



Richard Nixon and King George III

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WAS RICHARD NIXON mentally unstable at any time of his Presidency? Did he flip his lid, go bananas?

John Osborne, a veteran Nixon-watcher, asserted recently in New York Magazine that the former President had been "sick of mind." Which means that the reporter thinks he was mentally ill.

Theodore H. White, in the forthcoming "Breach of Faith: The Fall of Richard Nixon," writes that the handling of the President in his final days was "the management of an unstable personality" by a staff chief who feared a "personality explosion." Historian White sorrowfully predicts that the Nixon story would be written by some future students as "a study in psychiatric imbalance."

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SOME RESIDENTS of San Clemente, in bitter amusement, refer to this long-distance amateur psychoanalysis as "the bananas thing." Sensibly, Mr. Nixon says nothing at all: He is not about to follow "I am not a crook" with "I was not a nut."

Turning to the sources closest to the scene, only two men dealt directly with Mr. Nixon during his final week in office; one, Ronald Zeigler, has contributed nothing

to the "bananas" thing." The other, not surprisingly, emerges as the national hero in most accounts, the man who gets the hosannas for his easing-out of an "unstable" President before he could explode in madness: loyal, "leakproof" Al Haig.

Now that we have pinpointed the reasons for — and the source who profits from — the "bananas thing," to the main point: Was Nixon nuts?

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YES, I will have no bananas. From my own observation — admittedly fragmentary, but at least first-hand — and buttressed by talks with intimates — Richard Nixon in his final stages was a man harassed, tortured, and torn, but of sound mind coming to a rational decision to resign.

At Yale last week, a professor of Colonial history presented evidence to show that King George III — long maligned as a mad monarch — was not only not crazy, but "was not such a bad guy." It has taken revisionist historians 200 years to give crazy George a clean bill of mental health, and only 200 days to besmear the mental stability of Richard Nixon.