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mon. The bad habits the government developed in Vietnam spilled over to Watergate and, in fact, to the entire body politic. If the White House could lie and devise cover-ups for the bombing of Cambodia, or for the use of defoliants in Vietnam, or for what actually happened in the Gulf of Tonkin, then it seemed easy enough to carry over those tactics to situations at home. A powerful way of squelching debate over foreign policy was to argue that our actions abroad were dictated by the requirements of national security. The same argument became an irresistible device for the President's highest aides for promoting their personal political security.

Similarly, it was not unnatural that the President's aides should have turned to the C.I.A. to subvert or destroy the rights of American citizens. After all, the C.I.A. has been able to use secret and unvouchered funds to carry out illegal activities in other countries. Why shouldn't some of this highly developed capability, it was reasoned, be put to work in behalf of the man who was the ultimate boss of the C.I.A.? A critically important lesson we hope will not be lost on President Ford is that, whatever the nature or extent of the C.I.A. involvement in the Watergate horrors, its subversive activities abroad can no longer be considered Constitutionally or morally acceptable. If we violate the laws of another nation, even in our own supposed national interest, we are criminals under our own laws.

What else has been learned? It is possible that office-holders have also learned that the American press cannot be either discredited or intimidated by direct or indirect threats of reprisals or government control. None of the abuses charged to the press by Vice-President Agnew or President Nixon has any standing alongside the public service performed by the American press in persisting with its investigative reporting on Watergate, without which not all the links in the Watergate chain would have come into public view.

More important than any of the foregoing, perhaps, is that all those aspiring to high public office can now ponder some freshly demonstrated truths bearing on the eternal debate over ends and means. Richard M. Nixon wanted to be a great President. No one can doubt his sincerity when he says that his overriding ambition in the Presidency was to help bring peace to the world. And the historic record shows that no President in recent years did more to give a

Lessons for a President and a Nation

Something of value is to be learned by everyone, in or out of politics, from the events culminating in the resignation of Richard M. Nixon from the American Presidency. The American people have learned more about the real nature of their political system and their government than they have ever learned in their classrooms.

What lessons are there to be learned by Gerald Ford and by future Presidents?

The first lesson is that a new code of political behavior has been mandated by Watergate. Repeatedly, the defenders of President Nixon—and Richard Nixon himself—contended that they were merely doing what had been done all along. They said in effect that this is the way the game has always been played; and they seemed surprised that people weren't sophisticated enough to take Watergate in stride.

The lesson to be learned here is that it is not particularly important whether Richard Nixon was the first to bring dirty tricks to the Presidency. The lesson to be learned is that the American people are determined that he shall be the last to do so.

In this determination, the American people are not thinking solely of bug-gings or break-ins or burglaries carried out by one political party against an-

other. They are thinking of the President's responsibility to stay with the truth, even when unpalatable or inexpedient. They will not countenance lying by a President to the nation. Here, too, it doesn't particularly matter that Richard Nixon was not the only President to lie to the American people about the extent of U.S. involvement in a foreign war. It matters that the American people have served notice on their leaders, now and for all time to come, that they do not regard themselves as fit subjects for mendacity and manipulation, that they plainly have the resolve to plow through the muck in order to get at the facts, and that they have the capacity to punish office-holders who play games with truth.

If the American people have learned a great deal more about Constitutional government than they ever learned before, then men in government have reason to know more about the American people than they ever knew before. The highest office-holders in the land have now been instructed in the penalties of arrogance. They now know that they are not dealing with "children" who can be fobbed off or who can be told only that which bolsters the personal powers of the leaders.

Educable men in politics will have no difficulty in perceiving the lessons that Watergate and Vietnam have in com-

predominantly constructive turn to U.S. foreign policy than did Richard Nixon. It may be argued that this turn is primarily attributable to Henry Kissinger. The argument is not persuasive. If it is proper, as it is, for Richard Nixon to be taxed with the activities of Robert Halde- man, John Ehrlichman, and more than a dozen others, then it is equally proper to give him credit for the activities of Henry Kissinger.

The main point here, however, is that the means Richard Nixon used to serve his political ends destroyed any opportunity he may have had to persist in his quest for peace. His use of shabby tactics to destroy his political opponents, as in the cases of Helen Gahagan Douglas, Jerry Voorhis, Governor George Wallace, Senator Edmund Muskie, and others, ultimately brought him down and proved once again that the means shape the ends. It is being said by some commentators that the real tragedy of Richard M. Nixon is not that he ran counter to the American character but that he mirrored it. It is said that all the contradictions manifest in him—his ability to articulate the highest ideals of public service and his propensity for flouting them in his actions; his ability to rally large numbers of people to his side and his low estimate of them; his ability to command deep personal loyalties from the individuals who worked under him and the means he employed to check up on them; his call for generosity of spirit (nothing was more compelling in his farewell talk to his staff than his statement, made with unmistakable sincerity, that any person in public life has to expect that some people will hate him, but that the “only way they can win is for you to hate them back”) and his political vindictiveness (this was the same man who could maintain an “enemies” list in the White House in order to punish his political opponents)—all these contradictions, it is being said, are also deeply ingrained in the American character. Not so. A more accurate reading of the American character is to be found in Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma*. Thirty years ago Myrdal anticipated what will undoubtedly become the historic verdict on recent events.

“America,” Mr. Myrdal wrote, “has the most explicitly expressed system of general ideals in reference to human interrelation, compared to every other country in Western civilization. This body of ideals is more widely evaluated and appreciated than similar ideals any-

where else. . . . The ideals of the American Creed have become the highest law of the land. The Supreme Court pays its reverence to these general principles when it decides what is Constitutional and what is not. America has had throughout its history a continuous discussion of its principles and the implications of its democracy. A discussion which in every epoch, measured by any standard, remained high. . . . The American Creed has been the ideological foundation of rational morale.”

MEN OF GOOD WILL are now saying that all the lessons have been learned, that the books can be closed on Watergate, and that there is no need to complete investigations or to proceed further with prosecutions.

The issue here, however, is not whether the American people should be magnanimous. The issue is whether the lessons learned from Watergate can be made the basis for whatever new laws or changes in the political structure may be necessary to reduce the likelihood of future abuses of power. Unless everything is known about the way the office of the Presidency can be distorted and disfigured and made to serve personal ends, it is not likely that the corrective process will be as precise as it has to be. Make no mistake about it: Watergate was no mere caper. It was only the visible part of a profoundly dangerous departure from the traditional forms of American government. It represented a set of mind that was unwilling to work within the established limits of power, a set of mind that took easily to totalitarian accoutrements, including secret police, attempted corruption of legal processes, violations of the guaranteed rights of citizens, bribery, illegal surveillance, and obstruction of justice.

This is a serious business, much too serious to be washed out in mistaken notions of magnanimity and charity. The attempted subversion of a nation by its highest elected officials must yield to the same legal process these officials attempted to thwart or exploit for their own purposes.

Should there be no compassion for Nixon the man? No one could have watched Richard Nixon in his resignation talk to the nation, or in his extemporaneous farewell remarks to his staff, without having been moved by the sense of personal tragedy or by the positive qualities of the man. He had dignity in defeat; he was able to meet the chal-

lenge. The big need was to knit the country together again. He had a part to play in that purpose; it was not small or easy, but he understood it.

It was said of King Charles V that “there is a soul of goodness in things evil.” The eternal mingling of the good and the bad, the noble and the venal, the harsh and the gentle, is what brings drama and reality together. The millions of people in America and throughout the world who have admired and applauded Richard Nixon need not feel they saw things in him that were not there. What they believed in and responded to was real enough. Their belief in the possibilities of the man, however, was larger than his own belief in himself.

It is not necessary to stomp on this man in defeat. What is necessary, however, is for the American people to have access to the complete record. The investigation must run its course, not out of any sense of vindictive pursuit, but out of a great need to protect the nation against a dreadful recurrence.

It is now 325 years since the trial of King Charles I on charges that he waged a foreign war without the sanction of Parliament, arrogated to himself powers and privileges beyond the proper and legal reach of monarchy, and was in contempt of the rights of citizens. The events that led up to that trial, and the trial itself, were carefully scrutinized by the American Constitution-makers. The phrase “high crimes and misdemeanors” came directly out of English history. So did the idea that the House of Representatives, corresponding to the House of Commons, would have the power to impeach, which is to say indict, and the Senate, corresponding to the House of Lords, would have the power to judge. The minutes of the American Constitutional Convention at Philadelphia show that there was general agreement that the trial of King Charles, in the perspective of British history, served not only to set new limits to the power of the monarchy but also to create a new framework for representative government.

In the perspective of American history, the most important lesson of Watergate is that the ultimate power of this society must be consolidated in the hands of the American people. How this can be done in the modern world, with all its complexities and tensions, many of which call for prompt response, is the largest and finest test yet to confront the American intelligence.

N.C.