



Frost/Nixon

Peter Morgan

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In 1972, a break-in was foiled at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate Hotel in Washington DC. Within days a connection had been made with the White House and President Nixon's closest aides. It unleashed one of the greatest scandals in modern American politics and ended with Nixon's humiliating resignation.

David Frost's interviews with Richard Nixon drew the largest audience ever for a news interview. Could this British talk-show host, with no known political convictions and a playboy reputation, be the one to elicit an apology from the man who committed one of the biggest felonies in American political history?

Frost/Nixon premiered at the Donmar Warehouse, London, in August 2006.

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From Reader Review Frost/Nixon for online ebook

Kelsey says

4.5/5

I'm such a sucker for art that looks at Watergate - and while this is pretty much a dude fest, it's intriguing to see the combat by interview unfold. Also Peter Morgan is a genius so there's that. Dude wrote "The Queen". Who can't love him for that?

John Hood says

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Christmas with Nixon

This Year, Celebrate With a Ghost

By John Hood

Face it. Not everybody's peachy keen on all this Christmas stuff — the wining and the dining, the giving and the receiving, the Merry Ol' this-and-that which insists that no matter how you live it, It's a Wonderful Life. Add the long list of folks who don't even have someone to celebrate with in the first place, and you come up with quite a crowd.

But rather than suggest that the Humbugs and the Lonelies get together and make their own kinda Merry, I've come up with the perfect way to spend the holiday:

Have Christmas with Nixon.

Yeah, I know, the disgraced statesman shuffled off this mortal coil back in '94, but that doesn't mean for a minute that you can't get intimate with the man, especially if your line on intimacy includes the sordid details of his checkered yet monumental life.

The facts are all well known: Cali born Quaker, congressman, senator, VP under Ike, lost to JFK (for prez), lost to Pat Brown (for gov), then president — twice. Nixon was there behind the scenes before Vietnam became a quagmire; he was at the head of the table for its humiliating end. He also oversaw détente with the Soviet Union, rapprochement with China, as well as the creation of the EPA, DEA and OSHA (really).

Then, of course, there was Watergate, perhaps the single most colorful scandal in modern U.S. political history, and just the place to begin your holiday immersion.

First, you'll wanna get with James Reston Jr.'s *The Conviction of Richard Nixon: The Untold Story of the Frost/Nixon Interviews* (Three Rivers Press, \$13.95). As the subtitle suggests, this book is a behind-the-

scenes account of what went down before Sir David faced off against Tricky Dick for an audience of some 50 million, a spectacle that was at once an act of hubris (on both parts) as well as history.

Reston, whose byline has appeared everywhere from *Vanity Fair* to *The New Yorker*, and who's currently a Senior Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center, also happens to be the son of the late, great New York Times-man James "Scotty" Reston and a one-time assistant to Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall. In other words, this scribbler knows his way around a story as well as the corridors of power. Good thing too, because as point man for Frost before the face-off, his capacity to tell one and navigate the other became the basis for the "interrogation strategy" that left Nixon knocked beyond redemption.

As the subtitle also suggests, Reston's work served as inspiration for Peter Morgan's play *Frost/Nixon* (Faber and Faber, \$14), round two of your day with the dead ex-prez. Reston actually wrote *The Conviction* back in '77, right after the interviews aired, and didn't dust it off till Peter Morgan came calling, which makes the two integral to each other. Since the play's long closed and you'll be by yourself for the reading, I suggest you do your best to summon your inner Proteus (Reston's nickname for Nixon) and shape-shift both parts aloud. And while there's no way you'll nail it like Frank Langella (Nixon) or Michael Sheen (Frost), if you bounce back-and-forth between seats while you're re-enacting the scenes, you might come close to achieving the play's inner grace and utter turmoil.

When you've concluded your little play-acting, it's time to hit the cinema for Ron Howard's adaptation and see how close you came to the staging — and how close the flick comes to the play. Already nominated for five Golden Globes, including best script (for Morgan) and best lead (for Langella), it's a cinch you'll dig what's up on the screen, though whether you dig it as much as Roger Ebert (four stars) or *The Herald's* Rene Rodriquez (only two) will be up to you. But since it's a vital component of your holiday equation — not to mention one of the most talked-about movies of the season — skipping it is not an option.

Now it's time for the fourth and final round of your Christmas with Nixon. Yes, you guessed it, that means Oliver Stone's 1995 epic ode to the man who made peace — and who would be pilloried.

Conceived under the rubric "The Beast" (a metaphor for the dark forces that conspire beneath us) and starring Anthony Hopkins as the president and Joan Allen as his wife Pat, Stone's magnum opus may not have been granted the box office it deserved, but it remains one of the best bio-pics ever lensed. Ebert dug this film too, and lauded the way it took "on the resonance of classic tragedy," while the aforementioned Rodriquez claims this as his choice of Nixon flicks. The "Director's Cut" adds 28 minutes to the original proceedings, which means three hours and 33 minutes of total Tricky, and a wild-eyed way to end your holiday.

Realini says

Frost/Nixon by Peter Morgan

This motion picture has been nominated for five Academy Awards:

Best Motion Picture of the Year, Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role, Best Achievement in Directing, Best Writing, Adapted Screenplay and was also nominated for the corresponding Golden Globes and other prestigious prizes.

And it is a mesmerizing, fascinating, enchanting battle between a president that has had to resign after the Watergate scandal and a 'talk show host' that had been dismissed as lightweight before the confrontation.

Frost/Nixon does not go into the details of the most spectacular scandal in politics so far- we'll have to see where the Muller, Russia investigation will end- this was done in All The President's Men and other classics. The audience is introduced into the subject, we see the departure of the helicopter and some of the aspects of the end of the Richard Nixon administration, but most of the spectacle will be furnished indirectly, by the guilty president himself.

If the American president was a world known figure as the leader of the free world, David Frost, in spite of some success in Britain, Australia and for a while in the United States, is a rather less familiar entity, but his ambition knows no limits.

His project is to interview Nixon and thus create a sensation, for the departed leader has kept silent about Watergate and almost everything else.

The issue of the payment is important, for they offer, after negotiations with the agent, an unprecedented, record breaking six hundred thousand dollars, whereas networks do not pay for news interviews. Indeed, it will nearly bankrupt David Frost, who ends up putting everything he has and taking huge loans to cover the estimated cost of over two million dollars.

The former president is a very smooth operator, intelligent, cunning, very skilled and sure, up to a late point in the game, that he will win in front of a man without a background in political analysis and known for his womanizing, superficial looking shows.

It must be said that, although Watergate was a disaster and the attitude of the unrepentant Nixon is loathsome, reminding present day viewers of The Donald and his feeling that he can pardon himself, is above the law, the only American Supreme Commander to have resigned has had some great contributions, like establishing relations with China, which was a brilliant, daring, extraordinary move.

In the first parts of the interview, the politician dominates the agenda, has answers that are very long, twenty three minutes, in which he talks about his achievements and it looks like this will be a fiasco.

The whole enterprise would just serve to rehabilitate Nixon and show the world what a great leader he was...indeed, in desperation, one member of the Frost team points to a camera man who would vote with the former president, after hearing all the laudatory talk.

David Frost is not just under editorial, professional pressure, but the financial scheme is about to collapse, as all the networks refuse to get involved with the interview and pay anything for it.

There comes the last part and the only remaining chance and before that, Nixon calls his interlocutor, late in the evening, for a conversation that he would later forget, maybe because of the few drinks he had had.

In the last part, Nixon starts looking like Trump, saying the president is anyway above the law and finally admitting that he has committed crimes.

Frost/Nixon is a fabulous film, if not always, at least for many scenes.

Nicolas says

Loved the movie, loved the play. It's written in a way that gives it such urgency. It really keeps you interested and shows a different side of Nixon. I would love to put on a production of this someday.

SmarterLilac says

This was my first exposure to a Peter Morgan play and I loved it. It seemed to have more depth and elegance than the film version, although the movie remains largely faithful to the original text. It has inspired me to try to locate and hopefully watch these famous interviews.

I still can't believe there was ever a time when Richard Nixon thought he could rebuild his political reputation, actually return to Washington and function as some kind of Congressional advisor. I credit this play for making me realize what a pathetic, paranoid lunatic this man was, and for making me care more about revisiting the particulars of the Watergate scandal (the scene in which Frost finally confronts Nixon about the evidence of an obvious coverup on the president's part is really stunning.)

While the real story here is the battle of wills between the primary figures, I also find it a fascinating character study of two spectacularly disparate personalities.

Andrew says

I love Peter Morgan's work. He and McDonagh are the only screenwriters I follow religiously, and Frost/Nixon, as a play, is the reason why I started following him in the first place. The thematic ties between Frost and Nixon are realised brilliantly, and with subtlety, and Morgan's research is thorough. It's really four-and-a-half stars. But. This will do nicely.

Gary says

It's not history, but it's a fascinating character study of who David Frost and Richard Nixon MIGHT have been.

Ilze Folkmane says

I have not read a lot of plays. Besides all of those I have read have come from very different categories, so to try and compare them is a bit of an "apples / oranges" situation. But in my mind "Frost/Nixon" is a brilliant play. If I were to change my field (I cannot say that I have one actually) and direct, I would like to direct this one. The story perhaps is more appealing to Americans, but the dialogue is so brilliant that in the hands of great (and no less than great) actors there is no doubt that this play would be able to move member of any nation.

If you are not a fan of reading plays, watch the 2008 film "Frost/Nixon". It's brilliant.

Chris Millar says

I was fortunate enough to read this before it was published as I work at the theatre who first produced it. After the first read I knew I would see the show more than once. Great marriage of real and fictional dialogue. And even though the outcome is known, you can't help but wonder if Frost will get the interview he's hoping for. Good film too, but when I read this script now the images in my head are from our original production.

Robert Beveridge says

Peter Morgan, **Frost/Nixon** (Faber and Faber, 2006)

In general, I like to read the book before I see the movie, which is why it's now 2011 and I still haven't seen Ron Howard's much-nominated 2008 film *Frost/Nixon*; I just got round to reading the play upon which it is based. And a very good one it is, though I must say I've been on a very good run where play-reading is concerned; when your competition is Tracy Letts, Martin McDonagh, and the like, it's a bit hard to stand out from the pack. Morgan, however, holds his own very well as he explores the mental states not only of Frost and Nixon in the days leading up to the infamous 1977 television interviews, but also the mental states of a number of other key players. Is any of it even remotely accurate? I don't think we'll ever know, but Morgan is convincing and this is fiction, albeit docudrama, so the questions is ultimately irrelevant, and the consideration probably shouldn't get in the way of what is a cracking good story, very well told, in any case. Recommended, even after you've seen the movie. ****

Jonathan Igoe says

Amazing...

Julian Munds says

I sat down to read it knowing the film. It has a heck of a lot of telegraphing and direct address, all things I usually hate, but the characters have such vivid moments that it still wins me over. As a historical play it just works.

Kate Thompson says

I realized several weeks after watching this that I was really more in love with Frank Langella as Nixon than I was enamored of the script. Still a very interesting story, though.

Josh Fischel says

Compelling and awesome - I'm a sucker for plays and novels that are based heavily on real or imagined historic events, and this was just as enjoyable as a psychological thriller - in a way. Reminded me a bit of Copenhagen, in the way that it didn't condescend. A talkative play, but it still felt like a romp.

Andrew says

As someone who is only vaguely familiar with the events surrounding Watergate, I often had the sense that I was missing something. Nevertheless, for people of my generation, who mostly grew up with "Nixon" and "Watergate" known mostly through allusion, this play is worth checking out, especially since it's focus is more on the characters than the events.
