

# 27 "I Have Never Been a Quitter": A Portrait of Richard Nixon

OTTO FRIEDRICH

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*As his biographer Stephen Ambrose has said, Richard Nixon wanted to be one of the great presidents, even a modern-day Lincoln. But the flaws in Nixon's character prevented him from leaving that kind of legacy. He did accomplish many positive things during his tenure in the White House (1969–1973): though an ardent and dedicated anti-Communist during his entire political career, he effected a rapprochement with Communist China, established détente with the Soviet Union, and finally ended America's disastrous involvement in the Vietnam War. These were spectacular achievements for "the world's No. 1 anti-Communist," as Ambrose describes him. But Nixon above all was a pragmatist: his objective was to strengthen the United States in world affairs by playing the Soviets and Chinese off against one another through "triangular diplomacy."*

*At home, he reduced military spending and signed the measure that lowered the voting age to eighteen, but he was not much interested in getting legislation enacted on Capitol Hill. What occupied most of his time and energy was the antiwar movement and other enemies of his administration; he was obsessed with them and with what he perceived to be a liberal, anti-Nixon slant among the nation's major newspapers. Before long, a bunker mentality pervaded the Nixon White House: it viewed domestic politics as a desperate battlefield between "them" and "us," with the Nixon administration increasingly identifying "them" as traitors and "us" as the only patriots and true saviors of America. In the name of "national security," the Nixon administration flagrantly violated the law and the Constitution in its zeal to suppress dissent, defeat opponents, and uphold administration politics. Nixon himself compiled a list of his "enemies" and not only had their phones tapped, but also ordered the Internal Revenue Service to audit them. Most frightening of all, Nixon's "campaign of subversion" produced the Watergate scandal. It began in June 1972, when five men associated with the Committee to Re-Elect the President (CREEP) broke into the Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington, D.C., and were arrested on a charge of burglary. For a time, Nixon successfully covered up his complicity in the break-in and the abuse of executive power it represented. When reporters Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward of the Washington Post exposed the Watergate scandal, it precipitated what one historian called "the greatest constitutional crisis the country had faced since the Civil War." The crisis shook Americans of every political persuasion and eventually brought down Nixon's presidency. In August 1973, he resigned his office—the first American President ever to do so—and flew back to California in disgrace.*

Some historians have linked Watergate to the growth of an "imperial presidency," which resulted in an imbalance of power, tilted to the executive branch. Lyndon Johnson had hastened the process by waging his undeclared war in Vietnam and pressuring Congress into endorsing and funding it. In the Watergate crisis, as historian William H. Chafe put it, the country rallied against the excesses of the imperial presidency, insisting on "a government of laws rather than personal whim."

Nixon's only crime was not, as many Americans still contend, that he simply got caught doing what other presidents have done. Historian C. Vann Woodward observes in *Responses of the Presidents to Charges of Misconduct* (1974): "Heretofore, no president has been proved to be the chief coordinator of the crime and misdemeanor charged against his own administration. . . . Heretofore, no president has been held to be the chief personal beneficiary of misconduct in his administration or of measures taken to destroy or cover up evidence of it. Heretofore, the malfeasance and misdemeanor have had no confessed ideological purpose, no constitutionally subversive ends. Heretofore, no president has been accused of extensively subverting and secretly using established government agencies to defame or discredit political opponents and critics, to obstruct justice, to conceal misconduct and protect criminals, or to deprive citizens of their rights and liberties. Heretofore, no president has been accused of creating secret investigative units to engage in covert and unlawful activities against private citizens and their rights."

In "a post-Watergate backlash," as one historian termed it, American voters in 1974 gave the Democrats the second-biggest congressional victory in their entire history. Two years later, they sent Democrat Jimmy Carter to the White House, ousting Republican Gerald Ford, whom Nixon had chosen as his successor.

In the following selection, Otto Friedrich describes Nixon's painful and impoverished early years, which did so much to shape the angry, ambitious man he became. Though highly intelligent and gifted, as Friedrich shows, Nixon made his reputation by smearing political opponents, accusing them of being soft on communism. He rationalized such tactics on the grounds that he had to win. "Of course I knew Jerry Voorhis wasn't a communist," he said of one defeated opponent, "but I had to win. That's the thing you don't understand. The important thing is to win." Friedrich goes on to show how Nixon kept rising and falling, rising and falling, and finally rising again, in a political career that spanned more than a quarter of a century.

## GLOSSARY

**AGNEW, SPIRO** Nixon's vice president (1969–1973); he resigned after being indicted for graft and corruption.

**BROWN, PAT** Incumbent governor of California who defeated Nixon in the gubernatorial

election of 1962. Afterward Nixon held his "final press conference," in which he told reporters: "Think of what you've lost. You won't have Nixon to kick around anymore."

**BREZHNEV, LEONID** Soviet leader (first secretary of the Communist party) who with Nixon signed the 1972 SALT I treaty. In it, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to limit

antiballistic missiles and reached “an interim accord” on restricting offensive nuclear weapons.

**CHECKERS SPEECH** Nixon’s maudlin speech on television during the presidential election of 1952; in that speech, Nixon sought to clear his name after news of his \$18,000 slush fund donated by California businessmen had come to the surface. As he spoke, he told the story of the Nixon family dog, Checkers; hence the speech’s name.

**COX, ARCHIBALD** Appointed special prosecutor in the Watergate case; he was fired during the “Saturday night massacre” for insisting that Nixon turn over the tapes he had made of his conversations in the Oval Office.

**DEAN, JOHN** Nixon’s legal counsel; he was one of three top Nixon officials involved in the cover-up of the Watergate break-in. The other two officials were Attorney General John Mitchell and Mitchell’s deputy, Jeb Stuart Magruder. Dean pleaded guilty when he was indicted for obstructing justice in the Watergate investigations.

**DOUGLAS, HELEN GAHAGAN** Nixon defeated this former movie actress in the 1950 election in California for a seat in the United States Senate. She gave him his pejorative nickname, “Tricky Dick.” Nixon won this mud-slinging election by calling Douglas “the pink lady”—that is, a Communist—and insisting that she was “pink right down to her underwear.”

**EHRlichman, JOHN** Nixon’s chief domestic adviser who was indicted by a grand jury for obstructing justice in the investigation of Watergate. He resigned his office, stood trial for his part in the Watergate scandal, and served time in a federal prison.

**FORD, GERALD** United States congressman and House minority leader from Michigan who in 1973 replaced Spiro Agnew as Nixon’s vice president; Ford became president when Nixon resigned the office in 1974. One month later Ford pardoned Nixon for his crimes in the Watergate scandal.

**HALDEMAN, H. R.** Nixon’s chief of staff. Like John Ehrlichman, Haldeman was indicted by a grand jury for obstructing justice in the Watergate investigations. He, too, resigned from the White House, stood trial for his role in the Watergate scandal, and was confined to a federal prison.

**HISS, ALGER** Served in the State Department from 1936 to 1947; in that capacity he helped coordinate United States foreign policy. In 1948, Whittaker Chambers, an editor and confessed Communist courier, charged that Hiss had passed on confidential government documents to the Soviets. HUAC, led by Nixon, accused Hiss of espionage; he vigorously denied the charges and found himself indicted by a grand jury for perjury. He was later found guilty of that charge and sentenced to forty-four months in prison. He was never found guilty of espionage. The Hiss case “made Nixon a national figure.”

**HOOVER, J. EDGAR** Powerful head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation from 1924 to 1972. Hoover advised Nixon to order illegal wiretaps on his alleged enemies, as Lyndon Johnson had done.

**HUAC** Acronym for the House Un-American Activities Committee (its official name was the House Committee on Un-American Activities), originally established in 1938 to uncover “malign foreign influences in the United States.” It was taken over by conservative Republicans who, in 1947, launched widely publicized investigations into the extent of Communist subversion in this country.

**HUMPHREY, HUBERT** Lyndon Johnson’s vice president (1965–1969) and Democratic nominee for president in the 1968 election; Nixon defeated him by a narrow margin.

**KISSINGER, HENRY** Nixon’s national security adviser and second secretary of state (1973–1974); he arranged Nixon’s visit to Communist China in 1972 and negotiated with the North Vietnamese a cease-fire agreement in North Vietnam that called for an American withdrawal.

**MCGOVERN, GEORGE** Democratic nominee for president in 1972; Nixon soundly defeated him.

**MITCHELL, JOHN** Nixon's attorney general (1969–1972) who was implicated in the cover-up of the Watergate break-in.

**SALT I TREATY** See *Leonid Brezhnev*.

**SATURDAY NIGHT MASSACRE** On the night of October 20, 1973, a Saturday, Nixon ordered Attorney General Elliot Richardson to fire special prosecutor Archibald Cox, who was investigating the Watergate case. Richardson refused Nixon's order and resigned; so did Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus. General Alexander Haig, Nixon's new chief of staff, then persuaded Solicitor General Robert Bork to fire Cox. The "massacre" left the Nixon administration "a shambles."

**STEVENSON, ADLAI** Democratic presidential nominee who lost to Eisenhower in the elections of 1952 and 1956. As Eisenhower's running mate, Nixon spent much of his time in the 1952 campaign accusing Stevenson of being soft on communism.

**TEAPOT DOME SCANDAL** President Warren G. Harding (1921–1923), at the urging of Albert Fall, secretary of the interior, transferred control of the navy's oil reserves in Wyoming to Fall's Interior Department. Fall leased the oil reserves to a couple of wealthy businessmen in return for almost \$500,000 in "loans." Tried and convicted of bribery, Fall served a year in prison.

**VOORHIS, JERRY** The liberal Democrat Nixon defeated in the congressional election of 1946 in the Twelfth Congressional District east of Los Angeles.

**R**ichard Nixon's first conscious memory was of falling—falling and then running. He was three years old, and his mother had taken him and his brother out riding in a horse-drawn buggy, and the horse turned a corner too fast on the way home. The boy fell out. A buggy wheel ran over his head and inflicted a deep cut. "I must have been in shock," Nixon recalled later, "but I managed to get up and run after the buggy while my mother tried to make the horse stop." The only aftereffect, Nixon said, was a scar, and that was why he combed his hair straight back instead of parting it on the side.

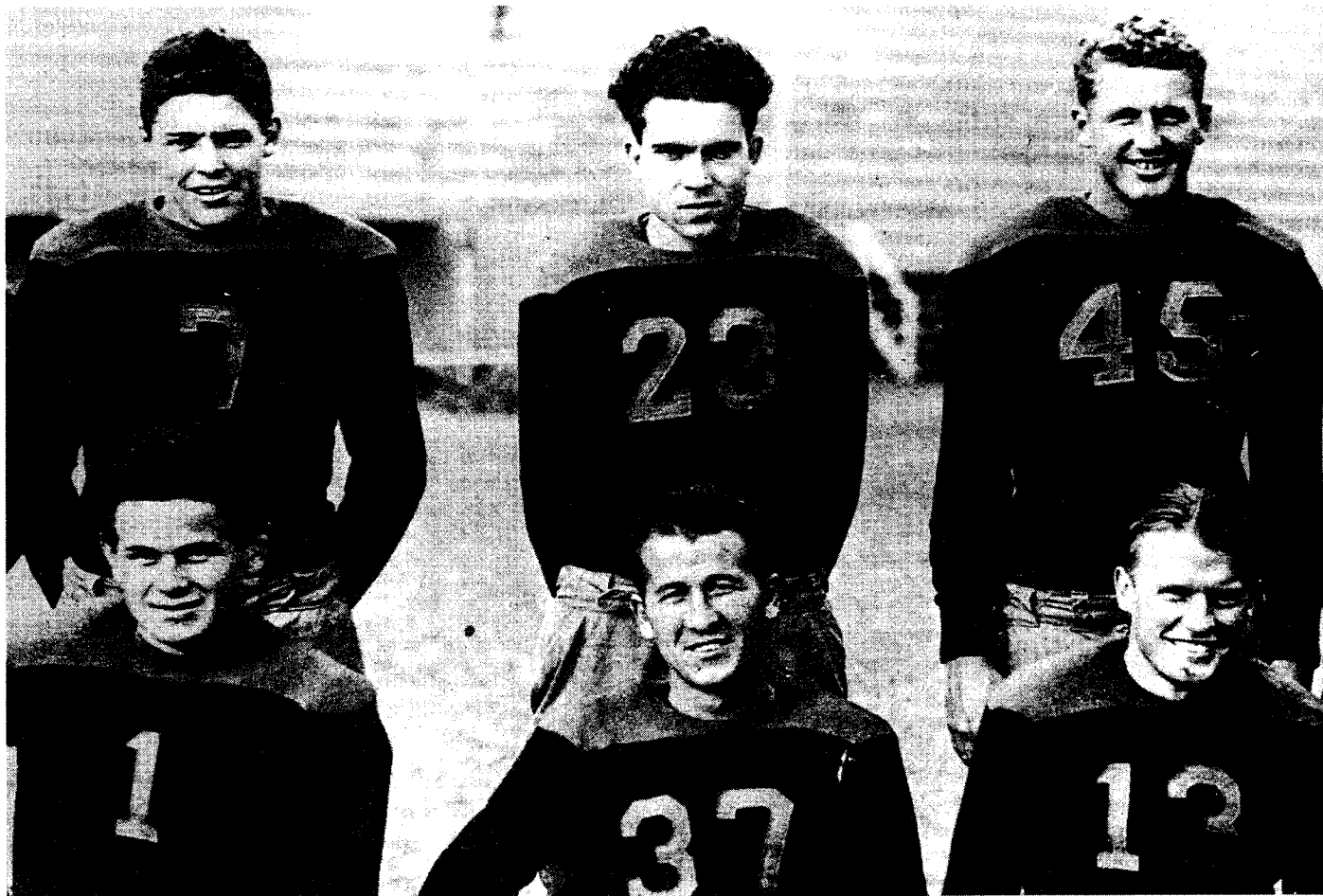
In a sense, Nixon spent his whole life falling and running and falling again. A symbol of the politics of anger, he was one of the most hated figures of his time, and yet he was also the only man in U.S. history ever to be elected twice as Vice President and twice as President. In the White House, he achieved many major goals: the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, restored relations with China, the first major arms agreement with the Soviet Union and much more. But he will always be remembered . . . as the chief perpetrator—and chief victim—of the Watergate scandal, the only President ever to resign in disgrace.

Despite all his gifts—his shrewd intelligence, his dedication and sense of public service, his mastery of political strategy—there was a quality of self-destructiveness that haunted Nixon. To an admiring aide he once acknowledged, "You continue to walk on the edge of the precipice because over the years you have become fascinated by how close to the edge you can walk without losing your balance."

He kept losing it, tumbling to great depths, then grimly climbing back. After being defeated in the presidential race of 1960 and then the California gubernatorial race of 1962, he bitterly told reporters,

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Otto Friedrich, "I Have Never Been a Quitter," *Time*, May 2, 1994. Copyright © 1994 Time Inc. Reprinted by permission.



*Richard Nixon (number 23), the second son of Frank and Hanna Nixon, was named after the English King Richard the Lion-Hearted. He attended Whittier College and wanted to play*

*football, but was “too small and slow to make the starting team,” writes Otto Friedrich, so “he showed up every day for practice in the line.” (UPI/Corbis-Bettmann)*

“You won’t have Nixon to kick around anymore.” Six years later, he fought his way to another Republican presidential nomination, which he spoke of as “the culmination of an impossible dream.” But at his last meeting with his Cabinet in August 1974, after what seemed like the final defeat in a lifetime devoted to the idea of winning, he burst into tears. “Always remember,” he said, “others may hate you, but those who hate you don’t win unless you hate them—and then you destroy yourself.”

From anyone else, that might have served as a public farewell, but the disgraced Nixon spent more than a dozen years in climbing once more out of the

abyss and re-creating himself as an elder statesman. He wrote his memoirs in 1978, then eight more books largely devoted to international strategy. He moved to the wealthy suburb of Saddle River, New Jersey (where he stayed until 1990, moving a mile away to Park Ridge), and began giving discreet dinners for movers and shakers. President Reagan called to ask his advice. So did President Bush. In November 1989, he became the first important American to make a public visit to Beijing after the massacre at Tiananmen Square.

The hallmark of Nixon’s youth had been poverty—poverty and family illness and endless

work. His father Frank, who had dropped out of school and run away from home after the fourth grade, was a combative and quarrelsome Ohioan. After running through a string of jobs, Frank moved to California in 1907, built a house in the desert-edge town of Yorba Linda and tried to grow lemons. There Frank's pious Quaker wife Hannah gave birth on Jan. 9, 1913, to a second son. She named him Richard, after the English King Richard the Lion-Hearted, plus Milhous, her own family name. The newborn baby, an attendant nurse later recalled, had a "powerful, ringing voice."

His mother sent him to school every day in a starched white shirt and a black bow tie, and he worked hard for his good grades. He liked to recite long poems and play the piano. One of his favorite forms of competition was debating, which he did well. Another was football. Too small and slow to make the starting team in Fullerton or Whittier High School or at Whittier College, he showed up every day for practice in the line. "We used Nixon as a punching bag," one of his coaches recalled. "What starts the process, really," Nixon later said of his life-long passion for winning, "are the laughs and slights and snubs when you are a kid. But if . . . your anger is deep enough and strong enough, you learn that you can change those attitudes by excellence, personal gut performance."

Nixon grew up in Whittier because his father had given up on citrus farming and found a new job there as an oil-field worker, then started a gas station, then expanded it into a general store. Hannah Nixon liked Whittier because it was largely a Quaker town where nobody drank or smoked or carried on. But life was not easy. All through high school, Nixon had to get up at 4 every morning and drive to the Seventh Street markets in Los Angeles to buy fresh vegetables for the family store.

When Dick Nixon was 12, his younger brother Arthur, the fourth of the five boys, complained of a headache; a month later he was dead of meningitis. Nixon wrote later that he cried every day for weeks.

When Harold, the eldest son, was stricken with tuberculosis, Hannah left the rest of the family to take him to the drier air in Prescott, Arizona. She could pay for this only by operating a clinic where other TB patients waited out their last weeks of life. In the summers Dick found jobs nearby as a janitor, a chicken plucker, a carnival barker. After five years, Harold died. "We all grew up rather fast in those years," Nixon recalled.

Harold's illness was also a great financial drain. Nixon had to turn down a scholarship offer from Harvard (Yale was also interested in him) and save money by attending tiny Whittier College. Duke University Law School was just starting when it offered Nixon one of the 25 scholarships available to a class of 44. At first he lived in a \$5-a-month room. Later he shared a one-room shack that had no plumbing or electricity; he shaved in the men's room of the library. In three years at Duke, he never once went out on a date. He finished third in the class of 1937.

Nixon had shown an interest in politics since the age of six, when he began reading news of current events and talking about them with his father. When he was 11, the Teapot Dome scandal prompted him to announce to his mother, "I'll be a lawyer they can't bribe." The practice of law in Whittier was hardly so inspiring. Taken into the firm of a family friend, he spent his first day dusting the books in the office library, then bungled his first case, losing all his client's money in a real estate deal. But he persevered, began joining various clubs, making speeches. He even joined a local theater group, where he met a schoolteacher named Thelma ("Pat") Ryan.

Driving her home from the theater, he said, "I'd like to have a date with you."

"Oh, I'm too busy," she replied. An orphan, she was not only working but attending classes as well. The second time Nixon drove her home, he again asked for a date, again was shrugged off. The third time it happened, Nixon said, "Someday I'm going

to marry you." It took two years of courtship before she agreed in 1940; she converted to the Quaker faith and used her own savings to buy the wedding ring.

Nixon probably would not have been content to stay in Whittier forever, but Pearl Harbor uprooted his whole generation. He knew that if he was ever to have a political career, he would have to join the armed forces. So despite the Quaker belief in pacifism, he won a commission in the Navy in June 1942. He served creditably as a supply officer in New Caledonia, then the Solomon Islands. His most remarkable activity, though, was to become a master at bluffing in stud poker. By the end of the war, he had won and saved a stake estimated at as much as \$10,000. He invested half of it in the following year in launching his political career.

Jerry Voorhis, a popular liberal Democrat, had won five straight elections in the 12th Congressional District east of Los Angeles, but a group of local businessmen hoped to unseat him. Nixon promised them "an aggressive and vigorous campaign." He began working up to 20 hours a day, making speeches about his war experiences, denouncing the New Deal. When Pat gave birth to their first daughter Patricia (Tricia), Nixon was out campaigning. (Confident of reelection, he stayed home when Julie was born two years later.)

Nixon implied—falsely—that Voorhis was virtually a communist. "Remember," said one of Nixon's ads, "Voorhis is a former registered Socialist and his voting record in Congress is more socialistic and communistic than Democratic." This kind of smear was to become a Nixon trademark. To one of Voorhis' supporters, Nixon later offered a very personal rationale: "Of course I knew Jerry Voorhis wasn't a communist, but I had to win. That's the thing you don't understand. The important thing is to win."

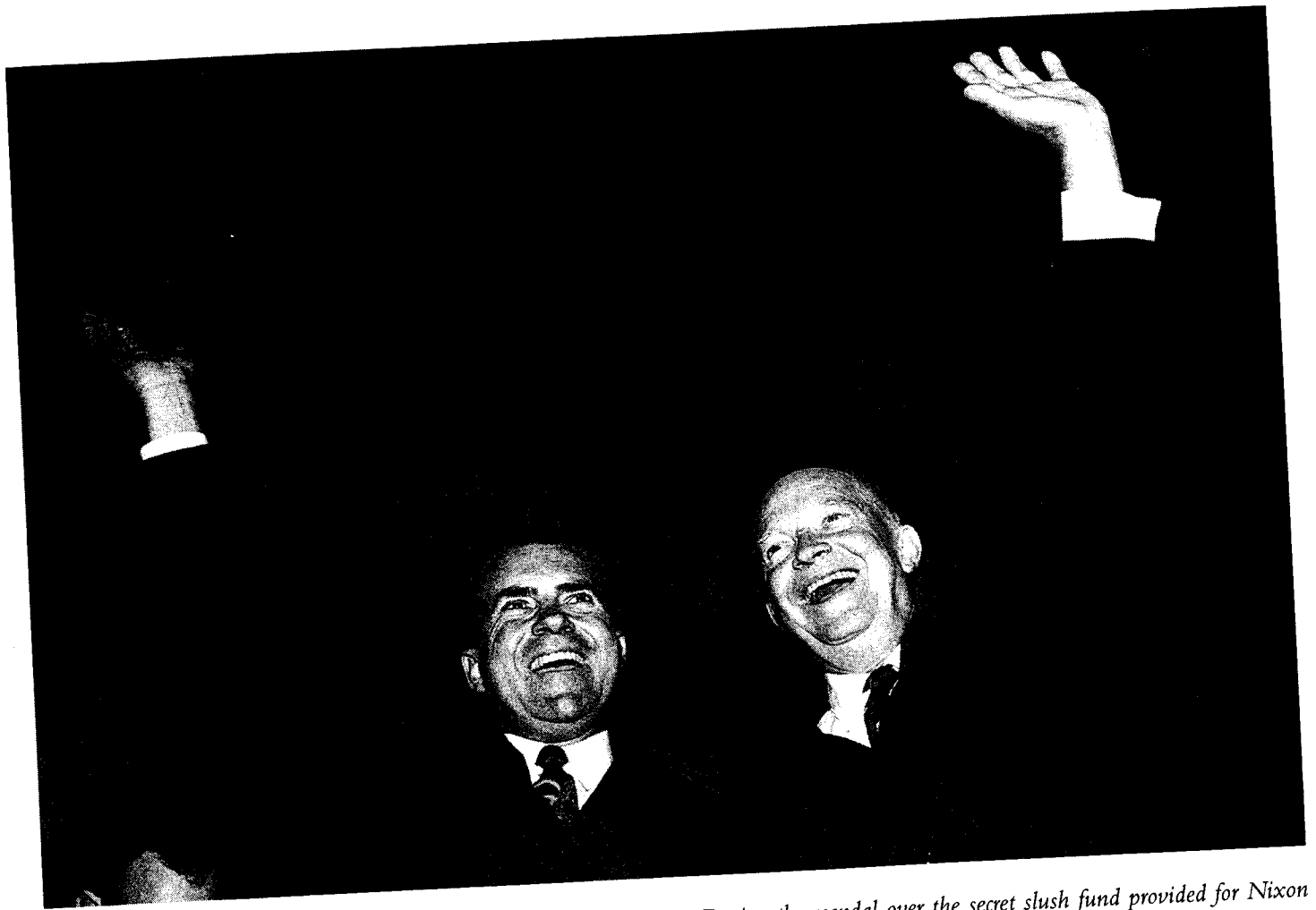
Win he did, with 56% of the vote. This was part of the end-of-the-war landslide that gave the G.O.P. control of both houses for the first time since the election following the Great Crash of 1929. Nixon

asked to be put on the Education and Labor Committee, which was going to rewrite the rules of labor relations through the Taft-Hartley Act. In return, he was asked to serve on an eccentric committee [the House Committee on Un-American Affairs] that devoted its time to noisy investigations of "un-American activities." It was to be the making of his career.

Nixon began looking for experts on communist influence in labor unions. This led him to a Maryknoll priest whose report on the subject included the fact that a TIME senior editor named Whittaker Chambers had told the FBI that he had belonged to a communist cell in Washington, and that it included Alger Hiss. It seemed incredible. A lawyer who had once clerked for Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Hiss had served as a State Department adviser at the Yalta conference, had helped organize the United Nations and was being touted as perhaps its first Secretary-General.

Hiss, then president of the Carnegie Endowment, denied ever having met anyone named Whittaker Chambers. Nixon had both men summoned before the committee to confront each other. Hiss finally admitted knowing Chambers slightly under a different name. Chambers insisted that they had been "close friends . . . caught in a tragedy of history." But nothing could be proved until Chambers produced the "pumpkin papers," microfilms of State Department documents that he said Hiss had given him for transmission to Moscow. Hiss was convicted of perjury in January 1950, served 44 months in prison and has spent the rest of his long life denying guilt.

The Hiss case made Nixon a national figure and launched him into a run for the Senate in 1950 against Helen Gahagan Douglas, a former actress who had served six years in the House as an ardent New Dealer. Since red hunting was a national mania in these Korean War days, Douglas foolishly tried to accuse Nixon of being soft on communism, and invented the name that haunted him for the rest of his life: Tricky Dick. But when it came to mudslinging,



*Nixon and Dwight Eisenhower. "Once nominated as Vice President," Friedrich points out, "Nixon was assigned to play hatchet man on 'communism and corruption' while Eisenhower"—the Republican nominee for President—"remained statesmanlike."*

*During the scandal over the secret slush fund provided for Nixon by California businessmen, Nixon gave his famous Checkers speech, after which Eisenhower proclaimed in public, "You're my boy!" (UPI/Corbis-Bettmann)*

she was up against a champion. He called her the "pink lady" and declared that she was "pink right down to her underwear." He won by the biggest plurality of any Senate candidate that year.

Nixon had hardly begun serving in the Senate before the Republican leadership started fighting over whether the 1952 presidential nomination should go to conservative Senator Robert Taft or to the immensely popular General Dwight Eisenhower. The convention was in danger of deadlocking, in which case it might turn to California Governor Earl Warren. That was certainly Warren's plan, and all the California delegates, including Nixon, were pledged

to back him. In some complicated maneuvering, though, the Eisenhower forces put forward a resolution that would give them a number of disputed Southern delegations. Nixon, who had already been sounded out as a running mate for Eisenhower, persuaded the California delegates to back this resolution, and so Eisenhower won. Warren never forgave Nixon for what he considered a betrayal.

Once nominated as Vice President, Nixon was assigned to play hatchet man on "communism and corruption" while Eisenhower remained statesmanlike. Nixon was all too eager to comply. He described Democratic nominee Adlai Stevenson as one



who “holds a Ph.D. from [Secretary of State Dean] Acheson’s College of Cowardly Communist Containment.”

The Democrats got their revenge when the press discovered and trumpeted that Nixon had a secret slush fund of \$18,000 provided by California businessmen to help finance his activities. Nixon insisted that the fund was perfectly legal and was used solely for routine political expenses, but the smell of scandal thickened. At Eisenhower’s urging, Nixon went before a TV audience estimated at 58 million with an impassioned defense of his honesty. “Pat and I have the satisfaction that every dime we’ve got is honestly ours,” he said. The only personal present he had received was “a little cocker spaniel dog in a crate. Black-and-white spotted. And our little girl—Tricia, the six-year-old—named it Checkers. And you know, the kids love that dog.” Hundreds of thousands of listeners cabled or wrote their support of Nixon, and Eisenhower settled his future by saying publicly, “You’re my boy!”

Eisenhower won 55% of the vote, and the freshman Senator from California, still only 39, found himself the second youngest Vice President. He also found that a President and Vice President rarely like each other very much, because the latter’s only real job is to wait for the former’s death. Nixon faced the great test of this uneasy relationship when Eisenhower suffered a heart attack in September 1955. It was up to Nixon to chair Cabinet meetings and generally run the White House machinery without ever seeming to covet the power that lay just beyond his fingertips. He did the job tactfully and skillfully throughout the weeks of Eisenhower’s recovery.

One major function of modern Vice Presidents is to travel, and Nixon turned himself into a latter-day Marco Polo: nine trips to 61 countries. Everywhere he went, he conferred, orated, debated, press-conferenced. In Moscow to open a U.S. trade exhibit in 1959, Nixon got into a finger-pointing argument on communism with Soviet Party Secretary Nikita

Khrushchev in the kitchen of an American model home.

To some extent, Vice Presidents’ tasks are defined by their own skills and experiences. Nixon knew more about politics than almost anyone else in Eisenhower’s Administration, so he became the G.O.P.’s chief campaigner. When Eisenhower’s second term expired, Nixon was the inevitable successor; he was nominated to run against the Democrats’ John F. Kennedy.

Eisenhower and others warned Nixon not to accept Kennedy’s challenge to a televised debate—Nixon was the Vice President, after all, and far better known than the junior Senator from Massachusetts—but Nixon took pride in his long experience as a debater. He also ignored advice to rest up for the debate and went on campaigning strenuously until the last minute. So what a record 80 million Americans saw on their TV screens was a devastating contrast. Kennedy looked fresh, tanned, vibrant; Nixon looked unshaven, baggy-eyed, surly. The era of the politics of TV imagery had begun, and the debates were a major victory for Kennedy.

The vote was incredibly close, with Kennedy winning 50.4% of the popular vote and Nixon 49.6%. He accepted the bitter defeat and returned to California. Then Nixon’s legendary political shrewdness abandoned him. He let himself be talked into running for Governor of California against the popular Edmund G. (“Pat”) Brown, and tried to imply that Brown was a dangerous leftist. It was after his crushing defeat that Nixon blew up at reporters and announced that this was his “last press conference.”

Still only 49, he decided to move to New York City and make some money by practicing corporate law. He joined a prosperous Wall Street firm, which thereupon became Nixon, Mudge, Rose, Guthrie and Alexander. But he never really retired from politics. He was just biding his time. He thought Jack Kennedy would be unbeatable in 1964, and Lyndon Johnson soon appeared almost as much so. Nixon played elder statesman, letting Barry Goldwater and

Nelson Rockefeller fight for the G.O.P. nomination. Nixon stumped loyally for Goldwater, and when that campaign ended in disaster, he became the logical man to reunite the splintered party in 1968.

Following the advice of a young advertising man named H. R. Haldeman, he finally learned how to make effective use of television: not in speeches or press conferences but answering questions from "typical voters" and then carefully editing the results. If that was artificial, so in a way was the whole 1968 campaign. Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey dared not repudiate Johnson's doomed Vietnam policy and talked instead about "the politics of joy." Nixon, who had agreed with Johnson's escalation of the war and hoped to court segregationist votes in the South, spoke mainly in code words about "peace with honor" in Vietnam and "law and order" at home. In a year of assassinations and ghetto riots, Nixon sounded reassuring, or enough so to defeat Humphrey and the war-torn Democrats. But it was close: 43.4% for Nixon, 42.7% for Humphrey, 13.5% for George Wallace.

Nixon's first term included sweeping innovations, often surprisingly liberal. He was the first President in years to cut military spending; the first to tie Social Security increases to the cost of living. He instituted "revenue sharing" to funnel \$6 billion a year in federal tax money back to the states and cities. He signed the act lowering the voting age to 18. And he benefited from Kennedy's decision to go to the moon. When Neil Armstrong landed there in 1969, Nixon somewhat vaingloriously declared that "this is the greatest week in the history of the world since the Creation."

His imaginative measures were shadowed, however, by Vietnam. Nixon, who had supported each previous escalation—and indeed repeatedly demanded more—had campaigned on a promise to end the war "with honor," meaning no surrender and no defeat. He called for a cease-fire and negotiations, but the communists showed no interest. And while U.S. casualties continued at a rate of about 400

a month, protests against the war grew in size and violence.

To quiet antiwar demonstrators, Nixon announced that he would gradually withdraw U.S. forces, starting with 25,000 in June 1969. From now on, the war would be increasingly fought by the Vietnamese themselves. When, from their sanctuaries in Cambodia, the North Vietnamese began harassing the retreating Americans in the spring of 1970, Nixon ordered bombing raids and made a temporary "incursion" into the country. The main effect of this expansion of the war was an explosion of new antiwar outcries on college campuses.

These were fiercely contentious times, and Nixon was partly to blame for that. He had always been the fighter rather than the conciliator, and though he had millions of supporters among what he liked to call "the Silent Majority" in "middle America," the increasing conflicts in American politics made it difficult to govern at all. Nixon, as the nation learned later when it heard the Watergate tapes, brought to the White House an extraordinarily permanent anger and resentment. His staff memos were filled with furious instructions to fire people, investigate leaks and "knock off this crap."

Together with this chronic anger, the mistrustful Nixon had a passion for secrecy. He repeatedly launched military operations without telling his own Defense Secretary, Melvin Laird, and major diplomatic initiatives without telling his Secretary of State, William Rogers. All major actions went through his White House staff members, particularly National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger and Nixon's two chief domestic aides, Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman.

Just as he loved secrecy, Nixon hated leaks to the press (though he himself was a dedicated leaker to favored reporters). And so when he first ordered an unannounced air raid against communist bases in Cambodia in April 1969, he was furious to read about it in a Washington dispatch in the *New York*

*Times*. FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover told the President that the only way to find the leaker was to start taping phones. When Nixon entered the White House and dismantled the elaborate taping system that Johnson had installed, Hoover told him that the FBI, on Johnson's orders, had bugged Nixon's campaign plane. Now Nixon started down the same path, getting Attorney General John Mitchell to sign the orders for 17 taps.

When a series of secret Vietnam documents known as the Pentagon Papers began appearing in the *New York Times* in June 1971, Kissinger persuaded Nixon that the leaker, Daniel Ellsberg, "must be stopped at all costs." The FBI turned balky at extralegal activities, so Nixon told Ehrlichman, "Then by God, we'll do it ourselves. I want you to set up a little group right here in the White House."

Thus was born the team of "plumbers." Its only known job involving Ellsberg was to break into his psychiatrist's office that September in search of evidence against him. But once such a team is created, other uses for it tend to be found. The following June, seven plumbers (five of them wearing surgical rubber gloves) were arrested during a burglary of Democratic national headquarters in the Watergate office and apartment complex.

They admitted nothing, and nobody connected them with Nixon. The White House itself was already doing its best to block any FBI investigation, but it formally denied any involvement in what press secretary Ron Ziegler dismissed as "a third-rate burglary attempt." Nobody has ever disclosed exactly what the burglars were looking for or what they found, if anything.

The Watergate burglary quickly faded from the front pages. Nixon was campaigning hard for reelection, portraying himself as a global peacemaker. In February 1972 he had reversed nearly 30 years of American policy by flying to Beijing, ending restrictions on trade with China and supporting China's entry into the U.N. In May he had signed the first arms-control agreement with Soviet leader Leonid

Brezhnev, placing sharp restrictions on antiballistic missiles. And although Kissinger's protracted secret negotiations with the Vietnamese communists had not yet brought a truce agreement, Nixon pulled out the last U.S. combat troops in August.

Nixon trounced Senator George McGovern that fall, capturing nearly 61% of the vote. Then, after one last spasm of belligerence in the carpet bombing of Hanoi at Christmas, Nixon announced in January 1973, "We today have concluded an agreement to end the war and bring peace with honor to Vietnam."

But the Watergate mystery remained. In court, five of the burglars pleaded guilty in January 1973 (the other two were quickly convicted), but they still admitted nothing. Federal Judge John Sirica angrily sentenced them to long prison terms (up to 40 years) and indicated that he might reduce the punishment if they confessed more fully. One of the seven, James McCord, wrote Sirica on March 20 that "others involved in the Watergate operation were not identified during the trial." In two secret sessions with Watergate committee counsel Sam Dash, he later named three top Nixon officials: Attorney General Mitchell; Mitchell's deputy, Jeb Stuart Magruder; and White House counsel John Dean.

Caught lying—but still denying any wrongdoing—Nixon said he was ordering a new investigation of the situation. Two federal grand juries were also investigating. So was the press. Though a lot of this probing was only loosely connected to the burglary, the term Watergate began to apply to a whole series of misdeeds that seriously tainted Nixon's great election victory. Not only did more than \$100,000 donated to Nixon's campaign end up in the bank account of one of the plumbers, but the entire fund-raising operation was marked by illegalities, irregularities and deceptions. Congress decided to investigate all this too. It chose a select committee to be headed by North Carolina's folksy Senator Sam Ervin.

Two and a half weeks before the committee was scheduled to open televised hearings in May 1973, Nixon made a stunning announcement: his two



*On August 9, 1974, having resigned the Presidency in the wake of Watergate, Nixon bade good-bye to his staff and Cabinet in*

*the East Room of the White House. To his right is his son-in-law, David Eisenhower. (Archives Photos)*

chief White House aides, Haldeman and Ehrlichman, were resigning, as were Attorney General Richard Kleindienst (who had succeeded Mitchell) and White House attorney Dean. "There can be no whitewash at the White House," Nixon said.

The Senate hearings soon showed otherwise. Magruder testified that Mitchell and Dean had been deeply involved. Then the dismissed Dean took the stand in June and testified that Nixon himself had been lying, that he had known about the White House cover-up attempts since at least September 1972. He also disclosed that the White House kept hundreds of names on an "enemies list" and used tax investigations and other methods to harass them. But how could anyone prove such charges? That question

received an astonishing answer a month later when a former White House official named Alexander Butterfield almost offhandedly told the committee that Nixon had installed voice-activated recorders that secretly taped all his White House conversations.

When the senate committee promptly demanded the tapes, Nixon refused, claiming Executive privilege. The new Attorney General, Elliot Richardson, had appointed Harvard law professor Archibald Cox as a special prosecutor in the whole case, and Cox sent a subpoena for tapes he wanted to hear. Nixon refused him too. Judge Sirica upheld Cox's demand, so Nixon resisted him in the U.S. Court of Appeals, which backed Sirica.

Nixon then offered to produce an edited summary of the tapes. When Cox rejected that idea, Nixon on Oct. 20 angrily told Richardson to fire Cox. Richardson refused and resigned instead. Nixon told Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus to fire Cox; he too refused and resigned. General Alexander Haig, Haldeman's successor as White House chief of staff, finally got Solicitor General Robert Bork to do the job, and so the "Saturday Night Massacre" ended, leaving the Nixon Administration a shambles. (In the midst of all this, it was almost incidental that Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned under fire for having taken graft and that he was replaced by Michigan Congressman Gerald Ford.)

The House began on Oct. 30 to look into the possibilities of impeachment. Inside the besieged White House, Nixon raged like a trapped animal. There were unconfirmed reports that he was drinking heavily, that he couldn't sleep, that he even wandered around late at night and spoke to the paintings on the walls. To a meeting of Associated Press editors, he piteously declared, "I am not a crook."

Special prosecutor Cox had by now been replaced by a conservative Texas attorney, Leon Jaworski, who appeared no less determined to get the tapes. Still resisting inch by inch, Nixon released 1,254 pages of edited transcript. They were a revelation of the inner workings of the Nixon White House, a sealed-off fortress where a character designated as P in the transcripts talked endlessly and obscenely about all his enemies. "I want the most comprehensive notes on all those who tried to do us in," P said to Haldeman at one point, for example. "We have not used . . . the Justice Department, but things are going to change now." The edited tapes still left uncertainties about Nixon's involvement in the Watergate cover-up, however, so Jaworski insisted on the unedited originals of 64 specific tapes, transcripts and other documents. Nixon refused. Jaworski filed suit. The Supreme Court ruled unanimously that a President cannot withhold evidence in a criminal case

(Mitchell, Haldeman, Ehrlichman and others were by now under indictment, and Nixon himself had been named by the grand jury as an "unindicted co-conspirator").

During all this, the House Judiciary Committee, headed by New Jersey's Democratic Congressman Peter Rodino, had been conducting hearings on impeachment. It soon decided to impeach Nixon on three counts: obstruction of justice, abuse of presidential powers and defiance of the committee's subpoenas.

Nixon meanwhile sat out in his beach house in San Clemente, California, reading a biography of Napoleon and staring at the ocean. But he had also been listening to some of the disputed tapes, and he had found one—the "smoking gun"—that threatened to destroy his whole case. It was a talk with Haldeman on June 23, 1972, a time when Nixon had long pretended to know virtually nothing about the Watergate break-in just six days earlier. This tape recorded Nixon talking with Haldeman about Mitchell's involvement, ordering a cover-up, planning to use the FBI and CIA to protect himself. For good measure, the tape also included presidential slurs on Jews, women, homosexuals, Italians and the press. The reaction to the new tape, when Nixon finally released it, was disastrous. Even conservatives like Ronald Reagan and Barry Goldwater demanded Nixon's resignation, as did G.O.P. chairman George Bush. A congressional delegation told the President he had no more than 15 votes in the Senate, about the same in the House. Shortly after, Nixon told his family, "We're going back to California." His daughters burst into tears; his wife did not.

Two days later, on Aug. 8, 1974, Nixon made his last televised statement from the White House: "I have never been a quitter. To leave office before my term is completed is abhorrent to every instinct in my body. But as President I must put the interest of America first . . . Therefore, I shall resign the presidency effective at noon tomorrow." There remained then only a series of farewells. He spoke once again

of winning and losing. "We think that when we suffer a defeat, that all is ended. Not true. It is only a beginning, always."

And so it was, once again, for Nixon. When he left Washington, there was a chance he might yet be prosecuted. Gerald Ford fixed that a month later by issuing a presidential pardon protecting Nixon from legal penalties for anything he had done in connection with Watergate. But Nixon's health was poor, his psychic shock obvious. An attack of phlebitis nearly killed him. He later told friends that he heard voices calling, "Richard, pull yourself back." And so he did.

His first public appearance came in 1978, and then the long, slow process of self-rehabilitation. Perhaps, in his last years, having regained a certain amount of public respect and even some grudging admiration, having acquired four grandchildren and all the comforts of leisurely wealth, Nixon finally found a little peace, finally got over that mysterious anger that had fueled his ambition throughout his long life. Perhaps.

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

- 1 What in Richard Nixon's background shaped him into the angry, ambitious man he became? How did his character traits affect his political career? What did he tell a supporter of Jerry Voorhis the most important thing was? What does this tell you about Nixon's character?
- 2 What was Nixon's favorite issue in his campaign against Jerry Voorhis for a seat in the national House and his campaign against Helen Douglas for a seat in the United States Senate? Describe the political atmosphere at the time that made that issue such a successful one for Nixon. What was Nixon's role on HUAC? What famous case rocketed him to national prominence?
- 3 What were Nixon's greatest successes as president? Why was he able to achieve momentous diplomatic breakthroughs with Communist China and the Soviet Union when nobody else could do so? We saw in selection 24 that Lyndon Johnson's policies trapped the United States in a stalemated war in Vietnam. How was Nixon able to end American involvement there? Why did he do so?
- 4 Discuss the Watergate scandal. How was the Nixon White House involved? Why did Nixon lie about his knowledge of the Watergate break-in and with the help of his aides try to cover it up? Why didn't Nixon simply tell the public the truth? What finally brought down the Nixon presidency, causing him to become the first American president ever to resign his office? Do you think that Gerald Ford should have pardoned Nixon?
- 5 Nixon's political career has been described as one of rising and falling, rising and falling, rising and falling, and rising again. How do you account for his resiliency? Do you think the nickname, Tricky Dick, was appropriate or inappropriate? How would you rate him as president compared with Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower?