by his enemies. In an extraordinary interview last May with one of his last-ditch supporters, Rabbi Baruch Korff, Nixon indicated that he still had not comprehended his own desperate condition—or even that he had done anything very wrong. "If I were basically a liberal by [the press's] standards, if I had bugged out on Viet Nam, which

BRACK—BLACK STAR

SHAKING HANDS WITH EGYPT'S PRESIDENT SADAT IN CAIRO THIS YEAR

WITH FORMER ISRAELI PREMIER GOLDA MEIR

they wanted," he said, "Watergate would have been a blip."

Nixon's critics, like Nixon, have tended toward overstatement. Poirier sees Nixon as Moby Dick—"a kind of frightening and tantalizing blank (though elemental force) in the political sea." Some think of Hannah Arendt's formula of the banality of evil—which, since it is an echo of her Adolf Eichmann thesis, is an ugly comparison. On the other extreme, Nixon likened himself to Abraham Lincoln. All of that, again, is propaganda—politics as P.R.

History will be forced to "watch what Nixon did." History, of course, has often reversed the verdict of contemporaries. The present verdict, unripened by perspective, is very sharply split. On one side Nixon as a visionary of foreign policy (with Kissinger's indispensable assistance). On the other, Nixon as a strange and solipsistic figure who confused self and office, aggrandizing both to the point that both were ultimately demeaned.

The American dream encouraged Richard Nixon to seize what he could, and what he sought was political power. A difficult and intensely private public man, he performed important services for the U.S. He was a patriot by his own lights but also something of a subversive, for he overstepped the limits of the U.S. Constitution in ways that no President had done before. The Constitution, no more, no less, eventually had the slow, reflexive power to punish him for it.