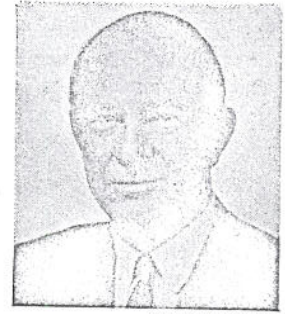


Washington Insight by Clayton Fritchey



FABIAN BACHRACH

GULLIBILITY IN WASHINGTON

Not everyone takes her gospel to heart, but when Jeane Dixon emits her prophecies (on everything from election victors to the spirituality of George Hamilton) she gets almost as much newspaper space as the State of the Union message.

At a recent dinner at the Algerian Embassy in Washington, I had the pleasure of sitting next to the beautiful Barbara Howar—but not for long. This witty young hostess, who already is almost as well known in the capital as Perle Mesta, was summoned to the phone before the soup had been removed. She was loath to leave the table, and suggested to the butler that he get the number and say that she would return the call after dinner. The butler then leaned over and said, *sotto voce*, "It is long distance, madam—and urgent."

Mrs. Howar left the room and was gone for some time. When she returned she was perplexed and a little disturbed. The call was from a very close woman friend who lives in a small Southern city. Mrs. X, the mother of several young daughters, was troubled and excited because she had just heard (or thought she had) a prediction by the famed Washington seeress, Jeane Dixon, that all American teen-age girls would soon "disappear." Mrs. X had talked with several neighboring mothers, who, it seems, had heard the same thing, either over radio or television, as had some of their frightened daughters. Mrs. Howar, like a sensible woman,

did not argue with her friend, but did her best to reassure and comfort her.

Later, after dinner, there was general discussion about this strange incident, and the conversation once again reminded me of how seriously, or at least quasi-seriously, the occult Mrs. Dixon is taken in some important sectors of this presumably sophisticated, cosmopolitan city. She has been made famous all over the country by remarkable publicity and by the success of Ruth Montgomery's *A Gift of Prophecy*, the interesting and best-selling book about her, but in Washington she is becoming one of the sights to see. She is on the way to being a local artifact; so it really doesn't matter much any more how right or wrong she is, or whether her gift for publicity exceeds her gift of prophecy.

The most fascinating thing about Jeane Dixon is not so much herself, but the market she has uncovered in Washington for her special wares. There have been other well-known crystal-ball gazers in our time, but Mrs. Dixon is the first to make her headquarters in Washington and the first to specialize in political forecasts. Politicians, by trade, tend to be at least a little superstitious: it is their nature to believe in miracles, for, as one new Senator remarked the other day, "I wouldn't be here otherwise." Others could say the same. Even the most rational are always on the lookout for signs and portents. They sometimes laugh at Mrs. Dixon, but they listen all the same. And she knows it.

She and her staff are more or less

impervious to skepticism these days. The day after the Algerian Embassy dinner I called Mrs. Dixon to check the story about the "disappearing" teen-age girls. She was out, but in her absence I talked to an assistant. It turned out that Mrs. Dixon had never made such a prediction, and had not been on the air the previous evening, either live or on tape. Her office gets such reports from all over the country all the time. The warning about the girls is only one of a number of canards that are in circulation. I asked the assistant if the alleged prophecy about the teen-agers always took the same form. "Usually," he said, "it is teen-age *virgins*." Mrs. Dixon and her staff try to track down the origin of the fake predictions, but generally it is a waste of time. In any case, she has bigger fish to fry.

It would take a team of full-time researchers to check all of the thousands of predictions Mrs. Dixon has made over the years, dating back to the New Deal, but I have enough of the record before me to conclude that it would have been better if Mrs. Dixon and her biographer, Ruth Montgomery, had reversed their roles. The attractive Mrs. Montgomery, one of the canniest and most experienced of capital correspondents, probably has a better overall record for prophecy than her heroine has, but it's too late now for recasting. Mrs. Dixon is firmly established; so much so that the Washington papers now give almost as much space to her annual January forecasts as they do to the President's State of the Union message in the same

month. Mrs. Dixon and the President try to deliver their messages on different days, however, so as not to compete with each other. These "annuals" by the seers are also now getting sensational display outside of Washington. This year, for instance, in next-door Baltimore, the *News American* Sunday edition of January 1, 1967, published the forecasts across the top of page one under an eight-column headline.

One Small Crystal Ball

Despite the publicity splash, not everyone in Washington takes the gospel from Mrs. Dixon, although everybody discusses her. In private life, she is not notably exotic or flamboyant. A pleasant, comfortable, low-keyed, middle-aged woman with a faint Mona Lisa smile, she spends most of her time helping out in her husband's real-estate office, or promoting the Children to Children Foundation, which she launched in 1964 to "beautify the souls of children—to help children learn to learn so they may grow to earn—and lead useful lives and make their contributions to humanity." Her only professional prop is a small crystal ball which a gypsy gave her as a child, and which led to the discovery of her occult powers. And speaking of these powers, Representative John W. Wydler (from Garden City, New York) rose in the House last year to say, "Mr. Speaker, one of the most remarkable women of our age lives here in Washington. I am speaking of Jeane L. Dixon whose prophecies have proven startling and correct. Her gift, which she attributes to God, has given this woman a prominent place in our society. This she has unselfishly used for the betterment of mankind."

On the other hand, there are some cranky critics who think Mrs. Dixon's gift has been used primarily for the betterment of conservative Republicans like Representative Wydler. Mrs. Dixon can't be held responsible for the emanations of her crystal ball, but it does seem that on balance it has a built-in bias against liberals and Democrats. For many years, with few exceptions, she has consistently predicted Republican victories, so it is easy to understand why in GOP ranks she has no peer as a seer. Moreover,



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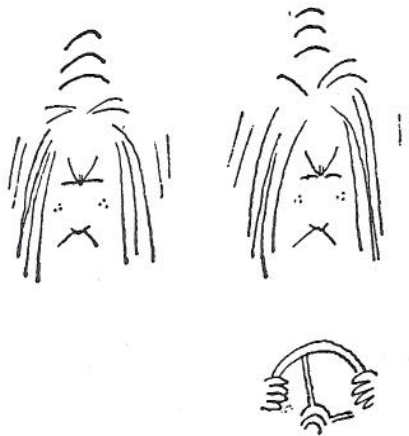
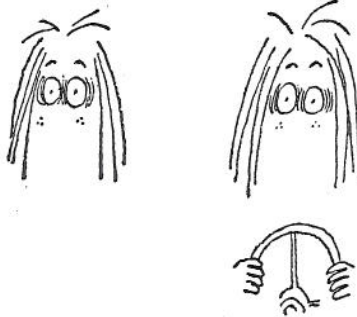
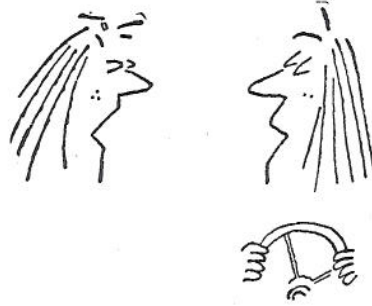
The Champagne of Bottle Beer



since the likes of Rockefeller and Romney never come up rosy in the crystal ball, she naturally seems like "one of the most remarkable women of our age" to the Old Guard and Southern Democrats. Even so, it must be acknowledged that she has some followers among the liberal, New Dealish, Democratic intelligentsia, but to this I would append an asterisk to this effect: The same seemingly rational people also believe (in varying extent) in flying saucers or the conspiratorial theory of Kennedy's assassination, or both. This is not to say that all those who think Kennedy was the victim of an extremist plot automatically believe in Jeane Dixon, but I have never met anyone who believed in Mrs. Dixon who did not disbelieve the Warren Report.

A Woman Is the Key

From first to last Mrs. Dixon has spurned the official conclusion. In the beginning, she got intimations that Fidel Castro was involved, but lately the scene has shifted to Russia. There is one thing to be said for her epiphanies: they are not only consistent politically, but also geopolitically and ideologically. Communism, specifically Russian Communism, is the source of all evil; Communist China, too, has recently commanded some of her attention, even though it doesn't get in on the assassination. "Oswald," she now says, "had accomplices. And the conspiracy originated in the Soviet Union." The key to the assassination "plot," she says, "is a woman; investigators should concentrate on Oswald's overseas travels, with the role of the young woman thoroughly explored. Oswald's bullet killed Kennedy, but I see that a shinier, high-powered rifle also fired a shot. The bullet that struck Governor Connally had not previously passed through the body of the President. Oswald's actions were dictated by a small group in Russia, headed by a man whose initial is S. This was neither Suslov nor Shelepin, however. A pretty, slightly-built young woman who was born in Russia but now resides in the U.S. could clear up the whole plot. She has handled both Oswald's rifle and the shinier one. Jack Ruby was involved, although he was not at the scene of the assassination." As to the



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mystery woman, Mrs. Dixon has a "feeling that the powers-that-be know who she is. But she is being protected, and I don't know why. Someone on the Warren Commission knows who she is."

The recent spiritualist revival in New Orleans, revolving around the crystal ball of District Attorney Jim Garrison and his nightmarish recreation of the assassination conspiracy, has done nothing to impair Mrs. Dixon's credibility. Like Mark Lane, the author of *Rush to Judgment*, Mrs. Dixon no doubt feels that the New Orleans sideshow bears out her intuitions. The most disturbing aspect of all this is the fact that in Washington there are a number of responsible people, some of them very close to the Kennedy family, who seem to share the doubts about the Warren Commission Report. In short, they seem to put more faith in the Garrison-Dixon-Lane suspicions than in the good sense and integrity of the Chief Justice, Attorney General Ramsey Clark, and J. Edgar Hoover. If the Dixon-Garrison insinuations should ultimately be substantiated, the government will surely be in deep disgrace. It is hard to imagine such an outcome, for it simply defies reason; but reason is having some rocky days in Washington as well as in less-informed places.

Reagan May Get Bad Advice

In any case, Mrs. Dixon's 1967 musings are not confined to the assassination. She sees more Republican victories ahead, but then who doesn't? "The door," she says, "is wide open" for a GOP triumph next year. Governor Ronald Reagan of California is a "man of destiny." The going will be rough for him, but he "is in harmony with the law of the universe and is destined for greatness." He will have to guard against members of the Eastern Establishment, she warns, who will deliberately give him bad advice. She declines to name the GOP nominee at this time, but "Romney will not be the candidate." Rockefeller "will work behind the scenes for himself," but won't be successful. If Nixon's performances on television were as successful as his personal appearances on Mrs. Dixon's crystal ball he would have been President long ago. Now she sees him "becoming

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more important to his country and party."

For Lyndon Johnson, she sees nothing but trouble ahead. He will soon face the "most momentous decision of his life" (revolving around a new crisis in the Middle East) but "the President must be alert to avoid being double-crossed by State Department efforts to neutralize his decision."

Mrs. Dixon considers Vietnam a small "bonfire" compared to battles yet to come. Our "real enemy" is not Hanoi but Moscow. America is also threatened from within, for she sees a mysterious "sixth column working to take over the U. S. government." In this instance the crystal ball did not see red, since Mrs. Dixon says the sixth column is made up of extremely wealthy men whose money endows them with enough influence to lure some of the most valuable government brains into their ranks. "Beware the big tax-free foundations," she cautions.

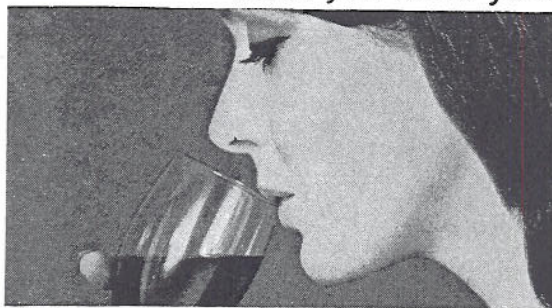
Mao Tse-tung and Ho Chi Minh will soon be gone from the "world power arena," which seems not wholly improbable since the first is seventy-three years old and the other seventy-five. On the brighter side she promises that 1967 will see a cure for cancer. The disease, she reveals, "can be brought on by confinement, shock, disappointment in life. It can be caused by a virus, by an accident, by many, many things."

Since readers will surely want Mrs. Dixon to be right on her cancer forecast, it would be only natural to ask, on the basis of past performance, how much reliance can be put on her prophecies. Her friends think she is close to infallible, but there have been occasions when the crystal ball became a little cloudy. Last year, for instance, she wrongly forecast that U. S. relations with de Gaulle would improve as a result of Johnson's "shortly" appointing a new Ambassador to France. This did not faze her fans, however, because Mrs. Dixon explained that Johnson had intended to do this, and that she "picked up his mental telepathy but he changed his mind." See?

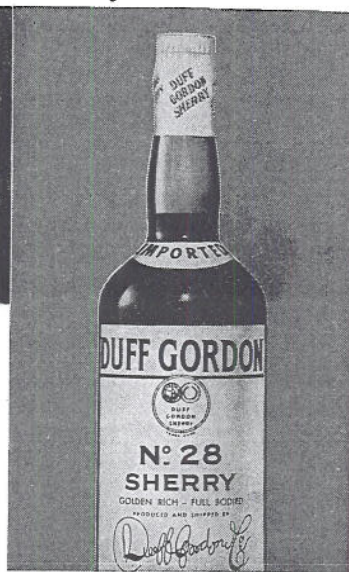
Some of the other past misses are more difficult to extenuate. Such as: World War III will break out in 1958; Red China will be admitted to the United Nations in 1959; Walter



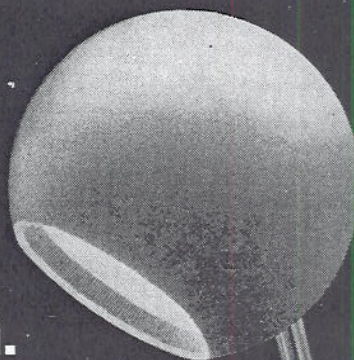
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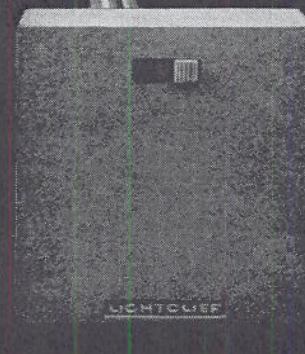
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Reuther will be the Democratic candidate for President in 1964; and Richard Nixon will be the Republican one that year; war will break out over Quemoy and Matsu in 1958; Britain's Conservative party will win the elections in 1964.

Ordinarily, observed *Time* magazine, "the prophet responsible for such predictions would be without honor in any country, but self-styled Seer Jeane Dixon is a woman of some standing in the nation's capital." As indeed she is, for in Washington the focus is on her hits rather than her misses, above all her prediction of President Kennedy's death. She told an interviewer from *Parade* magazine in 1956 that "a blue-eyed Democratic President elected in 1960 will be assassinated." Apparently this slipped her mind later on, for in 1960 she predicted a Nixon victory. Nevertheless, after Kennedy was elected, Mrs. Dixon kept seeing a "black cloud over the White House getting bigger and bigger." Shortly before November 22, 1963, she told a friend that "the President has just made a decision to go some place in the South that will be fatal for him." And on the day of the crime, she was lunching with friends at the Mayflower Hotel when she stopped eating and said, "Something dreadful is going to happen to the President."

To Be Opened Later

Mrs. Dixon has always specialized on the White House and the first families, so she was not at a loss when recently asked about the romance between Lynda Bird and George Hamilton. "I know exactly what's going to happen," she said, "but don't ask me to tell you now. I can send it to you in a sealed envelope to be opened later."

It seems that she has known the actor for years and has done a "reading" on him. "George has more spirituality than a thousand people put together," Mrs. Dixon reports. "He has a good soul. He can bring more spirituality into the President's home than anyone I know. They would be lucky to have him."

In any event, it appears George is lucky to have Mrs. Dixon, and so in a way is Washington, for the capital wouldn't be half as interesting without her. []