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 Those 'Final Days'



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SOMETHING like a firestorm of protest and denial has broken over the heads of Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, the young authors of "The Final Days," a coroner's report on Richard Nixon's resignation from the presidency.

People who praised them for their toil and courage in bringing the President down revile them now as gossips and profiteers. Excerpts published in Newsweek Magazine have generated a furious and bitter reaction.

Nobody is saying, if you listen closely to the howls, that what they have told us is not true. They are saying that Woodward and Bernstein should not be telling us. People hate themselves for reading the book, but they are doing it.

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ACTUALLY, it is on the whole sadder than it is sensational. Maybe poor Mrs. Nixon should have been spared the details of her private life with the President, or being pictured sneaking a mid-day bourbon from the White House pantry.

But leaving that aside, the authors have written a book that completes the impeachment process that was interrupted when Nixon resigned Aug. 9, 1974, a process that was overturned by Gerald Ford's pardon of him a month later.

It doesn't matter so much that Richard Nixon talked, in that last week, to portraits of dead presidents. He

never really talked to anyone once Haldeman and Ehrlichman were gone. He lied to everyone.

It doesn't matter that Richard Nixon sank to his knees weeping, in prayer with Henry Kissinger. He was dying in the only sense that mattered to him — politically, and dying men are given to weeping and prayer.

What does matter is the character of Henry Kissinger, who still holds the office of secretary of state. He comes off these pages as more reprehensible than Nixon — just as devious, secretive and paranoid, given to monitoring telephone calls with the President and never concealing from his staff his contempt and loathing for his patron, representing him as "irrational, insecure and manical."

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IT IS A GRISLY and gripping chronicle. Its political impact is something the Republicans will have to contemplate. They must have known from the long, bitter battle over the tapes that Richard Nixon was guilty and knew it. But they stood by him, and now many of them will have to explain.

Richard Nixon is no longer an issue. He cannot come back from "The Final Days." But Gerald Ford's blind defense will almost certainly come up, and so will the pardon.

The book has a moral for this election year. Never elect a man like Richard Nixon to the presidency.