

# Sending The Nixon Years Through Analysis

A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

Sen. Goldwater has taken to using the same language on former President Nixon and his eastern travels that he once used on the likes of Jane Fonda. (26 FEB)

David S. Broder, the widely read columnist of quiet political orthodoxy, has reacted to the trip with vituperation of an almost violent character. "The utter shamelessness of the man . . . there is nothing, absolutely nothing, he will not do . . ." are but some of the angry phrases Broder, ordinarily a Steady-Eddie type, has applied to our sojourner in the Orient.

But let's leave the possible political meaning of that journey to people who have a taste for such divinations and concern ourselves with the emerging unanimity of judgment about Nixon that remarks like Broder's now typify. Nixon the Hitler figure, the Mephistophelean aberration who was at length slain and sent back to the lower regions of San Clemente by the Good Guys, as Jimmy Breslin called them.

In 15 or 20 years what will the revisionist historians make of all the moralistic onanism prompted by the Nixon fantasy figure? For sure, the future historians will make short

work of the idea of a diabolic Nixon and will instead, interest themselves in how and why virtually a whole society lost the remnants of balanced judgment and fell on the man like a compacted mob.

From the summer of 1973 onward, Nixon increasingly became the object of the kind of universal media attack that we have heretofore pretty much reserved for foreign enemies or obscure domestic Communists. These past three years Nixon has had a worse press than Stalin in the height of the Cold War.

The only name for it is hysterical contagion. Granted that a thunderous welling-up of righteousness was indispensable for Americans to chase their elected monarch from office, such an observation may explain how the defenestration came to pass—but not why.

The usual answer to that is the anger was triggered by the discovery of Nixon's villainies, his discrediting of the presidency, etc., etc. That doesn't hold water either. To the very end, Nixon contended that he conducted the office in much the same fashion as his predecessors, and he was right.

The break-ins, the spying and the rest of that litany were standard op-

erating procedure in the White House for a generation. If you want to go to the bother, you can marshal enough evidence to show that Kennedy and Johnson may have violated civil liber-

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ties, extorted money and waged unconstitutional war on a larger scale.

Perhaps, some will answer, the difference was that nobody knew a Johnson and a Kennedy were doing it, but Nixon was unlucky enough to be found out. That doesn't make sense either, and the FBI persecution of Martin Luther King illustrates why. The recent revelations on the subject have brought out that the media had known what was being done to King for years. There is more than suggestive evidence that the media possessed information on a large range of illegal government activities here and abroad and chose to make no stink about it.

Then what brought Nixon down? The famous cover-up? The discovery of the much talked about "smoking gun" was the final proof that a cover-up existed in the sense that Nixon's enemies used the word and cost him

the last support by members of his own party. Nevertheless, historians may have a much harder time finding and defining the cover-up than most Americans did in the summer of 1973.

They're certain to ask why Nixon turned over the tapes with the smoking gun evidence on them if he were engaged in a conspiracy to obstruct justice. Why didn't he go ahead and obstruct justice? John Connally and every other person with practical political experience who's discussed that matter has asked why those tapes weren't destroyed.

One possible explanation was that Nixon is too lawyerly, that he really believed in the law, he understands it, and he couldn't bring himself to do it. He could encourage people to perjury—but did he think of it as perjury or as incitement to fibbing over a chicken-feed campaign incident?

The problem with the hypothesis that Nixon was too lawyerly to put the torch to such a mountain of evidence is that it runs right into the utterly shameless devil-man hypothesis. If Richard Nixon is not pure Hitlerian evil, the question of why and how he was removed ceases to be an unalloyed struggle between the forces of darkness and light.

If the people of the Broder persuasion incline to the evil-incarnate theory, at least one of Nixon's victims doesn't. He's Marcus Raskin, who was not only on the enemies list but who is one of the heads of The Institute for Policy Studies, a left-wing think tank that was massively spied on by the FBI.

Raskin writes (in "Notes on the Old System: To Transform American Politics," David McKay Company, 1974), that "To forestall a politically revolutionary consciousness, it was necessary to develop a theory that Nixon and his activities were distinguishable from the System's usual operations . . . Nixon had to be perceived by a majority in Congress and the media, as a pathological occupant of the presidency. . . . If people decided that Nixon as a President was no different from others, it could result in greater instability and a possible internal upheaval against the elites who exercised broad control over the society. . . ."

Did Nixon, then, have to be expelled in order to save Nixonism?

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