

Part of CLUES

Republicans Are Cannibals: Richard Nixon

Whatever else he accomplished on his long road to history's most disasterous presidency, Richard Nixon did not acquire a reputation as a philosopher, deep and original thinker, or even as a phrase-monger. Rather is his career the successful exploitation of the thoughts and words of others, warefully stored for retrieval and reuse at what for him seemed like the appropriate moment. His taste and his mind run to cliches. For him none are too stereotyped or too well-known and easily-identified.

There is one conspicuous exception, one time when Richard Nixon spoke lucidly, describin in his own, if limited, words exactly what he saw from ~~xxxx~~ his inside vantage point. Perhaps, in the anguish of his great Watergate travail, what he said during the Sherman Adams scandal, came back to haunt his greatest and Seventh Crisis.

Eisnehower was the everybody's uncle type, a pleasant-appearing man who, from his long, military, chain-of-command responsibility~~xxxxxx~~ life, wanted everybodoy else to do his work. He then wanted what was presented to him reduced to a single page. This gave him ample time for reading westerns, watching them on TV and his own private theater, and for playing golf, even ~~an~~ the White House law. His office is still scarred with the gouging of the cleats of the shoes into which he changed for this executive privelege.

So, Eisenhower needed an adjutant who whold think and decide for him. That man was Sherman Adams, former New Hampshire governor.

Long before becoming Eisnehower's White House chief of staff, Adams started taking New England petty graft from a textile magnate, Bernard Goldfine, who was later jailed. While this was immeasurably petty compared to ~~xxx~~ Nixonian corruption, with only a minor fraction of that pettiness coming to light, in many ways it parallels and was recalled during the earlier exposures of The Watergate. Adams had taken a vicuna coat from Goldfine and for this departure from presidential and public morality he was axed. What did not then emerge and was later hidden by four presidents is that he also took a fairly large amount of money under the table. According to Jack Anderson's May 20, 1973 column,

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because of a strange, down-east quirk that made a landlady dislike him, after his disgrace about \$350,000 was traced from Goldfine to Adams.

Richard Nixon, he of the Checkers speech, was vice president during all of this Adams furore. Observing the carryings-on in higher administration echelons as each Republican nabob sought to isolate and immunize himself, Nixon commented,

The trouble with Republicans is that when they get in trouble, they start acting like a bunch of cannibals.

Alas poor Nixon! He forgot this when he, his Presidency, his administration and his very closest and with that "bunch" the whole nation "got in trouble".

Chief cannibal was Richard Nixon. As king he felt it was his right to eat all the others so that he might survive. Perhaps a better phrase, one he didn't use, would be throw them to the wolves. Before King Richard the First got well into the display of those talents he began to develop at the transome to the Dean of the Duke law school's office he had just about everyone in the White House at each others throats and most of the rest divided into antagonistic camps; had, besides those he had planted, all parts of government leaking what hurt its antagonists, as each saw his antagonists, to the press; smoked out many who ~~was~~ might otherwise have remained silent, or at least loyal to him; even had government agencies fighting each other.

This was not the Nixon of Checkers. It was the Nixon making his Eighth Crisis.
of internecine warfare

He let the blood of his own, stoped through the gore/in public silence and close to total isolation from the rest of the world, made an antagonist of his own party and its hiereraky, abandoned most of its candidates and, ultimately, forced most to speak out against him and the others to express their doubts about him openly.

And before it was over, Richard, yet not quite on the throne, would have swapped ir for a horse.

But from the outset of the scandal, if, indeed, not from the beginning of his administration, he regarded all and everything as personal property, his because he was the President and everything belonged to the President.

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He ordered crimes - high crimes- and they were committed.

If any one of the many government agencies involved in the overall mess he made did not engage in criminal activity, that will be the eighth wonder of the Eighth Crisis.

It should be understood that what was done in his name, if without his specific, articulated order, is also his responsibility.

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The conventional attitude is that Richard Nixon has always been a dedicated party man to whom service to the party was a way of life and a matter of principle. In the words of Washington Post political commentator Lou Cannon [6/4/73], "his ^{long in public life} career... was built upon the foundation of unremitting party service."

Superficially, until 1972², this seemed to be the case.

Nixon does seem to have been ever-willing to do the party's work. None of it was every too dirty for him, witness his "twenty years of treason" attack on Harry Truman and all Democrats. When other Republicans sat the disastrous Goldwater campaign of 1964 out, Nixon thumped tubs from coast to coast, seemingly working hard for the party and for Goldwater.

As recently as the mid-term elections of 1970, he did campaign for his party's legislative candidates. He then switched from his trade-marked "soft on Communism" to soft on "law and order" in attacking Democrats.

Generally, the party in power loses a little strength in the mid-term elections. It is customary for the President, who wants and needs all the Congressional support he can get, to work for it. Nixon's 1970 efforts accomplished little. The optimistic forecasts of the party pros went unfulfilled.

In 1972, however, Nixon did practically nothing for most of his party's candidates, pretending almost to be above party. He concentrated all efforts on his re-election campaign and bled all sources of Republican funds for this, at the cost of the campaigns of all other Republican candidates. The other candidates did rather poorly. Considering the record-breaking vote for Nixon, the other campaigns were a disaster for the party.

It is doubtful if any president ever came as close to sitting out his own re-election campaign. It was the conventional wisdom that he profited from this greatly-reduced exposure because it tended to avoid criticism of his record of no accomplishment while focusing attention on his opponent and the weaknesses, real and Republican contrived, of that candidacy.

There is an obvious inconsistency in President Richard Nixon, for the first time

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in a long political life, ~~was~~ virtually abandoning the campaign, his own and that of his party and its other candidates. It is not fully explained by his wise strategy of letting the public see as little of him as possible. This is not a ~~mere~~ ^{while} figure of speech. He shunned television ~~and~~ making a number of radio broadcasts.

The 1972 election differed from all others in Nixon's political life in that it was the first in which he did not have to seek support for himself from the party. There was never any real doubt about the outcome of the presidential election. The sole question was how many millions of surplus votes Nixon would have. If ~~this~~ was not the reality once George Wallace was crippled for life and removed as a vote-divider, it was beyond question by the time of the nominating conventions.

Until the 1972 elections, regardless of whom he seemed to be working for, regardless of how undiluted his party regularity and loyalty seemed to be, Richard Nixon was always working for Richard Nixon. Most of all was this true during the Goldwater campaign and in the mid-year elections after it, when Nixon ~~was~~ did not run for any office. The more hopeless the Goldwater cause, the more benefit to Nixon. From it he earned his reputation of selflessness and "unremitting party service."

Aside from stashing away a lot of political due-bills for the future, Nixon attracted enormous attention to himself particularly because he was not running for office and his record was not an issue, was not subjected to political acid-testing. These ~~are~~ were the only years of Nixon's political life when Nixon's political record was not an issue and not subjected to close examination. It was the ideal way to present himself to the electorate, the perfect way to put the entire party in his debt.

Had it ever been necessary for Nixon to stand on his record in a campaign of rational issues, he'd never have made dog-catcher. There is no accomplishment in his record, no record to stand on except the paranoia he helped popularize, the red-scare in which whoever happened to be his opponent was painted red. (Pink for the lady, Helen Mahagan Douglas, as befits one who would like to be considered a gentleman.)

If California elections are not renowned for their purity, an uglier one than Nixon ~~administered~~ by Murray Chotiner and the off bag of lawyers almost all with Madison Avenue West pasts, morals and ethics who went to their White House reward with Nixon. In this campaign Nixon ~~against~~ Nixon and some of them were convicted of criminal transgressions against the election code. Despite this unequalled crookedness, he lost big. He lost his cool just as big, on camera. In his paranoid's view, the press that had reported him accurately, not his kind of campaign and campaigning, cost him the election. At ~~the~~ the moment he attacked the press and said it would no longer have Richard Nixon to kick around (an uncharacteristic psychological self-disclosure), Nixon probably did not believe he had any political future, so he didn't give a damn about the press. Or, at least, the reporters.

Before long, however, whether or not he thought the party could field a winning presidential candidate, he did ~~conceive~~ conceive that his loss to JFK and his drubbing from the party hack Pat Brown in the governor's race need not be an impediment to his taking another crack at the presidency. All of Nixon's political activity, and it was considerable, was in support of his coming candidacy, not of those he said he was appearing to elect. By the time of the 1968 there was no serious opposition to him. This had a side benefit of giving him a united party that had not been seriously hurt by pre-convention in-fighting.

Never was Nixon's affinity for the unprincipled and dishonest more apparent than in his campaign against the hapless Humphrey. The Democrats had seriously damaged their chances by with an undemocratic convention in which the bosses ~~named~~ ^{nominated} the man who could Vietnam ~~not~~ not get the Johnson Vietnam weight off his back. Nixon claimed a secret plan with which, once President, he'd end that horrible, unpolular war. He never had any such plan, but the pretense of it and Humphrey

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being saddled in the public mind with responsibility for it won for him.

As Nixon looked back over his own record in the party, on the party's with the Presidency (only a nonparty candidate, Eisenhower, President since Herbert Hoover), and on the election just ended, in which he had won while the party did not take control of either House of the Congress, he could have felt that he owed the party nothing and that it owed him much. I think he did feel this way.

Once he moved into the White House, he began acting that way, too. The first thing he did was block his party from his White House. In the place of those with political experience, wisdom and influence, he staffed his executive offices with those with personal devotion to him, those who could not have cared less about the party. ~~These were the ones who had been through the~~

Around himself he esconced those of Madison Avenue West who had been through the dirty campaigning with him. Those who had joined him in crime he knew he could trust. If he was wrong on their judgement, he was right enough on their personal loyalty to him. They were the "I'd-cut-my-right-arm-off" kind, those who would, in Charles Colson's memorable words, have trampled on their grandmothers for Richard Nixon's personal gain.

And they were all Nixonians, not Republicans.

Not even the non-political Eisenhower dreamed of or dared so separate himself from his party.

In the 1972 campaign, Nixon carried this to another extreme. He established, divorced from the Republican National Committee, his Committee for the Re-election of the President. Never before has a President run so anonymously, as though he were secretly ashamed of his own name or as though he thought people didn't like it and him. Its countless subsidiaries, affiliates and fronts likewise avoided his name and that of the Republican Party.

It was "Republicans, not Democrats, who dubbed the re-election machinery with the appropriate acronym "Creep". These Creeps devoted themselves and their energies to the singular task of putting their glorious leader back in the White House. They at

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froze the party leadership out of the campaign and out of the White House, access to which was controlled by this new Madison Avenue West end led by H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, who kept close watch on and control over the Creeps.

At the Creep top were men with government experience, like former Attorney General John Mitchell and former Secretary of Commerce Maurice Stans. Under them were an odd assortment of Nixon faithful, not a few of whom had been reassigned from the White House staff. They were expert at selling Nixon, collecting money for him alone, and at advertising and merchandising methods, not in government or politics, where they were so notably ignorant they became the subject of bitter jokes among professional Republican politicians.

Congressman Charles Lanigan of New York called them "the biggest bunch of fumlbers" he'd ever seen. He told a gathering of complaining Republican colleagues that one Creep official had actually called his office to learn if in New York the governor was elected or appointed!

Fumlbers, bunglers, and political ignoramuses they were. Unsuccessful they were not. They succeeded. The President was re-elected, with the largest vote in history. He failed to help his party in the Congress and is so failing, failed to help himself there. It is not because he didn't know the kind of campaign he was running would not help him in the composition of Congress or the loyalty of Republican members to him. It is that he didn't care, that something else meant more to him.

Perhaps he was insecure. Perhaps he didn't really trust the polls, all of which showed McGovern was never really close to being a tough opponent. Whether or not this psychological factor figured in it - and there is much in his history to give it validity - I think ~~the~~ ^{his} dominating ~~concern~~ concern was to get the largest majority possible, regardless of how he did it, without significant party participation, so he could present himself as and consider himself as The Man, a man of such personal popularity he didn't need the party or its machinery. As the man who was in his own right the national leader, the man who had earned the right, as he saw it, to rule the country

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AS HE SAW IT, DEMONSTRATION TO INDICATE HIS INTENTIONS

He acted as an authoritarian ruler. He did ignore the law when it suited his purposes. And his purposes were authoritarian. Consistent with this he did all he could to reduce the Congress and the courts to impotence, often enough fuming impotence and not uncommonly with Republicans among the most troubled and irate.

Nixon's above-party authoritarian posture in the campaign was the political castration of the party machinery and its nominal leaders. They could hardly disassociate themselves and the party and its candidates from an incumbent President who had all of Nixon's power and an established willingness to use it. The few who had the temerity of oppose him publicly, Congressman Matt McCloskey, California liberal, and John Ashbrooks, Ohio's bitter reactionary, were beaten badly. They served as cases in line point, making "perfectly clear" what happened to those who did not fall into ranks behind him.

Complaints to the White House were not ignored. They were used by Nixon's personal staff, his gauleiters-in-residence, to whip the complainers into ranks. The substance of these numerous complaints, however, was ignored. Nixon and his Creeps were wrecking the local parties and their candidates. The state chairman had a secret meeting on this, ~~secretly~~ where they discussed their common problem. One of them leaked the story to The Washington Post. Rather than redress their grievances,

Republican National Committee Chairman Senator Robert Dole and his a White House or Creep functionary phoned each named by the Post as having been at the meeting and conveyed the official displeasure to him. Nixon and Nixonians didn't care about the grievances. They did care about leaks about complaints. After their phone calls, there were no more leaks about such meetings. The complaints remained.

If Nixon had been a real dictator, he could hardly have exerted more dictatorial authority. The difference is in the trappings not the result. The trappings were of freedom in a free election. The result was a close approximation of complete authoritarian control. The end was Nixon's overwhelming re-election, often at the cost of Republican candidates for state and national offices, at the cost of the party, its machinery and leadership.