

NYTimes NOV 24 1973
Responsibility for What?

In his Disney World news conference, President Nixon said: "I recognize that because of mistakes that were made, and I must take responsibility for those mistakes, whether in the campaign or in the course of an Administration, that there are those who wonder whether this Republic can survive."

The survival of the Republic is not at issue; Mr. Nixon's and the nation's future are not synonymous. What is relevant to the charges against the President, however, is the repetition of Mr. Nixon's refrain that he "must take responsibility" for what has happened under the broad definition of Watergate.

What exactly does the President mean when he reiterates his readiness to assume responsibility? His *pro forma* acceptance of responsibility for everything in general and nothing in particular eliminates altogether any personal accountability at the summit.

Examples abound. In the course of the same news conference, Mr. Nixon stated: "I don't think Mr. Krogh has said of Mr. Ehrlichman, or anybody else, that I specifically approved or ordered the entrance into Dr. Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office."

That statement by the President conflicts with his earlier offer to "take responsibility for those mistakes"; it is also at odds with Mr. Krogh's and Mr. Ehrlichman's testimony. Mr. Krogh testified that he was carrying out the President's orders as he understood them. Mr. Ehrlichman earlier told the Senate Watergate committee: "On the 24th of July [1971], I sat in a meeting where the President gave Mr. Krogh his charter, his instructions. I must say that the President put it to Mr. Krogh very strong that he wanted Mr. Krogh and the people in his unit to take such steps as were necessary . . ."

What the Krogh-Ehrlichman testimony indicates is that the President's responsibility is not a matter of rhetoric but of fact. Mr. Nixon had left no doubt in the minds of his surrogates and subordinates that they were breaking the laws as part of the President's mandate to them. They were following, as Mr. Ehrlichman's description of the plumbers' activities makes clear, Mr. Nixon's "charter, his instructions."

That is the picture of the Nixon Administration at work. Mr. Nixon is now trying to retouch that picture and to paint over it with offers to assume responsibility for unspecified "mistakes" while denying that he was party to any of them.

Although it remains important to determine Mr. Nixon's personal role in any wrongdoing and its cover-up, there is no longer room for doubt that he is responsible for abuse of the trust placed in him by the American people. Mr. Nixon is responsible for the establishment of an oligarchy of men who bent the laws and the Constitution to their interpretation of the Presidential will. It is creation of the climate for such lawlessness and corruption for which Mr. Nixon must, above all else, assume responsibility.