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Secret plans come out in diary

Richard Nixon's secret plan to infiltrate and incite opponents of his Vietnam War policy — to make them appear violent, unpatriotic, even anti-American radicals — reached its pique in California on the night of Oct. 29, 1970.

Date line, San Jose: Rocks Smash Windows of President's Motorcade: Anti-War Protest Turns Ugly.

Now we are learning a big chunk of the real story. It comes from "The Haldeman Diaries," meticulously recorded and posthumously published by Nixon's chief of staff, H.R. (Bob) Haldeman.

I actually heard the rest of the story the night it happened, in 1970. Richard Nixon told me. (He didn't mean to, but he did.) Today, a mere quarter-century late, we can finally piece together what really happened in that confrontational finale to a midterm election campaign that divided our nation.

First, we must note Nixon's mindset: He worried that moderate Americans, increasingly disillusioned with the war, would sympathize with anti-war efforts.

So, Haldeman reveals, Nixon plotted his politics-of-division — an insight overlooked in the recent eulogy gush about a Nixon who vowed to "Bring Us Together."

"Sept. 12, 1970: At Camp David ... (The president) has several plots he wants hatched. One to infiltrate ... Common Cause (the recently formed public interest group), deal and needle them and try to push them to left. ...

"Next, (create) a front that sounds like SDS (the radical Students for a Democratic Society) to support the Democratic candidates and praise their liberal records, etc., publicize their 'bad' quotes in guise of praise. Give the senators a 'radical' rating."

In San Jose, Nixon took matters into his own hands — literally. From "The Haldeman Diaries":

"Oct. 29, 1970: ... San Jose turned into the real blockbuster. Very tough demonstrators shouting ... on the way into the auditorium. ... We wanted some confrontation and there were no hecklers in the hall, so we stalled departure a little so they could zero in outside, and they sure did. ... Made a huge incident and we worked hard to crank it up, should make really major story and might be effective."

Now the rest of the story: Nixon aides conferred agitatedly during the San Jose speech, which I covered as Newsday's White House correspondent.

Martin
Schram



Something was up. Afterwards, I headed toward Nixon's limousine and stood next to Haldeman and domestic adviser John Ehrlichman, opting to miss the motorcade to the airport.

The crowd chanted as Nixon and Gov. Ronald Reagan approached. Nixon, seeming strangely pleased, climbed atop the limo trunk, thrust his arms skyward, flashed his famous V-signs. Holding that taunting pose, he growled to his confidants (and me) through a clenched-teeth smile: "That's what they hate to see!"

As Nixon's motorcade departed, now-enraged demonstrators threw debris. Rocks dented Nixon's limo, smashed car and press bus windows. Haldeman noted: "Rock hit my car, driver hit brakes, car stalled, car behind hit us, rather scary. ..."

At the airport, reporters telephoned bulletins that anti-war protesters attacked the president, quoting White House officials saying Nixon had been waving friendly "V-signs" to supporters. From an auditorium phone, I dictated the real story to my New York newspaper, describing Nixon's taunt and his quote. Helpful editors read to me wire service bulletins: the misleading White House spin was accepted as gospel. So I hailed the first car I saw, paid the driver \$50, and arrived at the airport barely before the press plane door closed. On board, I borrowed the stewardess' microphone and shared my "exclusive" with my colleagues (as presidential aides fumed) — complete with Nixon's "That's what they hate to see!"

Havoc ensued. Nixon aides called for the plane to take off; but the reporters jumped up, raced to the phones and changed their reports.

For all their anger, White House officials never denied that Nixon uttered that revealing quote. Perhaps they'd seen that I was clever enough to be carrying my trusty tape recorder in my hand.

What Nixon aides didn't know (and I never bothered to mention) was that I hadn't been clever enough to turn on my trusty machine.