



One Man Against the World, by Tim Weiner
Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, February 2016

After all these years, what possibly is left to learn about the Nixon presidency? Plenty, according to Tim Weiner, author of the riveting new biography, *One Man Against the World: The Tragedy of Richard Nixon*. As Weiner, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award, notes: "For those who lived under Nixon, it is worse than you may recall. For those too young to recall, it is worse than you can imagine."

If ever there were a writer would could make history come alive, that would be Tim Weiner. His edgy, take-charge prose, coupled with newly declassified documents, make the book a chilling, compelling read.

Front and center is Nixon's tragic flaw: his belief that the presidency is above the law. Weiner skillfully illustrates how the Vietnam War and Watergate scandal were intertwined. Not wanting to be the first president "to lose a war," Nixon was "at war with his own military," defying logic and often with callous disregard for humanity. Nixon in turn treated his own citizens as if they too were his enemies. His bombing of a neutral country—Cambodia—lead to Kent State and the May 1970 Student Strike in which students (including this reviewer) in protest shut down their colleges across the country.

Most fascinating is Weiner's assessment of Nixon's inner circle. He has particular contempt for Secretary of State Henry Kissinger whom he portrays as a sycophantic opportunist, focused on his own personal power. Kissinger cynically derided Vietnam as a "fifth-rate agricultural nation," as the war raged on and on.

Weiner does acknowledge heroes amid the Watergate debacle. Elliot Richardson, as Attorney General, was dismissed when he refused Nixon's order to fire Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox. That task was left to Robert Bork, who, as the story goes, had been promised a Supreme Court appointment by Nixon. Bork would have to wait until 1987 for Ronald Reagan to nominate him to the high court.

However, Bork's nomination was then blocked by senators who had been involved in Nixon's impeachment—a footnote to "our long national nightmare."