

Four years after President Nixon resigned, he agreed to a series of interviews with David Frost, a British journalist. The first series of interviews - which took place in May of 1977 - were fairly easy for Nixon, and he avoided most controversial issues.

Then Frost moved on to the issues involving Watergate and the alleged cover-up of wrongdoing. Did the President know what was happening? Did he authorize a cover-up? Did he let the American people down?

The former President says that he voluntarily impeached himself when he resigned. He also tells us that he made many bad judgments when it came to the whole issue of Watergate.

These are among the words Nixon uses to describe his role in the whole matter:

I came to the edge ... Under the circumstances I would have to say that a reasonable person could call that a cover-up. I didn't think of it as a cover-up. I didn't intend it to cover-up.

Let me say if I intended to cover-up, believe me I'd have done it. Do you know how I could have done it, so easily? I could have done it immediately after the election simply by giving clemency to everyone and the whole thing would have gone away.

I couldn't do that because I said clemency was wrong.

But now we come down to the key point and let me answer it in my own way. How do I feel about the American people. Whether I should have resigned earlier. Or what I should say to them now.

Well, that forces me to rationalize now and give you a carefully prepared, cropped statement. I didn't expect this question, frankly, though so I'm not going to give you that, but I could tell you this.

I think I said it all in one of those moments when you're not thinking, and you say things that are really in your heart ... I had a lot of difficult meetings those last days before I resigned. The most difficult, and the only one where I broke into tears ... it was the first time I cried since Eisenhower died, I met with all my key supporters just a half-hour before going on television ... We all sat around ... Democrats and Republicans, about half and half ... at the very end, after saying "thank you for all your support during these tough years ... thank you particularly for helping us to end the draft ... thank you for the little acts of friendship over the years" ... half the people around the table were crying.

... I just can't stand seeing someone else cry ... I must say I sort of cracked-up ... pushed my chair back ... I blurted out, and I said: "I'm sorry. I just hope I haven't let you down."

Well, when I said "I just hope I haven't let you down," that said it all. I had. I let down my friends. I let down the country. I let down our system of government, the dreams of all those young people that ought to get into government but will think it's all too corrupt and the rest.

Most of all, I let down an opportunity that I would have had for 2 1/2 more years to proceed with great projects and programs for building a lasting peace which has been my dream...

Yup, I let the American people down, and I have to carry that burden with me for the rest of my life. My political life is over. I will never again have an opportunity to serve in any official position. Maybe I can give a little advice from time to time.

And so I can only say that in answer to your question that while technically I did not commit a crime - an impeachable offense - these are legalisms. As far as the handling of this matter is concerned, it was so botched-up, I made so many bad judgments, the worst ones mistakes of the heart rather than the head ... but let me say a man in that top job - he's got to have a heart, but his head must always rule his heart.

After apologizing to the American people, in this interview, Richard Nixon lived another 17 years. He visited the White House, as a guest of other Presidents. He was asked, from time to time, to give his advice on matters - particularly involving foreign affairs - but he'd accurately predicted that his "political life was over."

He wrote several books. With the help of others, including Diane Sawyer, he worked on his memoirs. (Sawyer also helped to prepare Nixon for the David Frost interviews).

The former American President died on April 22, 1994. Five American Presidents, and their wives, attended his funeral. He and his wife are buried at the Nixon Presidential Library and Museum located near his birth home in Yorba Linda, California.

Credits:

Clip of the Frost-Nixon interview, during May of 1977, online courtesy U.S. National Archives. An edited version of the interviews is available, among other places, at Amazon.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Richard-Nixon-Apologizes-for-Watergate0>

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