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A Man Of Property

By William V. Shannon

WASHINGTON, July 12—For most Americans, it is bewildering and too painful to contemplate the possibility that Richard Nixon entered the White House in 1969 fully intending to use the Presidency to make himself a rich man. Since the Presidency is sanctified in our national imagination, it boggles the mind to think that any man who has won this great honor might see it as a wonderful opportunity to line his pockets.

But it is also a distinct honor to become mayor of one's native city or governor of one's state. Yet trials in criminal courts tell over and over again the chilling story of mayors and governors who set out systematically from the day they took the oath of office to exploit their offices for private gain. When corruption is a recurrent problem at the local and state level, it is only realism to recognize that sooner or later a financially corrupt man might slip through the net of public watchfulness and get his hands on the Presidency.

As soon as Mr. Nixon was elected in 1968, he bought a house and land in Key Biscayne, Fla., for a purchase price of more than \$250,000. Six months later, he went deeply into debt to buy an estate in California for \$1,400,000. From the outset, it was a mystery how with his modest capital he could hope to pay for and maintain these two expensive properties.

Gradually, this mystery is being solved though the whole answer is not yet known. First, he paid very little Federal income tax by claiming huge, unwarranted deductions. Secondly, he billed the Government for millions of dollars in improvements and maintenance costs on the false basis that the Secret Service required them for security reasons.

A third part of the answer begins to emerge in the Senate Watergate committee's report. Exhibit No. 15 in that report is a confidential memorandum from H. R. Haldeman to John D. Ehrlichman. It reads in part:

"Bebe Rebozo has been asked by the President to contact J. Paul Getty in London regarding major contributions.

"Bebe would like advice from you or someone as to how this can legally and technically be handled. The funds should go to some operating entity other than the [Republican] National Committee so that we can retain full control of their use.

"Bebe would appreciate your calling him with this advice as soon as pos-

sible since the President has asked him to move quickly."

This memorandum is dated Feb. 17, 1969. Why was the President seeking money less than a month after he entered office?

Money was not needed to pay off any debt from the President's 1968 campaign. That campaign ended with a surplus of more than \$1 million that had already been placed in various California bank accounts under the control of Herbert Kalmbach, the President's personal lawyer.

Whether Mr. Getty made a "major contribution" to this secret fund is not clear, but Howard Hughes gave \$100,000 in cash and the head of a chain of Florida supermarkets gave \$50,000, also in cash. Despite Mr. Rebozo's care in "laundering" money through accounts controlled by his own attorney, the Senate committee has traced some of this cash to show that it was used to pay for improvements on Mr. Nixon's Key Biscayne house and to buy a pair of diamond earrings for Mrs. Nixon.

When a man is preoccupied with money, nothing valuable escapes his attention. The Constitution explicitly forbids officials of the Government from accepting gifts from any foreign king or country. Since 1881, the law has provided that all such gifts be turned over to the Chief of Protocol in the State Department for deposit in a museum or other public institution.

Nevertheless, when Mr. Nixon left office as Vice President in 1961 he took with him many valuable foreign gifts.

As soon as he became President, Mr. Nixon transferred record-keeping on gifts to himself and his family from the protocol office to an office in the White House. Why?

It required a tip from a former White House employe and persistent digging by Maxine Cheshire of The Washington Post to uncover this year the fact that Mrs. Nixon had received valuable jewels from the King of Saudi Arabia. Some of them had not been listed even in the White House's own confidential file until the day after Mrs. Cheshire first inquired about them.

A five-piece matched set of emeralds and diamonds had been appraised by jeweler Harry Winston in 1970 at \$52,000. Why did the Nixons have jewels privately appraised which under the Constitution they had no right to keep?

Warning signals about Mr. Nixon have been flashing "danger" from the beginning of his career, but the press and the public refused to heed them. One such warning was the \$205,000 loan that Mr. Nixon obtained in 1960 for his brother's roadside restaurant from Howard Hughes. How many other bankrupt restaurants has Mr. Hughes loaned money on? Was Mr. Hughes taking out a second mortgage on a hamburger joint or a future President?

The White House reeks with scandal today because too many people for too long gave Mr. Nixon the benefit of the doubt where no doubt existed.