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Watergate Ordeal Called
Moral Education for U.S.

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Whatever else it may have been, the ordeal of Watergate was, in the eyes of Lawrence Kohlberg, an exercise in moral education for the American people.

Initially, said the Harvard psychologist, public opinion accepted the Administration's explanations of incidents such as the break-in at the office of the psychiatrist of Daniel Ellsberg, the Pentagon papers figure. On the scale of the six "stages of moral reasoning" this was a stage 4 attitude—recognition that the rights of individuals must be balanced by society's need for law and order.

Gradually, however, public opinion shifted toward a recognition that such methods were a threat to the political system.

"At this point," said Dr. Kohlberg, "the American public has come once more

to respect, if not to completely understand, stage 5 constitutional government as something higher than law and order."

On the other hand, he continued, the country was led by a President who in his public statements "never nurtured an idea higher than stage 4" and who frequently spoke at the stage 2 "backscratching" level most commonly associated with preadolescents.

"Nixon's last comments before deciding to resign were comments of bewilderment," he declared. "After all the stage 2 exchanges of favors Nixon had done in getting Republican Congressmen elected, how could they vote to impeach him? Nixon, then, was destroyed by his own cynicism, by his inability to believe there was any power to moral principles or to a Constitution which embodied them."