

## BOOKS

## Ruminating With Nixon

*In The Arena*, by Richard M. Nixon, Simon and Schuster, 384 pp., \$21.95. Reviewed by William E. Saracino.

THE DUST cover of Richard Nixon's new book calls it "the most personal, profound, and revealing memoir ever written by a major political figure." Well, as the saying goes, two out of three isn't bad. The book is personal, and at some points profound. It will be revealing, however, only to those who are unfamiliar with most of Nixon's career.

The book is at its weakest when it covers ground that has already been well trod both in the press and in Nixon's previous books. Do we really need another explanation of what happened during Watergate or why he decided to pursue the opening to China? Happily, these and other well-worn topics represent only a small part of the book.

The meat of the book consists of short, conversational-style chapters on a wide ranging series of subjects. All the chapters are fairly short and cover a spectrum of topics from "peaks and valleys" to "family," "teachers," "temperance," "geopolitics," and "silence." Nixon admits he broke his long-standing habit of writing, rewriting, and editing all of his work on a yellow pad for this endeavour. Instead, he dictated the bulk of the text. You can tell, and the book is better because of it.

READING *In the Arena* is more like spending several hours listen-

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ing to Dick Nixon ruminate on life and the world than reading a political memoir. And all but the most jaded of Nixon-haters will have to admit that such a session would be fascinating. He shows an easy, comfortable grasp of all the topics covered.

On Watergate, while there are no new revelations, he does make the telling point that he was playing by the rules of engagement as he found them upon taking office and

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that the Democrats had used for decades. While not shying away from his own mistakes, he does also acknowledge that the press and Democrats were completing a political vendetta that had gone on for 25 years.

In another portion of the book he alludes to this vendetta and the irrational hatred he inspires in some quarters. It can be explained, Nixon says, in two words: Hiss and Vietnam. The hard left and the media never forgave him for proving them wrong about Alger Hiss's Communist sympathies. The New Left and the media never forgave him for proving them wrong about Vietnam. (It is easy to forget that when Nixon left office, the Vietnam war had been won — on *our* terms. The Democrat congressional Class of '74, which cut off aid to South Vietnam, resuscitated the moribund North Vietnamese war effort.)

Mainly though, this is Nixon at his relaxed best, bouncing from topic to topic, one time humorous, one time profound, but almost always interesting and cogent.

HE REVEALS that shortly after the pardon, he almost died during his surgery for phlebitis. At one point, according to his doctor, his blood pressure fell to 60 over zero. He also speaks in moving terms about his depression and despair after that surgery, and "not having anything to fight (live) for." He quotes Winston Churchill during that great man's wilderness years fighting his own "Black Dog" — depression: "here I am, discarded, cast away, marooned, rejected, and disliked." Although the similarity is striking, Nixon is no Churchill, and does not claim to be. His point is to emphasize the resilience of the human spirit and the wisdom of hope by showing the capability of grand events and occurrences to follow upon the heels of the darkest moments.

In an indirect defense of the Reagan years against the caterwauling "decade of greed, decade of greed" chant heard regularly from the Mesdames LaFarges in the media, he observes that "while greed is not good, wealth is." Our choice, he continues, is: "do we attempt to ration scarcity or do we attempt to increase abundance?"

NIXON ALSO lands a direct hit on our counter-culturists when he notes that the "smarmy retrospectives" in the media on Woodstock's 20th anniversary failed to note its "only enduring legacy — the glorification of illegal drugs."

Overall, the Richard Nixon that emerges in this book is not only "tanned, rested, and ready," he is

also relaxed, knowledgeable, and in command. One can only imagine the untold thousands of Nixon-haters around the country that this drives to carpet-chewing frenzies. And that, frankly, is part of the charm both of the man and the book.

**N**IXON NEVER had as strong a hold on conservative loyalties as when he was under attack from the left and their media allies. To paraphrase W.C. Fields, any man hated by Jane Fonda and Sam Donaldson can't be all bad.

The other charm of the man and

the book is that in an era of blow-dried Ken dolls passing for elected officials, Richard Nixon is the real thing. He has been "in the arena" for more than 40 years now. He has not ducked many fights and, consequently, has been bloodied and bruised. Yet he never gave up. As a result, his experience and insight make him our most distinguished "senior statesman," one whose advice, whether one agrees with it or not, should always be taken seriously by those who seek to participate "in the arena," even those who do so only as voters and citizens.

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## Johnson

*(Continued from page 7)*

will be a further petition probably to the U.S. Supreme Court. If Harris does not in the end prevail and does not get a new hearing on the merits or a new trial there will still be a delay probably measured in years before he could be executed.

*CPR: Why, when he was so close?*

**Johnson:** Because of delays at each step of the hearing process and then the trial court sets a new date of execution. There's just a lot of slippage of time between each of these steps.

*CPR: But if the panel and then the full Ninth Circuit and the Supreme Court all rule against Harris's appeal, could that not be completed in a matter of months?*

**Johnson:** It is conceivable, but it would be unusually rushed and would indicate that the courts in question were making a determined effort to avoid any delay. It's a problem in principle; if we're going to have a death penalty, we have to have a set of procedures that permit it to be carried out. But at the moment we have the penalty and we don't have agreement on the procedures. That's what's now being debated in Washington in the Judicial Conference of the United States.

*CPR: That is the real battle, is it not? Individual cases such as Harris won't change the system. Where is the power to stop lawyers from using procedure to make laws unenforceable?*

**Johnson:** Chief Justice Rehnquist, on behalf of the United States Judicial Conference, has submitted a plan to the Congress for legislation which would greatly restrict the opportunities for multiple federal habeas corpus review, that is, for repeated hearings of the kind that we have had in Harris. That proposed legislation is being very energetically resisted of course by death penalty opponents and by the prestige newspapers such as the *New York Times*.

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## Correspondence

*(Continued from page 2)*

*CPR*, Winter 1990) to show the hypocrisy of our colleges. Growing up in the United States, I believed I was free to do or say what I felt, moderated by the ethical norms my religion taught me. But in grade school I learned that those who expressed themselves most freely usually got into trouble. I looked forward to college where I imagined the restrictions of childhood would end and I would be able to express my conservative ideas freely, especially since I grew up in a liberal household where my ideas were not tolerated.

But now that I am in college, I am told not to dislike certain behavior because that would be intolerant, not to speak of traditional values because that would be closed-minded, and never to say the United States is correct since that would be ignorant. Same old restrictions, but this time I am an adult and the people telling me what to do also hypocritically speak so highly of freedom: college professors. Once again, thanks for Mr. Tennyson's article.

David Knatcal, chairman  
California Students for America  
Los Angeles

## Staffers Falsely Accused

I don't see anything in this publication (or anybody writing for it) who is in a position to relate to California conservatives. You all look like a bunch of transplanted Eastern seaboard types.

Jim Bald  
Assembly Republican Caucus Staff  
Sacramento

*Mr. Bald's no doubt normally keen analytical eye perhaps suffers momentarily from the strain of his high responsibilities. CPR's editor has lived in California since 1957. Three other senior CPR staffers were born here. Our editorial and contributor corps includes a writer with three years editorial-writing experience for major California daily newspapers, two members of UCLA's tenured faculty with 63 years cumulative experience teaching and writing in and about California, and one contributor whose full-time job is directing a research project concerned solely with California politics and policy. In any event, Mr. Bald seems to think conservatism is more a matter of shared geography than shared ideas. We disagree.*

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