

# The Nixon charisma

One good thing about Watergate. It has silenced those people who used to say Richard Nixon lacked charisma.

You know about charisma. It's that old Greek word some high-toned journalist resurrected during the Kennedy - Nixon campaign of 1960, sending the rest of us sneaking off to consult our dictionaries.

Well, it turned out that charisma is a great thing for a politician to have, the magnetic quality that charms other people and turns them into eager followers.

Pretty soon we political analysts were busy telling each other that Jack Kennedy was loaded with charisma, while Dick Nixon, poor chap, was utterly devoid of the stuff.

Which explains why Kennedy beat Nixon by such a landslide — two tenths of one percent of the popular vote. But I digress.

Down the years the Old Nixon gave way to the New Nixon and then to the Nixon we wouldn't get to kick around anymore and finally to the President Nixon we have kicked around more than ever.

But one thing remained constant. We all agreed that if there was one thing Nixon ain't got, he ain't got charisma.

And so it was something of a shock when the Watergate revelations began and we saw how much charisma he possesses.

There were men like Charles Colson, who said he would walk over his own grandmother to assure Nixon's re-election. It takes some pretty high-octane charisma to inspire sentiments like that.

Or think of all those dairymen out there in their barns, milking away as fast as they can, trying to raise \$2 million to give to their hero. That's charisma with cream on the top.

Compared to the magnetic power that Nixon packs, Kennedy's charisma was kids' stuff. JFK charmed the young and impressionable, the bobby soxers and their mamas. Nixon has the kind of charisma that turns

out steely-eyed millionaires and moves them to reach for their checkbooks.

Kennedy's charisma inspired the idealistic young to join the Peace Corps. Nixon's charisma inspired ex-CIA agents to join the Plumbers.

When Kennedy ventured into a crowd he had to be careful because his ecstatic admirers would rip off a cuff link or even a cuff for a souvenir.

Nobody but nobody rips off Richard Nixon. On the contrary, his charisma is the kind that makes people want to give him things. Like bundles of unmarked bills. And cashier's checks freshly laundered in Mexico.

Any handsome young President of the United States could win cheers from a crowd of good Germans by telling them how sweet it is to be able to say, "Ich bin ein Berliner."

But Richard Nixon has a charisma so profound that it renders other men speechless. Especially key witnesses. And even tape recorders.

Out of sheer devotion to her leader, Rose Mary Woods risked a slipped disc demonstrating how she put her best foot forward while simultaneously reaching for the telephone.

And for love of his former law partner, John Mitchell risked the fury of a woman scorned.

Nixon short on charisma? Why, in their dedication to this born leader young attorneys ruined their careers by committing perjury. The nation's top cop destroyed evidence. Successful businessmen doubled in non-profit burglary. One of them even made a fool of himself by wearing a red fright wig, no small sacrifice.

When men say they would go to prison for Nixon, they really mean it. A chosen few have gone. Others are waiting in line.

If that ain't charisma, what do you call it?