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Since the Watergate trials and tribulations of the Administration began dominating the news, there have been wide swings in public sentiment about President Nixon, his aides, Senate investigators and the press. Trying to measure public opinion can be tricky business, and this week scores of TIME reporters applied themselves to the task. For a special box accompanying our cover story, TIME revisited three dozen citizens whom we had first interviewed more than five months ago (TIME, May 28). For the cover story itself, concerned with the mood of America after the latest Watergate developments, TIME reporters round the country sought the views of hundreds of citizens from all walks of life.

In the South, where TIME reporters were directed by Atlanta Bureau Chief James Bell, most people seemed not only willing to talk, but eager to be heard. In fact, only one of all the Southerners approached by TIME—a shopper in Miami—declined to talk. Many of the individual interviews drew on-lookers into the discussion. In a New Orleans neighborhood bar, for example, the quiet questioning of patrons by one reporter quickly turned into a spirited political seminar that included Tulane University teachers and local taxi drivers.

In Los Angeles, Bureau Chief Richard Duncan assigned reporters to sound the public's temper throughout the Western states. In addition, Duncan conducted interviews himself, questioning among others a cattleman, a small-town banker, a former Nixon Administration official and Duncan's own daughter—about the sentiments of her eighth-grade history class.

Midwest Bureau Chief Gregory Wierzyński, whose reporters covered the heartland, found that people were openly discussing the possibility of presidential impeachment. He detected a shift in the public's attitude toward the press. "In the early days of Watergate," says Wierzyński, "I used to get chewed out regularly about press irresponsibility, particularly when talking to partisan Republicans. For the most part, recent events have stilled the lectures."

The never-ending flow of surprising news events caused some unexpected difficulties. Boston Bureau Chief Sandra Burton, who with her reporters was responsible for the New England states, spent the early part of the week conducting interviews around Plymouth, Mass.—an area symbolic not only as the landing place of the Pilgrims but also as the only congressional district in Massachusetts to cast its lot with Nixon in 1972. When it was revealed at midweek that two Watergate tapes were missing, Burton was forced to conduct her interviews a second time to see how opinions had changed.

New York Bureau Chief Marsh Clark took charge of covering the rest of the Eastern states. "It was an interesting week for me," said Clark, who had recently been on special assignment covering the Middle East war. "I returned from Jerusalem on Monday and started working on this story Tuesday. I found the complexities of the domestic political war no less challenging than those of the Middle East."

Ralph P. Davidson

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