## REVIEWS

## Books

## What Wanner of Man in title eige White House?

BY BILL MOYERS

THE PRESIDENTIAL CHARACTER: Predicting Performance in the White House

by James David Barber 4. Prentice-Hall, 479 pp., \$10

Imagine this compression between two voters leaving the parts in November:

Voter A: Well, what did vot don Voter B: It was jough a couldn't de cide whether Nixon is at active post tive or an active-negative or whether McGovern is a passive positive or a passive negative Once there was no doubt in my mind bin the campaign began to blur things to the point that I just wasn't sure. I finally made up my mind during Nixon's final television speech. I saw it in his eyes right, there are lesene of a power away rape utes to go, he seemed to punic, as if he suddenly realized that no one was believing anything he was saying. He never missed a bear, but for an instant his eves shifted belligerently as the thought struck him that they were about to take it all away from him beforc he was through with it. I decided definitely that his self-image is still vague and discontinuous and he still has that problem in managing his aggressive feelings. He's his old activenegative self-there's no doubt about it - and so I didn't vote for him.

Voter A: Then it was McGovern, eh? Voter B: Actually, no. After watching Nixon, I switched channels and caught

McGovern's final speech. I've wanted to believe that McGovern is an activepositive with an orientation toward productiveness as a volue and aur ability to use his styles flexibly, adaptively, suiting the dance to the music, so to speak. But last night I detected that basic contradiction in his character that has always been his weakness. He's either the receptive, compliant, other-directed character whose style helps soften the harsh edges of politics -the perfect passive-positive type-or deep down he's the true passive-negative with a character-rooted orientation toward doing dutiful service, the type who is in politics because he thinks he ought to be. I'm very suspicious of both types. So I didn't vote for McGovern, either.

Voter A: Then what did you do? Voter B: I wrote in my own name.

Implausible? Not if Voter B has read The Presidential Character. For here is a book that presumes to suggest that presidential behavior can be predicted if one studies the psychological make-up of candidates who seek the White House. To be precise, "the burden of this book is that the crucial differences [in the way various Presidents manage affairs] can be anticipated by an understanding of a potential President's character, his world view, and his style."

My first impression, upon reading that thesis, was to want to suggest to the author that he hie himself away to the nearest psychiatrist's couch; any man with the audacity to take on the subject must be nurturing illusions of Napoleonic dimensions. My second impression was that a very dry and laborious assignment lay ahead of me as I plodded through a pedantic psychological discourse written obviously in some distant ivory tower.

My third impression was that my first two were wrong.

This is an exciting book, the best of its kind I have read. It moves along more like an engrossing biography

than a psychological treatise; James David Barber, a "psychohistorian" and professor of political science, formerly at Yale and now at Duke University, has packed the book with scintillating information about Presidents. Herbert Hoover slept only three hours a night when he was in office and was so foreboding that his servants would hide in the closets when he came down the halls. Richard Nixon fell out of a carriage when he was three years old and has suffered from motion sickness ever since. Harry Truman wore such thick glasses when he was a child he couldn't play normal boyhood sports and was considered a mama's boy. Lyndon Johnson, the master mimic of his critics, once administered a dozen whacks to the backside of a pupil who had mimicked him; even then he was, ahem, sensitive to criticism.

But James David Barber is no drawing-room gossip spinning little anecdotes for the amusement of snickering guests at a Georgetown dinner party. Every bit of information is offered to support his effort "to see the man whole-not as some abstract embodiment of civic virtue, some scorecard of issue stands, or some reflections of a faction, but as a human being like the rest of us, a person trying to cope with a difficult environment." The clearest, clues to the whole man, Barber argues, are visible in the earliest life histories of our Presidents. "The President is a man with a memory in a system with a history," and to anticipate what that man might do once he is in office, we have to understand what has happened to him long before he set out to win it. That's hard, of course, since we are not inclined to probe fully a President's whole life until he has left office. But it is a helpful reminder in an election year that the child is father to the Commander-in-Chief.

Early experiences shape presidential personalities into four basic types. Active-positive Presidents want most to achieve results; they do a lot and

Edit Hovers in turmer special assistant to President Johnson and author of Listening to America.







Active positives is still as one seas a mana's boy.

as a trial has a regarder and toward and part of the critical break and of the critical break and parts which is applied to very brings in the case. If the most wear a regarder to the compart and produced applied in the case. If the greatest manner of the compart and produced applies it may be presented in a second of the compart and produced applies it was a produced and the compart of the compart and produced applies it was a produced and the compart of the compart live transaction, personably asserting, all power and efficients run-the bless. The store and efficiency have seen so that? and appear one year of a literated from high others. And appear one year of the process of the p phase ing court cause vities and pague

principles of the second problems of the principles of the second problems of the second pr integrals are religible; the object be-ing no start all our again at the bot-tore. Thus the sail series of superiating stries . The first major crisis in

visigns who are shielded from public security. Isolated within this cotenie, Nixon has shaped his administration to by his filelong processination with the thenies of power and courselfequeen, and west outling of his own inner fears of failure with the need to iven "humbation" and defeat" for the partial. He has come top egand the present ticy on stankly personal terms, besue if an some kind of metaphysical Benhell where he wrestles with the promption of the percentage of the percentage in an interminable test of his own virtue. It sepor difficult to believe that a man if intexicated with his ewn ego, whose force private wars he can now transen to the canvas of the nation, can be so immune to the suffering of peonie on whom he has visited the most devastating aerial warture in the history of man-all for the stated purpose of maintaining "respect for the Office of the President of the United States.'

"This character," Barber writes, "could lead the President on to disaster. . . . So far his crises have been bounded dramas, each apparently curtained with the end of the last act. The danger is that crisis will be transformed into tragedy-that Nixon will go from a dramatic experiment to a moral commitment, a commitment to follow his own private star, to fly off in the face of overwhelming odds. That type of reaction is to be expected when and if Nixon is confronted with a severe threat to his power and sense of virtue."

On the other hand, a victorious Nixon in 1972, freed from the calculations of electoral popularity, could follow the example, not of his hero-the stubborn and dogmatic Wilson-but of another man of independence, unheroic Harry Truman, "who drew upon inner strengths he hardly knew he had to move beyond toughness to tachievement."

It is fascinating stuff, and scary, too

"Passive-positives"-a liking to be liked.





to be so much at the whim of presidential character. We know so little about the effect of personality upon the office. There are weaknesses in Barber's assumption that we can increase our understanding. We can't know "the man whole," and; even if we did, we would likely be just as prone to vote as much by gut feel as anything. (Remember all those New Hampshire voters in 1968 who voted

Active negatives"-servants hid, mimics were punished.











"Passive-negatives"—in place of power, civic virtue and vague principles.

for Eugene McCarthy because they thought he would be tough on communism?) Barber's own bibliography is too selective; his sources for activepositive Presidents include too many unabashedly, sympathetic taccounts, such as Sorensen's Kennedy and Sam Roseman's Working With Roosevelt, while for his active-negative types he draws from an imbalanced selection of untriendly sources. And, finally, it's one thing to analyze with hindsight. to pick out experiences in childhood and adolescence that, looking back, explain behavior in adulthood, But when it comes to predicting presi-





"Active-negative" incumbent (he took a tumble at age three); and "passive positive" hopeful (he-might turn another way).

dential behavior, which Barber suggests voters should try to do, how do we know which traumatic and/or happy childhood experiences are the important ones?

But these are negligible shortcomings of Barber's approach, and I think he has written a book as important as Garry Wills's Nixon Agonistes. It is not impossible to determine in advance what a candidate might do once he reaches the White House. If polities were a science, it might work, But politics is as capricious as an artist's temperament because, like art, politics is born deep in the mystery of self. There ought to be better ways to choose our leader, but since there aren't, we will have to go on being governed by people who are quite like us. As the man said, America is a place where anybody can grow up to be President, and often does.