



The President's dog, King Timahoe, joined Nixon, Ehrlichman, Kissinger and Haldeman as they conferred at the Western White House in San Clemente, Calif.

By Theodore H. White

NO SIMPLE LOGIC yet embraces what is known as the Watergate affair. In the word "Watergate" are contained a family of events, a condition of morality and a system of acts, charges, allegations which, until those accused have had their chance to speak in court and be judged by law, defy final judgment.

Yet the story of Richard Nixon's re-election cannot be told without it. That election was not a traditional party contest between Republicans and Democrats. As presented to the people, it was an election of ideas — sharpset, harshly contrasted — and of two personalities who spoke clearly of their directions.

But underneath their claims it was a clash of cultures breaking away from the old common culture of comity and civil peace that had once bound Americans together. Watergate was born of two new cultures which saw Americans as enemies of each other. And since the Committee for the Re-election of the President struck the decisive blow against the old common culture, it is the Committee to Re-Elect that concerns us here.

The Committee to Re-Elect was born of legitimate purpose, but was entrusted not only to men ignorant of American politics, but to amateurs who were among the most stupid and criminal operators in electoral history.

How, under Clark MacGregor's predecessor as chairman, John Mitchell, could so great a stupidity have been conceived, for such trivial and profitless stakes as could be won by criminally invading and criminally wire-tapping the Democratic National Committee at its Watergate offices?

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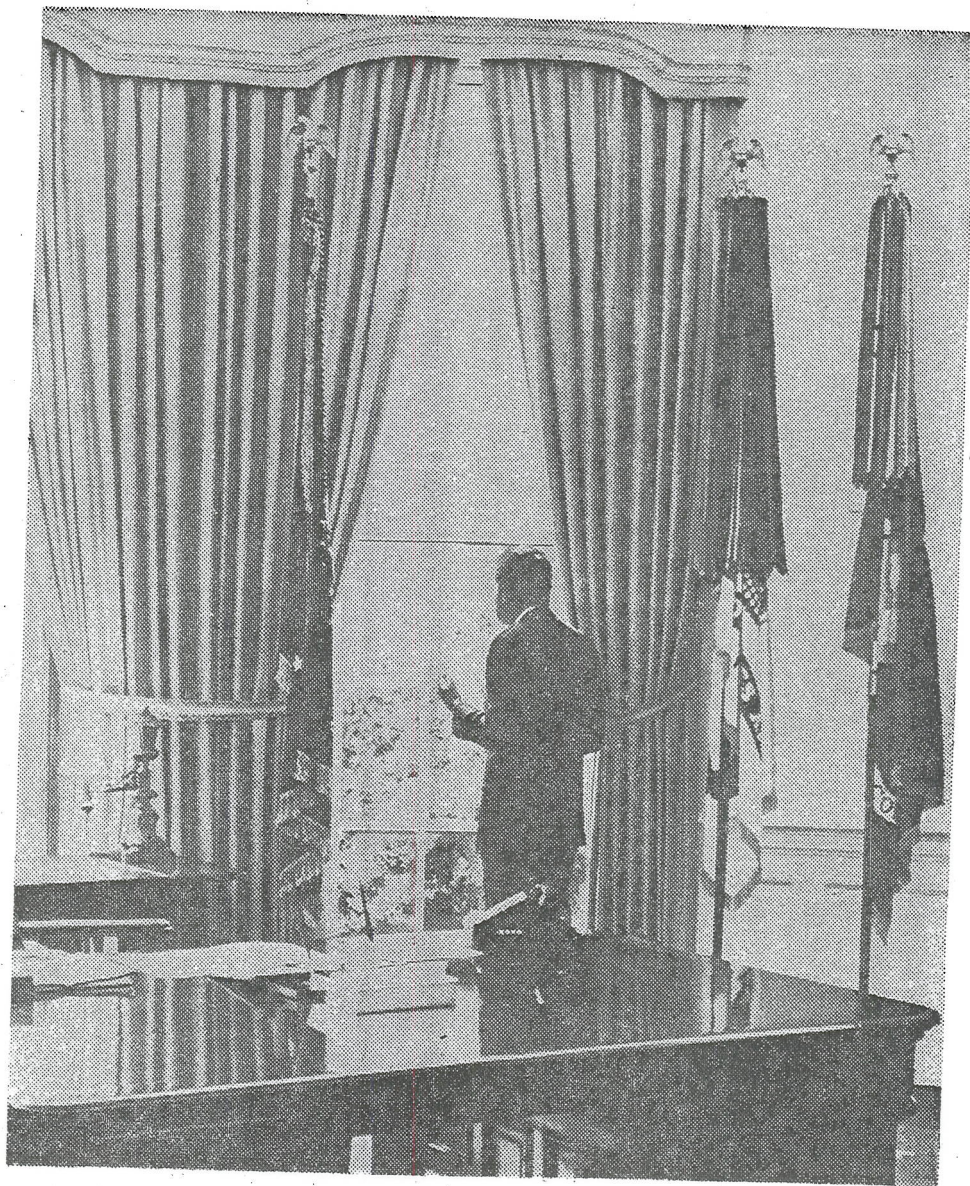
And why should such an enterprise have been carried on at the end of May, when — with the elimination of George Wallace from the campaign, the successful gamble of the president in Vietnam, a blaze of triumph sure to rise from his trip to Russia — victory was assured?

It is perhaps best to start with the personalities, and then go on to the philosophies which finally rocked the White House and American politics with scandal and taint that surpass, in American history, even the scandal of Teapot Dome or the grubbiness of the Grant Administration.

The Making of the President--1972

Nixon and the Watergate

Nixon in the Oval Office: A patriot, a fighter and a lonely man as well



One starts at the beginning, and with the supreme personality — that private and lonesome man Richard Nixon, one of the more able minds to occupy the presidency in our time, a devout patriot, his personality already scorched by years of humiliation and roughhouse combat before his election to the presidency in 1968 by 499,704 votes, an infinitesimal margin of 0.7 per cent of the total vote cast.

By the week after that first victory, the view from Nixon's new eminence was not at all what he had long imagined it would be — that when the president calls, patriots respond. He sought to have Hubert Humphrey, his defeated rival, speak for the United States in the U.N.; Humphrey turned him down. He sought, as a gesture of bipartisan unity, to appoint Democratic Senator Henry Jackson as his secretary of defense; Jackson turned him down. He sought David Rockefeller as either secretary of defense or secretary of treasury; David Rockefeller turned him down. He wanted Robert Finch to be his attorney general; Finch refused. He wanted Daniel P. Moynihan of Harvard as his secretary of labor; the leaders of labor vetoed the choice.

Only a few months earlier, during the campaign of 1968 when his election seemed certain by a huge margin, he had described to me one evening on the road his concept of government.

"I want two teams in the White House," he had said, "a big team, but also a young team." The big team — names like Governors Romney, Rockefeller, Scranton — would run the cabinet. But he needed a young team, men between 30 and 40 — "they learn awfully fast." He needed people who could move hard and fast. Haldeman, Buchanan, Price. Finch would certainly be in the cabinet. What did I think of Henry Kissinger for foreign affairs? he asked.

And he had Professor Glenn Olds, whom he described as a "brilliant man," at work on details of staffing the government. I was familiar with the work of Olds, a philosophy professor who had been conducting perhaps the most sophisticated screening of talent ever done for a presidential candidate, heading a team dedicated to filling the Federal administrative structure with America's best men.

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But it was not, as it turned out after the election, to be that way at all. The entire pre-election screening of personnel conducted by Olds never reached Nixon. The big men would not join him. And, like all presidents before him, he found that no single man's range of personal acquaintances was broad enough to give him the staff to fill the key leadership posts of American government. Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson had all rubbed against the same limitations before. And Nixon itched to work on problems — not personnel.

Theodore White is the distinguished journalist whose books describing presidential campaigns have become a tradition. The latest in the series, "The Making of the President — 1972," is about to be published. Here is one of a number of exclusive excerpts from that awaited volume.

He mused that day, so my notes refresh my memory now, about the kind of people it takes to run the government of the United States.

Businessmen? "Damn it, most businessmen aren't good at government. Some people go to the other extreme, get intellectuals—get torn to pieces in government at the levels they have to work at. Then they say, get politicians — but politicians, though they do have the necessary experience, they tend to be not imaginative enough. . . ."

He wanted bright people, young people, people with ideas, people to whom he would give time to think. But always, in this and other interregnum talks, two people were uppermost in his trust and confidence — Haldeman and Mitchell.

ment of personal loyalty had isolated the president — not only from his cabinet but from much else: from Congress, from the press and television news system, from his own Republican Party.

Those closest to him knew he was bored and irritated by small detail; and the atmosphere of the White House had become that of a court. The president wanted the ordinary things done. Those who moved forward, in his court and in his esteem, were those who got his will done and did not bother him with details.

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It was some time toward the end of 1971, the date still unclear, that a moral line was crossed at the White House, and at the highest level—by one of the apparently gentle group around the President, John Ehrlichman.

One should linger over the personality of John Ehrlichman. Most men at the Nixon White House gave loyalty to the President only — not to substance, not to cause, but to the person. Ehrlichman not only gave loyalty to the President, but was concerned with the cause of good government. He was one of those indispensable individuals, moreover, who could translate policy, once set, into program and action.

Over the years, I had watched him transformed from the brisk and bustling campaign administrator of 1968 to a grave public servant, slowly growing portly, with ever widening horizons.

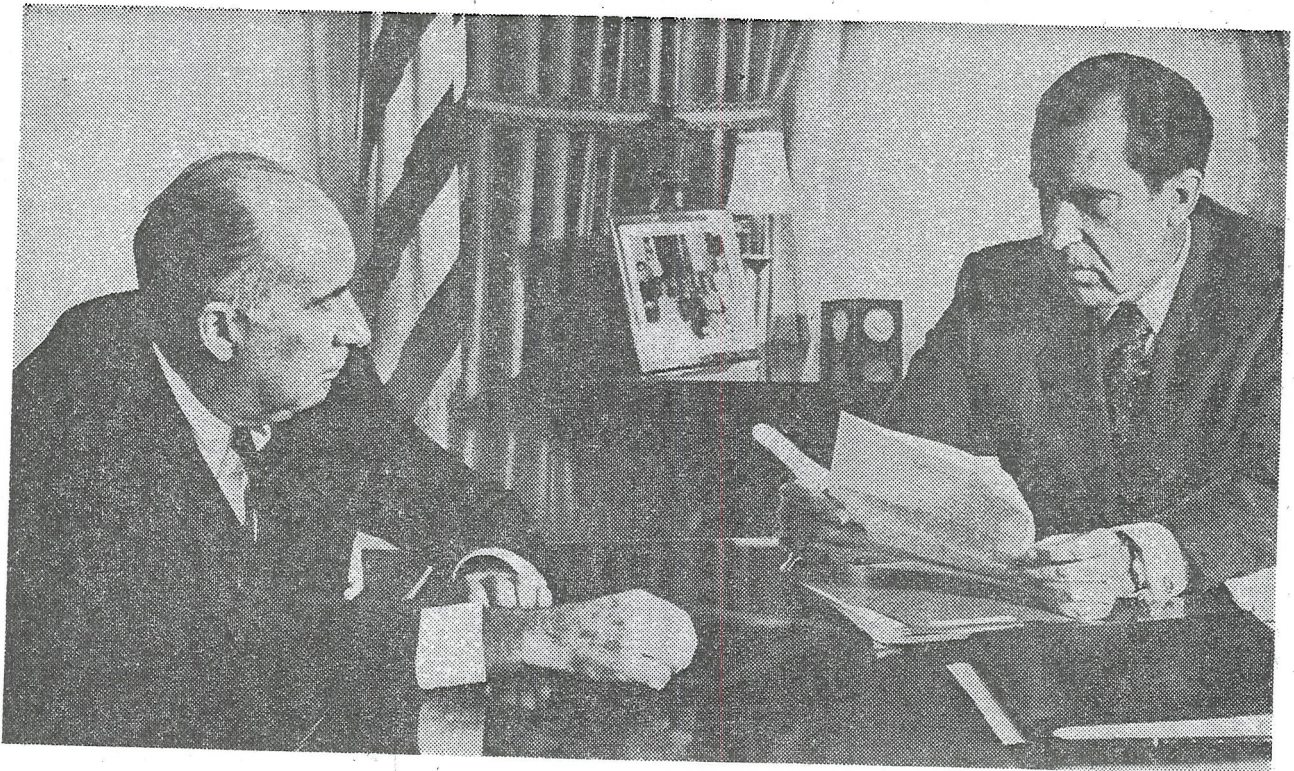
Always courteous, mild, affable, an Eagle Scout, he had an almost limitless capacity for work and a sense of history. It is this last, this sense of history he entertained, that makes the tragedy of the man so poignant, his actions so incomprehensible until courts or public hearings pass final judgment.

Ehrlichman was that man in authority at the White House who might have been expected to recognize and then to stop in time the rupture of mor-

As for Mitchell, said Nixon two days after he had been inaugurated, after having come from a two-hour lunch with Mitchell, "I want no climate of fear in this country, no wire-tapping scare. He (Mitchell) will control that with an iron hand."

And then, as in all other conversation, he went on to ideas, with that fascination he can exert when he talks of ideas. From the very beginning, the mind of the 32nd president came to rest on abstractions, while the choice of men who would become his lesser instruments was left to people in whose personal loyalty he had absolute confidence.

Three years later, by early 1972, this require-



Nixon believed that John Mitchell (shown conferring with him at the White House) would control the danger of a "wire-tapping scare" with an iron hand

ality that later poisoned the electoral campaign of the President.

In late fall of 1971, Ehrlichman discovered that the Plumbers Group, over whom his office exercised jurisdiction, had gone far beyond its technical mandate of leak plugging — it had burglarized the offices of the psychiatrist of Daniel Ellsberg, an outrage. Had Ehrlichman then summoned Hart and Liddy to his office, leaned across the desk and done the most difficult thing an administrator must sometimes do — which is to say, "You're fired, and you may have to go to jail" — no Watergate scandal would have occurred.

According to the testimony of the FBI, however, Ehrlichman simply said that he "did not agree with this method of investigation" and instructed the Plumbers "not to do this again." The two criminals were thus safe—gently chided but not punished, and free to go on.

Ehrlichman had condoned a crime in the name of what seemed to him a higher principle; and his career, like that of so many others, was to be wrecked.

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In this writer's opinion, it is possible that at least three or four million Americans were so disillusioned by both candidates that they chose not to vote at all. Had it not been for Watergate, it is quite possible that Richard Nixon's margin would have been increased by another three or four million votes — that, indeed, his stunning 61-38 victory might have gone as high as 65-35.

Contrariwise — had the full story of the Watergate scandal and its companion fund-raising scandals been thoroughly exposed during the campaign, Nixon's margin would probably have been diminished to that of most ordinary candidates who run in the 55-45 area of choice. But it is doubtful that in 1972, given the moods, emotions and public issues of that year, George McGovern or any other Democrat could have been elected.

The facts remain — and the after-myth of a contrived or rigged election cannot change them. Americans were given an open choice of ideas, a free choice of directions, and they chose Richard Nixon.

The mandate he received was of historic dimensions; whether or not Watergate was to erase the meaning of that mandate as the Vietnam War erased Lyndon Johnson's mandate of 1964, and as court-packing eroded Franklin D. Roosevelt's of 1936, remains to be seen. But the shaping of the Nixon mandate in the public mind in the fall of 1972 remains one of the watershed markers of the end of the postwar world.

Tomorrow: Temptation of power