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Nixon Is Looking Better And Better

Washington

WE ARE all now permitted to recognize as truth one central point that Richard Nixon's defenders have been making for two years: that the use of the FBI for political purposes in the Nixon administration was mild compared with the misuse of that agency in the Johnson and Kennedy years.

William Safire

MIT Prof. Noam Chomsky, that giant of linguistics who joined or led just about every radical antiwar protest during the 60's, has this to say in his introduction to "Cointelpro — the FBI's Secret War on Political Freedom," published this month by Pathfinder Press:

"Illegal FBI operations (under Kennedy and Johnson) . . . while incomparably more serious than anything charged in the congressional articles of impeachment or other denunciations of Nixon, aroused scant interest and little concern, specifically, in the organs of American liberalism that were so agitated over the latest tax trickery or tape erasure.

"Ergo," concludes Chomsky, "Nixon's defenders do have a case."

Nicholas Von Hoffman, a modern Peter Porcupine whose Nixon-hating credentials have always been in good order, writes: "In the months since his departure, his defense looks better and better. Half a dozen congressional committees have brought forth volumes of information all adducing that the break-ins, the tapping, snooping and harassment have been routine government activities for a generation at least."

And so it appears that revisionism is already doing its work. History will show the Nixon administration not as the one that invented abuse of power, but the one that gloriously if unwittingly served the cause of individual liberty by the clumsy way it tried to continue the abuses of Kennedy and Johnson.

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THE SECRETS being "revealed" now, accompanied by synthetic gasps of horror and an effort to make J. Edgar Hoover the sole scapegoat, were not secrets at all: They were known to Democratic senators and their staffs, and to some timorous Republicans as well, for two long years.

Why was this vital information not vouchsafed to the public? Why was it not leaked to, or dug out by, investigative reporters who are otherwise busy being immortalized by our most glamorous movie stars?

Because the public, if possessed of the whole truth, might not have acted as the public opinion manipulators wanted them to. If the whole truth were let out, Nixon might have escaped. That explains the two-year delay in testimony tucked away by the Senate Watergate Committee, much of which is still to come.

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IN HIS book "At that Point in Time," Fred Thompson, the inexperienced minority counsel of the Senate Watergate Committee, blurts out why Republicans on the committee did not call FBI Deputy Directors William Sullivan or Cartha Deloach to the stand, to recount the Kennedy-Johnson FBI abuses we officially learned about only last week. "(Sen. Lowell) Weicker was adamantly opposed. He said it would look like an attempt to justify some of the actions of the Nixon administration."

And so the greatest cover-up of all took place: the suppression of the truth about Democratic precedents to Watergate, on the grounds that it might ameliorate the hatred being focussed on Nixon — on the assumption that the public was too stupid to take action if it were permitted to know the whole story.

The reason for the deliberate suppression of evidence in 1974, for the lackadaisical reportage then of what we see now, was the fear that a false claim of "everybody did it" might make it impossible to hound Nixon out of office.

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EVERYBODY DID not do it; the Justice Department under Eisenhower, for example, shows up far better than under Roosevelt, Kennedy, Johnson or Nixon. But even assuming the fear of anti-Nixon partisans to be valid, did that give the orchestrators of outrage the right to suppress evidence? To manage the news and fan the hysteria? To prevent perspective?

As each new abuse of power finally dribbles out, we can ask ourselves: "Why now? Why not two years ago?"

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8 DEC 75