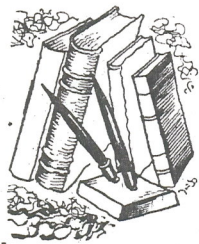


Reliving A Sordid Drama

READING LEON JAWORSKI'S just-published book is like licking an aching tooth. It hurts, but you can't stop. Jaworski is the tough old Texas turkey who served as Special Prosecutor for the Watergate trials. He stepped into the office late in October, 1973, across the bloody floor of the Saturday Night Massacre; he served for 12 months in one of the most demanding and dramatic assignments ever given a lawyer. In "The Right and the Power," he tells his story.



Some jaded critics may be inclined to dismiss Jaworski's work as merely one more Watergate book. I found his account rewarding because Jaworski shared an agonizing experience that saddened many others. He came to Washington with an illusion of Richard Nixon's innocence; and he stayed to see that illusion cruelly shattered.

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JAWORSKI'S DEFLOWERING came on a morning in December, 1973, when he listened for the first time to the famous tape of Nixon's conversation with John Dean and Robert Halde- man the preceding March 21. The experience left him badly shaken. "I had not come to Washington expecting this. I had expected to find all sorts of wrongdoing by his aides, conduct unbecoming and even criminal, but it had never occurred to me that the President was in the driver's seat. . . Listening to him scheme, knowing he was the President of the United States, I felt as if my heart was shriveling inside of me."

Jaworski was compelled by the nature of his job to sit on this damning evidence. Even the most accurate transcript, he suggests, cannot adequately convey the shocking contrast between the public Nixon, projecting a polished image, and the private Nixon, profanely plotting with his aides.

"Listening and relistening to the tapes, I was amazed at the inordinate amount of time they consumed. I often wondered how Nixon was able to concentrate even briefly on the matters of state that begged for his attention."

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JAWORSKI'S TASK was to coordinate the prosecution of the Watergate defendants collectively. Toward the end of his stay, Jaworski ran into harsh criticism on two counts — that he had not moved swiftly, after Nixon's August resignation, to obtain an indictment against the former president; and that he had not challenged Gerald Ford's September pardon. His lawyer's explanation makes sense. He was convinced that Nixon could not possibly have obtained a fair trial until months or years had elapsed; and he was satisfied, after examining the precedents, that Ford's pardon was fully within the presidential power.

Jaworski's book makes a significant contribution to this historian's collection of Watergate books. As Special Prosecutor, he was chiefly responsible for the criminal side of the story. He alone had "the right and the power" to put the defendants in the dock.