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The Everlasting Effect of Richard Nixon

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Abstract

Since his resignation almost fifty years ago, President Richard M. Nixon's name has been weaved through the fabric of history thanks to popular culture: books, biographies, films, from comedy to historical fiction, with documentaries, TV shows, cartoons and even comic books. More famous, and the scandal that popular culture mostly re-adapts, the Watergate Scandal, which ensured a distrust in the political system of the United States, a divide still present in the relationship of the public and its elected officials. Young generations of scholars have encountered Nixon's name through popular culture over and over, and are much more likely to learn about his turbulent political career from parodies and satires sooner than from history books. The paper does not to dispute the wrongdoings of this formidable character but showcases how Nixon's name is embedded in public discussion thanks to the iconography of his character, his voice, the strong jawline, the unique nose, and speeches delivered by the former President, his action in and outside of the office, as well as his unique relationship with the media—a relationship which is evolving with each new President in the White House.

Key Words: Popular Culture, United States presidents, history, Richard Nixon, John F. Kennedy

Vincent Vega (played by John Travolta) in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) is tasked with looking after his boss' wife, Mia Wallace (played by Uma Thurman). The two go to a fictional restaurant by the name of Jackrabbit Slim's, where their host, among a long list of celebrity impersonators that make up the staff of the restaurant, is an older gentleman, wearing a simple grey suit, and a brushed back dark hair.¹ His arms always folded in front of him, he is never named by either character, but his mannerisms cannot be mistaken: this is Richard Nixon himself. The grey of his suit is not the color of Nixon's real suit, but the color which it appeared to have through the black and white television sets of the American people during the first televised Presidential debate between him and Democratic candidate John F. Kennedy.² In a final scene, the host returns to announce a twist competition in the restaurant, with a Marilyn Monroe impersonator by his side,³ the actress who famously had an affair with President Kennedy. A small scene, but striking to

¹ *Pulp Fiction*, Dir. Quentin Tarantino, Perf. John Travolta, Bruce Willis and Uma Thurman, Miramax, 1994, DVD.

² CBS, "TNC:172 Kennedy-Nixon First Presidential Debate, 1960." Youtube video, www.youtube.be/gbrckqLSRw.

³ *Pulp Fiction*, *ibid.*

those who recognize the historical significance of reducing Richard Nixon to the role of a waiter, among Hollywood's walk-of-fame characters in an American diner-like burger restaurant.

When talking about the presence that Nixon still possesses, one has to look at the ways the President has been portrayed or quoted since he resigned from the Oval Office. What could not be foreseen at the time would be the everlasting effect that Richard Nixon would have in political and popular culture for the years to come. From his time as a vice-Presidential candidate speaking to American voters about his financial situation, to being part of the first televised presidential debate, all the way down to his interview with David Frost, the media had a hand in shaping history. Like many presidents before and after him, Nixon too cemented himself in the world of popular culture, but not as a hero, more of a parody of himself. The scene in *Pulp Fiction* is one of countless that have brought back the iconography of Richard Nixon, and the aim of this paper is to detail the many ways in which popular culture has gotten a hold of the iconic voice, the strong jawline, the unique nose, as well as the mannerisms and speeches delivered by the former President, and how even in the 21st century he is an iconic character that graces both the small and big screens.

The politician, Richard M. Nixon, the 37th President of the United States, was elected twice and is still the only President to leave his post after a resignation. He was a man who fought long and hard to get into the Oval Office and was on the headlines of both the printed press and television news over several years. Thus, when discussing media history, one is bound to bump into Richard Nixon at some of the biggest milestones. Although it was not until 1968 that he got the presidential seat, his political career had begun far sooner, and his presence in mainstream media helped him to become an expert of the press, but not an expert of presenting himself according to the press' wishes. This was something he had to learn from his opponent John F. Kennedy, who "set out to become the first movie-star politician."⁴ The idea of a White House open to the press was something the Kennedy administration perfected, and all other Presidents after him had to have their battles with the media, as there would be no way of closing the doors to the private life of the first family again. Unlike Nixon, who had already resided in the White House as vice-President to Dwight D. Eisenhower, between the years of 1953-1961, Kennedy was indeed very "attentive to the press."⁵ He made covering the campaign as easy

⁴ John A. Barnes, *John F. Kennedy on Leadership: the Lessons and Legacy of a President* (American Mgmt, 2005), 51.

⁵ Barbie Zelizer, *Covering the body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 20.

as possible, by handing out transcripts of his speeches just minutes after they were made. By cutting back on research and fact-checking, the life of the press was made a lot easier.⁶ This was a practice that the press looked for in every candidate afterwards, and also one of the reasons Nixon disliked them so much.

Being the only President to ever resign from the Oval Office, he already made history. Still, this portrayal in all of these movies and TV shows point to one thing: his failure. As this paper has discussed thoroughly, Nixon was a very active politician, and even though the media reported on it constantly, it seems that his shortcomings overshadowed many of his political successes in his lifetime. The young Richard, eventually the running mate of Dwight D. Eisenhower, was a Senator from California who had experience as a politician but was not a leading man. Nixon was previously a congressman for California between 1947 and 1950, after which he became a senator, a position he later resigned from purposefully to run for the vice-Presidential seat. He became known for the indictment of Alger Hiss, a State Department official whom Nixon was determined to expose as a Communist.⁷ The case was covered thoroughly by the press and as Nixon became more famous around the country, he also advanced in his political career. Nixon's rise to power was jumpstarted by his presence on the Republican ticket, and despite his active years as a successful politician, being a representative or a senator alone would not have moved him ahead. His use of the media for manipulation and campaigning was more visible once he was in office. He was a good choice for second in command, but he had not become the right candidate for the presidency until his battle against vice-President Hubert Humphrey in 1968. When it comes to Nixon, the entirety of his time in the White House, including when he held the vice-Presidential seat, is referenced or parodied in popular culture, even though his resignation is considered to be the most important moment in his career.

Before diving into the several facets of popular culture in which Richard Nixon was featured, it has to be mentioned that there are hundreds of films set in the 70s that feature Nixon through archival footage of his television appearances. In these the main characters either refer to his words, or the footage is used to highlight the period in which the story takes place. When looking at these films, there are also two kinds: movies that had an actor portray the late President, and the ones that used or remade archival footage for the story. The first movie to be discussed was written and directed by Olive Stone, entitled promptly Nixon (1995). It is one of four movies that feature the President's name

⁶ Ibid, 20-1.

⁷ Deb Riechmann, "Nixon Urged Hiss Indictment," last modified October 13, 1999, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/feed/a52881-1999oct13.htm.

in their title, and that will be discussed in the paper, the other three *being* *The Assassination of Richard Nixon* (2004), which only used archival footage; *Frost/Nixon* (2008); and finally, *Dick* (1999), which was a nickname which became famous following his actions to remain in power, and the movie plays with the ambiguity of the word.

This first film, directed by Stone, received mixed reviews, as its aim was to focus on the feelings of Nixon (played by Anthony Hopkins) about how the lies that he and his administration were keeping were eating at him, resulting in continuous conflict between him and his wife Pat Nixon (played by Joan Allen). The three-hour movie starts from Nixon's first run for office against John F. Kennedy, and ends with his resignation. The movie also aims to showcase the hardships of campaigning, as well as the weight of being president. It is a truly touching movie, and it rebuilds famous footage of Nixon, as well as uses the tapes that ended up incriminating the President and his staff.⁸ Director Oliver Stone has often been criticized for his depiction of Presidents in several of his movies. However, unlike the other examples in this paper, the audience knows exactly what to expect when seeing a film entitled "Nixon." What makes the former President an iconic figure is that since his resignation in 1974, he has become a somewhat of a non-playable character, who appears in the least expected stories, many times not having anything to do with his political career. This paper urges the readers to see this movie and to read up on the criticism that follows it, as it is highly educational and a great representation of a difficult time in US history.

The Assassination of Richard Nixon (1994) is the true story of Sam Bicke⁹, who wished to divert a passenger plane and crash it into the White House in hopes of killing Nixon. He was stopped at the airport; however, he believed that he would be thought of as a hero, as his frustration with a dishonest and racist America led him to desperation, and he believed that Nixon was the biggest conman of them all. This movie only used archival footage of Nixon's speeches held at the White House, and voiceover of the tapes Bicke made of his plans. The story the movie was based on took place in 1972, when Nixon was re-elected, and was followed by his resignation in 1974.

In the past fifty years, the resigned President has become somewhat of an icon. Him smiling and doing the victory or peace sign with both hands in the air—a pose he performed both when he won the election for the first time, as well as when he left the White House for the last time, before entering Marine One —, is so ubiquitous that it was featured in the movie *Point Break* (1991). In the movie bank robbers wore presidential masks, and the one who got Nixon, before exiting the bank looked back at the hostages,

⁸ *Nixon*, Dir. Oliver Stone, Perf. Anthony Hopkins, Cinergi Pictures Entertainment, 1995, DVD.

⁹ Originally Samuel Byck, but changed for the movie.

raised his hand in victory and, imitating Nixon's voice, said "I'm not a crook."¹⁰ Nixon included this sentence in a speech about figures and earnings only to end in the positive note that reinforced how he was only serving the American people: "[They] have got to know whether or not their President is a crook," and he then uttered the most famous line of his whole political career "Well, I am not a crook."¹¹

Another movie quoting these iconic lines was *Contact* (1997), in which the opening scene zooms out from Earth and we listen to transmissions on a satellite orbiting. Among famous lines from other Cold War presidents, one can easily make out the voice of Nixon emphasizing that he is not, indeed, a crook.¹² Another radio transmission can be heard in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975): as Brad and Janet get lost in the rain in the night, from the radio the audience can make out clearly the (by 1976 famous) resignation speech of the President, aired back in 1974, and it is this transmission that actually dates the story of the film for the viewer.¹³

In the mini-series *11.22.63* (2016) the main character travels back in time to 1960 where a tailor simply tells him "When I vote, it comes down to character. Richard Nixon has it. You look at him, you think that's a good man,"¹⁴ and as the protagonist already knows about the Watergate scandal he just smiles awkwardly. This was not the only example of a main character encountering either the phenomenon or the man himself through time travel. Nixon appeared at the beginning of his presidency in the British series *Doctor Who* (2005-), where the protagonist, the Doctor, was trying to save a little girl who called the Oval Office over and over again looking for help. At the end of their adventure Nixon approaches the Doctor and asks him if he will be remembered, to which the reply is "Oh Dicky. Tricky Dicky. They are never going to forget you."¹⁵ He is already referencing some of the nicknames Nixon received during his life in office, prior and during the presidency.

¹⁰ *Point Break*, Dir. Kathryn Bigelow, Perf. Keanu Reeves and Patrick Swayze, Largo Entertainment, 1991, Videocassette.

¹¹ Carroll Kilpatrick, "Nixon Tells Editors, 'I'm Not a Crook,'" last modified October 13, 2016, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/watergate/articles/111873-1.htm.

¹² *Contact*, Dir. Robert Zemeckis, Perf. Jodie Foster and Matthew McConaughey, Warner Bros., 1997, DVD.

¹³ *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, Dir. Jim Sharman, Perf. Tim Curry, Susan Sarandon and Barry Bostwick, Twentieth Century Fox, 1975, DVD.

¹⁴ *11.22.63*, season 1, episode 1, "The Rabbit Hole," directed by Kevin Macdonald, written by Bridget Carpenter, aired February 15, 2016.

¹⁵ *Doctor Who*, season 6, episode 2, "Day of the Moon," directed by Toby Haynes and Julian Simpson, written by Stephen Moffat, aired April 30, 2011. BBC.

Although it is an entertaining notion to take a story to the past through time travel, and even perhaps alter the outcome of history, most movies that look at the 37th President were made in the genre of historical fiction, among them the award-winning *Forrest Gump* (1994), where the main character, Forrest, being at the Watergate Hotel as a guest of the President, sees men with flashlights in another room. He believes that they are looking for a fuse box, so he calls it in to get them help, when in actuality those were the men who broke into the Democratic office in order to bug it.¹⁶ Another film of comedic nature entitled *Dick* (1999), solely devoted to Nixon's last years in office, is about two teenage girls who befriend the President. The whole purpose of the movie is to rewrite history, in a way to make it seem that Dick Nixon made foreign and national political decision due to his friendship with the two main characters. One of them lived at the Watergate complex and because of that the White House keeps a closer eye on them. They walk his dog Checkers, they ask him to end the war, they teach him the iconic victory sign, which he learns to be a peace sign, as well as influence those people in his staff who decided to resign before the truth about the scandal was finally revealed.¹⁷

It has been proven popular to take history and add new characters to it: besides the comedic effect, it also encompasses an educative aim, as the insertion of a character through whom the audience can witness history is a great way to understand how and why certain events unfolded the way they did. Today a large majority of television audience might only hear about Richard Nixon because they encounter him in a movie or a TV show. A great example of a joke in a movie for kids but aimed at an older audience was the animated film *Minions*, released in 2015, where we can see a campaign poster from 1968 with Nixon on it, hands in the air doing the peace sign, and the slogan reading "Finally a name you can TRUST!"¹⁸ It was a children's movie which included several jokes from the sixties that probably brought up a lot of questions that only the adults could answer, Nixon being the sign of trust is one of them. Even if the evil henchmen that are the *Minions*, did not help with his election, there was one TV series which believed that his rise to power was aided by outside forces. In an episode of *The X Files* (1993-2018) series Nixon is seen with a genie who can grant him three wishes. The detectives find a pattern for the mysterious appearance of the genie and conclude that Nixon was a man "who got all the

¹⁶ *Forrest Gump*, Dir. Robert Zemeckis, Perf. Tom Hanks, Robin Wright, Gary Sinise, Sally Field, and Mykelti Williamson, Paramount Pictures, 1994, DVD.

¹⁷ *Dick*, Dir. Andrew Flemming, Perf. Michelle Williams, Kirsten Dunst and Dan Hedaya, Canal+ Droits Audiovisuels, 1999, DVD.

¹⁸ *Minions*. Dir. Kyle Balda and Pierre Coffin. Dreamworks, 2015. DVD.

power he ever wished for and then lost it,”¹⁹ alluding to the idea that he really wished for more than he could handle, thus bringing about his own destruction. Both of these examples featured nothing more than an image of the former President, but that is further proof of how Nixon’s fame precedes him, and that neither a movie nor a TV show needs to detail the history of his time in office in order build on it.

Comic books are wonderful examples of how superheroes can be added to historical events and be made active participants. Richard Nixon appeared in the comic book and then the movie adaptation of *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (2014). In it the people are afraid of mutants, afraid of everything that is unknown to them, and the President is in the end saved by them.²⁰ Big comic book series, which included continuous criticism of contemporary society, in particular the X-Men series, heavily feature presidents in their plots. This series has been in print since 1963, thus adding to the rich history of comic books and graphic novels that narrate major moments in United States history. The comic book version, *Days of Future Past* was published back in 1981.²¹ That was not the only time Nixon appeared in a comic book. It is not just major companies – such as Marvel and DC comics – who decided to use him, but there was a small comic entitled *Forward with Eisenhower – Nixon* printed with the intent of helping the campaign along. Although these are almost impossible to get, some faint copies exist in museums, showing a young Richard Nixon smiling as the candidate for the vice-Presidential office. Arguably, these are not of the same caliber as those of the major distributors, but it is interesting mainly because very few Presidents used comic books in their campaigns, and at a time when television was not as widespread, it is fascinating to witness the tools with which both the Republican and the Democratic party wished to inform its possible voters for the upcoming election season.

When it comes to political satire there is one show that has to be mentioned, as it did not only cash in on the fame of the former President, but decided to resurrect him: *Futurama* (1999-2014), by creator Matt Groening. According to the show, taking place in the year 3000, people’s heads can be preserved and given eternal life, and as such the show kept bringing back historical figures. Richard Nixon is first introduced in a museum, in the Hall of Presidents, and remains a returning character in the series, as he becomes the President once more in a story line that aims to parody voter turnout in election season

¹⁹ *The X-Files*, season seven, episode 21, “Je Souhaite,” directed by Vince Gilligan, written by Chris Carter, aired May 14, 2000.

²⁰ *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, Dir. Bryan Singer, Perf. Hugh Jackman and Jennifer Lawrence, Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2014, DVD.

²¹ Chris Claremont and John Byrne, *X-Men #138–141*, *The Uncanny X-Men #142–143*, Marvel Comics. January, 1981.

in the United States. In one episode Nixon decides to campaign to become President of Earth. Among the many hints at actual historical events, first the protagonists of the show make recordings of him, a call back to his recordings in the Oval Office. Second, Nixon gives a speech about how he is going to keep the robot body that helps him move around, referencing the *Checkers speech*,²² made during his campaign to stay as the candidate for the vice-presidency, “I paid for this body and I would no sooner return it than I would my cocker-spaniel dog Checkers”.²³ In the cartoon Nixon still wins the elections because he is the only one who goes to vote. Nixon’s head then receives a body, no other than that of Spiro Agnew, his former vice-President, who had resigned just before the President did, amidst the Watergate Scandal. A small but significant detail, as a vice-President literally made up the body of the President, and thus allowed the bodyless head to perform his famous victory sign once again. In another episode which parodies the Vietnam War - even playing the title song of the famous show *M*A*S*H* (1972–1983) - there is one scene where Nixon says “I want this robot fixed. Fixed like Kennedy fixed the 1960’s election,”²⁴ which was a reference to the results which were brought into question at the time. Kennedy’s victory was within the margin of error and many believed that Nixon was cheated out of getting the presidency. There was an article written by Richard Wilson, a veteran Washington correspondent and columnist, entitled “How to Steal an Election,” highlighting how close the numbers were. After the article got published Nixon himself called for Wilson and told him fair and square that the presidency cannot be stolen.²⁵ The *Futurama* series always portrayed the President as somewhat of an aggressive type and although records show that Nixon let go of his loss to Kennedy, maybe that was not true considering his nature. Nixon’s character was featured in sixteen episodes, as he was elected president of the universe in the year 3000, and out of those episodes over a half has one-liners referencing his political career.

During his lifetime, President Nixon wrote six books that were published after his time in office ended, among them *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (1978), as well as a revised and more personal biography entitled *In the Arena: A Memoir of Victory, Defeat, and Renewal*

²² Richard Nixon, “Checkers Speech,” September 23, 1952, television broadcast, *Media Services*.

²³ *Futurama*, season 2, episode 7, “A Head in the Polls,” directed by Bret Haaland, written by Matt Groening, aired December 12, 1999.

²⁴ *Futurama*, season 3, episode 2, “Was Is the H-Word,” directed by Ron Hughart, written by Matt Groening, aired November 26, 2000.

²⁵ Gary Allen, *Richard Nixon: The Man Behind the Mask* (Western Islands, Boston–Los Angeles, 1971), 121.

(1990).²⁶ The Watergate affair reached beyond the sea and the reason for his resignation was clear to everyone, although the flow of information, even that of popular culture, was limited in the Cold War era. It was not uncommon to add the word “gate” to end of words to signify a political scandal. And although that disgrace tinted his name, the former President could not disappear from public eye. As far as popular culture is concerned, Nixon’s character has appeared in both historical fiction as well as satire, the latter emphasizing all those negative connotations that come with how he was forced to resign the presidency and his confession to David Frost.²⁷

It is hard to find any movies or true story adaptations that detail his successes as vice-President. Although Nixon was not present in the media on an everyday basis, as far as domestic policy was concerned, he did become an “ambassador” for the United States and as such appeared in international news all the time. He was sent on several missions abroad in a crucial era of the Cold War. His diplomatic ability and standing strong during a troublesome time made him somewhat “cool” and famous on an international level.²⁸ His first trips took him to Asia, South Korea and Japan, which would give Americans the impression that he was an expert in Asian affairs. He was more of an “ambassador” sent around to deliver Eisenhower’s will. In 1956 he traveled to Europe, Austria to meet with Hungarian refugees and then a year later he traveled to Africa.²⁹ The idea of Richard Nixon as a hero back home was born after a trip to South America, from which he believed he would not return safely or that he might be killed.³⁰ During his trip he visited Peru, where people chanted “Go Home Nixon!;” in Venezuela he was spat on, leaving the military of the country as well as that of the United States to help rescue him. He arrived home to the States, where thousands of Americans gathered at the airport to welcome him, including the President, and for weeks people praised the bravery with which he faced the Venezuelan people alongside his wife Pat.³¹

Evidence points to his wrongdoing being the only thing that history left us. Not to mention that his rivalry with Kennedy has seemed to survive both of them, despite historians revealing that the two men were on good terms and respected each other a great deal

²⁶ The author of this paper is yet to find a bookstore in Hungary that sell any of President Nixon’s books, either by or about him, yet books of John F. Kennedy and his wife fill up the history sections.

²⁷ Richard Nixon, interview by David Frost, *The Watergate Interview*, CBS, May 5, 1977.

²⁸ “The Vice-president,” *The Nixon Library and Museum*, accessed August 31, 2016, www.nixonlibrary.gov/thelife/apolitician/thevicepresident.php.

²⁹ “Richard M. Nixon, 36th Vice-President (1953-1961),” *United States Senate*, accessed September 1, 2016, www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/VP_Richard_Nixon.htm.

³⁰ “The Vice-president,” *ibid.*

³¹ “Richard M. Nixon,” *ibid.*

as politicians. However, this rivalry has had an impact not only on political history, but also on the popular culture that tries to detail and represent it, either to showcase history or to distort it in an entertaining manner for the viewer.

There is no question about how the Watergate Scandal ensured a distrust in the political enterprise of the United States, a divide still present in the relationship of the public and its elected officials. Any and all illegal activities must come at a cost, even if Nixon did not seem to think so. In his interview with David Frost, he claimed that when the President did something it was not illegal,³² which was the sentence that fired up the conversation between them. And among the many reasons why Nixon's action should be and are still taught in classrooms is really what American democracy is based on: that one should not accept authority blindly but instead should place value on searching for facts.³³ The Constitution of the United States in its first amendment stipulates the need for free speech and free press, while the fourth amendment points out that "the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures" cannot be violated in any way, and not just by the police but by any outsider.³⁴ The Watergate break-in was indisputably an illegal activity, and there are more examples of how one lie can stick with a politician's career for life. Perhaps the attempt of the movies listed above parodying this part of history is an attempt to heal the nation, as although the severity of the scandal cannot be overlooked, it can still be reexamined and understood in a different manner than it was at the time.

Although Nixon evaded impeachment by resigning and receiving an official pardon from President Gerald Ford, the simplest argument one can make for reusing Nixon's case is the fact that it made him relatable. When one makes a mistake, they seem more down to earth, more approachable, but Nixon never showed his personal side more than he had to. The main reason Oliver Stone's movie was so highly debated was that trying to see inside the head of this complex character seems impossible. Nixon was a very smart man and an even more skilled politician. It is not surprising that any admission of guilt for wrongdoing could be gotten out of Nixon only once he left his political career. The media was not easy on Nixon, and unfortunately for him, no matter his successes in foreign affairs, the American people have always voted based on internal affairs.³⁵

³² Richard Nixon, interview by David Frost, *War at home and abroad*, CBS, May 19, 1977.

³³ Malcolm Katz, "Classroom Implications of Watergate," *The Phi Delta Kappan* 55, no. 7 (1974): 465–67.

³⁴ "Fourth Amendment," *Legal Information Institute*, Cornell Law School, www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/fourth_amendment.

³⁵ Marion Just et al. "Leadership Image-Building: After Clinton and Watergate," *Political Psychology* 21, no. 1 (2000): 179–98.

And as far as the general population is concerned, something broke in the American people. Conspiracy theories are nothing new in the history of a country, but the fact that the White House could be behind something illegal while its mission has been to uphold the laws of the land, had been unprecedented. People were given the sense that their government was working against them. Such conspiracies would come to life with or without Nixon, as it did in the case of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, but they would not stand on such solid ground without him. The scandal brought about a threat to the democratic country that the Americans had fought so hard to establish. Before Watergate it seemed natural that governmental information should be confidential, a great example would be the Warren Report which details the death of Kennedy. After this scandal, however, common sense suggests having papers available to the public at all costs.³⁶ The aim to end this kind of secrecy over official documents can be seen as we speak, as the courts have recently ordered the release of former President Donald J. Trump's tax records; not only that, but there was considerable public interest over the report submitted by Robert Mueller and his team.³⁷ Today the courts are trying to unveil if there was any real conspiracy behind the January 6th insurrection against The Capitol in 2021, in an aim to ensure the public that justice will be done.³⁸ The disbelief in one's government is the worst thing any politician can elicit in the public, and Nixon knew very well what he had done as he said so himself to David Frost in their interview "I let down the country, I let down our system of government and the dreams of all those young people that ought to get into government but will think it is all too corrupt and the rest."³⁹ The magnitude of this interview also resonates into the 21st century, for instance by plays reenacting it. The most famous of these was written by Peter Morgan, made into a movie by Ron Howard, being then awarded Movie of the Year AFI award in 2009, as well as nominated for five Academy Awards, entitled *Frost/Nixon* (2008, *Frost/Nixon*). The movie, with Frank Langella as Richard Nixon and Michael Sheen as Australian born David Frost, focuses on the most famous part of the original interview series, where Nixon admits his wrongdoing.⁴⁰

³⁶ Richard R. Schwartz, "President's Message: After Watergate," *Law & Society Review* 8, no. 1 (1973), 3-5.

³⁷ Jan Pytalski, "Hundreds gather near White House to demand Mueller report release," last modified April 4, 2019, www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-russia-demonstrations/us-rallies-scheduled-to-demand-release-of-full-mueller-report-idUSKCN1RG14Q.

³⁸ Madison Hall, et al. "702 People Have Been Charged in the Capitol Insurrection so Far. This Searchable Table Shows Them All," last modified November 22, 2021, www.insider.com/all-the-us-capitol-pro-trump-riot-arrests-charges-names-2021-1.

³⁹ Richard Nixon, interview by David Frost, *The Watergate Interview*, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Frost/Nixon*. Dir. Ron Howard, Universal Pictures, 2008, DVD.

The film was purposefully left as a final example in this paper: as anticipated in the paragraph on Oliver Stone's *Nixon*, its title already allures to the fact that the story is about the former President. This depicts the magnitude of one single moment in the life of former President Richard Milhous Nixon, and not the entirety of his political career. There are several moments in the career of this big politician that popular culture has chosen to deal with, but this final chapter is almost never subject to parody or satire. The complexity of the situation that arose from the Watergate scandal is one that the American audience is still dealing with, and the waves that stemmed from mistrust in the political elite is one that is felt up to this day.

Richard Nixon filmed the Checkers Speech in 1952, which means that he has been present in public discussion for seventy years. Of those who served in the White House and are prominent in popular culture, John F. Kennedy represents the loss of potential, the loss of a possible future, while Nixon is villainized and far too often the target of a joke. But since his resignation almost fifty years ago, Nixon's name has been weaved through the fabric of history thanks to popular culture: books, biographies, films, from comedy to historical fiction, with documentaries, TV shows, cartoons and even comic books. Young generations are bound to encounter the name of this famous President through popular culture over and over, instead of the history books, and that is the case for US citizens as well as a foreign audience to the United States. The aim of this paper was not to dispute the wrongdoings of this formidable character but to showcase how, perhaps some seventy years from now, Nixon's name will still be embedded in public discussion, thanks to the iconography of his character, his mannerism, his action in and outside of the office, as well as his unique relationship with the media – a relationship which is evolving with each new President in the White House.

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