

# NIXON SAYS HIS LIFE ALMOST LOST VALUE

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## It Was Close to 'Unbearable' After Resignation, He Tells Frost

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WASHINGTON, May 25—Richard M. Nixon, professing regret that he was unable to clear his name "through the agony of a trial," said in another interview televised tonight that his life had become "almost unbearable" after he resigned the Presidency in disgrace.

"No one in the world and no one in our history could know how I felt," the for-

Excerpts from interview, page 40.

mer President, his lips pursed and quivering momentarily, told David Frost in the fourth of their nationally televised conversations.

His description of a "life without purpose" was an indirect response to Americans who, Mr. Nixon said, understandably were incensed that he was "able to get off with a pardon." He suggested that he might have declined the pardon but for his physical and mental collapse and his conclusion that he could not obtain a fair trial.

Yet Mr. Nixon, explicitly availing himself of a chance to use the telecasts as

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a substitute for a defense at an impeachment or a criminal trial, nonetheless continued to minimize the misconduct with which his aborted Administration came to be identified.

He justified, as politics-as-usual in Maryland, former Vice President Spiro T. Agnew's acceptance of cash kickbacks from contractors and said he could "well understand" that Mr. Agnew had not spoken to him since resigning in 1973 out of bitterness that Mr. Nixon had not "put the arm on" the Attorney General to go easy on Mr. Agnew.

Mr. Nixon described, as if it had been philanthropic, a plan to start a Watergate defense fund for H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, once his senior aides, with \$100,000 of a secret campaign contribution from the late industrialist, Howard R. Hughes.

### Gift to the Archives

He insisted he had been unaware in 1970 that an aide had fraudulently backdated the deed for a gift of pre-Presidential papers to the National Archives in an ultimately unsuccessful effort to help Mr. Nixon evade payment of \$432,787 in Federal income taxes.

The former President defended his once covert attempt to undermine the Chilean Government of the late Marxist President, Salvador Allende Gossens, by saying a right-wing dictatorship in Chile was preferable to a left-wing democracy in terms of United States security.

In phrases, gestures and tones at odds with the textbook image of an elder

statesman, Mr. Nixon spoke of having counseled Mr. Agnew to avoid prison through "the resignation option;" of an unfulfilled pledge to pardon Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman should they get "a bum rap" at the Watergate cover-up trial; of a denial, which he challenged any listener to disprove, that he had "a whole bundle of cash" hidden away somewhere, and particularly of his resentment of a "sanctimonious" American press.

"I don't want 'em repressed" he said of the news media, "but believe me, when they take me on or when they take any public figure on—Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative—I think the public figure ought to come back and crack em right in the puss."

### On Woodward and Bernstein

Mr. Nixon's harshest words were reserved for Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, whose reporting on Watergate won a Pulitzer Prize for The Washington Post and led to their best-selling book describing in detail, but without any souring, "The Final Days" of the Nixon Presidency.

Refusing to use the names of the two reporters, Mr. Nixon called them and their book "trash." He said he could understand and even "respect" Mr. Woodward and Mr. Bernstein for seeking professional advancement by "pandering" to a liberal audience, "but when it comes to fictionalizing fact and doing it in a vicious way, that I will not forget and I consider it to be contemptible journalism."

He said he had not read "The Final Days" and that, "All I say is Mrs. Nixon read it and her stroke came three days later." Moments later, Mr. Nixon with-

drew the suggestion that the book, in which his wife was described as sexually estranged and increasingly reliant on liquor for solace, had caused her illness.

But he called the Woodward-Bernstein account a logical consequence of the Supreme Court's attitude toward libel, "which is really a license for the media to lie."

For all that, Mr. Nixon confirmed to Mr. Frost one of the most dramatic disclosures by Mr. Woodward and Mr. Bernstein in their book, the tearful scene in which Mr. Nixon and Henry A. Kissinger, then the Secretary of State, knelt together in prayer two days before the President resigned.

Amid reminiscences in the privacy of the Lincoln sitting room of the White House, "We were crying," Mr. Nixon recounted. "Not in a, not, you know, sobbing, but it was an emotional moment because we knew it was the end of a long relationship and the beginning of something new."

On impulse, he confided that he had faced difficult decisions before by kneeling in prayer at the table where Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation. On this occasion, he said, he had invited Mr. Kissinger to join him in prayer after saying:

"I'm a Quaker and you're a Jew and neither of us is very orthodox but I think both of us probably have a deeper religious sensitivity than some of those that are, are so loudly proclaiming it all the time."

Mr. Nixon said he had later telephoned Mr. Kissinger and asked that he keep the incident secret.

By the former President's account, he

agonized over whether to accept the pardon that former President Ford extended to him on Sept. 9, 1974, one month after his resignation, because he knew that Mr. Ford and the nation would interpret the act as an admission of guilt.

He said he had told Herbert J. Miller, one of his lawyers, "I'd just as soon go through the agony of a trial and, so that we can scrape away at least all the false charges and fight it out on those in which there may be a doubt and then I'll take whatever the consequences are."

But he signed the document, Mr. Nixon said, because Mr. Miller persuaded him there was no chance of a fair trial and because the former President was "so emotionally drawn, mentally beaten down, physically not up to par that I said, 'Well, okay, I'll do it.'"

Dismissing published psycho-histories as "just bunk" for concluding that his career had been marked by a death wish, Mr. Nixon nonetheless told Mr. Frost that he had felt as if he faced "life without purpose, not having anything to live for" once he secluded himself at his estate in San Clemente, Calif.

Mr. Nixon emerged from self-exile to submit to the interviews only under an arrangement that will enrich him by at least \$600,000 and perhaps as much as \$1 million. But, in a long soliloquy, he said that Americans who envied those able to live in a state of languor at "international watering places" were misguided.

"They don't know life," he said, "because what makes life mean something is purpose, a goal, the battle, the struggle—even if you don't win it."

His recollection of an anguished, grudging decision to accept a full pardon stood as a counterpoint to the attitudes Mr. Nixon displayed as he recited, without apparent regret, traumatic events that preceded his final days in the White House.

As edited by Mr. Frost, the most striking illustrations of the former President's views on official mores dealt with the disgrace of Mr. Agnew and the almost cavalier uses of secret stores of political money.

Mr. Agnew, who was consistently denied any illegality, was out of the country today. An associate told reporters that the former Vice President would have no comment on the telecast.

### Report on the Charges

Mr. Nixon said that Elliot L. Richardson, then the Attorney General, and Henry E. Petersen, then the Assistant Attorney General in charge of the criminal division of the Justice Department, had informed him on Sept. 25, 1973, that the charges against Mr. Agnew were serious, apt to be corroborated and of sufficient magnitude that he should serve time in prison.

Mr. Agnew insisted that he was innocent of bribery charges, Mr. Nixon told Mr. Frost, saying, "Now, we have to understand what he was talking about."

As the former President described it, Mr. Agnew did not dispute the evidence that contractors who had done business with Baltimore County when Mr. Agnew was its executive or Maryland when he was its Governor had "contributed to expenses" of Mr. Agnew, in keeping with "common practice."

But Mr. Nixon said that Mr. Agnew had assured the President "he never did anything while he was Vice President for which he received any funds" and that he had not accepted kickbacks "from somebody who would not have otherwise been entitled" to a Government contract in Maryland.

Which version, Mr. Agnew's or the prosecutors', had Mr. Nixon accepted, Mr. Frost wondered.

### A Pragmatic Decision

"I was very pragmatic," Mr. Nixon replied. "In my view, it didn't really make any difference."

He explained that it had been clear from the attitude of Mr. Richardson and Mr. Petersen that the Vice President "was, frankly, going to get it. So, under the circumstances, it became an irrelevant point. I'm not going to sit here and judge Spiro Agnew," he said.

The former President said he had agreed with the former Vice President's expectation that a trial would amount to "a kangaroo court," in part because Mr. Agnew had been Mr. Nixon's point

man in an attack on the political left and the news media and was never "one of the liberals' favorite pin-up boys."

Accordingly, Mr. Nixon said, it was incumbent on Mr. Agnew to bargain a solution without a prison term "and, therefore, the resignation option became absolutely indispensable."

On Oct. 10, 1973, Mr. Agnew resigned, pleaded no contest to one count of income tax evasion, allowed the Government to publish 40 pages of allegations against him and accepted three years of unsupervised probation under a bargained arrangement.

#### **No Contact Since Then**

Mr. Nixon told Mr. Frost that he had had no contact with Mr. Agnew since that date. He added:

"I can well understand, putting myself in his place, that he feels that he's, that things could have been worked out differently. I can well understand that he feels that I could have put the arm on Elliot Richardson a little harder to get Richardson to let up on him."

As for the planned defense fund for his two former aides, which they spurned, Mr. Nixon said it had shown "what a good friend" he had in C.G. (Bebe) Rebozo, the Miami banker. He said that Mr. Rebozo had talked him out of offering Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman personal funds in 1973.

Mr. Rebozo said, "Never," Mr. Nixon recalled, and proposed that the President use \$100,000 secretly passed to Mr. Rebozo by Howard Hughes and, as Mr. Nixon put it, "other campaign funds that were possibly available for this, which we don't need to go into."

At one point, Mr. Nixon cited as proof that the Hughes money had been a campaign contribution his theory that, "if it had been a gift, why Bebe would have had it invested in something and we'd made money out of it or something like that."

#### **Refused Gifts 'Like That'**

Moments later, Mr. Nixon amended the statement, saying that he had never "accepted any kind of gift like that because it would compromise me in dealing with potential Government contractors."