

Timothy Naftali

Hi, I'm Tim Naftali, director of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library Museum. Today is August 17, 2007. I am here with the Reverend Charles Colson.

Charles Colson

Actually, just Chuck Colson because I'm not ordained. I'm a layman working full-time in ministry, however.

Timothy Naftali

Well, then it's my pleasure to be with Chuck Colson --

Charles Colson

Right.

Timothy Naftali

-- in Naples, Florida.

Charles Colson

Lovely place.

Timothy Naftali

Thank you for joining us to participate in the Richard Nixon Presidential History Program.

Charles Colson

Happy to do it.

Timothy Naftali

I'd like to start in Massachusetts. I'd like to ask you a little bit about your political education working with Leverett Saltonstall.

Charles Colson

Well, when I came out of the Marines I came right to Washington to go to law school at night and met one of the senator's assistants. And so, by a remarkable set of circumstances, I ended up at age 25 in the office of the United States Senator in the number two job in the office, and two years later became his administrative assistant. I was certainly on the fast track. I loved politics. I had studied political philosophy at Brown University; that was my undergraduate degree. I was going to law school

with an emphasis on constitutional law, so I was fascinated by government. As a kid I'd handed out leaflets on street corners back home in Massachusetts and really had a dream that someday I might be able to do something significant in politics, not because at that stage at least I thought I was looking for power, I really loved the satisfaction of seeing things done that changed the way people live. And I had a wonderful five years working, or four-and-a-half years working, with Leverett Saltonstall. He was a distinguished public servant. He really cared about the common good. He was not partisan; he was very bipartisan in his approach. I was the partisan. My job as his administrative assistant was to get him re-elected in 1960, and it was a formidable task. First, I'd never run a political campaign. Secondly, John Kennedy was on the ticket from Massachusetts the same year we were running as Republicans on the other side of the ticket, and the polls showed us way behind. So I started out the campaign having had no experience at it, figuring out what turned out to be some pretty good strategies, and we ended up winning it with an 800,000-vote split between Kennedy and Nixon -- between Kennedy and Saltonstall. So that was my introduction to politics. That was a baptism by fire. During that period of time I got to know Richard Nixon. He was Vice President, and I would take things to him periodically. Saltonstall being a senior senator, Nixon being Vice President, they would have a lot of occasion to deal with one another. So I had a fair amount of personal face-to-face contact with Nixon. I was dazzled by the man. I found him to be extraordinarily well motivated, very idealistic, very keen, wonderful mind, uncommon intellect. And we became friends of sorts; I mean acquaintances I would say, politically. And after I left Senator Saltonstall's office to practice law ended up in 1962 in Richard Nixon's -- I'm sorry, can I stop that? You're on digital, aren't you?

Timothy Naftali

That's okay. Go ahead, just stop and --

Charles Colson

Just fix it. I ended up in 1964 sitting in Richard Nixon's law office in New York plotting how he might get the nomination that year. So I never really left politics. I was practicing law, but I never really left it.

Timothy Naftali

Let me ask you about -- before we move to '64, because I know something very interesting happened then -- what was a Massachusetts Republican? How would you describe -- what was a Massachusetts Republican in that era?

Charles Colson

Well, we would tend to be more liberal, middle of the road, certainly than the Orange County crowd, or the then burgeoning conservative movement. Probably burgeoning is the wrong word. It was emerging from Barry Goldwater and the new guard, as opposed to the old country club Christian -- the old country club Republicans, which would be the case for Massachusetts. I was a misfit because I was a bit of an ideologue conservative, having studied Russell Kirk and Edmund Burke in college and really interested in -- I really got very involved with Barry Goldwater and with some of the young, at that time, young conservative activists on Capitol Hill. So I was very much at home with the Orange County crowd and very much at home with Richard Nixon, even though I came from that bastion of the liberal elite, which Nixon so disdained.

Timothy Naftali

So it's '64 and you write him a memorandum?

Charles Colson

I did. I realized Goldwater was going to get the nomination, but I didn't think he could win. I didn't want to see a liberal candidate beat him. I thought Nixon was the one candidate who would have the credentials to debate and possibly beat Lyndon Johnson. And so I wrote him a memorandum in the spring telling him why I thought he should run, why I thought he should step in, why if the convention would have deadlocked he would be the perfect candidate, why he should be maneuvering himself to get in position to run if he could. He invited me to New York. We spent some time together, went up to his apartment one evening. He talked about his vision for foreign policy and his ideas about NATO and the North Atlantic alliances and the emerging alliances in the world, the dangers of communism. It was a fascinating evening. And he said to me, riding in his car, he said, "You know, if I get in this campaign to run for President," he said, "I just can't face all those same tired pedestrian faces that hung around me in 1960." He said, "I need some fresh blood. Would you come in and help run the campaign?" And, of course, I bit at that immediately because I would love to – I, at that point, would have loved to have worked for Richard Nixon. But I did some surveying, which he asked me to do, of congressmen and political leaders and got few takers. I think the Goldwater machine had it pretty well locked up. So it was an idea that fell short; he obviously did not run.

Timothy Naftali

How many of the inner circle shared this optimism that perhaps there could be a brokered convention in '64?

Charles Colson

Buchanan was one of them. He was in the Nixon office, the law office, and working with him. I don't think Haldeman or Ehrlichman; at least if they did I had no contact with them. I don't know. I don't think there were very many.

Timothy Naftali

But so from 1964 on he sees you as someone he can bat ideas around with?

Charles Colson

Yeah, he did not much until '68. When he formed his campaign, which was very successful, to go out and win Congressional friends in the '66 election, I was not involved. I got some invitations to be involved, but that was a difficult time. I was building my law practice, and I would have gotten into a Presidential campaign but didn't get into that. So I didn't have that much contact with him until the '68 campaign when I assisted working through Bryce Harlow and a few others on the campaign that I knew well, Bob Ellsworth, assisted in some of the issue papers. I then ended up taking a leave of absence from my law firm for four months and working full-time at it sharing an office in New York at the headquarters with, of all people, Alan Greenspan -- he was doing domestic policy -- and Dick Allen.

Timothy Naftali

How confident were you in '68 that he'd be elected?

Charles Colson

Not at all. We'd seen what happened in 1960 how easily the lead could evaporate. I crossed swords for the first time, and not the last, in the 1968 campaign with John Mitchell. John Mitchell felt he had a lead and he wanted to sit on it, and I thought that was dumb politics, because momentum is everything in political campaigns. You're either rising or you're falling; you're not sitting still. And I thought it was important that Nixon make a really concerted push. And I particularly saw an opportunity to do what Truman had done so effectively in 1948, and that's put a coalition together of particular interest groups that felt left out by the Democratic Party to form what I saw in '68 and then articulated in '70 and '72 this new emerging conservative majority in America. So I got into some squabbles with Mitchell over that. I was a bit on the outside because Mitchell had pretty well cornered Nixon's ear. And so he won that battle, and we went down to the wire, as we all know now, rescued what would have been a lost campaign by Nixon's, I believe, by Nixon's election eve performance with the questions and answers. He was absolutely virtuoso.

Timothy Naftali

You think that's what saved him?

Charles Colson

Oh yeah, I watched the polls that weekend and saw them vacillate back and forth. I think the big push came on election eve when Nixon did such a superb job.

Timothy Naftali

You have a sense for politics. Was this from your experiences in Massachusetts or is it from your reading? I mean, you're a young pup then. You're a young pup telling people what they should be doing.

Charles Colson

Yeah, right.

Timothy Naftali

Where does this come from?

Charles Colson

Well, I was a Marine officer, a captain in the infantry. I'd always been in charge of things. I'd been editor of the school newspaper when I was in prep school, and I got to be championship debater. I was always running things. It just came naturally to me, and I loved politics. I loved the intrigue of it, I

loved the way you're mobilizing public opinion and I was something of a student of it just from my undergraduate studies and my own personal interest. So I think I had a pretty good nose for it, and I had been hanging around a lot of politicians in Washington, learning a lot. And so when I was in the '68 campaign I would have been 37 years old, young, but I had some strong, passionate ideas.

Timothy Naftali

Had you learned anything from watching the Kennedys?

Charles Colson

From watching the candidates?

Timothy Naftali

Kennedys, from watching the Kennedys.

Charles Colson

Oh, the Kennedys. Oh my, well, yeah. John Kennedy was the junior senator from Massachusetts when Leverett Saltonstall was the senior senator. And it was interesting because Saltonstall called him John, and John Kennedy always called Leverett Saltonstall "Senator." Most of the time when John Kennedy wanted to deal with Senator Saltonstall he would call me. I dealt with Kennedy a great deal. Kennedy's staff were all friends of mine. We were buddies even though we were on opposite sides of the political aisle, and they showed me some of the tricks of the trade. In fact, I learned some things from Ted Reardon, who was one of Kennedy's assistants, about how they'd won their last statewide senatorial election, and I copied some of their good ideas politically. I also organized a major mailing in the 1960 election in Massachusetts of Democrats for Kennedy and Saltonstall. And we mailed that to every Irish name we could read in the phone book, organized a major mailing. It was, of course, all secret until the last minute, until it was mailed, but it peeled off a lot of Democratic votes. It was obviously not helping Nixon, but Nixon didn't have a chance of carrying Massachusetts. He'd written it off. He'd been there in the campaign; I talked with him, and he knew he didn't have any chance to win it. He thought he could engage Kennedy, but his engagements with Kennedy, whether he's in Massachusetts or anywhere else, were not helping him because Kennedy came off better in the debates visually, not in terms of content. So yeah, I learned a lot from the Kennedys. I learned a lot from watching Massachusetts politics.

Timothy Naftali

We're going to talk a lot more about Richard Nixon, but let's spend a minute on John Kennedy. You interacted with him a lot. Just give us a word picture. What was he like?

Charles Colson

Well, he was a charming guy. He was a very nice fellow to work with. He was smart in the sense that he knew how to use people effectively and where to get the resources. He was charismatic and could draw the best out of people. He was a good leader. I never thought he had the depth of experience or a feeling about the world that Nixon had, and most of his experience had been simply as a senator in

Massachusetts, so that was to be expected. I was with him a few times when he was President and watched him, as I've watched every President that I've known, which now goes back to Eisenhower, grow enormously in the job. I mean Kennedy took on the responsibilities and never had a chance, tragically, to really develop a major thrust to his own Presidency, but he certainly grew in that job.

Timothy Naftali

'68, you're working on the Key Issues Committee --

Charles Colson

Right.

Timothy Naftali

-- with John Tower, I think.

Charles Colson

John Tower was the chairman and Brad Morris, my pal from Massachusetts, congressman, was the vice chairman, which is how I got involved in it.

Timothy Naftali

What were your thoughts about the Great Society?

Charles Colson

Well I thought it had been a failure in the sense that it was promising something that couldn't be achieved by government, basically. And it was, even in those days -- and I've come to believe this more deeply today, with good evidence to support it -- it was eroding a sense of responsibility on people for handling their own lives. And I've seen that now working the last 30 years in prisons, the fact that criminals today feel like victims. We've created a victim mentality in the Great Society. I also was a small government conservative, which meant cut back the size of government, which is one reason I liked Nixon so much, and the Great Society was the precise reverse. It was government taking over all aspects of life. So I was pretty strongly opposed to it.

Timothy Naftali

Richard Nixon wins, but you don't go into the government immediately.

Charles Colson

Well, I had some invitations to. John Volpe became secretary of transportation. He was an old friend of mine from Massachusetts politics, had been governor, and we were very close, and he asked me to come in and be general counsel of the Department of Transportation. I refused. He asked me if I'd be undersecretary. I said I would consider it, but I really wasn't very excited about that. And then Elliot Richardson, who was then assistant secretary of state -- undersecretary of state. Elliot Richardson, who

was undersecretary of state, called me one day and asked me if I would come over and meet with him. And Elliot and I had worked very closely together in Massachusetts, had a lot of respect for one another, and he asked me if I would be assistant secretary of state for handling the legislative affairs of the state department. And I got intrigued with that. Ironically, I had been opposed to getting into Vietnam. I thought it was a mistake. I thought we would be in a quagmire. I thought Eisenhower had been right in the late '50s when he said, "Don't get into a land warfare in Southeast Asia because you can't win it." And so I had actually written some statements for Gerry Ford when he was Republican Leader saying that we shouldn't rise to the bait. We shouldn't get into Vietnam. Here's Elliot Richardson saying, "Will you come in and help defend the Vietnam War on the Hill?" And I told Elliot I didn't think I could do it as a matter that I didn't believe in it. And he made a very persuasive argument that we should be at least able to give the Vietnamese people a chance to help themselves live their own lives and leave honorably. He articulated -- this was in the middle of 1969 -- he articulated the Nixon policy, which Nixon then later spoke about at Guam, and I was impressed by that. I thought we're in this thing, it's a mess and Elliot appealed to my better instincts, and I told him I would seriously consider it if Bill Rogers wanted me to do it. Took me in to meet Bill Rogers and I guess they put my name forward to clear it at the White House for appointment as assistant secretary of state. Bryce Harlow would have to clear that name. I got a call from Bryce Harlow, an old friend that worked for Eisenhower, and he said, "I understand you're considering going over with the striped pants crowd at the state department at Foggy Bottom?" And I said, "Yeah, because my old friend Elliot has asked me to do it." He said, "You're not going anywhere in government except here, and come over and see me." So I went over to the White House, had some meetings with Bryce. He told me frankly that the old man, as he called him, was feeling strangled by the Berlin Wall, by Haldeman and Ehrlichman. He needed somebody who could break him out of that, get him in touch with the broader world, who knew Washington, who could get him in touch with the power bases in the city of Washington and help him politically because he wasn't getting that from Haldeman and Ehrlichman. I'm sure it's all right to talk about this now. That was obviously in great confidence. And he told me that I should write up my own job description of what I thought I could accomplish, the idea being to help Nixon solidify himself politically with interest groups and political centers of power and outside constituencies, which I did. And ended up sitting with Bob Haldeman one night, who went through it all, and said he thought that might be a workable thing. He'd let me know. Next thing I know I got a call to come over and see Nixon and asked me to come in and be his special counsel, which I did in November of '69.

Timothy Naftali

John Whitaker let me look at the interview you did with him, and you described in this interview with John Whitaker, you say that when you saw Nixon in '69 --

Charles Colson

Right.

Timothy Naftali

-- he seemed worn down.

Timothy Naftali

Well, I got there right after the -- I got there the week after a lot of the protests and demonstrations that surrounded the White House, a quarter of a million people. I also hadn't seen Nixon since the campaign except at public events, and I hadn't sat down with him. I'm not sure the first time that I really spent any time with him it was over the first few months I was in the White House when he called me in for a specific purpose. But he seemed frustrated, and he seemed tired and beleaguered, and you could tell what that first year had done to him. You could also tell what the opposition was doing to him, and that's what every President discovers is that you go in, and it's a great, glamorous moment, "Hail to the Chief" is played, and music you love to hear, and then all of a sudden you discover all of the problems you've got to deal with, the bureaucracy that is intractable, the White House staff that doesn't do what you tell them to do, and the press. I mean, Nixon came into a terrible reception in Washington. I remember "The Washington Post" article, I think by Sally Quinn, saying the Nixon crowd coming from Orange County to Washington is like Hitler occupying Paris. There was some pretty mean stuff said, and there were poor relations right from day one with the Nixon administration. So I saw this in Nixon, I saw the toll it had taken on him.

Timothy Naftali

What were the first campaign -- the first issues that you worked with? Did you work on the ABM?

Charles Colson

Oh yeah, intimately on the ABM. I guess I was in charge of that campaign in the White House. The first thing that ever happened, I'd written about in my book because it was kind of colorful, Bryce Harlow had said to me, "One of these days we are going to see a large mushroom cloud erupt over the Oval Office because the old man is not getting what he wants from his staff." Well the first time Nixon called me in it was on a Friday afternoon. I had just been there a short period of time, and he had Haldeman and Ehrlichman in the office. And he said, "Chuck," he said, "Tell me what you think about these Catholic voters you keep talking about. What should we be doing?" So I told him some of the issues that I thought were important to the Catholic constituency, and particularly aid for parochial schools. There was a case going on in the courts, and there was a debate about whether the government would get involved, whether the administration would get involved, and Nixon looks at Haldeman and Ehrlichman and says, "We're going to do this," bang hits the desk. "I want an executive order. I want the Justice Department into this. I want to get us involved in helping get aid to parochial schools. I believe in that." So he turns to me and points his finger and said, "Okay, it's Friday afternoon. Have it on my desk Monday morning." And then he said to me -- I guess Haldeman and Ehrlichman had just left the room, that's what happened. Haldeman and Ehrlichman had just walked out of the room and he turned to me, and he said, "You understand what I want to do, don't you?" And I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Okay, get me an executive order on my desk Monday morning." And I said, "Yes, sir." And he said, "Don't pay any attention to Haldeman and Ehrlichman. They're Christian Scientists. They don't understand this," which I thought was humorous. He had already figured out how their own religious beliefs affected what they were going to do policy-wise, and it did frequently in the White House and Nixon saw this shrewdly. Anyway, that led to an absolutely explosive weekend when I got Bill Rehnquist, later the chief justice of the Supreme Court, and he was then the assistant attorney general for the Office of Legal Counsel. I said, "Bill, I need an executive order here by Monday morning." And he got a hold of Ehrlichman, who was somewhere, had gone off for a ski weekend or a weekend away from the White House, and Ehrlichman said, "Tell him to forget it." Well,

we got it. I wrote parts of it myself, brought it into the President, and of course there was absolute fury from Haldeman and Ehrlichman. From that day on I was toxic with them because Nixon would do this frequently. If he couldn't get them to do what he wanted them to do, he would give it to me to do, order me to get it done. I would, and all it did was create a White House of constant friction. He did this with Haldeman and Ehrlichman and me frequently. He did it with me occasionally with Kissinger. So there were always those moments where I was viewed as the loose cannon, and to some extent I was as far as the White House bureaucracy was concerned. But that was at the direct bidding of the President of the United States. He wanted it that way.

Timothy Naftali

Did he choose to have contestation and friction because it meant better ideas or did it because --

Charles Colson

Yeah, oh no --

Timothy Naftali

-- that's how you control people?

Charles Colson

Both, it was both his desire to -- that was the way he operated. He would love to hear the clash of ideas. He'd love a good debate. He actually -- everybody had the idea you should be a "yes" man to Richard Nixon and that's not true. He liked hearing good arguments, if they were well reasoned. And he was very bright; he could get this in a hurry. He also realized that there was a natural process of lethargy that sets into a White House or any bureaucracy, any institution, and that people will kind of do what they feel like doing. They'll do what's urgent, what they have to do. And he was seeing a lot of his good stuff mired down in his own operation. Haldeman's job was to kick everybody's butt and get it done, but Haldeman often wouldn't do that because he was much more wired into the structure. It was his structure; he had created it. So Nixon used me in that play, but I think it was his way of getting things done, but it was also his way of fleshing out ideas. He didn't like to make the final decision without listening to everybody's argument. And he would get a position paper and everybody chopped off on it; he'd want to hear the other side of it. In fact, he played devil's advocate often with many of us in the White House staff. Some people didn't realize what he was doing, but he was forcing you to flesh out the arguments.

Timothy Naftali

Like a lawyer.

Charles Colson

Yeah, like a lawyer. Exactly. Like preparing for a case.

Timothy Naftali

Tell me about what you did on ABM. How did you create support for that?

Charles Colson

Well, we created an outside committee, a Safeguard America Committee, which was a wonderful play on names. And I raised some money from outside interest groups to back this committee, we got some prestigious people on it, former foreign policy experts, and I was put in charge. Haldeman called me in one day and he said, "The President wants you to do this," and the President talked to me about it three or four times. "You coordinate everything going on in the White House," so I coordinated the legislative liaison and the public campaign. The public campaign was very significant because we were able -- Herb Klein and I flew up one day to visit Henry Cabot Lodge at his home in Beverly, Mass., and got him to write an article. We got the writer, which was published in "Reader's Digest" on why the Safeguard America Campaign, the ABM, was vital to our security, and I was personally, deeply convinced it was an essential bargaining chip in the SALT Agreement process. Absolutely could not have achieved what was achieved in arms limitation without it. So for me, it was not just a political victory; it was a labor of deep conviction. Three things proved decisive: the number of gray-haired foreign policy eminences that I was able to recruit to support us who then went up on Capitol Hill and did some lobbying, number one. Number two, a long talk I had with an old friend, but also someone who could be very treacherous at times to be a friend of because she was personally vindictive, was Margaret Chase Smith. Margaret Chase Smith I'd known since I came to Washington. She was close to Leverett Saltonstall, and I went back and cashed in every chip I had making the case to her. And I can honestly say from the discussion that I had with her, which was a long one, that it was the arguments on the merits that switched her vote. Her vote was the critical one we needed and used to win. The other thing that helped a lot was an advertisement that I did for the newspaper. It has a funny story to this, but I raised the money to put a full-page ad in "The Washington Post," "Safeguard America" and a sign of, a picture of a huge mushroom cloud and an atomic explosion saying, "Save America From This: Safeguard," with all of these distinguished names signing it. That came out the week before the vote and created a huge stir in town. And that very afternoon I got called in by Nixon. He told me thought it was the best ad he'd ever seen, and he wrote on his news summary the next morning, he said, "That ad is the best thing I've seen. We need more ad writers like that." Well, I'd done it in my own office. It absolutely -- it rankled Haldeman about as much as anything that ever happened because Haldeman came from the advertising world. He considered himself an advertising marketing genius; he considered me a political lawyer. And so when I got a copy of the news summary with Nixon's marks on it, I sent it back to Haldeman and I said, "Anytime you want this old Washington lawyer writing your ads, let me know. I can work for you at J. Walter Thompson." But we would rub it in with each other that way, but that would prove to be a very successful use of outside resources to get a significant foreign policy objective achieved.

Timothy Naftali

We interviewed Mel Laird, and he said he played a role also in getting those votes.

Charles Colson

He did. Mel Laird was a very effective lobbyist on the Hill. I would say that there were two or three others who carried a lot of weight up there, and I'll think of the names as we go along. I don't think --

Bill Rogers did not do much. He was not able to do much; he just didn't have the credibility in that area. But a few people were able to make significant inroads. We started out behind by several votes.

Timothy Naftali

Let's go back. You said President Nixon told you that the ABM vote was very important.

Charles Colson

He said it was essential -- that without that capacity, he would not be able to negotiate effectively with the Soviets for arms reduction. People forget now because history has moved so far beyond this, but we were really worried about losing the arms race. And if we'd lost the arms race the Cold War would have turned out with the Soviets winning and not us. So there was a great deal at stake, the kind of stuff that would keep you awake at night as you thought about it, and this was a key, key weapon in his negotiating tool armor.

Timothy Naftali

Let's talk about the Haynesworth campaign. What role did you play?

Charles Colson

I didn't play much in Haynesworth. I think Haynesworth was nominated before I got to the White House. I played a role in the Carswell campaign, which was a disappointing effort all around. I mean Carswell was not a good choice to say the least. When we heard he was being named, I went down the hall to Bud Krogh's office and said, "Bud, you've got to find out what decisions this fellow has written," and what we can find out about it is find out about his record, judicial record, and we couldn't find a thing. And he was a nice enough fellow, Carswell, and he satisfied the President's desire to bring some people out of the conservative forgotten, conservative ranks of the South, but he was a terrible nominee. I did the best I could arguing, unsuccessfully, that the President under the constitutional balance, in the constitutional balance, something I'd studied in law school, that I think it was Federalist Paper Number 72 in which the argument was made that the President needed a check on his right to appoint judges and Cabinet members and the like simply to avoid the dangers of nepotism or appointing someone who was grossly unqualified -- I didn't mean grossly unqualified. I've forgotten the language now. But it was clear that it was not a second opinion by the Senate. It was a check against a gross excess by the President or some personal political payoff, and that was the Founding Fathers' intention. In recent years the Senate had taken a much more assertive position. In any event, it was in the Carswell fiasco, which is what it was because Roman Hruska, the senator from Nebraska, said, "Well, we ought to have some representation in mediocrity on the Supreme Court as well," because the attack was he was a mediocre candidate, which he was. I wrote a letter -- I was very proud of it, actually -- for Nixon to see. I said, "What you really need to do is write to the Senate, and particularly to the senators on the committees that are holding these hearings, explaining to them what their responsibilities are because they don't have an unlimited license to pick or ratify these choices to the Supreme Court. This is your responsibility, and they only can refuse a nominee if there is some element of personal prejudice or favoritism on your part, and that's exactly what the Founding Fathers intended." So I wrote this very good letter -- I was very proud of it -- and took it to Nixon and said, "This is the kind of letter I think you should send." And he read it and thought it was great. And I said, "Now we need to check this out," because I hadn't talked to anybody in the Justice Department. I

hadn't talked to anybody. Constitutional lawyer; I wrote this myself. Well, he didn't even hear me. He gave it to Rose Mary Woods and the next day he sent it up to the Senate, and there was smoke and outrage and fury and cartoonists had a field day with the Senate firing a cannon back at the White House. It was a great confrontation. To this day, I believe the letter was absolutely right. I believe that's the law, but it has been by custom and usage now completely changed to be simply a -- it has to be an agreement between the Senate and the President. It's never intended to be that.

Timothy Naftali

Carswell was Mitchell's selection?

Charles Colson

Yes, Carswell was Mitchell's choice and, as I remember at the time, he didn't clear it with anybody in the White House. The person who was handling that was in the White House, Ehrlichman at that point was general counsel to the President. And Bud Krogh, his assistant, found out about it very late in the game, so I really don't know how Mitchell navigated this with the White House staff, if he did at all. Maybe he did it directly with the President.

Timothy Naftali

What was your mandate? It sounds like you did a lot of different things.

Charles Colson

Well, I was in charge of the special interest groups and being able to mobilize constituencies around the country of all kinds, every kind of a group, in order to build public support for the President's policies. That was the first charge I had; that was the job description I wrote for myself. I decided to name it special counsel to the President because I wanted to keep the credentials of a lawyer. And a good friend of mine had been special counsel to Kennedy, Mike Feldman, and I thought well, this is a good job. I'll do this. But very soon -- I think it was, oh, maybe mid-1970, I'd only been there six months -- Nixon was dealing with me on a lot of things that had, way beyond my mandate, dealing with the networks and the Fairness Doctrine, an issue that's back in the news today, and trying to put pressure on the networks because their coverage was so, in our view and a lot of other peoples' view, biased against the administration. And so he got me into a number of those issues working with him directly. We had broadcast network executives come down to his office, and I arranged the meetings, and I had Frank Stanton in my office during the selling of the Pentagon controversy and the contempt citations. And I was reporting directly to the President, which he told me to do. And Haldeman knew it, didn't like it, but he knew it. And it was very clear by the end of the '70 election that I was in charge of most of the political work in the White House. In fact, we spent one day at Key Biscayne, a picture that's in my book that is interesting because only a couple of us in the picture are still alive. It was Don Rumsfeld and I are still here, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Rumsfeld, Bryce Harlow, Bob Finch, Nixon, Mitchell. I think I've got them all. And we spent the entire day strategizing and talking about what we would do in the second term and which Cabinet members you would keep; which ones you wouldn't. It was out of those discussions that I really became much closer to Nixon because he liked my political judgment, my political analysis. I'd sent him a series of memos, which are I think in the files, I believe you have access to them, urging him to help develop a new majority, populist majority, that was made up of main street Americans who felt that they'd been discarded by the Democratic party. And it was

after that meeting at Key Biscayne that the President sent a note to Haldeman, which Haldeman called me in and showed me, saying, "Put Chuck Colson in charge of all of Herb Klein's operations, all of the communications apparatus." So from the beginning of 1971 on I had not only the outside interest groups, I had the political portfolio. I also had the communications portfolio, actually. Herb remained a spokesman -- sweetest man in the world, but couldn't run anything. He remained the spokesman and I ran his office. Ironic footnote to history here, I didn't get along with Jeb Magruder. I thought he was weak and wimpish and just not my kind of guy. So when Haldeman called me in and he said, "You're going to take over Herb Klein's office," I said, "All right, I'll do it." He said, "The President wants you to." I said, "Fine." He said, "He wants you to be kind to Herb and not make Herb feel like he's being shoved aside, but you run things." And I said, "Okay," but I said, "I don't think I can work with Jeb Magruder. I don't think Jeb Magruder will work with me." And Haldeman said, "I knew that would be the case. Don't worry, I've taken care of it. I've put him somewhere where he can't do any harm over in the campaign apparatus," the Committee for the Re-Election of the President. Well, the rest is history. The particular political perspective that I advanced to Nixon and which he embraced, particularly in the wake of the '70 election, off-year election, was that the Democrats had begun to abandon their own base. Their own base were blue collar, working class, largely ethnic, Irish, Italian, Polish groups, and that was the historic base of the Democratic Party. It was interesting when you asked me a few moments ago my relationship with President Kennedy because one of his assistants, Fred Dutton, wrote a book in the same year that I was advocating to Nixon that we should aggressively seek out this constituency to build a new Republican majority. Dutton wrote a book at the very same time in which he said the Democrats are going to become the party of the intellectual elite, the liberal elite, and they will forget the working class people and lose their own base. And so, you know, Dutton saw it happening and I saw it happening, and I persuaded Nixon to do what he did, which was to reach out, and but for Watergate I've always felt that what became known as the Reagan Democrats would have been the Nixon Democrats. It was a good strategy.

Timothy Naftali

Let's talk about the wedge issues in 1970. What was it that was making, in your estimation, blue collar Roosevelt Democrats, perhaps, uncertain about the Democratic Party? What were these issues in 1970?

Charles Colson

Well, by 1972 we were campaigning on three issues: amnesty, abortion and acid, the three A's. It was a permissive culture; the Democrats were encouraging a permissive culture. The abortion issue was a significant issue with Roman Catholic voters, and the Democrats were abandoning them, calling pro-choice even then, which is now a whole generation or two later with nothing changed except the political alignment has broken the same way. They were viewed as soft on crime, although I think maybe that was one of the issues we exploited beyond its own merits. I always felt we did. Someone said Nixon campaigned in the 1970 election as if he were running for county sheriff, and that was a pretty apt description. The crime issue was one that really aroused public fear. We never ran on the race issue, but we did run against bussing. And the reason we were against bussing was not because it was a black/white question but because it was taking people out of their own school districts to move them into another area to accomplish a social objective, as opposed to education. And we -- there were many of us in the White House who thought that was fundamentally wrong. I did, Nixon did, and I think that was an issue that had great appeal to the urban Catholic voters. I know we got Cardinal Kroll one night and then invited him down to Washington and got Al Haig, because Al Haig was a graduate of the parochial schools in the Philadelphia area, and took him out on the Sequoia and talked about

these kind of issues. Kroll was a great scholar and he and Nixon had a fabulous time, but this was part of exploiting the abandonment by the Democratic leadership of what had been the historic constituency.

Timothy Naftali

This also did put you, whether you liked it or not, in the same camp with people who were against bussing for the reasons that you did not find, that you were not comfortable with.

Charles Colson

Yeah, it also put us in a difficult position with the Philadelphia Plan, which was, my job was to cultivate labor union support for Nixon, which we did very effectively. And the Philadelphia Plan, which was a minority affirmative action hiring plan --

Timothy Naftali

George Shultz.

Charles Colson

Yeah, Art Fletcher, wonderful guy, Fletcher. And I hated to be against him on this issue, but I was, because I saw it as what labor viewed as a mortal threat, that they would be forced to hire simply for the purpose of race. I thought that was wrong as well, even though I came from Massachusetts where we were in the liberal vanguard on the civil rights issues. I had been with Saltonstall fighting for the passage of the civil rights laws. We were blocked by the filibusters from the Southern Democrats, but we were passionately trying to make those changes. I had persuaded a man by the name of Ed Brooke to run for the Senate and helped him get elected, the first African-American in the Senate. When I started practicing law, one partner and one other associate and the second associate we hired was an African-American, the first person to break the color bar in the Boston Bar. So I didn't think I had any prejudice in me, but those were issues that I felt strongly about regardless of the racial implications there. Not looking at it from a racial perspective, but looking at it from a perspective of is this a sound way to run a society. And I think people have come around a long way on the affirmative action question on that very grounds, not because you're against blacks. And I think Nixon did not have -- you could listen to those tapes and you could think that he was anti-Semitic, that he had a, was bigoted in a variety of ways. You'd have to know Nixon, and this was just part of the way he talked. And when he was talking that way he was meaning people who were against him politically, not because of their origin, not because of their race, not because of their religion. It was simply that these were the ways he would characterize his opponents. He also -- very important to note -- I think we would never have had -- we would have had de jure desegregation of the South, but never de facto had Nixon not insisted on a low-key approach of getting community councils so that you could do it face to face, not at the point of a bayonet. And this was his orchestration and this most historians today will tell you, I think, agree that this was the most effective progress that was made in de facto desegregation of the South.

Timothy Naftali

Why did Nixon -- I mean, did you talk to him about the Philadelphia Plan because he supported it ultimately --

Charles Colson

Oh, yeah. -- Yeah, he did support it. He supported it, and he liked Art Fletcher. And I fought Nixon on this and eventually -- I've forgotten how he got himself out of it, but -- I can't remember right now. Did we disband it?

Timothy Naftali

The Philadelphia Plan?

Charles Colson

Yeah.

Timothy Naftali

I don't think so. I mean it was a Nixon administration achievement.

Charles Colson

Yeah, but I think before the second term it had pretty well run its course. I don't -- I'm not --

Timothy Naftali

So he changed the Plan?

Charles Colson

Oh, he did, yes. But I'm not sure -- I'm not sure -- This isn't helping you on this tape historically --

Timothy Naftali

That's all right --

Charles Colson

-- but I can't remember exactly what happened, but I know it went from being an issue to being a non-issue and I'm not sure how we got there.

Timothy Naftali

Well that raises a -- that's a nice segue to a question that historians ask all the time. They look at some of the legislative achievements in the first two years of the Nixon administration. Then they read

Haldeman's diary entries from '72 and they wonder, was Nixon changing or did he support legislative initiatives that really weren't, that he wasn't comfortable with philosophically? It's a new environmental policy, the issues like this. Because you do see more conservatism or an attempt at conservatism -- it doesn't happen because of Watergate -- in those first months of the second term. How would you navigate that?

Charles Colson

Most of the stuff I've read about Nixon they miss a lot about him, because I don't think they knew him that well before he became President. I always considered him a conservative, and I was an ideological conservative. And my dealings with him in the '60s I thought this man has a real conservative disposition and a conservative temper. When I define conservatism I'm not necessarily talking about the specific policies you embrace. I'm talking about whether you feel you live by the preserved moral order of the past, the wisdom of civilization that's been accumulated. Do you stand on the shoulders of those who went before you? Are you a utopian who believes by human design you can create the perfect society, which is the Great Society was the ultimate utopian reach of government? And Nixon had a very conservative temperament. Now he was a pragmatist. You do those things in politics that are necessary to get you elected, but it was to me I never saw a change in him. What I did was bring out the old Nixon with the memos I started writing in '70, the Nixon I had known before, the Nixon who was evident in his campaigning for the Senate and the Nixon I thought I understood. When he first was elected did a lot of things, which as President you need to do. I mean there were issues that wouldn't necessarily excite him but they were important issues. Head start was a very important thing; he took a lot of pride in that; but it wouldn't necessarily have fit his ideological agenda. As he went into '72 and as that election was over, that's when he went into almost hiding in Camp David with this massive plan to totally restructure the government and eliminate agencies and cut back the bureaucracies and hired Roy Ash to be the great Systems Analyst. And that was the old Nixon coming out. Now is my chance. The elections are all over; I'm going to pare back this huge bureaucracy, which he hated, despised, and I think you would have seen. And I think a lot of his detractors believed this was the case, a very conservative administration in the second Nixon term.

Timothy Naftali

One question about 1970: Was 1970 pivotal because Nixon did not do as well -- his candidates did not do as well in the election as he had hoped? Is that why this discussion occurred in 1970?

Charles Colson

Well, in part, it was a debriefing of the campaign. We lost some seats we should have won, but won some seats that were surprises: Maryland and Tennessee, and a third one that we picked up seats. And in off-year, the first off-year election after the election of a President, we went counter to the historical trend. So it was not a bad election at all, but it wasn't everything we had hoped for.

Timothy Naftali

Did you expect Bush to win in Texas?

Charles Colson

We tried. I ran some ads down there for him, which were pretty tough political ads. He liked them, but he couldn't let on he did. Yeah, we thought that was one we would pick up. Thought we had a good chance at picking it up.

Timothy Naftali

Well, Connally's choice of Bentsen was a good --

Charles Colson

Yeah, right.

Timothy Naftali

I'll ask you about Connally in a moment. One of your other portfolios was labor.

Charles Colson

Well that's the whole idea of mobilizing outside constituencies, right.

Timothy Naftali

I talked with George Shultz about his work with Meany. You worked with everybody but Meany.

Charles Colson

That was by design.

Timothy Naftali

Explain, please.

Charles Colson

Well, Shultz, when he left the Labor Department to become director of the Office of Management and Budget, I got very much involved in the labor unions because of the negotiations over the postal reform, creating a private corporation. And it got me at cross purposes with the postmaster general and ultimately with George Shultz, although George and I were pretty good friends, both former Marines, a lot in common. I considered him a good friend. I used to spend some time with him in Florida when we'd go to Key Biscayne, his wife and my wife. But he always was very careful not to let me into his area, and he had a particular relationship with Meany and he was the only one who would deal with Meany. So he said to me, "I know you're trying to cultivate labor leadership, go to it, but when you want anything with Meany, deal with me." Well I didn't want to deal with Meany anyway because I had a much better back channel to Meany through Jay Lovestone, who was his assistant and a hawk on the war. So I really didn't need to deal with Meany.

Timothy Naftali

By the way, did your views on the war change?

Charles Colson

I don't think so, only in one respect. Sitting outside -- I mean a conservative perspective on the use of military power, as we saw it with the debate over Iraq, would be generally not to get yourself involved in what could be regarded as an internal struggle in a distant land where the only way you could win it was large numbers of troops on the ground. And sitting on the outside, as I was in early 1960s watching us get into this, I thought it was a serious mistake. Once in power I realized we had to find an honorable way to get out, otherwise we would be, appear weak to the Soviets and the Chinese. Then, as I got more involved with Nixon, and as he would call me into his confidence on more occasions and talk to me about a whole range of issues -- I mean you'd listen to those phone calls, and he's discussing everything. And there were times we'd go out on the Sequoia and just talk policy; he'd love it. And many times he would make a point that how we, and particularly through the last -- 1972 when we were trying to get out of Vietnam, I listened to his arguments and bought them completely that we had to continue to play the Chinese and the Soviets against each other, that actually Vietnam was not an end in itself. It wasn't a war over preserving South Vietnam. It was a war over keeping the Chinese and the Soviets off balance, because I think the nightmare scenario would be a sign of Soviet alliance. And Vietnam ironically kept them fighting with each other, because the Chinese wanted to be responsible, and the Soviets were sending in things over the rails to the North Vietnamese, both trying to win the favor of the North Vietnamese, actually competing with each other. And that turned out to be something Nixon used to his advantage in the separate negotiations going on with China and with the Soviet Union. And so I came to realize that there was much bigger stakes in Vietnam than simply getting out with a reasonable settlement that gave the South Vietnamese government a chance to stand on its own feet, peace with honor, getting our POWs back, there was something even bigger, and that is how it was going to play out in the geopolitical struggle between the two great axis of communism: China and the Soviet Union and ourselves.

Timothy Naftali

Is he telling you this in '69 and '70 or is it --

Charles Colson

No.

Timothy Naftali

-- in '72?

Charles Colson

No, this kind of discussion went on in -- I remember one night on the Sequoia when Haldeman and Ehrlichman and Kissinger and I were cruising with the President, and he talked about this, and he talked about his trip to China before it was out publicly. And talked about wanting to get a supersonic

transport, because that's the way he'd want to land in China. But he would, with a couple of glasses of wine, wax pretty eloquently on some of these questions, that night in particular I remember. And then I saw it play out in the decisions he was making on May 7, 1972, and then the decisions to resume the bombing before Christmas after the election.

Timothy Naftali

Let's talk about that, because you are a unique historical witness. You're up at Camp David with him.

Charles Colson

No -- or yes, I was at Camp David with him, but on one occasion, but not on these issues.

Timothy Naftali

Let's talk about -- this is after the election --

Charles Colson

Right.

Timothy Naftali

You're with him; Kissinger's away.

Charles Colson

I was with him in the Oval Office, mostly in the Executive Office Building office, and had many, many conversations. Kissinger was away, that's correct. And I don't remember now where Kissinger was, but I remember one day he sent a cable back to Nixon and Nixon called me in his office in the EOB and he threw it at me and he said, "Read this and tell me what you think." And what it was was a summary of the way in which the North Vietnamese were backtracking on things we thought we had negotiated, the way in which they weren't keeping their part of their agreements, and then an appeal by Henry that the President go on national television, all three networks, and state the case to the American people of why we had to go back and start bombing. Nixon threw it at me, and I started reacting to Henry's foreign policy analysis. Nixon said, "No, no, I don't want that. I want you to tell me why should I go on television and do this?" So we got into a long discussion. I told him I didn't think he should. I didn't think he should be the one to announce the bad news, but might have to explain it at some point, but I didn't think he should be the one to make that announcement. And Nixon didn't want to do it. He said, "Henry's trying to shove it off on me. He always wants me to do the bad news, and he always does the good news." This was a constant psychological warfare between Nixon and Kissinger; both men with huge egos and one who was President and the other who thought he was President. So this went on a lot and I found myself in the crossfire on that many times. While Kissinger was away, Haldeman and Ehrlichman were also away. I think I was the only guy sitting in the White House with the President through many of these discussions in early December. I think Haldeman and Ehrlichman were at Camp David planning with Roy Ash the reorganization of the government, which is why I was spending so much time with Nixon and why I was so much involved in this. Then over New Year's weekend Nixon was at Camp David on the phone with me constantly --

I think he was at Camp David. It could've been California, but he was on the phone with me back and forth the whole weekend because Kissinger had had an interview with reporters in which he tried to put responsibility on the President. Nixon finally just erupted, and we had some really difficult sessions and Henry and he wouldn't talk to each other for 10 days. So I was very much involved in that. And I remember both May 6th when I was with the President when he made the decision to mine in the harbors and bomb Haiphong -- bomb Hanoi and mine the harbors of Haiphong. I remember that, I remember his discussions, and I remember vividly his conversations before resuming that bombing. That's a terrible responsibility. Most people -- people in today's high-tech media saturated world get stereotypical pictures of particular characters on the public stage, and they then conclude that that's all there is to that person. Nixon was a very complicated personality. He's characterized for history as the evil emperor who punished his enemies and was vindictive and mean and vicious. He's actually a very kind, decent man, and there were many, many, many times when we would have discussions even though I was the guy with the political portfolio, and I was the guy with the task of mobilizing outside groups, where he would just talk about, you know, we have to do this because this is the right thing. In 1964, riding in the back of his limousine with him up to his apartment on the Upper East Side he had said, "You know, we have to do this because the kind of world our children and grandchildren are going to live in depends on it." He could be an incredible idealist, and people don't see him that way. And unfortunately, they won't because he's got the Herblock cartoon with the five o'clock shadow, an evil incarnate, and he was anything but. He was a very decent human being, a brilliant human being, morally flawed, like all human beings are in my opinion; maybe to excess because of a lot of experiences in his life that left him suspicious about things and people, but a very complicated man with a very good streak in many respects.

Timothy Naftali

We have these tapes. How are students of the tapes -- how should they view the Nixon on the tapes?

Charles Colson

Well, the problem with the tapes is they're one-dimensional as well, and you can't tell -- I spent a lot of time in public speaking. An awful lot of what you do is body language. An awful lot of what you do is the way you move your facial expressions. It is the emphasis you put on things. It is far more than just the words you hear. You also can't listen to a conversation out of context without understanding -- and still understand what the real intent was out of that conversation. So I remembered, when I was preparing my own defense in the Watergate trials, listening to some of the tapes and I couldn't make them out and I didn't remember them. And they were so garbled one of the prosecutors thought we were talking about doing something devious to Senator Kennedy. It was Colonel Kennedy we were talking about who was coming out of the office talking about the situation in Vietnam. So I know they've refined the tapes, and I've listened to some since, and they're one-dimensional. They won't tell you everything. You won't know when Nixon was kidding, which he would kid a lot. You won't know when he was playing devil's advocate. You won't know when he was fermenting the kind of disagreement within his staff that got him the kind of opinion he wanted to hear. And there's a lot of that. You just can't take that off the tapes.

Timothy Naftali

Well I'd like you to preserve an anecdote you told John Whitaker about a joke you played on Henry Kissinger.

Charles Colson

Oh yeah, Kissinger had the right, although he abused it, to come into the Oval Office or the EOB office, without having somebody announce him or take him in. I always went in through Steve Bull, but Kissinger could just walk in when he wanted to. Nixon told him that because of the severity of the foreign policy issues, to feel free to just come in and interrupt anything. Well, Henry would do it for trivial things. And one day Nixon was really kind of ticked off at Henry for a variety of things, and we were in the Executive Office Building, the far door swung open, I looked over, it was Henry. I caught a glance of him. Nixon did not appear to look, but I know he knew it was Henry, and he immediately said to me, "Well, I think you're right, Chuck, about that. I think it is time that we use nuclear weapons. Everything else has failed." And Kissinger, I look over to him, stood in the doorway, absolutely paralyzed. Well, that's on a tape somewhere. Somebody's going to hear that on a tape and say, "Oh, my Lord, this Nixon really was a madman. Colson did bring out the dark side of Nixon. Everything they say is true." It was pure humor. Nixon loved it and did that often, that sort of thing, often.

Timothy Naftali

Let's talk about some tough times, though. The Pentagon Papers. You witnessed the President's reaction. Tell us a bit about that, please.

Charles Colson

The Pentagon Papers came out in the Sunday "New York Times" on Monday morning. I was at the senior staff meeting in the Roosevelt Room, and there was a mood of panic and despair, Kissinger throwing papers on the tables saying, "We cannot run a government this way." I was in with Nixon that morning and he was genuinely, genuinely alarmed. I mean I could tell when Nixon was putting on an act. I could tell when Nixon was manipulating people. I'd been with him enough. I was enough like him, actually, interestingly enough, that I knew when he was doing things for effect and when he wasn't. He wasn't doing this for effect. He was genuinely concerned that there could be a wholesale

down in our security system, and we would get CIA assets exposed. We would get secret operations like National Security Study Memorandum Number One, which was a contingency plan for Vietnam, out in the public domain, and this could be catastrophic to us, particularly in our relationships then, which he knew about, but most of the people didn't and I didn't, in detail, that were going on with Russia and the Soviet Union -- the Soviet Union and China. So he was aware of the consequences more than anybody else, more than Kissinger, I think, and he was genuinely alarmed and told me we had to do something to stop Ellsberg. We had to get these -- he told Mitchell to go ahead and sue the papers, try to get a restraining order in the court, which of course failed, and told me to do whatever it took. Find out who this guy was, stop him. And that really led to the creation of the Plumbers. That was really the trigger for what later became the undoing of the Nixon Presidency, guys running off with reckless abandon. But I never had a moment's doubt that Nixon was genuinely concerned and that there were two areas that we would have to fight this on. One was legally, and one was in the court of public opinion. And that would be my side of it, which is why I was looking for anything I could find that would be derogatory about Ellsberg.

Timothy Naftali

You bring, and this would be a problem for you later, you bring E. Howard Hunt into this cast of characters.

Charles Colson

Yeah, at the time that Nixon wanted to bring in a group of people who would do security, I never knew about the Huston Plan. The Huston Plan was before I was sitting in the inner counsels or, if it was discussed, it was never discussed in my presence, so I never heard about it until Watergate had exploded. The meetings I remember were in the summer of '71 when Nixon was exploding over the papers that were being circulated through Washington, not only the Pentagon Papers that got to the press but some that got to the Brookings Institution and other places where Nixon, and senators' offices. We would get calls that senators' offices had them. So I heard him in one meeting say, turn to Haldeman -- I was in the room with Haldeman, just the two of us -- and he turned to Bob and he said, "Bob, how many times am I going to tell you? We need a team here, people that can go in and break in, if necessary, and get those papers back." He said, "We're not going to get it done otherwise. The FBI used to do this; they're not doing a good job of it." All of this is on tape, so you probably heard these tapes. I was sitting there listening and, this is maybe where youth becomes a disadvantage, I took him very literally. I thought this is really what he means, and he's the President, and troops are in battle, including friends of mine, flying helicopters in Vietnam, and this is a serious business. When we left the Oval Office that day I turned to Haldeman and I said, "What are we supposed to do with this?" And Haldeman said, "Well, we've got to get somebody to do something about those Brookings papers." He said, "Call Ehrlichman and just tell John to take care of it." So he said, "We're letting the President blow off steam." He said, "He's blowing off steam." So I called Ehrlichman, and I told Ehrlichman the conversation. Ehrlichman said, "Go talk to Jack Caulfield and tell him I told you to talk to him, and tell him his job is to have a plan to get those papers back." This may sound naive to you, but it's true, that my first thought was that you would call Mel Laird and get Mel Laird to suspend the security clearance at Brookings and order the papers returned. I had not dealt with Jack Caulfield. I knew who he was, an ex-cop who had been security for Nixon in the campaign and I didn't know what he did, except he reported to John Dean and John Ehrlichman. But I called him and he said, "I don't want to meet you in your office. I'll meet you in the men's room." So I go to the men's room and he said, "Tell me what it is." He said, "I heard from Ehrlichman's office that you had a message from the President." And I said, "Well, he wants to get these documents back," I told him. He looked at me and I said, "Probably the best thing to do would be to call Mel Laird." He said, "Oh no," he said, "We'll never get anywhere that way." He said, "You know when I was with the New York Police we used to create a fire as a diversion and then we'd go in and get any papers we wanted out of anybody's office." I said, "I don't know how you do your business, but all I can tell you is the President wants those papers back." Left him, and that was the last I heard of it until Watergate. I never heard what happened, and nothing did happen, as a matter of fact. But much was made out of that to one of the explosive allegations in Watergate is I proposed the bombing of the Brookings Institution. And I told the press at the time, they came to my house and interviewed me for that, that they were wrong. It was "The Washington Post" I wanted to blow up, not Brookings. And I made light of it because I really thought it was a joke. And John Dean has made a campaign, a crusade, over the years of talking about what a madman Colson was. I'm not sure whether you know this or that it makes any difference, actually, it doesn't make much difference, but Caulfield called me three years ago to ask my forgiveness because he said it was a lie, that I had not ordered that, and he said there was perjury; he didn't say who committed it. And he told my biographer, Jonathan Aitken, that -- and I've written John Dean and told him it isn't

true. And I told the prosecutors after I had total immunity. They said, "Did you order Brookings?" I said, "No, I did not." They said, "You've got immunity. You're going to prison anyway. Did you do it?" I said, "No, I did not do it." But, as a result of that, and I take full responsibility, I didn't blow the whistle on the President. I didn't say to him, "That's not a good thing for you to do. That's not something you should be doing," and I should have. I also did, as a result of those meetings, send a memo to John Ehrlichman in which I said, "Here are six candidates to bring in to run a security operation in the White House." And I had six names; you will find them in the files. The bottom name actually was Howard Hunt. I think he was my last choice. There was an investigator of the Senate I had worked with that I had as first choice. In any event, it came down to Hunt, and I never had interviews with Howard, although he'd come by my office a number of times, but I didn't talk to him about this. I arranged for him to go interview Ehrlichman, and Ehrlichman hired him. He was put in my area staff-wise. He did have a consulting agreement. I didn't arrange that; that was done by the staff secretary's office. But he saw himself as my friend and would come by my office a lot and tell me what was going on, so I was responsible for that. He teamed up with Gordon Liddy, and they reported to David Young and Bud Krogh. Hunt brought Liddy into my office once, the only time I met him in the White House, insisted that I meet him because they were having trouble getting approval of a counterintelligence plan at the Republican National Convention. I spent maybe two minutes, three minutes, picked up the phone, called Magruder and I said, "Look, these guys are complaining you're not making a decision. Make a decision. Do what you have to do. Do whatever you've got to do," and hung up the phone. That was really the extent of my involvement with Liddy completely, and Hunt I had more involvement with. Hunt, I used him in the ITT case and he would come by my office when I felt like talking because he was an engaging guy; interesting storyteller, novelist, a great novelist, wrote great books, thrillers; and CIA operative and very secretive about it. I would enjoy it. I mean I would listen to his tales and thought they were fascinating.

Timothy Naftali

You both went to Brown?

Charles Colson

Yeah.

Timothy Naftali

Didn't you know each other through the Brown Alumni Association?

Charles Colson

Yeah, yeah, I was the President of it in Washington, and he would come to meetings and I knew he was in the CIA, so I knew him slightly, not really well. And then he -- yeah, I forgot this. When he left the CIA he came to work for Robert Bennett of Bennett and Associates and made an appointment to come see me. And this was before all this Pentagon Papers stuff. And he said to me, "I'm out of the CIA now, but I have a lot of experience in this area. If I can help the White House in any way, anything you want done, you just call me." So when the decision was made to hire someone for the Plumbers I put him on the list, remembering that he had volunteered and had this kind of background and that he was politically reliable. But it is significant; he offered before I ever thought of him.

Timothy Naftali

Because the President would refer to him as Colson's CIA guy.

Charles Colson

Yep.

Timothy Naftali

So --

Charles Colson

I was the one who recommended him.

Timothy Naftali

But this would be a tag for you, which would prove problematic later on as well.

Charles Colson

Uh-huh.

Timothy Naftali

The discussion with Liddy and Hunt was in February of 1972. This was when they were trying to get the intelligence plan --

Charles Colson

Right.

Timothy Naftali

-- Gemstone, which I'm sure you didn't -- they didn't go into any detail with you.

Charles Colson

Well, they said we're going to get up some counterintelligence operations at the committee, and we're going to find out what's going to be done. At the convention we'll prevent disruptions, and it all sounded legitimate to me.

Timothy Naftali

They didn't mention the Democratic National Committee, did they?

Charles Colson

No, I never heard that.

Timothy Naftali

IT&T -- the IT&T case was in a way a precursor to Watergate.

Charles Colson

Sure was.

Timothy Naftali

What was your role in making sense out of that?

Charles Colson

Well, I quarterbacked it, without any question. I was the guy in charge of -- whatever we did in the ITT case, for better or for worse, I'll take responsibility. The President put me in charge of it, I reported mostly to him, to Haldeman sometimes, and it was to try to rebut the allegations, which we thought were preposterous, that it was an exchange of a contribution to the Republican National Committee for the Convention, that we intervened in Chile, and I mean all of the things that Dita Beard wrote in that letter --

Timothy Naftali

And the antitrust case?

Charles Colson

And the antitrust case, of course. And I thought this was preposterous. There was a task force, Mitchell put Marty in on it, and I think somebody from the Justice Department. I had been with Harold Janine of ITT when he met with Ehrlichman in Ehrlichman's office when there was discussions about the money that was going down from ITT to help overturn the communist government --

Timothy Naftali

Allende.

Charles Colson

Allende, yeah, government. And so I had heard Ehrlichman and Janine talking about these things. There was no discussion about contributions or the Republican Committee or the antitrust case. Clearly, Janine and IT&T were trying to curry favor with the administration because they had issues that they were dealing with, and the antitrust case being prime among them, but it never came up in the conversation I was in. Maybe it did elsewhere. But I thought the whole thing was a bogus charge. I

really did not believe it and talked to enough people in the government that if there'd been any truth to it I think I would have picked it up. So I fought it like I would fight a case in the Supreme Court. I did everything I could: send Howard Hunt out to interview Dita Beard lying in bed in the hospital. And that's when he went and got his ill-fitting disguise, his ill-fitting wig. I didn't know where he had gotten it, but I if I thought about it probably would have realized he'd got it from the CIA. And he brought back information, which didn't help us. She stuck to her story that it was true, and I could find no evidence it was true on our side. But it was putting us in real jeopardy on Capitol Hill, and it was a serious issue, and I fought it as hard as I could. One afternoon, and I've never known why this happened, Haldeman called me in and said, "The President says you've been working too hard on this thing. Just go home and take a long weekend." I never had that happen. This was like on a Thursday afternoon. And I said, "No, we've got to fight this thing." He said, "Forget it." So I got called off, that was a Thursday afternoon, and I went home, and I did spend the weekend at home, but always wondered why that was suddenly ended.

Timothy Naftali

So maybe there was a little more to it than you had found?

Charles Colson

Well, possibly you could draw that conclusion, or possibly we had fought it too hard and we were making more of an issue that we'd do better ignoring it. I don't know. I have no idea. I will tell you this: to the best of my ability I tried to find out if there was anything to it. Because, as a lawyer, I recognized full well that I needed to know the facts. I would still defend what we did in the best way I possibly could, but I didn't want to be surprised. So I really tried to find if there was anything to it and couldn't get anyone to give me any glimmer of evidence.

Timothy Naftali

There is a budget from the Committee to Re-Elect that a Bruce Kehrli gave to Haldeman, which he approved in early 1972. And under Colson they mention \$90,000 to you for what is described as black operations, operations that were not to be associated with the RNC. I was --

Charles Colson

I knew what black operations were, but nobody ever gave me \$90,000. I'd have loved to have had it. There were things we did with bogus committees, but I got most of the money for that from outside groups. I never got anything from the RNC or from the Committee to Re-Elect the President.

Timothy Naftali

Well, you were owed it because Haldeman approved --

Charles Colson

Wish I'd gotten it.

Timothy Naftali

How did these bogus committees work?

Charles Colson

Well, you would form a committee -- Carl Shipley, who was a former Republican National Committeeman for the District of Columbia formed these for me. A guy by the name of Joe Baroody [phonetic sp] used to raise money from some of his clients for various front committees, and we would do some mailings from these committees. We did the ad in the Safeguard America campaign.

That was all funded by Joe Baroody and some of the people that worked with him. So if there was money coming out -- there were a couple of times Haldeman told me I had money for some events, like entertaining my staff. I was surprised at that. Took them out on the Sequoia one night. But nobody ever told me there was a line item in anybody's budget with cash.

Timothy Naftali

Well, there was one. Actually, speaking of mail operations, George Herbert Walker Bush, I think in his memoirs, mentioned that in '73 when he was head of the RNC you wanted him to do some mail order, or some mailings that he refused to do. Do you remember having a clash with later President Bush?

Charles Colson

In '73?

Timothy Naftali

In '73, just before he left.

Charles Colson

No, he wasn't there very long, was he?

Timothy Naftali

Well, you didn't overlap very long. He replaced Dole as head of the RNC. He wasn't there long --

Charles Colson

Yeah, when I went over to the White House he was not head of the RNC, and I don't think I had any role after I left the White House. I'd be surprised.

Timothy Naftali

Let me ask --

Charles Colson

Could've been -- no, it wouldn't have been.

Timothy Naftali

I think you overlapped just a month or two.

Charles Colson

Could be.

Timothy Naftali

Let me ask you about where you were on June 17, 1972. Where were you that day?

Charles Colson

I was at home in McLean, Virginia, sitting at my swimming pool. Let's see, this was Saturday afternoon, and I had noticed in the paper an article about the

-in at the Democratic National Committee, I think that morning. I think I had seen that in the morning; I'm not sure right now. What I remember vividly is a telephone call from John Ehrlichman on the White House phone saying, and I was sitting outside at the time with friends, and Ehrlichman said, "Where is your pal, Howard Hunt, these days?" And I said, "I don't know. I haven't seen him in a long time. I haven't seen him in several months, I think since the I.T.T. thing, actually." And he said, "Well, does he work for us?" I said, "No." I said, "He left months ago." I said, "In fact, he's off the payroll. Why are you asking?" He said, "Well, some of these guys involved in that break-in," so I must've known about it, must've seen it in the paper, "had in their pocket his name and a White House phone number and we're just trying to track it down." And I thought, oh no. It hit me and I hung up the phone and turned to Patty, my wife, and said, "If we're involved in this, this could be the end of this President's time in office." I mean I was just sick when I thought that if Hunt had had anything to do with it and if we had had anything to do with it, I realized it was going to be a huge problem. That was the first I heard -- the people who were with me that day, now a retired lieutenant general in the Marines, a classmate of mine at Brown, a classmate in the Marines, remember my conversation coming away just shaking my head thinking this isn't possible. Nobody could be that stupid. And my reaction was not on moral grounds, because if somebody told me we've got a way of getting information about what's going on inside the McGovern campaign I would've said, "Great, get it for me. Don't tell me how you got it, but get it." But the Democratic National Committee made no sense, because Mario Bryant had no power. They were broke. I can't imagine why they broke in. To this day I don't know why they did it. To this day it's one of the mysteries to me why anybody went to the Democratic National Committee.

Timothy Naftali

So you didn't see any of the political take, any of the intelligence that came from that operation? Because it was running for a little while before --

Charles Colson

I never saw it. Never heard anybody talk about it.

Timothy Naftali

Did you interact with Gordon Strong? He --

Charles Colson

I don't think so, not much. Are you talking about in '72?

Timothy Naftali

'72 --

Charles Colson

What job did he occupy?

Timothy Naftali

He was Haldeman's liaison officer to CREEP.

Charles Colson

He was never in any of the meetings that I had. Bruce Kehrli was the staff secretary, and he would get me papers I needed to see. I could always trust Bruce; he was good at that. I had my own strategy meetings going on. Strong was never in those, no.

Timothy Naftali

Before we push on a little with Watergate, how uncertain about re-election were you in early '72? Were you concerned about --

Charles Colson

Early '72?

Timothy Naftali

Yeah, were you concerned about Muskie?

Charles Colson

I thought Muskie would beat us. He was ahead of us in the polls. I knew him well because he was a New England senator when I was a -- he came right at the end of Saltonstall's time. I think he came -- might have come in the 1960s as a matter of fact. But I stayed on with Saltonstall as secretary of the

New England Senators Conference, so I got to know Muskie quite well and Muskie's people, and I really liked him and had a lot of respect for him and believed he would be a very formidable opponent. I was concerned that he could beat us. And I looked at the demographics, looked at the vote breakdown, looked at Nixon's poll standings, looked at the issues we were dealing with, and his being the candidate was my worst nightmare. McGovern was my fondest hope, but I never thought it possible.

Timothy Naftali

Would this explain why the Committee to Re-Elect and the White House sponsored the dirty tricks and the other activities, which many members later disavowed?

Charles Colson

Oh, I think so. I mean it was not until after the Democratic Convention that any of us thought we could relax. That infamous letter, memo I sent to my staff after the Republican Convention, I was dead serious. I mean, the one that quipped about the press clipping that said I would run over my own grandmother was not exaggerated; everybody be at their desks; it was a colorful memo. But I was dead serious. I mean I thought we had to fight every inch of the way to get Nixon re-elected. And even as we were riding high in the polls in '72 I still figured there's going to be a surge. There are going to be Democrats going back home. There's going to be a closing of the gap, it never closed. It stayed constant all the way from McGovern's nomination through the election.

Timothy Naftali

What was the line though that you didn't want to cross though in fighting for re-election?

Charles Colson

What was the line you didn't want to cross?

Timothy Naftali

Yeah, were you drawing any lines? Not everything was acceptable.

Charles Colson

The only line I would have drawn is don't do something that is going to be counterproductive or stupid. Don't do anything if you're going to get caught at it. I mean I'd been in Massachusetts politics where -- and I'd known about the Kennedy and Johnson bugging the planes. I mean I knew the history of this, and I'd played rough hardball politics. So I wouldn't have been morally offended by many of the things that went on. The Segretti tricks, I think, are comical. I think they're really hysterical, and I'd be normally laughing my head off. I didn't know about them, but when I read about them later I thought that's, you know, it's childish, but it was not, I think, I didn't feel I was crossing the line, no. I was not -- in terms of questions like this I would be a pragmatist. If this was something we could do and get away with it, we'd do it.

Timothy Naftali

I'm going to go out of order because there's just a number of things I'd like to ask you about. From the tapes, you worked on the Nixon administration's reaction to the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Tell us a little bit about recruiting John O'Neill, if you can recall.

Charles Colson

Yeah, I've searched my memory for that because it became a current issue in 2004. I'm not sure that I recruited him. Somebody in the White House told me about him and I -- I can't tell you how I heard about him, but I invited him to my office and was hugely impressed. A Naval Academy graduate, very military, handled himself well, spoke articulately, and was, as he told me, a Democrat who voted against Nixon, but believed Nixon was absolutely right and that the war issue was being politicized. And, as a patriot, he wanted to come forward and contradict what Vietnam Veterans Against the War stood for. He, I think, had started at that point a little organization, I think his organization actually had a name at that point. I don't know if it was -- we helped them get television appearances and that sort of thing later, but I think he had already organized it. The Vietnam Veterans in Support of the War, perhaps? And I had a guy on my staff who watched out for these things, Bud Evans, who probably was the one who told me about it and about O'Neill. But I remember being very impressed with him and then wanting Nixon to meet him. So I took him in to the Oval Office. He had another man with him; I can't remember his name. And the only thing that struck me was he had on a cord suit and he looked kind of preppy and black shoes, but he had on white socks. And he looked like a country bumpkin, but he was so articulate in defense of the Nixon policies and such an encouragement to Nixon, and Nixon brought Kissinger in to meet him and made a big thing of him. And he went out from there and did his thing with a lot of help from our staff, getting interviews and that sort of thing, to promote him as an offset to John Kerry, who I had never met, knew him only from his public appearances and what I'd seen on television. I picked up a lot about him from people who knew him and had a, I thought, a pretty balanced picture of the guy. Nothing that has happened since has changed that picture, and he's a very interesting character. Interesting isn't the right word. But I did my best to undermine him.

Timothy Naftali

What did you do other than find John O'Neill?

Charles Colson

We probably called veterans organizations and, I mean, but it was nothing -- there was no black operation. There was no attempt to smear him other than some of the information I'd picked up about him, which wasn't very complementary. I passed on to reporters and others, but no, there wasn't -- he's paranoid. He's got this idea that I ran this big campaign. He said this in the 2004 election. He said, "The Bush people are pulling all of the stops out against me. They now have Chuck Colson, Nixon's attack dog, working against me." I didn't have anything to do with the 2004 campaign. I'd met with Bush. I'm a friend of Bush's, and had some long conversations with him, but I wasn't involved in the campaign. I do not believe as a religious leader I should be involved in a campaign. I'll tell you what kind of a guy Kerry is. This is interesting. That probably doesn't -- may not be relevant here --

Timothy Naftali

Well, we interviewed him --

Charles Colson

But yeah, okay. I went to the National Prayer Breakfast in the early '90s and one of the speakers -- mid-90s, perhaps. The speakers never announced until the last moment. The speaker was announced was John Kerry. I've gone to the National Prayer Breakfast every year since I became a Christian. In fact, I went one year with Nixon who was not a believer. Kerry came in the mid-90s and I was sitting two tables from the podium in the front of this huge hall at the Hilton Hotel ballroom. And Kerry gave the most evangelistic message I think I've ever heard. It would outdo Billy Graham. It was absolutely magnificent. So I'm back to my office, I was really convicted, because he was a guy I'd done everything I could to fight against and thought very badly of whose now become a Christian. So I wrote him a letter and I said, "Dear Senator Kerry, you and I once were at odds with one another, and I want you to know I heard your speech today, and I was deeply moved, and I'm thrilled you've become a Christian and I'd like to come by and visit with you and have prayer. And I'd like to apologize personally for anything I might have done to hurt you in the past." And if you understood the perspective I come from as a believing Christian, this is the first thing you would do. This is a matter of natural instinct, and I really was rejoicing. I never got an answer back, but I got a call from a reporter for "The Boston Globe" saying, "Is it true you apologized to John Kerry?" And all Kerry had told him was I had apologized for the terrible things I'd done. I explained to him the circumstances. It came up again in the 2004 election. Kerry has never to this day acknowledged that letter or acknowledged me or anything, except to constantly tell people I apologized to him. Well, I did, but in the context of wanting to meet with him for prayer. So that doesn't leave me with a good taste in my mouth about John Kerry.

Timothy Naftali

No, when you read Haldeman's recollections of this era and your recollections, there's a tension. Haldeman recalls you as bringing out the darker side of the President, and you recall Haldeman bringing out the darker side of the President. Help us understand, first of all, what this means, "the darker side of the President," and what roles each of you played.

Charles Colson

Well, we had a lot of competition between us, and there were moments when I really liked Bob Haldeman, when he would relax and be himself. There were times when he could be utterly obnoxious. I mean he would bark these commands or he would be cutting in his response. I remember one night, I'd only been in the White House six or eight months, and the President had on a tie that was all very heavily figured, and he was going on television that night. So at the executive mess for dinner I went over to Haldeman and I said, "Bob, don't let him wear that tie tonight because it will look terrible on television." "Oh, are you an expert on this?" I mean there were times when he just wasn't a nice guy. He was a hard guy to work with. He would put you down. He'd cut people down. And most people dealing with him had -- they had their run-ins. They had their moments when they were really treated not kindly by Bob. Bob could be very rough with people, obsequious of people above him and at times tyrannical with people under him. There were many times I saw him take notes, agree with the President when I would have disagreed then maybe did later. There were times when I thought he was

simply being mechanical in reacting to the President. There were times when he did things I wouldn't have done. And there were other times when I brought out the dark side of Nixon. You didn't have to work very hard to bring it out; it was always close to the surface. He was a gut fighter. Nixon was a street fighter. He was -- his first reaction was to fight back. His first reaction was to get even with people. And what he needed were people who would give him a more measured reaction, and both Bob and I did it the wrong way. We did it, okay, let's go get those guys. And in reflection now, if I regret anything about the Nixon years, I regret a lot, but the thing I probably regret the most is that I didn't take those occasions to try to help Nixon moderate some of those views. Haldeman and Ehrlichman say that they were given orders like I was given, but they didn't carry them out, but that's not been my experience. They did exactly what I did. In fact, as I mentioned, there were times when we went beyond. We were on the Sequoia one night, and Haldeman and Ehrlichman, Nixon, and I, and having drinks up on the deck and then we'd go down to dinner and we're talking about something that Arthur Burns had said, and I can't remember now exactly what it was, but he had said something that would -- I guess he was not supporting the President on one of his initiatives, and I've forgotten exactly what it was.

Timothy Naftali

Money supply.

Charles Colson

Money supply, okay. And at dinner that night Nixon turned to me and he said, "He's lobbying for a raise, isn't he?" I said, "I don't know." And Nixon said, "Yes, he's told me he wants a raise and he wants to get the same as the Cabinet." He wanted to be bumped up. He wanted the Federal Reserve Chairman to get a raise. And Nixon said, "Put that out to the press." And so I didn't, I said, "Yes, yes, sir."

Timothy Naftali

But you knew that Burns didn't -- that he wanted it to be effective after he left.

Charles Colson

Yeah, the next morning, which it strikes me was a Saturday, I went into Haldeman and I said, "Bob, that's not a good idea. You know, the President, we should not do that." And Haldeman said, "You have your orders, go do it." So there was a case where I was being wise for once, which wasn't all that common, and Bob was saying no, no, go for it. And that happened more often -- I mean that happened frequently. I happen to remember that one vividly because it turned out to be a very bad thing. I mean it was bad for Nixon, bad for the country.

Timothy Naftali

What happened?

Charles Colson

The story was put out and, of course, it was false and discredited and then it came out that I was the one that had planted that story.

Timothy Naftali

You had some allies in the media: Novak, Robert Novak and others. How did you -- you were one of those who was allowed to plant stories, right?

Charles Colson

Not very often, very seldom. I had people that did that, but I only probably had Novak in my office twice the whole time I was in the White House, and he would be the most friendly of the reporters. Jerry terHorst was an old friend who later became Ford's press secretary. He was the one I gave information to about Ellsberg from the FBI files, the result of my going to prison. There were reporters who desperately wanted to see me, and once in a while I saw one if I was told there was a really good reason for doing it. But I tried not to do that because I thought it couldn't help me. I didn't deal with the press. I had John Scali working for me who did on foreign policy questions and a fellow by the name of Barker -- oh my, I cannot think of his name -- sorry, it's getting late in the day -- who would deal with the press. Oh, and Clawson, Ken Clawson. Clawson did a lot of that. In fact, most of the stuff I planted I would plant through Clawson.

Timothy Naftali

Did you ever meet Bob Woodward?

Charles Colson

No, oh, not until, yeah the --

Timothy Naftali

Years later.

Charles Colson

Right, in the middle of Watergate.

Timothy Naftali

In the middle of Watergate?

Charles Colson

Yeah, he was constantly after me; he wanted to see me. I refused to see him because I thought it was wiser not to. I was a Nixon loyalist, and I realized what he was trying to do, and so I didn't want to contribute to his efforts. And finally, my law partner, David Shapiro, who was also representing me,

said, "Listen, this could be an important thing. Do this." So I had him in my office one night in my law firm, and this would have been in the summer of '74. And he began the conversation by saying, "Mr. Colson, I have found in the last several months of covering the stories that the people who won't talk to me have something to hide, the people who will talk to me must be on the level." I said, "I made a mistake inviting you in. I don't want to talk to you." I asked him to leave. That was our one meeting, and he left my office. That was the only time I saw him. I did talk to him on the phone a few times, always a mistake.

Timothy Naftali

Always a mistake?

Charles Colson

Uh-huh, always. My better judgment was not to talk to him, but once in a while my worst judgment won out, and it was always wrong.

Timothy Naftali

About the desire for revenge, on the tapes, so we have it record, after the

-in the President would meet with you, and he seems to be venting with you. Haldeman in one interview said when the President vented with you it was a sign of trust, and he only chose a number of people to vent his anger with. But he chose to do it with you. Why? In looking back on it --

Charles Colson

Well, I think there was trust. He told Bebe Rebozo once that he'd never had a son but if he had he would like a son like me. He had that kind of feeling towards me, and I did to him. I mean I really felt very loyal to him and very close to him, admired him greatly. It was an emotional thing with me in some respects because both of my boys were approaching draft age and getting the war over and the draft ended, even though I was against the all-volunteer army, but I felt personally very committed to Richard Nixon. I do to this day still respect him greatly. So I think he knew that and I think he could let his hair down with me. He did plenty of times.

Timothy Naftali

It's a very deep anger that's --

Charles Colson

Oh, yeah, yeah. He told me, though it's been disputed I understand, and I guess it's available on the tapes. But I remember him calling me on Sunday saying he got so mad he threw an ashtray across the floor at Key Biscayne, across the room. And someone later said that he didn't say that. It's in my memory.

Timothy Naftali

But he had you -- he wanted you to go and get "The Washington Post's" licenses overturned.

Charles Colson

Uh-huh.

Timothy Naftali

And he talked to you about using the IRS against his enemies.

Charles Colson

Did he?

Timothy Naftali

Yeah.

Charles Colson

When was that?

Timothy Naftali

This is late summer of '72.

Charles Colson

Well, I never had anything to do with the IRS so --

Timothy Naftali

No, no.

Charles Colson

-- I didn't do it. But I remember the licenses, and I had talked to Dean Birch about that before, who had been chairman of the FCC, and there'd been a big fight over those licenses in the past, so that was not -- they wouldn't -- I don't remember whether they had to keep getting them renewed in those days. I think they did. But that wouldn't have gone uncontested. He did have me go up and see Walter Annenberg -- I don't know if that shows up on the tapes -- about mounting some competition to "The Post" and even taking over "The Washington Star," which later became "The Times." So there were a few things that I did when I left the White House, but most of the time -- no, let's see. No, that was after I left the White House.

Timothy Naftali

It was after you left the White House.

Charles Colson

Yeah, that was afterwards. There wasn't anything we did during the campaign because you'd be too vulnerable.

Timothy Naftali

When did you get the sense that you were going to be the fall guy for Watergate?

Charles Colson

Well, I worried about that right after the election. There had been four or five episodes that made me really suspicious. I was coming into Haldeman's office, and there was a meeting going on, and I opened the door because nobody told me not to, and I was going in to see Bob. And John Mitchell was right on the other side of the door, and he held the door and he said, "What do you want?" And I said, "I want to see Bob." He said, "Well, we're in a meeting. We just as soon you not come in right now." I said, "Is my friend Howard Hunt involved in this?" And he said, "Up to his ears." This was right after the Watergate. This was in the first week. And I shook my head, but I wasn't welcome in that meeting. We came back from California on Air Force One and the President -- this was in August. I think we were coming back from California. And I left Air Force One to go to my car to drive home and realized I'd left something on the plane. So I went back and in the staff conference room where I had to walk in, Haldeman and Ehrlichman were talking, and it was just like, boom, shut off the moment I walked in the door. It was very awkward and I got out of there as quickly as I could, but it was obvious that they did not know -- I mean, it could have been anything, but I kind of felt it was about me. I just had that sixth sense. It became very clear to me when, After the election, the morning after the election, Nixon very unwisely called his staff in and told everybody to turn in their letter of resignation or let them know what they wanted to do in the next term. So I wrote him a memorandum and told him I was going back to practice law, but there would be things that I would stay to do. Chairman of the Republican National Committee I thought I'd love to do, because I love the politics, or the Labor Department. I think those are the things -- that memo is probably in the file somewhere. And I was the first one of the senior staff, other than Haldeman and Ehrlichman, to be invited up to Camp David for dinner with the President. So I come in and it's, you know, just very cheerful, convivial evening. The wine is flowing, and the steaks are great, and Nixon's talking about the great future, and he says, "Now, you know, Chuck," he said, "if you want to stay there will be the right position for you, but I think you'd be wonderful in the kitchen Cabinet, maybe general counsel of the Republican National Committee, and you could be my outside advisor and help me from the outside." So I was beginning to get a sense of things that wasn't characteristic of him, and Haldeman and Ehrlichman were sitting there nodding. So when we left that evening and went back to our lodge I said to Haldeman, "What does this mean, Bob?" I said, "Does he want me to stay or not?" Bob says, "I think you should go. You can do better on the outside."

Timothy Naftali

So they had poisoned him against you?

Charles Colson

Well, I've always thought so, but you've read more of the tapes than I have. I haven't gone back to read the tapes.

Timothy Naftali

Not everything is on the tapes.

Charles Colson

No, I --

Timothy Naftali

There were discussions that are on --

Charles Colson

Oh, lots of discussions.

Timothy Naftali

But what I wanted to ask you was what have we missed? I mean what discussions did the President have with you about Watergate that aren't on the tapes?

Charles Colson

I don't know whether the stuff at Camp David was on tape, was it?

Timothy Naftali

Not all of it.

Charles Colson

Huh?

Timothy Naftali

No, not the main --

Charles Colson

Some of it was.

Timothy Naftali

Yeah, some of it, but --

Charles Colson

Some of it was, because one of the nights I was up there with him he was talking about -- this was in mid-December of '72 -- he was talking about Kissinger having given his Oriana Fallaci interview. And we're talking just the two of us in the little sitting area off the living room, and all of a sudden he waves to me, and we go into the hall leading into the bedrooms and he said, "The next administration Kissinger's gone. I don't want him around," and just vents. And then we walked back into the room and resumed the conversation. Now if I'd had any intelligence I would have realized that place was bugged. There were other times when Nixon gave me clues, but I just didn't believe he would do that.

Timothy Naftali

You tell a story about you sent somebody to Paris to photograph a woman --

Charles Colson

No, get a photograph.

Timothy Naftali

Get a --

Charles Colson

-- published in a French newspaper, Ted Kennedy dancing with Maria Pia, who was in the swinging society of Paris, appeared in the newspaper. Somebody sent us a clipping from Europe. Nixon said to me, "I want that picture." We really thought Teddy Kennedy might be our opponent in '72, and he would've been a tough opponent. I think would've been tough. And we tried through the normal ways to do it and couldn't, just didn't turn up on any of the news services. Contacted the people in Paris and couldn't get an answer. So I called a guy in New York by the name of Jack O'Hara -- not Jack O'Hara.

Timothy Naftali

Mulcahy --

Charles Colson

Well, Jack Mulcahy's lawyer, Pat O'Hara, and said, "Pat, will you get on a plane and go to Paris and get me that picture?" Which he did, came back and delivered it to the White House, and I walked in the Oval Office. When the President called me in the next time, I walked in and I said, "I've got something I think you'd like to see," and I dropped the picture on his desk. And he picks it up and swings around with his feet under the table behind his desk and laughs uproariously. Now that should've been a pretty good clue to me that he didn't want to laugh into the microphone, but it wasn't. I was naive. But we

got the picture. Never used it, but it was good insurance if we thought we were going to run against him.

Timothy Naftali

That would've appeared in the newspapers at some point.

Charles Colson

Yes.

Timothy Naftali

Tell me --

Charles Colson

By the way, Nixon called in Kissinger in that same meeting and said, "Henry, come look at this," still back at the window. And Henry looked at it and laughed. Henry loved that stuff.

Timothy Naftali

Well he, Nixon, probably was a little jealous that Henry could be photographed with starlets around the world.

Charles Colson

Yeah, we had those conversations, too.

Timothy Naftali

I've read that some of these vindictive or desires for revenge came out when the President was drinking.

Charles Colson

Uh-huh.

Timothy Naftali

What -- was it that he couldn't hold his liquor?

Charles Colson

Again, the complicated personality. I don't want to say he couldn't hold his liquor. There were evenings -- there were times when I thought Nixon came close to going too far with his wine at dinner and sometimes his scotch. He could pretty well control it. I mean he could have a drink or two before

dinner and always a bottle of wine, vintage wine, very good wine that he would save for himself, and the other people at the table would be left with the dregs, that I thought he went too far. There were -- never a time when I was with him was he not in complete control of his faculties. He was never dangerous. But there were two or three phone calls, which I suspect have been listened to, when I thought he was over the edge. April 30th when he fired Haldeman and Ehrlichman, he sure sounded it. One night he called me, I was up seeing my dad who was sick, and he had just come back from Russia, so it would've been in '72. And my dad had had a heart attack, so I was in Massachusetts, and I get a call from the President at two in the morning, and he is incoherent. I couldn't make head nor tail out of what he was saying. And he would say something and he would slur off and then there was just a long silence. Well, I'm connected to him with one telephone. We didn't have cell phones in those days. So I went to a neighbor's house and I said, "I have to make a phone call and don't ask any questions." It's two o'clock in the morning, but I need to get a telephone so that I could get disconnected from Nixon and call the White House switchboard. Well, I called the White House switchboard, got Manolo, the valet, and I said, "Manolo, something's happened to the President. I'm connected to him on the phone, but I think he's passed out. Get in and see him quick." He was at Camp David. And Manolo called me back 20 minutes later and said, "He's fine; he's asleep." The next day the President called me and said he was on heavy doses of sleeping pills, that the jetlag had gotten to him, and it could well be. But there were times when he would call me in the middle of the night, two o'clock in the morning, "Hope I'm not bothering" -- oh, this was often. "Hope I'm not bothering you. Is this alright to talk?" And I said, "Yeah." Because he would sleep two hours and then he'd wake up and he'd want to do some work, and he would call me. And he did not sound like he'd been drinking, but he wasn't as clear witted as he normally was. And there were times he'd get up in the night and couldn't sleep, and so I recognized the phone call was just handholding.

Timothy Naftali

So this -- these were the times when he would -- you would not do what he asked you to do?

Charles Colson

Oh yeah, absolutely.

Timothy Naftali

Because you've said, I've seen and I've read it, you've said that there were hundreds of things, or a hundred things, he asked you to do that you didn't.

Charles Colson

Uh-huh, there were times when I knew couldn't and shouldn't.

Timothy Naftali

How -- let's -- you're a complicated person.

Charles Colson

Yeah, right.

Timothy Naftali

What -- how did you know or didn't know?

Charles Colson

Well, if I sensed that it was one of those middle of the night deals where he was just ranting, I'd let him rant and listen, and you'd agree with him. And he wanted me to fire all of the people at Bureau of Labor Statistics one night he called me. And I called George Shultz, George could maybe look into this. And I said, "George, he wants to fire the Head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and all of those people over there. He said they're all against him." Shultz said, "Don't do anything until I come back." Shultz got on a plane, he was up in Pittsfield, flew back, and dealt with him -- directly with the President. But I -- there were many times when I did not do what he said and got the person involved who should stop him. There were times when I didn't and wish I had, but there were an awful lot of things he would ask you to do that you just knew you couldn't do, couldn't do, shouldn't do. So driven, so incredibly focused that it was difficult for him to have leisure time.

Timothy Naftali

You say he didn't know how to unwind --

Charles Colson

Are we back on the camera?

Male Speaker

We're back on.

Timothy Naftali

You say he didn't know how to unwind?

Charles Colson

He didn't know how to unwind. I remember one time after, gosh, I guess it was after the Teamsters endorsed Nixon, which I arranged in '72. I went out to California to be there for the Teamster meeting, which happened to be down the road from San Clemente, so I was there when they made the decision to endorse him, and it was front page story the next day. Well, that next morning he was exuberant and he says, "Let's go for a ride!" And we go outside into the golf cart, which he then drives with the Secret Service trying to follow us. I was never more nervous for my life, because he's driving up and down the roads, and here's where Kissinger's got a house, and he's showing me this stuff, and he's not a good driver, and he's not paying any attention and we're in a golf cart. But it was his way of celebrating. And that's about as far as I ever saw Nixon go in really -- in genuinely taking a moment out just to celebrate something. And he didn't have the capacity to relax. Another time at San Clemente I was there for dinner, just the two of us. So we go up into the little upstairs library that looks out over the Pacific and he said, "This is where I brought Brezhnev and this is where we talked about this," and went through

the entire conversation he had with Brezhnev. That's relaxation for Richard Nixon. I mean I found it kind of interesting, I supposed, but I could've engaged in more stimulating conversation than to relive his negotiations with Brezhnev that took place in this room. But Nixon was so totally focused that I don't think the man knew how to let down, which is why you would get those middle of night calls, which is why he was so intense about everything he did. He didn't know how to cool it.

Timothy Naftali

Recount for us, please, the episode after he learned that George Wallace had been shot. He was concerned about Bremer.

Charles Colson

We were absolutely panicked that Bremer would turn out to have been an ally of some right wing group or somehow some crazy involvement with us. I figured any connection with us and the President would be impeached on the spot. So he called me in his office and, this will be on the tapes I suppose, jokingly said, "Well, you should've finished the job," you know, kidding. He said, "This is bad if any of our people have anything to do with this." He said, "It would be great if he came from the left." So he said, "What can we find out about it?" And I sat down at the table in the Executive Office Building and called Mark Felt at the FBI and said, "Mark, tell me what you can tell me." This is probably 5:30 at night. It's been three hours since the shooting. And they had his apartment cordoned off; they had his place cordoned off. But anyway, there followed a series of phone conversations with Mark Felt in which the President was sitting pantomime telling me what to say, whispering loudly -- I'm sure Mark must have heard it -- and relaying all of these instructions. "Find out if there's any literature inside, any political literature." "Mark, is there any political literature inside? Has anybody been in yet?" He's saying, "Well, I don't have a report on that." I'd say, "Well, call me back when you find out anything." Meanwhile, the President said to me, "How about" -- and this was Howard Hunt -- "How about your friend, the CIA guy? Could we get him to go out there and find out what's going on, or maybe plant some literature?" I said, "I'll go call him." I went back to my office and called him and just said, you know, "Could you do anything? Could you find out anything?" I said, "It's probably too late." And Hunt's response was, "I'm sure they've got the place sealed off. I can't get inside, unless you can get me inside." I said, "I'll call you if I need you," and I never called back. Told the President that and we kept waiting all night -- or, not all night. We kept waiting for the next three hours for reports from Mark Felt, which came either directly to me in the President's office or to me in my office, and then I would call the President and tell him. And, as it turned out, of course he'd been stalking Nixon as well, so there was no political gain or loss, except Wallace being on the sidelines was a help to us.

Timothy Naftali

So, but Nixon was pantomiming in your office as you were talking?

Charles Colson

No, in the President's office. In his office in the EOB --

Timothy Naftali

In the EOB, that's right.

Charles Colson

-- he's sitting there making gestures and I'm trying to read his lips while I'm talking to Mark Felt. There must've been five or six conversations like that.

Timothy Naftali

But Chuck, this is what I find -- I cannot understand about the Watergate period. I see no evidence that he sat with you at any point and said, "What was Hunt doing?" He knew Hunt was involved.

Charles Colson

Oh, sure. Well, he wanted Hunt. No, no, no, go back to the thing that -- that ill-fated conversation about Brookings. Turns to Haldeman and he said, "I've been telling you I want somebody in here who can do these kind of black bag jobs. I want somebody in here who can do what the FBI used to do. We need to do this. We need to protect national security." I now thought about that later and thought that's just -- Mr. President, you can't do that, not under the White House. And I regret I didn't, but I didn't. But I always thought he knew what was going on because -- and the Ellsberg link. I was sure he had approved it because of that conversation outside and in the Oval Office. So, I mean, I always thought Ehrlichman must have gotten his okay. It turns out he didn't, but I always thought he would have.

Timothy Naftali

But in the summer -- or in, let's say, after the election in '72 I'm just surprised Nixon didn't have a conversation with you about Hunt and --

Charles Colson

We did have one.

Timothy Naftali

-- what to do about --

Charles Colson

We did have one. We had two or three in January. No, he knew Hunt was involved. By then everybody knew Hunt was involved. That wasn't, you know -- the question was amnesty. And this is an interesting story. I really felt badly that I'd gotten Hunt into that, really felt badly.

He lost his wife, and I felt responsible. And I didn't know we were paying him money until he called me and told me so, which I recorded and gave to John Dean, thinking John Dean was really a white hat doing an honest investigation. I was never in any of the meetings, the cover-up meetings. If you go back and look at the staff in attendance, I wasn't at them, so I was being set-up. You're right. But Bill Bittman, Hunt's lawyer, came in to see me in January. I agreed to see him because Hunt had asked me to. I was appalled by his approach. It was very heavy-handed, and I cut him off. I said, "Look, if you talk to me this way I cannot help you. If you will just be quiet, I'll tell you what I want to do. As a

friend, not to keep anybody quiet or anything else, I don't care about that. Just as a friend, he should not to go prison because he was doing what he thought he was being told to do by the White House. So if he did go to prison, I would go to the President and ask for amnesty, ask for a pardon, ask for some relief. You have my personal assurance on that. That's not to hush you up or anything else, but it is only because he's a friend, and I brought him in here. I feel responsible." And I really didn't -- I guess I knew he wasn't -- no, I didn't know he wasn't testifying. He had said plenty on his tape that signaled to me that he was volatile and, if not blackmailing us, letting us know that we'd better take care of him. But that wasn't the reason I would talk to the President. I never did talk to the President. However, walking between the West Wing and the EOB one night with Ehrlichman and one other person, there were three of us, may have been Ken Cole, who worked for Ehrlichman, or it might have been Bud Krogh. No, no, there were three of us walking along and I turned to Ehrlichman and I said, "You know, John, I'm going to be leaving here, but if you guys allow Hunt to go to prison, to get convicted and to take the rap for this, I'm going to come back and talk to the President. I'm going to tell the President" -- no -- "Before I leave I'm going to tell the President that I want to be sure he pardons him, before I leave this White House." And Ehrlichman didn't say a word to me. I never did it. I did it so that Ehrlichman would think I was doing it, but I never raised it with the President. Later, Ehrlichman said that I had done it and the President went into a frenzy. That was December when he called me over to the White House. December of '73, and he's sitting up in the Lincoln Sitting Room with all of the tapes out, transcripts in front of him, and he says, "Did I promise clemency for Hunt?" And I said, "No." "Are you sure? Did I have a conversation with you in which I promised it?" I said, "No, positive, not." And you may remember, this turned out to be one of the charges in Watergate, but it did not happen because I didn't ask him. But I told Ehrlichman I was going to because I wanted to be able to come back to Ehrlichman and get him to help me. I figured I was going to be gone, those guys were going to be on the inside and I wanted to keep my leverage, so I said something that wasn't true.

Timothy Naftali

Oh, so the --

Charles Colson

But the President and I did talk about these things. We talked about Liddy, we talked about Hunt, and in one conversation, which is I'm sure on the tapes, the President said, "Does it get here into the White House?" You've heard the tape.

Timothy Naftali

Yeah, but it's -- I think it's in January.

Charles Colson

January, and I said, "Yes." He said, "To Haldeman and Ehrlichman?" And I said, "Yes." At that point I'd figured it out pretty well. And then, you probably listened to the tape of February 14th, but I said to the President as I was leaving, "You've got to get who was responsible for this and get them out of here." I also told him in a conversation in March on the phone that he should get a special counsel and investigate it openly, get the thing out. At that point, I really did realize that he was in deep danger.

Timothy Naftali

Well, you must -- I mean, you knew how the Haldeman system worked.

Charles Colson

Mm-hmm.

Timothy Naftali

Did you think it was possible that \$300,000 could go to somebody to undertake an intelligence operation without Haldeman knowing?

Charles Colson

Oh no, I had every -- well, I didn't have any question that Haldeman approved what went on, but I really didn't think anybody was stupid enough to

-in to the Democratic National Committee. And I didn't think Haldeman would have approved that. No, I did not think that.

Timothy Naftali

So, you think he approved sort of general political intelligence?

Charles Colson

Right, Strong might have or Higby or somebody like that, but Haldeman was too smart for that.

Timothy Naftali

Why weren't you involved in discussions of political intelligence at that point in the '72 campaign?

Charles Colson

You know --

Timothy Naftali

I'm trying to understand why you weren't involved.

Charles Colson

I don't know why, unless it was the rivalry with Mitchell and Magruder. It would have been perfectly logical -- There was a meeting every week in the President's office in the EOB of sort of the brain trust of the campaign, Mitchell, and then the fellow who came in to replace Mitchell --

Timothy Naftali

Clark McGregor.

Charles Colson

Clark McGregor, John Connally, me, Haldeman, sometimes Ehrlichman, not always. And this was sort of the strategy session. The intelligence issue never came up once, and I was not part of the staff discussions or the staff process of approving it. The only time I heard about it was when Hunt brought Liddy into the office. And I have attributed that to the fact that Mitchell and I did not get along.

Timothy Naftali

Do you think the President knew that you were being set up to take the fall for Watergate?

Charles Colson

Yeah, I do. I hate to say that because I would like to think that he had as much affection for me as I did for him, but I think he knew it. I think he had to know it.

Timothy Naftali

How do you explain that, since you've described how close you were?

Charles Colson

Well, I don't agree with Darwin, but that's the survival of the fittest. I was below him on the food chain. If the President of the United States is thinking how he's going to save himself, anybody's expendable.

Timothy Naftali

Last two questions.

Charles Colson

That's not the way I would see it, but that's the way I think he saw it.

Timothy Naftali

Last two questions, because I promised I'd let you go.

Charles Colson

I'm just feeling like I'm not as sharp answering you because it's getting --

Timothy Naftali

One was could you tell us the story, and you tell it in your book, about asking -- you're in prison, you're with a group of your former colleagues and you ask Magruder what happened. Tell us how that happened.

Charles Colson

Well, Dean and I were conversing in my room in Holabird. Testimony was going on. Magruder had been brought there to testify in the trials, so the three of us were there. Herb Kalmbach was also there. And Dean and I were talking and I said to John, I said, "You know, John, we're all in prison because of Watergate, various roles in it. Why do you think we broke into the Democratic National Committee?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "You didn't approve it?" And he said, "No." And I said, "I never heard of it." He said, "Well, the guy that said yes is Magruder." So we go down the hall and get Magruder and bring him up to my room, very suspicious. Sits on the bed and we start idle chatter, and I said, "You know, we were just having a conversation, John, and we're all in prison now, it's all over, we're paying our price for this. Why did we ever get into this thing? Why did we approve the Watergate in the first place? Why did we decide to go in there for intelligence? What were we trying to find?" And he got red in the face and nervous and agitated and got excited and got up and walked out. Never answered us. And both Dean and I just shook our heads because he was the guy, apparently, who gave it the green light. Now later he has said the President told him to. That's ridiculous.

Timothy Naftali

Where were you --

Charles Colson

I don't believe that for a minute.

Timothy Naftali

You don't believe it? Well, what about Mitchell?

Charles Colson

Oh, Mitchell I think did. But the President was always protecting Mitchell; he had to protect Mitchell.

Timothy Naftali

Why?

Charles Colson

Mainly because he felt about Mitchell the way I did about Hunt, only more so. Because he told me once, "John Mitchell didn't want to come here. His wife's an alcoholic. He didn't want this job." He said, "I could never turn on Mitchell. I could never do anything to hurt Mitchell. I forced him to give up his law practice and come here." I think there he really felt a special loyalty, but it would've been

different with me because, you know, I was a young guy on the career ladder moving up, and here's an older man with a half a million dollar a year law practice in New York, and Nixon talks him into coming down as Attorney General. Well, his wife embarrasses him, and he ends up disgraced.

Timothy Naftali

Where were you the day that Nixon resigned?

Charles Colson

In prison at Holabird.

Timothy Naftali

How did you feel?

Charles Colson

Well, I was relieved that it was over, disappointed, because I would have thought he would have taken his own troops with him if he was going to resign, pardon us, or commute the sentences. Hopeful that probably Jerry Ford would do that, sad for Nixon personally. I mean, I really felt it. I really felt empathetic, because I knew what an incredibly difficult thing that was for him to do, just to stand there and look at people in shame, how hard that would be for a man that proud.

Timothy Naftali

Did he ever talk to you about a pardon for you?

Charles Colson

Nope.

Timothy Naftali

Did you see him afterwards?

Charles Colson

Oh, yeah, the first week I was home from prison I got a call from him. I had said something negative about Kissinger on television, Barbara Walters, and Nixon calls me and it's like old times, and we're just chatting away, and he is ebullient. And he said, "By the way," you know he said, "Chuck, we've only got one secretary of state, and we've got to support him." I said, "You didn't like what I said on television?" "I think we should let Henry" -- he was nicely telling me to lay off of Henry. And I'm sure Henry called him. But it got us into a good conversation, and that's when he said to me, "You're not going to go into this religious business, are you?" He said, "If you want some help I've got people in business who would love to hire a guy like you." I said, "No, no." I said, "Sometime I'll come out and see you if you'll let me, maybe a Sunday morning." And I said, "I'll talk to you about it, but I don't know what I'm going to do yet." And I did go out and spend three hours with him on a Sunday

morning, deliberately told him on the phone that I was coming out because I knew he liked Sunday morning worship services at the White House, and he wouldn't go to church now in San Clemente, but I would conduct a church service for him in his office. And I got there, and he had had his phlebitis. His leg was elevated. My wife was sitting in the waiting room. I figured I'd be with him a half an hour. I was there three hours. I never got to talk about what I wanted to talk about. All he talked about was Watergate, mistakes we made. His first question to me was, "What did you go to prison for, Chuck?" I said, "It was for disseminating derogatory information about Daniel Ellsberg." He said, "I told you to do that." And I said, "Yes, I know. That's what I went to prison for." Which story I've not told beyond my family, but my wife roars laughing because here I go to prison for the guy for doing what he said and spent seven months in prison, and he doesn't even know why I'm there. But he wasn't himself then either. He was really shot after he left office. I saw him again a few more times, not in San Clemente but when he came to New York, and saw him getting back on his feet, and always had a good relationship with him. And he was always very friendly to me. I never really spent much time with him after maybe the first three or four years out of -- oh, I know, I was in New York for something, and I called him and he said, "Come on over." So we spent an evening together, and that was maybe the early '80s. But I didn't see him much from then until the end. I talked to him a few times.

Timothy Naftali

Okay, did you feel -- were you -- when Bud Krogh went back to see the President after he had served his time, he felt he should apologize to Nixon because he felt that he had done something that had hurt Nixon. My sense listening to you is that you didn't -- you felt that the blame could be shared.

Charles Colson

I didn't apologize to him because basically I was doing exactly what he told me to do, and I didn't really think I was involved in Watergate. And I had given him -- turns out, Henry Ruth, the assistant prosecutor told me I was the only one who had done this -- I was the one who had given him the right advice. "Get rid of the people who did this. Hire a special investigator." Technically, I left the conspiracy when I did that, but it didn't matter because I had already pled guilty. But he -- I realized if he had taken my advice he might still be President, so I didn't feel like I owed him an apology no.

Timothy Naftali

So did you -- Did he disappoint you?

Charles Colson

Oh, sure, of course, but I also understood the man. Families disappoint one another sometimes, but you're still family.

Timothy Naftali

Thanks for spending time with us.

Charles Colson

Okay, Tim, I enjoyed it.