



Watergate Could Cripple the President

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THE UGLY Watergate mess can perhaps cripple the President politically. That is the result now being fervently aimed for by many Democrats, plus many key people in the newspaper and television communities. It no longer seems an unlikely result, either.

In tackling the subject, it is necessary to speak more personally than is usual — if only because I have so often been asked why I have not tackled the subject more vigorously before. The answer is simple. It has seemed wrong to apply to President Nixon moral standards that were never applied to his predecessors in office.

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FOR SUCCESSFUL black propaganda in U.S. politics, for instance, there has never been anything to match the so-called Sackville Letter of 1888. That year, Grover Cleveland was running for reelection against Benjamin Harrison. Cleveland had followed a policy of fairly close collaboration with England. The British Ambassador of the day, Lord Sackville, was a fatuous fool.

So the Republican black propaganda department faked a letter from an alleged ex-Englishman now become an American. Which presidential candidate, the letter asked Lord Sackville, should an American vote for who was attached to English interests? "Cleveland," replied Lord Sackville in writing. The letter was promptly published. It helped a lot to beat Cleveland, too.

In sum, this sort of thing reaches back to the remotest past of American politics. In addition, none of the post-war Presi-

dents who has been most admired, have had spotless records in these areas.

If the records have not been destroyed, the historians will also find singularly gamey reading in the politically motivated termination of the case of Governor Sherman Adams by President Kennedy and his brother Robert, then Attorney General. Anyone who knew him (and loved him) knew that President Kennedy could play politics much more roughly than touch football.

In sum, only two things at first made the Watergate different from the political shenanigans of the past. What was done was far more ambitiously organized, and it was immeasurably sillier and more ill-judged.

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IT IS ALSO well to remember that the American system does not work very well when the occupant of the White House is a political cripple.

In the present case, moreover, we are not talking about a President leading an isolated, self-contained America, whose only problems are domestic problems. We are talking about a President who must lead America in the age of the H-bomb, when the fates of scores of other nations are bound up with the fate of the United States.

In short, there is likely to be exceptionally rough weather in the world during the second Nixon Administration.

And if anyone thinks the U.S. can safely get through really rough weather with a politically crippled President, they need to think again.