

**Volume 3**

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**The Wit of Richard Nixon**

**Lead:** Humor is the ready partner of many successful politicians, but humor never came easy to Richard Nixon. He succeeded largely without it.

**Intro.:** *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

**Content:** To evaluate the wit of Richard Nixon is difficult. There is Watergate. There is a widespread but inaccurate perception that Nixon had no humor at all. His sense of humor was real, but it reflected the darkness of his emotional apparatus, the

**demons and hostility that plagued him.**

**Nixon was a transition figure, a straight-up politician who did not possess and could never quite fake the charisma required of politicians in the TV age. His experience with the dashing Jack Kennedy, whose seduction of the press was the stuff of legend, convinced Nixon that he needed to effect some kind of flair that would reach through the picture tube and grab the electorate, but his efforts to be loved were nearly always a little heavy-handed. He was competent and highly-qualified, even brilliant, but like all politicians he wanted to be loved and admired. It never worked for him.**

**Nixon came closest to open humor in his dealings with the press, but even that was pretty dark and may even have led to his downfall. There was little love between Nixon and Dan Rather of CBS. Once Rather stood during a news conference to ask a question "I want to state this question with due respect for your office," Nixon retorted, "That would be unusual."**

**The President was obsessed with press leaks. Referring to a 1971 secret domestic initiative, he said, "That was a pretty well-kept secret. I didn't read about until the afternoon papers." His determination to plug those press leaks led to his establishment of the**

**security strike group, "The Plumbers" which in turn led to Watergate, his impeachment, his downfall and his disgrace.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

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