



## A Tawdry Affair

**Joseph Kraft**

**H**AD BOB Haldeman chosen to write a serious book about Richard Nixon he could have made a contribution to history. Instead he decided to go for a socko revelation. He then apparently drew back.

The upshot is a tawdry business for everybody involved.

Despite the Niagara of material written and spoken by and about Nixon, large historic questions remain. How was it possible for someone so ill at ease with people to rise so far in American politics, and to serve as President?

What is the connection between Nixon's often foolish comments and his capacity to make some considerable decisions in both domestic politics and foreign affairs?

Haldeman was in good position to answer at least some of those questions. He saw Nixon plain. He reinforces with new material the now widespread impression that Nixon had a foul temper.

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**B**UT NO picture of the whole man is painted. Instead, Haldeman falls back on views previously advanced in other books.

Failing deep psychological insight, Haldeman could fall back on a store of detailed information, important because it came from him. In one episode that I know particularly well, the bugging of my home in Georgetown and my hotel room in Paris, Haldeman

confirms some suspicions that were never proved.

He says that Nixon personally ordered the bugging in each case. He intimates that the purpose of the bugging was to get information on what Henry Kissinger was saying about Nixon to outsiders. Indirectly, in other words, he places at the root of all the White House horrors Nixon's neurotic suspicions.

Evasions characterize Haldeman's accounts of a great many matters. So the Haldeman book brings no conclusive evidence to bear on such questions as whether Nixon knew of the Watergate break-in in advance, or approved the coverup.

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**H**OWEVER, Haldeman's publishers claimed that the book answered those questions decisively and also threw new light on such matters as the identity of the White House leak known as "Deep Throat." In fact, the book did not give useful information on those matters. But from the bogus claims it was only one step to the corridors of gossip and then a jump to a break of the publication date by the Washington Post.

In retrospect, everybody involved ought to have at least a red face. Also a strong sense that those of us in the press and television are all going to have to be more responsible if we expect to earn public respect and continue to enjoy the special privileges of the First Amendment.