



Degrading Obsession Of Congress, Nixon

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JUST OVER forty-two years ago, on a sweltering July day in New York City, I first began to follow the reporter's trade. Since then, I have spent almost four decades as a political reporter with headquarters in Washington. So it may be an interesting statistic that I have never before been totally overjoyed to be leaving this city.

In all past summers, when vacation-time came around again, I have always left with a real pang. Or I have even settled down quietly to enjoy Washington's many summer pleasures. This time, the pang ought to be sharper than ever. The things in summertime Washington that I especially love — the garden and all it stands for — are at a new peak of perfection.

It strikes me, too, that in these last years, since Washington has at last acquired black leadership, it has become a lot better place to live. I further expect that improvement to continue when the black leadership is popularly elected, as it soon will be.

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UNFORTUNATELY, however, Washington correspondents have to live in a city-within-the-city — in political Washington. Still more unfortunately, political Washington has now become a hateful and degraded place. So it has suddenly become a perfect delight to depart from it.

Political Washington is hateful because of the passions unleashed by Watergate. The mingled venom and hypocrisy that characterize too many of the President's enemies are almost as distasteful as the crimes and follies the President stands accused of. So it is hard to feel much sympathy for anyone, especially when the guts

are meanwhile being torn out of the most sacred and vital institutions of the American political system.

Political Washington is also degraded for quite a different reason. In brief, because of Watergate, the most urgent and essential national interests are now being neglected, or even trampled underfoot.

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IT IS degrading that no one at all, in either party, has effectively raised his voice in favor of getting on with all the other urgent public business, even if the matter of the President's impeachment remains to be resolved. There is a failure of leadership implied in this that makes any veteran of the past think with despairing longing of the Washington of Franklin Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman and John F. Kennedy.

In those happier days, voices would have been raised, and not in the White House either. Just imagine what George W. Norris or Sam Rayburn, Robert LaFollette Jr. or Robert A. Taft would have had to say about non-stop double digit inflation. The roar would have been heard from coast to coast.

It is degrading, finally, that political Washington has so lost its sense of national priorities that John Dean gets more notice than double digit inflation. Worse still, this is not our unique problem of potentially desperate character. The energy problem is still critical. A financial crisis threatens. The whole U.S. strategic position is deteriorating. And so what does the Congress discuss, in public and in private? The politics of impeachment. And by the same token, the President is of course similarly obsessed, and so is everyone else. So this is a good place to leave for a while.