

Selected Quotes and Comments

We've got a nation of 210 million people who need leadership and need it badly; and I've found in reading the history of our presidents that very few presidents satisfied the morals of all the people. . . Now so far as leadership goes I think in foreign affairs the people accept him. Domestically, no they do not — and he has a long way to go.

Senator Barry M. Goldwater
The Christian Science Monitor
December 17, 1973

It is deemed inappropriate for me to express an opinion upon whether President Nixon should or should not be impeached. Anything I might say could too easily be taken not only to rest upon some special information that came to me as Special Prosecutor but also to indicate that my work in that capacity was conducted with a particular bias in one direction or the other. Neither consequence would be a happy event; the inhibition continues to weigh heavily with me.

Archibald Cox, in a letter to
Skeptic,
February 12, 1974

For President Nixon to either resign or be impeached at this time would be a complete surrender to hysteria deliberately created by the communications industry, which in its most important segment is monolithic in its hatred of President Nixon. They have carried on a villification of him which exceeds all bounds of decency and propriety and which has created a lynching-type psychology in the nation in which no fair judgment of the Administration can be made at this time.

William Loeb, in a letter to
Skeptic, January 30, 1974

It is by this tribunal, that statesmen, who abuse their power, are accused by statesmen, and tried by statesmen, not upon the niceties of a narrow jurisprudence, but upon the enlarged and solid principles of state morality.

Edmund Burke, at the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, Governor-General of India, before the House of Lords (1786-96)

How macabre that on the eve of the country's celebration of 200 years of independence, we are faced with the sickening realization that the government has declared independence from the people to whom it belongs. . . . Impeachment, under such circumstances, becomes not punishment but an act of almost majestic forgiveness, a diminution of the profundity of the crimes which have been committed against us. . . . Impeachment is not enough. It touches nothing, treats nothing of the deeper sickness of this nation. . . . The system that made Watergate must change. We must dismantle what stands now and replace it with a government and economic system men like Jefferson were able to envision. It will require more than either present party is capable even of imagining — a political system in which the overwhelming power of the executive is no longer left free to ride roughshod over the will of the people or the other branches of the government, no longer able to impound funds or continue wars which the majority do not want continued.

Richard Parker
Forum Letter, May 21, 1973

Most of the critics who parlay Watergate into impeachment belong in the pulpit or in the academy, not in

Congress. Congress, which has always been potentially supreme — it can deny jurisdiction to the Supreme Court, funds to the executive, and impeach the lot of them — is ultimately responsible for the stability of the nation. Under certain circumstances, the stability of the nation could require the removal of the President. But there is the lapidary distinction: the purpose cannot be to punish the President, only to effect his removal. This is the distinction that threatens to be drowned out in the fury of the current debate. They are still saying . . . that if Richard Nixon is "proven" to be guilty of having foreknowledge of Watergate, or guilty (which is worse) of attempting to obstruct justice, then he must be removed in deference to the office of the Presidency. In deference to the office of the Presidency, he must not be removed. Censured, yes, humiliated, yes. But to remove a President is to remove the sovereign. To remove him is to punish the citizenry who benefit from the national stability.

William F. Buckley
The New York Times Magazine
May 20, 1973

President Nixon has usurped authority that is not his, and used his power — both legal and lawless — to undermine justice, liberty and the general welfare. In so doing he has presented us with an historic choice: We can impeach or, through inaction, acquiesce in an executive power which some day, in stronger and more ruthlessly intelligent hands, will overwhelm the democracy. The moral of Watergate would then become not that the Constitution is dead, but that it is impotent to resist a President ambitious and skillful enough to destroy it. If that power exists, that kind of President will come. The inevitability of such abuse was so clear a lesson of

history that it was made the basic principle of our constitutional democracy.

Men must have power, but they cannot be trusted with power. "In questions of power," wrote Thomas Jefferson, "let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief by the claims of the Constitution. . . . That confidence is everywhere the parent of despotism." Impeachment is the only protection in the entire elaborate constitutional structure against the kind of abuse and corruption of executive power which has not been unmasked. There remain no legal or constitutional doubts about the appropriateness of impeachment.

The issue is now one of politics: Have decades of erosion and years of subservience stripped Congress of the will to perform its constitutional obligation? Or have so many of its members become implicated in the general corruption of the time that they are afraid to expose and censure the abuses of others? . . .

Richard N. Goodwin
Rolling Stone
December 20, 1973

If this was a contest only between the President and his traditional enemies — the liberals, the anti-war activists, the longhairs — Nixon would win handily, overwhelming the reformers and moralists. But though the President may still believe that his enemies consist only of dissidents, the battle is now between Richard Nixon and the American political system. And the odds have reversed themselves.

There is indeed fear in the land and fear in the House, and it is that very fear that will in all probability drive Richard Nixon from office. By the time the impeachment vote in the House is taken, for most Congressmen it will take more courage to vote *against* impeachment than *for* impeachment. The very ambiguity of the term impeachment, an ambiguity that has made it so difficult for most

Americans to understand the process, becomes in the House the saving grace for a legislator afraid of the voter's wrath. . . . A "no" vote is the definitive vote, the vote for final and ultimate acquittal. The "yes" vote, both in the Judiciary Committee and in the House, merely passes the buck on to another body, and House members will then be able to interpret their vote in a number of ways. . . . (they) can always rationalize that they were allowing the Senate to fulfill its constitutional role.

Between Nixon and November — The House of Representatives Faces Its Moral Imperative, an analysis by the National Committee for an Effective Congress, January 1974

Mr. Nixon's integrity is unimpeachable. I don't condone the Watergate break-in by some of Mr. Nixon's aides, but remember that they did not break into the Democratic headquarters looking for silver or gold. It was a political act. Doubtless they were looking for political information, perhaps trying to find out how the people who later appeared in Miami to support McGovern had gotten control of the Democratic Party. . . . What crime has our great President committed to warrant the abuse heaped upon him by lunatics, liberals and blood-thirsty haters and, in many instances, misguided good Americans?

Representative Otto E. Passman
(D-Louisiana)
Los Angeles Times
February 5, 1974

I can only conclude from Mr. Nixon's actions that he considers himself above the law. There is only one procedure left to show that we are a government of laws, not a government of men. That is the course of impeachment. I, therefore, hope that

the House of Representatives brings the charges. . . . I have not prejudged the President. I say only that he is accountable for his actions and that sufficient prima facie evidence exists to call him to account.

Senator Floyd Haskell
(D-Colorado)
Civil Liberties
January 1974

. . . the President of the United States needs not just the people's votes but their trust — a fund of respect or admiration or affection which he can draw on in troubled times. Lyndon Johnson, for all his talents and accomplishments, did not have that trust. . . . Nixon, we fear, cannot restore confidence. He lacks the trust of the people not just because of what has happened during the past year but because he did not truly have their trust in the first place. Like Johnson, he had only their votes. A candidate can win votes from people who feel that the nation's interests are served by his policies or who feel that their own interests are served by his policies or who believe him to be an efficient administrator or who dislike him less than they dislike his opponent. Trust — which has to do with how voters see a candidate as a man rather than as a candidate — does not necessarily accompany votes, even if the number of votes constitutes a landslide. In order to restore confidence, Nixon would have to change not only the widely held belief that he participated in a cover-up of the Watergate break-in but the widely held belief that he has always been capable of doing such a thing. The combination probably defies any President's restorative powers.

The Talk of the Town
The New Yorker
November 19, 1973



"The Political Death of the Bogus Caesar," Thomas Nast's comment on the impeachment of Andrew Johnson in 1868.