

# Nixon and the nation's morality

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**I**T IS my contention, not popular at the moment, that if Richard Nixon is brought to impeachment, then a large portion of the electorate will in some respects be on trial with him. If this curdles the cream in your coffee, my humble apologies.

But the essence of this argument is that all people, and especially free people, are inherently responsible for the collapse of national morality. You may say that this is projecting morality to the broadest possible extent, but we have applied it to others in years not too far gone — to the Germans and the Japanese in the wake of World War II, and to the French in lesser degree. We held them accountable for the transformations and transgressions of their leaderships, so how are we to escape the pinching of the shoe?

A reading of the transcripts provided by the President of various White House conversations reveals the dismal fact very little attention was given to what was basically right or wrong in a number of situations. Instead, we are left with the picture of increasingly harried men trying to figure out how they could escape the cupidity that surrounded them.

Now the voice of outrage rings throughout the land, with the Chicago Tribune and Cleveland Plain Dealer the latest of note to join in the chorus, and the odds on impeachment have dropped, in racing parlance, to "a sure thing." Beyond resignation, there seems no way Richard Nixon can avoid a long and excruciating examination by the Senate.

All right. If that is the popular will, let us have it out to a finish. But in the process we must not make what might be the fatal mistake of avoiding the crucial issue. Were the President and his henchmen violating existing morality, or were they to at least some extent reflecting the mores of today's society? Ah, this is quite a question, isn't it?

For the truth is that in many areas and for many years we have been hiding morality



under a bushel, so to speak. Where shall we start in the projection of this indictment?

Well, what was moral about the rampant suppression of the rights of the black people for nearly a century after the adoption of the 14th Amendment, which still stands as the finest "civil rights law" ever written?

What was moral about heralding a "War on Poverty" and then sliding away from it because we weren't intelligent enough to stay out of Southeast Asia?

What has been moral about the open and accepted domination of elections by special interests?

What has been moral about the production and sale of shoddy merchandise; or, equally as bad, the deliberate sabotage of manufacturing processes by workers?

What has been moral about the snakepit into which we have permitted — yea, encouraged — "entertainment" to fall?

And what has been moral, to hold this to the short form, about income tax cheating; expense account padding; traffic ticket fixing; the prostitution of amateur athletics; fee splitting; phony warranties; flagrant price increases; secret sessions of elected bodies; with much of this, if not all of it, either condoned or yawned-at by the "best informed people on the face of the earth?"

The morals of a nation are not wholly

held or totally reflected by its leadership. In many instances, as a matter of fact, the leaders reflect the morals of those they govern. This is why it is said that if Richard Nixon goes into the dock, he will not be alone. To various degrees, most of us have been guilty of some form of immorality, and if we do not understand this then Watergate will turn out to be an exercise in futility.

The state of our morality has troubled a number of observers, including Drew Middleton, for many years an outstanding foreign correspondent for the New York Times. He has written a book entitled "Where Has Last July Gone?" and in it he deals with the ultimate question of survival — if forced to it, could we stand alone as the English did in 1940-41? We come to this:

"No one with any knowledge of history can ignore the signs of decadence. Vast expenditures on military enterprises far from our shores, enterprises bungled by civilian and military leaders alike. The widening gap between rich and poor. The disappearance of the middle class, which, with all its faults and virtues, was essential to the flowering of America. Great corporations and interests becoming states within the state. Corruption rife in business and politics. A wave of preoccupation with sex, including the exaltation of homosexuality. Old standards mocked, old values discarded."

Morality in the White House? We need it, God knows. But elsewhere, too.