



The Breaking Of a President

— William Hogan

"BUZHARDT listened to the tape a second time and decided that 'school was out.' He telephoned General Alexander Haig and presidential counsel James St. Clair immediately in California and reported that 'the smoking pistol' had been found. He added, to Haig, that the time had come for the President to concentrate on how he would leave office — now. For the story had to be disclosed. Haig agreed to relay the message to the President."

In "Breach of Faith: The Fall of Richard Nixon," Theodore H. White has written his best book since "The Making of the President 1960." I thought I had been overkilled by details of last August's fall of an administration. But this sustained, stimulating narrative of those days, and the sequence of events and errors that led to Richard Nixon's doom rekindles the dramatic tragedy in tingling fashion.

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THE RESULT is something of an "I-was-there" report and analysis by a superb political reporter. White makes much of Richard Nixon's "unstable personality" in the final days, a man whose conduct became "increasingly erratic" toward the end of his presidency to the point where General Haig in effect became acting President while subtly maneuvering Mr. Nixon's resignation.

In the original 1960 "Making of the President," Richard Nixon was the villain of the piece, and John F. Kennedy clearly the hero. White tempered his opinion of Mr. Nixon in the 1968 report on the campaign and election. He was widely criticized for trying to "promote" this complex, unloved man who thirsted for ultimate power to the point he placed himself beyond the law.

In "Breach of Faith" Mr. Nixon becomes the insecure one-time poor boy with dreams of riches who chopped his way to the political top. Then at the top he could not free himself of small time political tricks, chicanery and, as it turned out, an unnecessary crossing the line of the law.

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THIS IS NOT a hatchet job. White sees Nixon's "true crime" as his destruction of "the myth that binds America together," the myth that one man, the President, stands for law.

"If the Judiciary Committee did not act," White observes, "the office of the presidency would be transformed. And then there would be no faith, no real strength in America, no compelling reason for men to stand and fight or die in jungles or in the air, nor even to behave decently to one another. . ."

This is an exciting book in the best Teddy White tradition (Atheneum; \$10.95).