



# Nixon's Memoirs

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PRESIDENT FORD'S phone call to former President Richard Nixon in California reminds me of something I nearly forgot. That is the sample chapter of Nixon's memoir of his presidency which came my way not long ago.

By itself the document is a piece of sentimental trash. But a word seems in order partly because so much false information has been spread about the first draft of the sample chapter.

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PROBABLY the most important point is that in the first draft, at least, Nixon does not deny his guilt. He acknowledges that he approved the basic Watergate coverup plan. He further admits that the original decision to cover up led him into a long series of lies in which he used the power of the presidency to protect himself and his friends.

To be sure, the guilt is minimized. As Nixon has it, the original decision was a casual one, made under prodding from his chief of staff, Robert Halde- man, for the purposes of preventing the blowing up of a big scandal that might compromise John Mitchell and others.

A second point of interest involves the pardon, or more specifically the meeting which took place between the White House chief of staff, General

Alexander Haig, and the Watergate special prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, on the day of the resignation. That meeting has always been an object of suspicion.

In the sample chapter he claims that General Haig returned from the meeting to inform him that he had nothing to fear from the special prosecutor. Haig's correct conclusion after his conversation was that Jaworski was not interested in prosecuting a former President.

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BUT ANOTHER interpretation is open. It is that Haig improperly raised the issue of letting Nixon off, and that Jaworski gave him assurances. That point is central to the question of whether or not there was a deal allowing Nixon to get off before he resigned. Since Nixon, in his account, tends to support the view that something like a deal had at least been offered, Haig ought to break his long silence and elucidate.

The more so as Nixon treats Haig in cavalier fashion. The former President speaks of a "mutiny" by Haig at one point when the general insisted on releasing the tape of the conversation that finally proved beyond any shadow of a doubt Nixon's guilt. Nixon deals in the same way with virtually everybody else who at any time gave him less than total loyalty.