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Best-Ever Nixon Document

The president's 1970 memo "with regard to the whole warmth business."

By Bonnie Goldstein

Posted Monday, July 16, 2007, at 2:31 PM ET

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On July 11, [papers](#) and [recordings](#) of [President Richard Nixon](#) that previously had been [withheld](#) by the [Nixon Foundation](#) were [released online](#) and at the [Richard Nixon Presidential Library](#) in Yorba Linda, Calif. Among these was an extraordinary piece of Nixoniana: a meandering [11-page memorandum](#) (PDF) that Nixon sent in 1970 to his chief of staff, [H.R. Haldeman](#), urging that White House staffers talk up what a warm human being "RN" was. (As was his habit, in the memo Nixon referred to himself repeatedly in the third person.) Nixon complained that "average voters" regarded RN as "an efficient, crafty, cold, machine." To help correct this common misconception, Nixon cited "warm items" (Page 3) such as "the calls that I make to people when they are sick, even though they no longer mean anything to anybody" (Page 4). "I called some mothers and wives of men that had been killed in Vietnam," he added, helpfully.

Because he was Nixon, he resented somewhat the social imperative that the president be courteous. "[W]e have gone far beyond any previous president ... in breaking our backs to be nicey-nice to the [Cabinet](#), staff and the [Congress](#) ... around Christmastime," Nixon grouched (Page 3). "I have treated them like dignified human beings and not like dirt under my feet" (Page 4), he continued. Connoisseurs will recognize this last as a choice illustration of Nixon's rhetorical tendency to render the thing he denies (that he treats subordinates "like dirt under my feet," that he is "a crook," that the press will "have Dick Nixon to kick around") much more vivid than the denial itself ("not," "won't").

The public's failure to appreciate RN in "the whole field of warmth" (Page 4), Nixon believed, stemmed in part from his own humble reluctance to recite "all the good deeds" he had done. "The President does not brag about all ... he does for people" (Page 4). He had kept to himself, for instance, that "when I learned that [Alex Butterfield's](#) daughter ... had been badly injured, I told Alex to bring her to the office even though I knew she would be embarrassed about her appearance" (Page 5). Nixon [resigned](#) in August 1974 after Oval Office tapes showed that he had worked to cover up the White House's role in the Watergate burglary. He never did persuade the American people "with regard to the whole warmth business" (Page 6), and the 1970 memo, which appears below and on the following 10 pages, stands as a poignant illustration why not.

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"Son Tay" was the site of a failed attempt to free U.S. prisoners of war held by the North Vietnamese.

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"Jordan" refers to [events](#) following King Hussein's military assault in 1970 against Palestinian forces then situated inside Jordan. Syria responded by sending tanks to Jordan. This in turn prompted the U.S. to move aircraft carriers and other ships to the area. Nixon privately assured Israel that if Egypt and/or the Soviet Union were to join the threatened Syrian incursion, then the United States would commit troops to support Israel and Jordan. The threat of a Cold War confrontation was mooted when Jordanian troops halted the Syrian incursion.

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