

# Watergate Just a Historic Ripple

By Andrew M. Greeley

**D**ESPITE what you have been reading in the papers, Watergate is going to end up as a bizarre but minor footnote in American constitutional history.

Those of us who earn our living by studying trends in public opinion have been deluged with phone calls from people wanting to know what impact the departure of Richard Nixon is going to have on American society. The only honest answer is "none at all."

When all is said and done about the only net result will be at least one more full term of a Republican president.

★ ★ ★

**A**T THIS reading President Ford will be a shoo-in for re-election. I define a "liberal" Democrat as one who hated Mr. Nixon so much that he wanted to get rid of him even if it meant six or ten years of Mr. Ford. Most of the rest of us Democrats wanted to keep Mr. Nixon in office because then we would have won in 1976.

Alas, the former President wouldn't cooperate with us; so we had to get rid of him even though it will be a disaster for Democratic chances in 1976.

But then "liberal" Democrats are like Bourbon kings. They never forget anything and they never learn anything. Having put Mr. Nixon in office twice (once by not supporting Hubert Humphrey and the other time by imposing George McGovern on the rest of us) they now are so happy about his fall that they don't realize that we're going to have a much more conservative President for the next six years.

★ ★ ★

**B**UT BEYOND that there isn't going to be an "impact." The power of the presidency will not be weakened as the Nixon supporters feared and his adversaries hoped. The presidency is by both structure and symbol the most powerful executive office in the democratic world.

The more complex our society gets and the more critical its world commitments (and in a time of international food crisis our world commitments are more important than ever), the more power the American presidency will have.

There is simply no way the Congress or the press is going to change that fact. Nor is it very likely that Congress is going to modify its archaic structure to become more efficient in checking and balancing the presidency.

★ ★ ★

**P**RESUMABLY, future Presidents will be more careful about keeping the law, or at least more intelli-

gent about the way they break it. They will be more particular in the kinds of people they let on their staffs. Some may even tolerate disagreement and dissent from their staff.

For a time Presidents will be more diplomatic in dealing with Congress, the bureaucracies, the press. They will try to remember the names of their cabinet appointees. They will go through the motions of being more accessible. They won't dress their guards up like imperial soldiers from a comic opera.

And you can bet your bottom dollar they won't tape record conversations in the Oval Office. Or keep written lists of their enemies.

★ ★ ★

**A**LL OF THIS is very nice, and for small favors we must be grateful. But a revolution in the structure of government it surely is not.

For reasons that escape me, a lot of high level worriers like to see major events as the result of long and inevitable historical processes. Watergate, we are told, was the inescapable consequence of the emergence of a strong presidency.

Baloney. Just as the Vietnam escalation in 1965 was not the result of Kennedy's 1961 inaugural speech, so Watergate was not the result of the New Deal's creation of a strong presidency. It was, like so many other "historic" events, the result of an unfortunate concatenation of random events.

★ ★ ★

**W**ATERGATE was caused by Mr. Nixon's peculiar personality and the mistakes of his political opponents that put such a manifestly unpopular and incompetent man in the White House.

He is gone. And we will not have a troop of clowns stumbling into politicians' and psychiatrists' offices or trooping around federal agencies with enemy lists.

We should be satisfied with that and not expect anything of more cosmic importance.