

## An Evil Man?



### William A. Rusher

IN THE January 10 issue of the "New Yorker" magazine Elizabeth Drew, the ordinarily sensible Washington correspondent and commentator, delivered herself of a judgment so extreme that it ought not to be allowed to pass unprotested. "Obviously," she wrote, "the wound of Watergate is deep — not just that such things could happen but that for the first time in 200 years we elected a truly evil man to our highest office."

I think I understand what is happening to Ms. Drew, and I urge her to sit back and reconsider before relegating Richard Nixon to the ranks of the demons.

This is a complicated world, and we must constantly oversimplify to understand it, let alone discuss it. The more conscious we are of our oversimplifications, the sounder our judgments will be.

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WHEN great gusts of passion begin to blow across the political landscape, the dominant personalities and forces on it tend to take on mythic characteristics. They cease to be merely personalities and forces, and become personifications of good and bad moral qualities: Platonic forms buried deep in our unconscious — or, if you prefer, in the collective memory of our race or culture. Every demagogue knows this, at least intuitively, and deliberately encourages the process. Feelings engendered in us are powerful, simple, and seemingly clean.

It is only later — centuries later, perhaps — that proportion is restored, the human lineaments of the protagonists re-emerge, and a time comes . . . "when men will not hate you . . . Enough to defame or to execrate you . . . But pondering the qualities that you lacked . . . Will only try to find the historical fact."

This process is so familiar to educated people nowadays that manipulators of public opinion will often try, in the name of a premature and totally false "historical revisionism," to reevaluate for the solace of believers in lost causes (themselves included), individuals and forces by no means ready yet for the scalpel of the true historian. I have no doubt that in another decade or two we will witness the first such serious effort to cosmeticize Nixon himself.

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BUT THE final evaluation of Richard Nixon will have to await the verdict of generations far less impacted than this one, and it will almost certainly not be (pace Ms. Drew) that he was "a truly evil man."

Able, energetic, perceptive, undeniably; self-destructive, too, quite probably; vain, combative, and unscrupulous, no doubt; above all, perhaps, a man of his time and place: of an America that had temporarily forgotten, in its zeal to make things better, the fundamentally corrupting quality of power.