

# The President's Wise Decision

REFLECTING FURTHER on President Nixon's Wednesday speech, we have concluded he was right not to go beyond renewing his simple denial of personal involvement in the Watergate crime and cover-up. A detailed defense by him not only would have been foolish, it also would have destroyed his main purpose.

That purpose was to put Watergate in perspective — to convince the nation the time has come to fold the main circus tent, turn Watergate over to the courts where it belongs, and get on with the country's affairs.

To many the speech was a let-down. The public, grown accustomed to the slam-bang melodrama of the Watergate hearings, expected Mr. Nixon to maintain that pace. He contributed to that expectation by the many days he spent at Camp David working on the speech. Friend and foe alike thought he would come out slugging.

SOME OF HIS enemies would have been satisfied with nothing less from him than a confession of personal complicity. They have already tried and convicted him. They are less after the truth than they are after the man.

Some of his friends wanted blood too. They had been all set for a slashing attack by the President on some of the Watergate Senators and some elements of the media.

Still others expected the President to buttress with new facts his previous statements of non-involvement.

So the President seemingly disappointed very many. Most particularly, he disappointed because he made no attempt to prove his innocence.

But we must remember that he doesn't have to. The burden of proof is on the other side. The President is not charged with anything and only one man in the whole United States, John Dean, has even implied under oath that Mr. Nixon violated the criminal law.

That's the legal situation. But what of the political situation? Doesn't the President have a duty both to the people and to his office to prove his innocence? Doesn't he have to prove his innocence in order to be able to govern effectively?

THE ANSWER is no. Politically as well as legally, no case against him exists. He cannot fight a pillow stuffed with the feathers of conjecture and innuendo. The further answer is that any step by him beyond the simple denial he has made could open up an endless volley of backs and forths of the "Yes you did" "No I didn't" "You did too" variety. This would bog the Presidency in the Watergate mire for still more months and defeat the very purpose he was trying to achieve Wednesday night.

That purpose is to reduce the abnormal preoccupation with Watergate so that he, the Congress and the people can turn to the nation's many other important items of business.

It is a desirable purpose. Watergate is important. But so is the daily life of the nation. Watergate will be with us for years. We should not and cannot sustain a Watergate fixation. The sooner it moves wholly into the courts the better.