



## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

As this issue went to press, Richard Nixon's dramatic exit had occasioned a vast sigh of national relief and catharsis. The feeling of deliverance from evil, or at least political dyspepsia, was so intense that many citizens were almost grateful to its involuntary creator, Mr. Nixon. Duly reflecting the consensus, President Ford invoked prayers for his fallen predecessor, and called for a bright new era of probity, candor, and good feelings. "Our long national nightmare is over," he announced. "Our Constitution works. . . . Here, the people rule."

Well, it's about time Americans enjoyed some euphoria, an outburst of pride in the integrity of our best instincts and political institutions. The country has missed all that for at least the past decade. Still, we can't help saying that unanimous perceptions of complex events make us queasy; in fact, *Harper's* has always questioned instant formulations of history, and this may be a good time to keep ourselves in training.

For example, a skeptic might note that a substantial number of influential people in Washington knew a great deal about the Nixon team's unlawful activities soon after they be-

gan in 1971 and well before the 1972 election. Yet these people, many of them sworn officers of the law, failed to come forward. There is also the legend of an indefatigable press uncovering the Watergate conspiracy, whereas it appears that the facts were selectively leaked by various law enforcers—after Mr. Nixon irked them by his inept efforts to control the federal bureaucracy. Even then, it required more than two years of prolonged agony and dithering over the obvious before Nixon stopped lying to his countrymen and manipulating "the system" in his favor. It is true that he did so under the inexorable threat of impeachment. But it is not clear that the result validates the constitutional process designed by the Founders as a "grand inquest of the nation." The defendant himself abruptly halted the process—much to the relief of Congress—as soon as it began to work effectively. Nixon's resignation was akin to a defendant's pleading guilty to a lesser offense in order to escape trial for the crime he actually committed.

Perhaps this would have satisfied the Founders. But when a democracy tolerates for so long a Presidential performance of such blatant dishon-

esty and irresponsibility, and when a trial on the merits is aborted before it begins, one may ponder whether our government is truly a government of laws, not of men.

The removal of large weights from the souls of men and nations tends to make for lightheadedness. But, graceless as it may be to say so, the troubling fact remains—Mr. Nixon would still be in office had he not inexplicably taped, retained, and doctored the evidence of his own guilt. What drove him from office was not the constitutional process but his impulse to self-destruction. His political death was by his own hand.

Having blamed it all simply on his loss of political support in Congress, Mr. Nixon left us with the first unelected administration in history, a teetering economy, and myriad unanswered questions. What other dark acts lurk in the taped (and untaped) Nixon record? Why did he allow himself to sink into an entirely avoidable quagmire? Were his flaws really those of a weakling, not a tyrant? How should we deal with all the unsolved problems—rival intelligence agencies, uncontrolled bureaucracies, reelection politics, inflated campaign spending—that drove Nixon to fear-

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ful excesses? Do we actually need an even stronger Presidency and stronger men to fill it?

**H**arper's itself is left with the question of whether anyone cares to hear another word about the Nixon drama. Even so, our readers being more open-minded than most, we have devoted this issue largely to fresh perspectives on the Watergate fiasco. Our special section, "American Character: Trial and Triumph," is the work of our Washington Editor, Taylor Branch, George Crile, and Marie Nahikian. It takes the place of **WRAPAROUND** (for this issue only) and is based on the same editorial concept—that often the most honest and inviting way to deal with a complex subject is to present it in an unpretentious, nonlinear format.

Among other things, we've sought and published the hitherto unreported perceptions of various Watergate participants, including the long-silent Gordon Liddy, E. Howard Hunt, and two Cuban burglars, Bernard Barker and Eugenio Martinez. Their states of mind (notably Liddy's) have given us pause, to say the least. Whatever you think, we guarantee that the whole issue contains only material that taught us something new; we hope you feel the same way.

**W**e're especially grateful to Jamie Wyeth for permission to use his drawings. Mr. Wyeth is a distinguished painter, not a magazine illustrator. But, as a fascinated observer of the Washington scene this summer, he found himself sketching a personal record of historical events, and the results are likely to command much attention in the art world. You can preview a generous sampling throughout "American Character: Trial and Triumph." —R.S.

**WRAPAROUND** will be back next month to deal with the topic of Adventure. In December, the subject will be Sleep and Dreams. Contributions from art, science, literature, and life will be welcomed. Please address them to **WRAPAROUND**, Harper's Magazine, Two Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016.



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# Harper's

Magazine

## AMERICAN CHARACTER: TRIAL AND TRIUMPH

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**Piety in the Bunker**

**E. Howard Hunt:**  
**The Clandestine Tradition**

**Eugenio Martinez:**  
**My Missions for Eduardo**

**Bernard Barker:**  
**I Might Do It Again**

**Herbert Porter:**  
**My Little White Lie**

**Hays Gorey:**  
**John Dean's Dilemma**

**James Boyd:**  
**The Plumbers' Trial**

**Tom Huston:**  
**Confessions of Repression**

**Taylor Branch:**  
**The Judges and the Midget**

**Geoffrey Stokes:**  
**A Computer Analyzes Nixon**

**Drawings by Jamie Wyeth**

