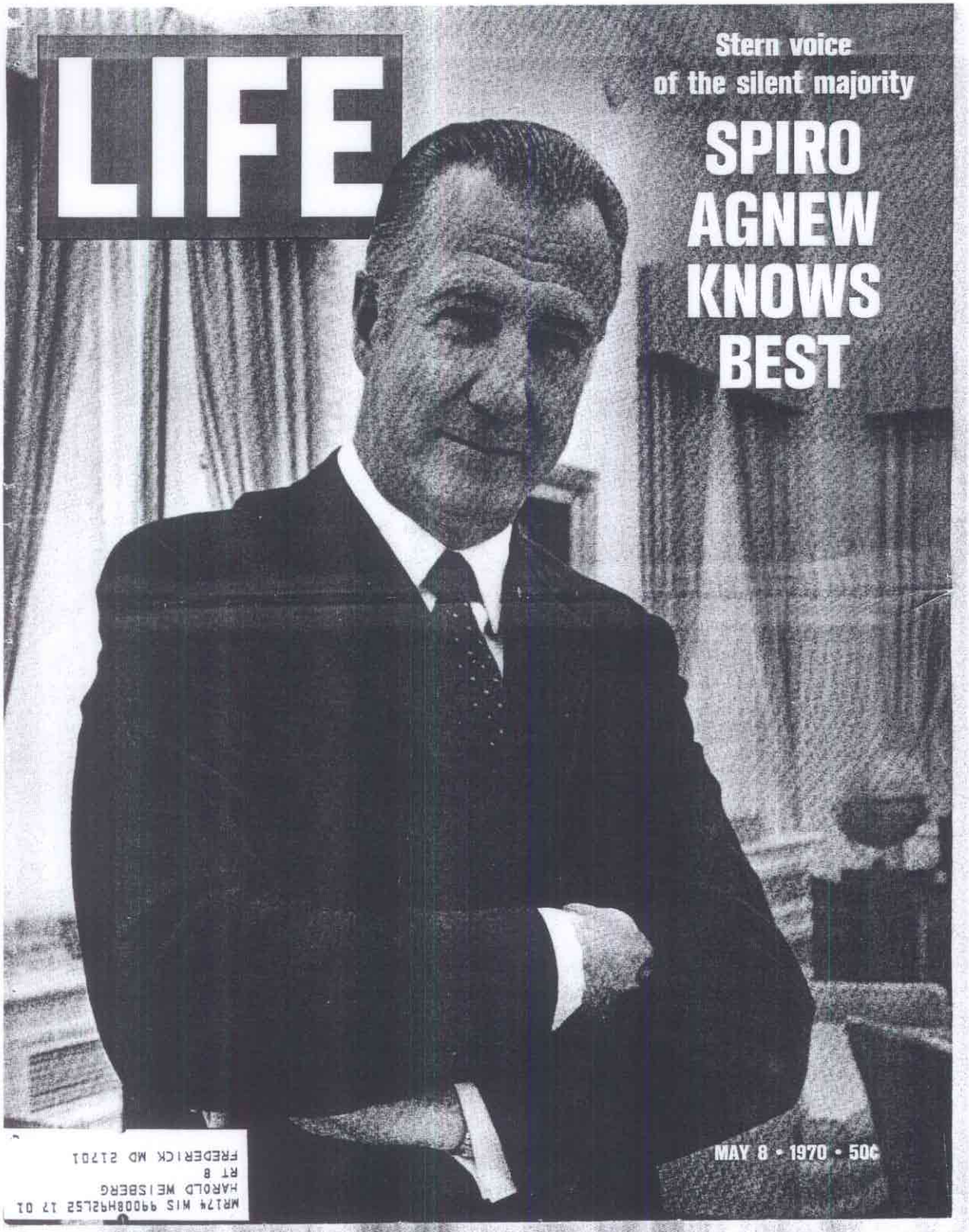
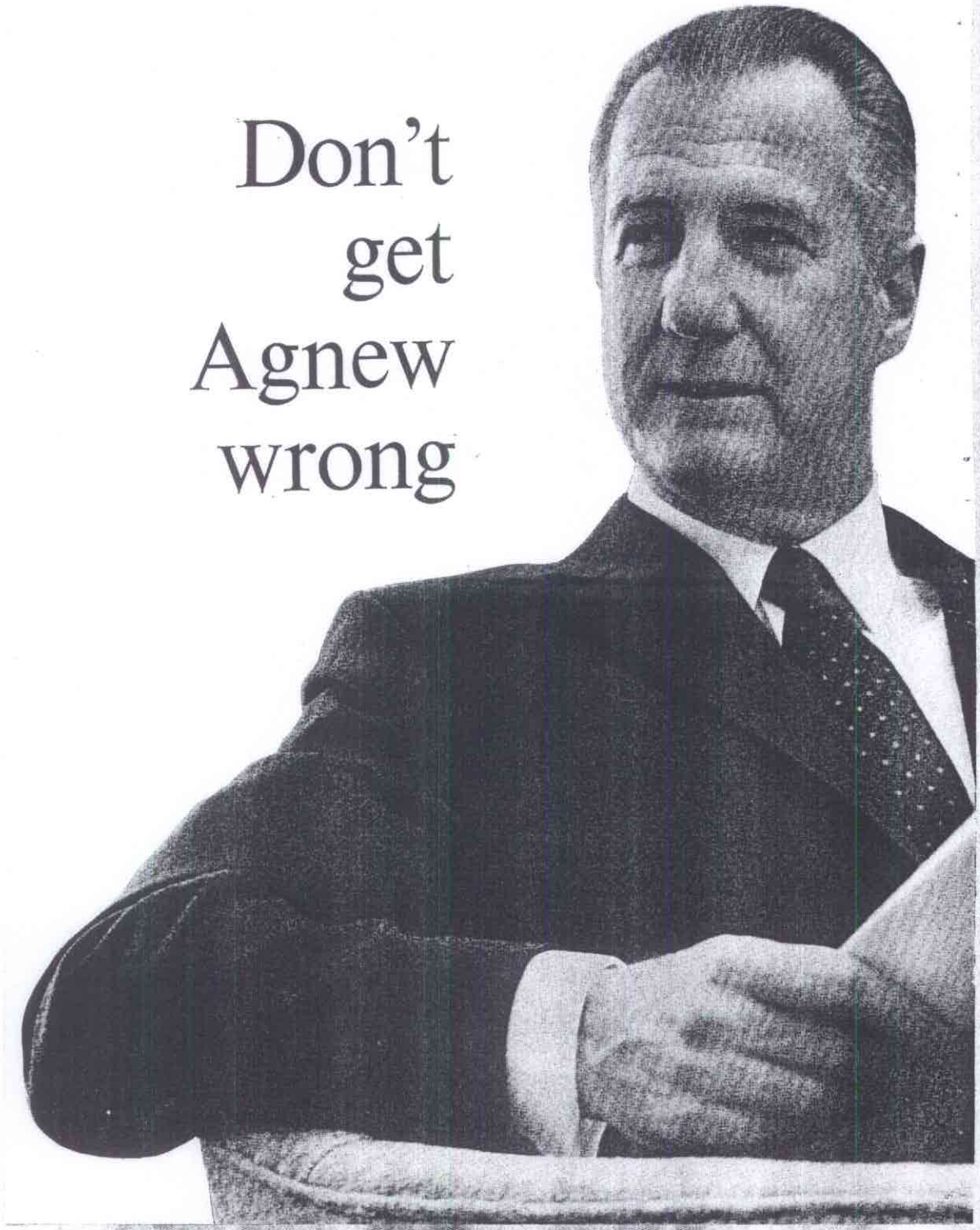


# Don't get Agnew wrong



# He's really a fox in Veep's clothing

by BROCK BROWER

As a painting, it qualifies as a sort of 11th-rate Brueghel. Forget who did it. What's of interest is that a man named J. Walter Jones ordered it done eight years ago, from photographs, to include all his close friends around Baltimore County, Md., plus their wives and families, in this one cheery, roisterous alehouse scene. The fun, of course, is to pick out who's who despite their colorful Ye-Merrie-Olde-Times guises, and actually the easiest one to recognize—as a stout and goodly alewife, in bonnet and billowy blue muttonchop sleeves, with a brimming tankard—is Judy Agnew. The Agnews' children are harder to spot, they've grown so since—Randy, back now from the SeaBees, the two oldest girls out of the house, one of them already married, and the youngest, Kim, embarrassingly politicized—hardly the moppets pictured here, tumbling about the tavern in cap and kirtle. But the real hidden surprise is Ted Agnew, down in the left-hand corner, ale mug in hand. A pale but really quite good likeness, sitting at the foot of the long deal table, in blue-and-green-striped pantaloons, with a floppy blue-and-green-striped cap pushed back vacantly on his head, smiling that familiar, sad-happy, cookie-cutter grin—Spiro T. Agnew as a slightly dejected jester.

All in fun, of course. Jones has known the man—and backed him to the hilt—since before Agnew ran for Baltimore County Executive in 1962, the year this picture was painted. It's a private joke, really, a tribute, the way Jones explains it, to Ted Agnew's solid sense of humor. Moreover: "There's been no change. He can still relax. A great deal of humor." But what with all the controversy lately over the Vice President, Jones is just a wee bit more discreet about showing off this group portrait. In fact, he keeps it all the way downstairs, hanging on a rather distant wall of his wine cellar. "And whatever you do," the Vice President told him recently, studying the picture again, laughing really . . . still, "don't let the press see it."

Right. Because, no question, there's a wide-open, easy "cheap shot" here, enough to sorely tempt any reporter who has sat through a week or so of the Vice President's atrabilious speeches. "The liberal media have been calling upon me to lower my voice . . . I will not make a unilateral withdrawal and thereby abridge the confidence of the silent majority [applause]," for abroad in the land he hears "a cacophony of seditious drivel [applause]," and "to penetrate that drivel we need a cry of alarm, not a whisper [loud applause]." And in the face of that kind of rhetorical overkill—with its almost comic display of a good vocabulary—there is every urge sometimes to seize this chance, reach out and pull cap and bells right down around his ears.

The only trouble is, they don't really quite fit. In sum, there may be considerable *opinion* around to the effect that the Vice President is a fool, some of it expert, but in *fact*, he is not.

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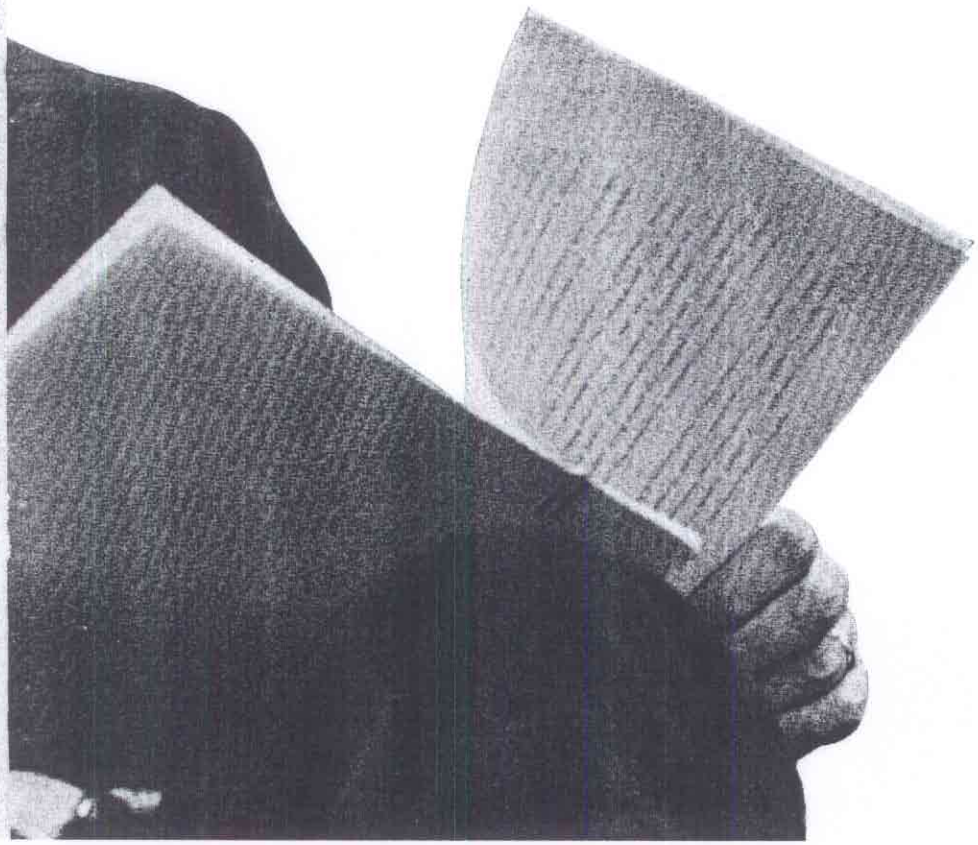

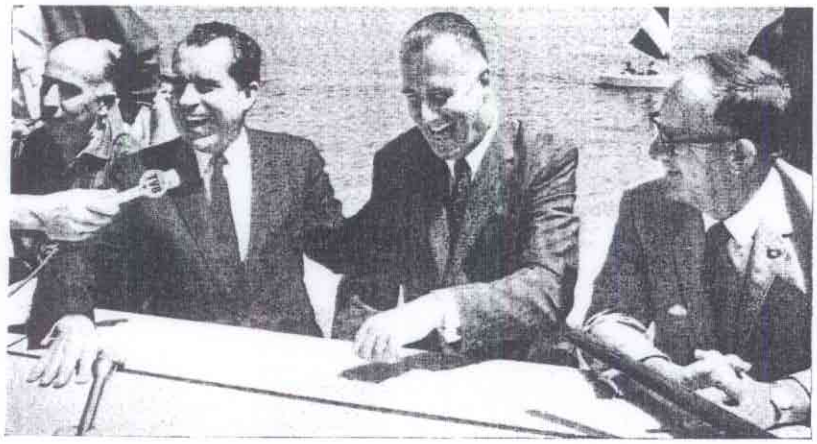

Long ago, 22 months ago, when Spiro Agnew was a political unknown, the Vice President-to-be campaigned with Richard Nixon in San Diego.

# 'I knew I had a big problem'

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Better believe that 135 IQ, hard as it is to check. In fact, taking Spiro T. Agnew for an oaf has been a snare and a delusion all along, the press's biggest damnfool mistake from the very beginning.

How did almost the entire fourth estate not so much distort as just plain miss so badly? Some small excuse: they were certainly not alone. There is even the case of one of Agnew's own speechwriters, attending the candidate down in Texas during the 1968 campaign. Senator John Tower was introducing the future Vice President, using the very words that Nixon had so carefully chosen to characterize his choice. "There's a mystique about this man. You can just look at him and see he's got it." At which point Stephen Hess, present White House aide—none other—began shaking his head and moaned, "Whatever it is, I hope it isn't catching."

But not only has it turned out to be catching, whatever it is—it is also proving to be the most fortuitous political boon yet to fall to the Nixon administration. Enthusiasm for Agnew's knock-heads maledictions against the protesters, the youth marchers, the TV commentators, the New York *Times*, the Washington *Post*, *et al* has swept through Middle America like the croup. Moreover, the Vice President has somehow managed to stir these roiling, fund-raising emotions while remaining, in most of what he says, remarkably apolitical. There is a rumor around, now of long standing, that he might someday address himself to the problem of school desegregation, since he heads that committee for the President, but if and when he does, it will be his first confrontation with a substantive issue of government since he suggested going to Mars.

Even the President, who, in general, has relished Agnew's performance, gives some indication that he would prefer his Vice President to broaden out into a discussion of welfare, foreign affairs, not just go slam-bang. But Nixon has made no move to rein Agnew in, and, in fact, to do so might spoil his abrasive appeal. "He's touching people," argues one of his boldest Administration supporters, "telling them about what's right and what's wrong. He's talking about basic problems—why our kids are going bad—instead of the old, chewed-up issues. You can't throw those old clichés around anymore."

And if, in the process, he is maybe further polarizing the country, widening the rift with the young'uns, at least the oldsters are finding in him a great source of solace. It is astonishing the warm feeling of relief this seeming sower of discord leaves behind in his hectic wake. "He said what a lot of us have always suspected," admits a Nebraska Republican county chairman, breathing a little easier, "and we're glad to have it confirmed as so." All very salubrious and politically adroit and partisanly canny and, what's more, all from a man whose only rise a year ago was from nonentity to probable liability, who was being dismissed as a boring speaker, an impromptu bumbler, a clown, a carper, or, in his own not-really-quite-apologetic words, "a fluffor, if I can coin a legalistic term."

"I knew I had a big problem," he allows now, reflecting back on those grim post-inaugural months before his recent triumphs and sudden ascent up the popularity polls. "The first thing I had to establish was that I was human. I went through a little self-deprecating treatment, to show that those accusations of insensitivity and coarseness were . . . not quite fair. But you know, you come to a difficult decision. When do you turn off the self-ridicule and turn to something else? You have to modify your humorous remarks or you just stay stuck there, being a buffoon."

Which would hardly represent progress. Borrowed *Laugh-In* gags may smooth and soothe, but there's no real movement there. Nor did zealously pursuing his official functions as Vice President help much either. He still keeps to his appointed rounds—attendance at Cabinet meetings, presence at National Security Council sessions—but they can sometimes be as frustrating as his powerless "Presidency" of the Senate. "He found out that wasn't satisfactory," says his chief aide, C. Stanley Blair. "It only frustrated him to sit there and listen to debate and not be able to take part. He felt the Vice Presidency could be something a little more . . . a little different." But what? Work on space, on school integration helped, but still what? And where does a worried hack suddenly turned national figure find help in discovering the true bent, and future course, of his stymied political career?

"You don't," says Agnew, and so much, at least as far as he is concerned, for any idea that he was stripped down to parts and rebuilt in the White House garages as one of Richard Nixon's used cars. "It has to be a personal decision, and decisions like this are sometimes so intuitive that you don't know how you reach them." In 1968, when Hess and John Sears came over from the Nixon camp during the campaign to salvage Agnew, he sulked and balked and continued intuitively straight on toward what both thought would be his own sure destruction. "In politics, I've always lived by my instincts. If people are telling me 25 good reasons for doing A, and yet there's still a feeling I have that I should do B, I go with my feeling. But what that feeling is, it's the sum of a lot of subconscious impressions. It's a subliminal type of intelligence."

And relying on that "subliminal type of intelligence," he never really did feel he had to go through much of a metamorphosis. More of a vindication. He has always believed that the damage done him in 1968 was more the press's doing than any of his own. Not that it didn't hurt. "It caused me to be very depressed because I felt so helpless. Running for national office for the first time involved an intensive, difficult adjustment anyhow, and things just kept getting worse. People who knew me kept asking, 'What are you doing? It doesn't sound like you.' "

Yet, aggravating as it was, that felt discrepancy is what he now thinks kept him whole, saved him from being done in altogether by chivying reporters. "They did me one favor. They overdid it so much that they didn't affect my self-confidence. I knew I wasn't that stupid. So I just said the hell with it, I'm not that Cro-Magnon man."

On the contrary, "a proud man," according to Blair, "with a great deal of pride in virtually every way you can have it." And what Agnew, as a proud man, most believes himself to be is his own man —"pretty free to say what he doggone pleases," says Blair—and, on another sensitive point, in words of

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Father of four—and grandfather of one—Agnew is a believer in paternalism. At left, he hugs daughter Kim, 14; above, with his wife Judy, he holds son Randy's daughter Michelle Ann.

# The stock speech is a parental Talking-To

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his own choosing. Indeed, one of Agnew's prides turns out to be pride of authorship. For years he sought diligently to Increase His Word Power, intentionally learning a new word every three or four days, using it over and over until it cloyed. "I'll never forget the time, as governor, he got hold of 'mandated,' " recalls an old Baltimore reporter. So those sweeping, gelatinous phrasings—"effete corps of impudent snobs," "Judas goats," "didactic inadequacy of the garrulous," et cetera—are all his, and he grows wroth when even a sympathizer like William F. Buckley Jr. says he lacks skill at polemics. "Dear Mr. Buckley: . . . the zinger from you hit a tender spot. . . . I have always felt I was reasonably able to express myself lucidly. . . . Find enclosed a copy of a speech I delivered to a group of Negro leaders after the Baltimore riot and the controversial New Orleans speech. I selected these because they are my product, not that of a speechwriter."

Of course, this can't always be true. Agnew admits to outside drafts on such important positional diatribes as that boomed at the TV networks last Nov. 13. But it is true enough of the speeches he sent Buckley, true always of a certain type of speech that is, in fact, the true bent and probable future course of the man. And that speech is the good, old-fashioned, parental Talking-To. He can write one of these very quickly, "in about two hours," according to Blair, which, come to think of it, is as long as any parent probably ought to reflect before letting fly.

He has delivered any number of these homilies over the past six months—first in New Orleans, La. against "masochism," then more notably in Harrisburg, Pa. against "impudence" in the streets—but the one down in Atlanta, Ga. stands out as perhaps the purest Agnew: nil politics, total moralizing, big words, high thoughts and a rabbit-punch ending. The gathered caretakers of the reborn Southland GOP were expecting portentous remarks on "education," *i.e.*, school desegregation, but the Southern strategy is, if anything, a go-slow strategy, no reason for the Vice President to force his thoughts on that subject. Also, he'd given his last prepared speech the night before in Minneapolis, so he had to put this one together half aboard Air Force Two and half in the Marriott Motor Hotel, right up to 15 minutes before the dinner. That meant another Talking-To, and requisitely, outside the hotel, there was the usual misbehavior. A parade of demonstrators chanting "Screw You . . . Ag . . . new!" backed by a tinkly rhythm section of two crew-cut-and-pig-tailed Hindu monks plunking "*Hare Krishna*" on palm cymbals. Agnew could easily study this waywardness from eight stories up, between rushed paragraphs of his speech.

He began calmly, as all fathers do, explaining in a highly general way just where things now stood. "So many of us have become robots," he warned. He lamented "the detachment of modern life, the fear of really knowing one another," shook his head over any "quick, easy solution to our interpersonal relations." And all this, he then moralized, all this can be seen in the foul practice of demonstrating, made to sound as pernicious as self-abuse, and going on right outside this very hotel.

Then the tongue-lashing—what father is not going to put up with any longer—all packed into a trim two minutes that can be snipped out for TV, almost without having to review the tape. ("For years I've been telling politicians to do that in their speeches," David Brinkley happened to remark recently, "but I never told it to *this* one.") His voice rose, if only from bland to stern. "I will subside to a more professorial tone," he said—the father offering to go *his* half of the way—but only when "some of our young people" give up their allegiance to Castro and Mao, when they stop hanging out with the Black Panthers, when they pull themselves together and get out from under "this blanket of filth and confusion." And then: "Let the few, the very few who would desecrate their own house be made fully aware of our utter contempt!"

Not that the Vice President, like all fathers, didn't mean every word he was saying and not that he isn't surprisingly knowledgeable—yes, all read up on the latest Dr. Bruno Bettelheim—and not that he hasn't himself been through enough of this kind of contretemps in his own family, particularly with 14-year-old Kim. "She's a very affectionate child," he says, "but she maintains her posture of disagreeing with me about things like music and dress." And the war, and a Moratorium arm band that he wouldn't let her wear. "I gave her my stereo, and the other night she was playing this godawful caterwauling, and I had to say to her, 'Kim, I don't know what good it is giving you a stereo for that music.' " Okay, fair enough, he said it to her. But to whom was he really saying all those things down in Atlanta, to whom was that tough Talking-To effectively addressed? Because when his avid listeners rose in ovation, they were all lily-white, middle-class, status-torn, money-worried, equally aggrieved parents. They had been teen-agers back with Frank Sinatra or even Rudy Vallee, and their most radical political act had been to spend $100 that night to dine Republican in the city Sherman once burned. The young people who presumably should be getting the Talking-To just weren't there, and whenever they are, which is rarely, they pick this moment to walk out of the woodshed.

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# He showed them how to cow the mighty media

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"It reminded me of religion," said one young hostess after his St. Louis speech, on her way rudely through the exit along with several other young hostesses. "You had to believe it to begin with." Agnew had just offered his famous tirade—"... Yippies, hippies, yahoos, Black Panthers, lions and tigers alike—I would swap the whole damn zoo for a single platoon of the kind of young Americans I saw in Vietnam"—and the diners, having finally been given their $125,000 worth, were going into postprandial tumult. "But all the guys we know coming back from Vietnam," the hostess went on, "say, 'Peace, peace.' " She pointed to a small knot of bearded young lions and tigers, far above in the balcony, who were holding up a banner that read "Enjoy Your Din-Din (Burp) While Others Starve!" "He thinks we're different from those other kids, but we're not. He's alienated me too."

But then again, would even her well-scrubbed, blue-eyed alienation have affected the cathartic, self-congratulatory impact of Agnew's remark? The cheering down among the crowded tables—and this was the biggest such affair ever thrown in St. Louis by either party—was for a father figure who had come and brought succor to other, less articulate, more downtrodden father figures. His outspokenness was taken as no excess, only an index of his honesty, a sign that he can be broadly trusted to say what he really believes, "not just be a politician."

Not long ago, of course, that was being taken as a sign of his ineptitude. Back on April 11, 1968, for example, he got himself, as governor of Maryland, involved in a much more direct Talking-To, that speech to the Negro leaders after the Baltimore riots. He called together all those he claimed to respect as moderates—not the "circuit-riding, Hanoi-visiting . . . caterwauling, riot-inciting, burn-America-down type of leader"—and accused them of complicity in the chaos, attacked their failure to speak out against the incendiary "opinion of a few, distorted and magnified by the *silence* of most of you here today." It was an ill-considered, arrogant performance, and most of those present—when he reached the words "And you ran"—walked right out on him. No doubt he was once again speaking from assured convictions, having become more and more appalled by the course of black militancy. But as governor, he left his own relations with the Negro community in another kind of chaos, and as a politician, he utterly shattered the coalition with the state's liberals that had gotten him elected in the first place. His outspokenness that day can only be seen as accumulated pique, a surly display of Big Daddy rectitude.

These days, as Vice President, he has no such weighty gubernatorial responsibilities. He can much better go right ahead in this uncompromising, patriarchal vein. "You've got to realize, people really are irreconcilable in this country," says a White House aide. "The President has got to say On-the-One-Hand-This, On-the-Other-Hand-That. But it's different for the Vice President. He can say things the President can't." He can appeal to the many disgruntled Americans who have heard too much eloquence from Those Up There to Us Down Here, speak frankly to them as someone who has himself been made just as much a butt, a laughingstock, as they often feel they have. He can show them that he is beyond the dirty, leprous reach of the press, that a few brave words can cow the mighty media into better behavior. He can assure them that the "sniveling, hand-wringing power structure" and "some of those who call each other 'intellectuals' " now have to take him seriously, that even his worst enemies admit there is a kernel of truth in what he is saying, and that, above all else, he is sincere.

It is also worth noting that this suddenly aggrandized Agnew is, to a large extent, a product of TV, an instantaneous magnifico, created the night of Nov. 13, 1969, when all three networks put him on live from Des Moines, Iowa for his most famous Talking-To, "The responsibilities of television," sternly delivered to the networks themselves. The public response has not yet ceased, much of it the same old hate mail the me-

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The Vice President and Bob Hope console golf pro Doug Sanders at Palm Springs after Agnew bounced a bad shot out of the rough off his head.

# The code word meant 'another Joe McCarthy'

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dia have always gotten, but with a new tag line—"almost like a rubber stamp," says one TV commentator—"Agnew is right."

Nobody is saying exactly whose bright idea this grand maneuver was, but unquestionably Agnew undertook it, in Blair's words, as "a labor of love." "I disagreed with rule one: 'Never attack the media.' And I thought I had a broad enough base to do it," he says himself. "But then I've always lived high-risk politics. I've found it's better in the long run not to play it cosy. Things that come out first as a minus seem to convert later into a plus."

Besides, he had some old scores to settle that go right back to the days he first stumbled, almost naively, through a PTA presidency into local Republican politics. Back then, he was only out to do his civic duty, a night school lawyer with a suburban conscience, but in 1962 a Democratic split gave him a risky shot at becoming Baltimore County Executive. He pulled it off, and four years later, when the Democrats fell into complete, statewide shambles over a racist candidate for governor, Agnew ended up as one of those five rare Republicans to hazard Maryland and get all the way to the mansion in Annapolis. He always ran as reform-minded, liberally inclined, but, above all, decent: a mild and moderate voice who favored at least one integrated swimming pool and a limited open-housing law. Only the press ever doubted him, and in view of those high risks he was taking for selfless good government, how dare the Baltimore *Sun*, what right had the *News American*? When he ran for County Executive, for instance, a veteran political reporter sniffed out an alleged deal to allow the incumbent Democratic county personnel director to remain in the event of an Agnew victory. Agnew called up the reporter the next morning at 7 a.m., denied any such deal, and cursed him roundly—always a master of epithet—up and down the humming wire. "And who do you think was his first appointment when he took over as County Executive?"

As an isolated incident, nothing, but as a pattern of behavior, something else again. "He was always profanely bawling out reporters. He had to be the stern father who was never wrong," says this newsman, viewing him admittedly *in extremis*. "But he just did not understand government. I think, even when he was governor, he found the job thoroughly distasteful. He once told me—in the middle of some very crowded function—how much he disliked people, and he brought that into the governorship. Even his department heads couldn't get to see him."

So when Agnew found himself quixotically running for Vice President two years later, that was the kind of press reputation he brought with him, along with some of the very reporters who had helped create it. He blames a lot of his troubles on "the intellectual dishonesty of these hostile people from the state," who, of course, were the first folk the national press asked for a fill-in on the unknown Agnew. "I had a pollution problem before I even opened my mouth."

He had a lot more problems, however, *after* he opened his mouth. Gaffe after gaffe, for many of which, in a stubborn, cockeyed way, he also blames the press. Take his explanation of how he came to call Hubert Humphrey "squishy-soft on Communism." "The session was very informal. It had been drawn out for over an hour. Somebody said Humphrey had called Nixon a hard-liner, what did I think of that? I started saying that Humphrey was a soft-liner, soft on the economy, soft on a lot of things. And then the phrase just came, entered my head. There I was. You see, it was a code word. Not to me. To the press. This code word meant, 'Here's another Joe McCarthy.' Well, I'm about as far from Joe McCarthy as you can get. But unless you know the code words, you're in a lot of trouble."

Agnew seems to feel that the reporters tried to jostle him into dropping these "code words," maybe even put some of them into his mouth, far out of context, so that he was deliberately made to look silly. A pretty thin defense. A much better line for him to take might be to argue that in the process of thoroughly debriefing the Baltimore reporters, and keeping up with Agnew's many fluffs, the press might just have overlooked the actual impact he was having on the people who came out to see him campaign. "He was doing a first-rate job," says one Administration aide, "coming across the same way he does now. The reporters didn't get the simple fact that he was winning us votes."

But by that time the animosity between Agnew and the press had so deepened that it might well have paralyzed any reporter's grasp on simple fact. The candidate had stopped holding press conferences altogether, would only answer the questions of local reporters who came out to meet his campaign plane. On the other hand, the New York *Times* had broached a possible conflict-of-interest scandal touching Agnew that turned out to be totally without substance, then wouldn't back down. It was not a happy airplane.

Then, on the final campaign leg over the Appalachians to a West Virginia mountaintop, came the last little bit of fun-and-games. Several reporters got together in lighthearted exasperation and typed out a jugular parody entitled "The New York *Times* Retraction." Just before landing, a TV reporter gathered together the hasty copy and moved forward to the plane's public address system.

"With the election just a day off this great newspaper has decided that it is, indeed, big enough to admit error. We unqualifiedly and wholeheartedly endorse Governor Spiro T. Agnew. . . . With his immense background as president of a PTA . . . his willingness to call a spade a spade. . . . Besides, he says that some of his best friends are Polacks. . . . Governor Agnew is hard-nosed, it is true. But the times do not call for squishy-soft noses. . . ."

A United Airlines steward had already yanked out all the wires to the P.A. system, but the TV reporter kept right on reading, louder, straight through every bygone Agnew blooper.

Agnew had to have heard at least some of it.

"Ridicule is the hardest thing to take in politics," he says, thinking back on that campaign. "There were days when I would have preferred being castigated to being made fun of."

He had to have heard part of it, and almost a year later, his own turn came round.

And the reaction to his attack on TV commentators was so overwhelming, and generally favorable, that he could even afford to be a little coy about it. "Somehow, when I look around the tube from time to time I feel I've had a modicum of success here and there," he told an audience of old friends in Baltimore County, "but I want to be well understood that I have a great respect for a free media. . . . Someday perhaps my friends who

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# He has 'philotimo' in abundance

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operate the flow of opinion through the television tubes will understand that I acted only in the best interest of what I thought should be said at that moment and that . . . gentlemen, I'm calling off the war."

But that doesn't make him any less of a war hero. He is still wildly popular as a veteran who will sometimes speak of his memories, draw a lesson or two from his combat experiences. "I don't do it just for the political effect," he insists. "There really has been a distortion. I'm concerned about the balance. When editorial opinion is so one-sided, it really does begin to drift into news coverage." And if, on occasion, he slips and becomes a little caustic, remember how often, and near mortally, he was wounded. Who else, in the long history of hostilities with the media, what other politician ever came so early under such withering fire, yet still survived to tell the gruesome tale? Only Richard Nixon, possibly. But then that makes twice, to the same generation of Republicans. And think, for every Dick Nixon, for every Ted Agnew, how many there were whom the polls will not return to us again. There could have been only one responsible Administration conclusion. It must never happen again, especially in the fall of 1970.

That, in fact, is how the Vice President fits into the overall political strategy now emerging from the White House. It has been called, too quickly, a Southern strategy, when it really goes far beyond that. Why, in fact, should the Administration confine itself to basically tactical moves—Agnew to Atlanta, Carswell to the Supreme Court—in so local a theater of operations? "We should try to turn the whole country around," says a White House spokesman. "Otherwise we're just here as caretakers, the Eisenhowers of the '70s."

An immense undertaking, and to succeed, so the theory goes, the Administration must confront and confound a thoroughly entrenched liberalism that controls almost every important institution in the land. "They've got the media, both houses of Congress, the academic community. We've got the White House and that's about it."

Thus, the lonely and embattled White House needs all the help it can find, most especially the sort of blunt, brute partisanship the Vice President offers. Indeed, Agnew's iron-willed gracelessness and his capacity to startle are seen as invaluable assets in the struggle against received opinion. "The fact that he's gotten as high as he has so fast has its advantages. Others who've been around longer are inhibited in what they say, how they say it. But the Vice President is less concerned than any politician I know about what the hell anybody else is going to care." As a result, people react strongly, not blandly, to what he says, and if that strong reaction can be properly harnessed, it is the one impetus, short of "another Andy Jackson out of the West," that can maybe change the country around, or back, to a more Republican predisposition. That is why Agnew is essential, even outside the South, and that is why Nixon, of course, knowing all along, chose him in 1968.

Could what still looks like such blind, dumb luck really have been that much foresight on Nixon's part? Certainly the choice of Agnew was an unsettling enough surprise to everybody else at the time, including Ted Agnew. Actually he had a golf date that day. J. Walter Jones had already alerted his pilot, was planning to fly Agnew out to one of the island courses. Then, at 8 a.m., Agnew called him to say there was going to be a little delay, his name was one of ten. At 9:30 a.m., he called again to tell Jones, better come on over, he was now one of four. And by the time Jones got there . . . "Like Judy says, we were all kind of numb —tried to act nonchalant, but like a kid who'd swallowed worms."

Not so Nixon. He grew, during the post-convention letdown, compulsively voluble, and at a gathering of reporters in Key Biscayne, he could not get off the subject of Ted Agnew, what a "gut fighter" he really was, how tough he would be in the tight spots, what a hardworking, loyal fellow the press was "going to get to know in the days ahead." He acted as if he and Agnew had already exchanged the innermost cockles of their hearts, while the reporters were still trying to find out how many times the two of them had ever actually met.

And since the answer is not that often—their acquaintanceship was "very late in coming into being," Agnew admits—it has to be set down as a minor miracle of political judgment that Nixon chose Agnew. In fact, that choice is still considered so much the sudden elevation of a lesser mortal that nobody thinks to ask why Agnew chose Nixon. Another mistake, because Agnew has never been that much of a pushover, any more than he has ever been that much of a fool.

The assumption has always been that once Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, Agnew's original choice, suddenly backed away from the race, under circumstances particularly embarrassing to Agnew, he immediately gravitated toward Nixon, even trimming his political convictions so that he could sidle rightward. But this analysis simply overlooks the most important element in Agnew's character, that pride. An almost Hellenic pride, a quality his fellow Greek-Americans call *philotimo*, best summed up as an extremely sensitive, highly masculine, even physical self-esteem. Though Agnew hardly courts the ethnic association, much prefers just plain "Ted" to "Hey, Big Spiro!" and, in fact, speaks very little of the language, he still has *philotimo*, and in abundance.

Obviously that pride suffered when Rockefeller so cavalierly withdrew from the race late in March 1968, without so much as a phone call to Agnew to warn him what was going to happen on TV that day. Agnew had to stand there, as head of the national Draft Rockefeller movement, surrounded by press, and watch his man simply refuse to run. "Why was I put in this position?" was all he could inwardly wonder. But at the same time, that pride was still sufficiently intact to make him wary, stubborn, plenty tight-lipped about whom he would support next. He did during this period go through something of a crisis, of a muddle, in his attitude toward black power. He brooded, imploded, and came forth to make what amounts to a mistake of pride. By his own limited lights he had been decent and moderate; why should the black students of Bowie State College confront him, the "good Negroes" of Baltimore desert him? So he

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# Nixon is 'so care about my feeling

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gave them, incredibly, a Talking-To. But that was still much more his own bullheadedness than any attempt at refurbishing himself to suit political convenience in Miami. By convention time, he was leaning toward Nixon, but still open to Rockefeller. All he'd made certain were his moral principles, pulled forth shining from the wrecked alliances and burnt-out hopes he had left behind him.

"I have not changed my position on any issue," he argues obstreperously. "If I have any single criticism of political categorizing, it's that it never gives a sufficient definition of where a person really is." Especially a person who takes the issues as they come. "Back in Baltimore County, as I went along, I saw we had to do something about open housing. That meant an invasion of the rights of private ownership, but I thought this invasion was warranted. As governor, I appointed Negroes to places on my staff, saw that they served on state draft boards for the first time. I suppose I looked to some people like I was a little bit to the left of Abbie Hoffman. And I feel strongly, aggressively that qualified Negroes should have a stake in the establishment. But even back then I rejected summarily the idea that demonstrations could ever properly involve law-breaking."

This last, of course, has now become the most resounding side of his party rhetoric. But every so often there are balky hints, proud inklings from him, indicating how much he objects to the charge that he is limited to that side. Over and over again he has been asked about his chairmanship of the President's committee on school integration *vis-à-vis* any Southern strategy. He has a pat answer: the committee is deep in its deliberations, and there is no Southern strategy. But once, privately, he varied that denial in a definitely provocative way. "Let me tell you something. If we had a Southern strategy, they never would have put *me* in charge of that committee."

A touch of pride, or perhaps only humbug, but in any case, that sensitivity in Agnew that Nixon most meticulously respected as he sought, though never directly

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ter neighborhood, they have certainly shifted, burgeoned. Again, Nixon may have had him right from the beginning. There is supposed to be "a mystique" about this man, and Agnew is determined, even if it means more hard work and greater sacrifice to meet the payments, to have one.

That is perhaps the strangest contradiction in the man. He has risen to prominence, if not quite to eminence, on a surprisingly widespread sympathy for his fluffs and solecisms, an affection for his blundering openness. He became popular because he struck so many people as Their Guy, sometimes just as incompetent, often just as inadequate as they feel themselves to be, but also, mind, just as sensible. Yet Agnew himself is desperately uncomfortable about his past gaffes, one reason he tends to blame them on circumstances, even on others. He will dutifully laugh at them, but the memory is painful, and always there. Not that he regrets having the common touch. But he just hates having left all those smudges.

This peculiar agony can be seen, almost in cameo, in his experience out at the Bob Hope Desert Golf Classic. On his second shot of the day, with a number three wood off a golf-cart path, he slammed one right into the back of Pro Doug Sanders' head, just barely missing Bob Hope himself. Headlines again. Of course, they all kept right on playing, Agnew smiling hard, wetting his finger and feeling for the wind whenever his ball fell off its tee. "All you people," he would warn the crowd nervously, "just stay loose out there," then whack into a slice, or a hook, or even into the ground right behind his ball. And all this, predictably, won him yet a greater following, the heart of every duffer in the land. "He plays just like I do."

But Agnew did not, does not want to play just like they do. He was inwardly mortified for 18 painful holes, as, in fact, he always is whenever he plays a terrible game of golf. "I wish it weren't so," says his friend Jones. "I wish he could relax more when he plays. But if his shots are bad, he's a very unhappy guy." Weeks later, talking over his play that day out in the desert, he was still trying to salvage something. "My putting wasn't that bad," he reflected. "You know, it made me just mad enough to want to learn to play the game really well." And if his golf doesn't come through for him, then it will have to be his tennis, which he has taken up again after 16 years, playing this past winter on an indoor court with his aide C. D. Ward, ferociously, dedicatedly, often from 10 o'clock to midnight.

In other words, like so many people who are prone to error, he is at heart a perfectionist. "I don't think he necessarily demands that of other people," says another friend, "but he does of himself." And if this is true of his golf, or his tennis, or his pants creases, it is even more so of his political career. He is determined on an impeccable performance, and when he goofs he suffers, not doltishly, but mortally.

And what that suffering has done, in conjunction with all that pride, is to force him aloof. In fact, for a man who has grown so suddenly popular, he has put himself out remarkably little for the people. His followers usually have about as much chance to meet and rub shoulders with him as the French did with De Gaulle. He arrives for his speech, hovers briefly near the pre-dinner reception, tucks into his meal, rises and says his say, then disappears off to bed, sending along his apologies to any extra-sleek fat cats who have huddled in hopes of talking privately with him. And the rest is televised news: those continuing meanmouthed snippets from his speeches that keep his reputation for guts and straight talk running high and handsome.

All this distancing, of course, is

# His mystique is slowly beginning to form

helping a mystique laboriously to form. If he is not perfect, then at least he is no longer seen as so imperfect. He is becoming more and more removed from his fumbling past, from that slightly haunting caricature of himself down in the corner of Jones's tavern painting. He can control his own situation, maybe even the laughter of others. Air Force Two can continue to draw up behind obscure supply terminals, a few sticky questions can be answered at the briefest of press conferences, and he can be off to sermon the faithful, leaving behind a hint of urgency, a trace of amiability, and no sign of a fool.

In fact, the old Air Force Two itself (Agnew has a sleek new jet for trips abroad) seems almost a part of this sealing-off of Agnew, another aspect of the mystique. It happens to be a reconverted tanker, so that it is all but windowless. The crew calls it "the Tube," and travel inside it is by encapsulation. A journey passes without a single peek at the visible altitude, without even the sweep of anonymous clouds. Aloft, but even more than that, aloof.

The Vice President often flies almost alone. And almost alone, away from people, he is easier, chattier. He has a string of anecdotes about Tom Marshall, Woodrow Wilson's Vice President, to offer. But he paces some, and there is always that awareness that he is here on a fast climb, that he has just barely leveled off from being upwardly mobile.

"I have a theory of political destruction by the media," he suddenly propounded, during a flight back to Washington, D.C. "In the early days of a political career, the media are omniscient. You can be completely destroyed by adverse publicity. Violently destroyed. But later, after more and more exposure, they can't hurt you. Nothing they say has impact."

Then, as Air Force Two began to lower toward a landing, he raised his arm, extended his hand, open-palmed. Another man from his staff did the same. Some joke of a salute perhaps, but no, he smiled, "It's a little game we play." The object was to slap down hard at exactly the moment the wheels touched. There was no way, of course, to get help from the outside. Impressions, past experience, a sense of the moment-to-moment situation, maybe some subliminal data were all anybody could bring to bear. Finally, you had to go with your feeling. . . .

No, he did not hit it right on the button, but he was the closest.

The Vice President, with Tricia and Pat Nixon, greets the President on his return from Midway in June