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Time

THE PRESIDENCY/HUGH SIDNEY

# The Consuming Pursuit of Power

The brute force of the presidency is still astonishing. During Richard Nixon's absence in the Middle East, Washington almost subsided into a Southern city stricken with the last days of spring. Then he came back.

His jet caravan arrived with thunder and a blast of hot air from the helicopter rotors and the speeches on the south lawn of the White House. Almost as if Nixon's arrival were a signal, the high-energy politicians began to shoot off and collide with each other. The presidential propaganda office cranked out in awed gasps stories of the millions of joyful Arabs who had shouted praises for Nixon. Press Secretary Ron Ziegler talked in super-superlatives of new eras, of more and better chances for peace. There were box scores of miles traveled (14,775), records broken (first President in Egypt in 30 years, biggest welcome ever). Nixon called the movers and shakers of Washington in for briefings on the triumph. They rolled up in their huge black limousines, strode purposefully to the Cabinet Room—first the congressional leaders, then the Cabinet and the National Security Council.

For his guests, the President talked of continents and whole peoples, he embraced millions with the wave of his hand, summed up countries in a few sentences, looked back over centuries with a nod or two.

DAVID KENNERLY



HELICOPTER BRINGING NIXON HOME

This is the modern ritual of power. It is a final exhilaration for men in these positions, a distillate of the presidential spectacle that sweeps across oceans and mountain ranges with such ease.

And even as Nixon conferred, they wheeled the big jets into the hangars at Andrews Air Force Base to give them a fresh coat of turtle wax and burnish them for the trip this week to the Soviet Union, which will be bigger, more profound and yield more headlines that the workers in the White House will clip, measure and assay.

Perhaps Thomas Jefferson's Monticello or colonial Williamsburg are not the places from which to view modern presidential might. But for Jefferson and his contemporaries, power was never the final joy. The ultimate pleasure was to be back among the places and people they loved. Jefferson's reward for service was not cheers or ceremonies but the opportunity to perfect his thoughts, use the language

well, design a graceful structure, plan a garden ("No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of the garden").

How far we have drifted. Almost all of our national political leaders are totally consumed by the pursuit and exercise of power. Few of them ultimately translate their efforts into the small increments that give life the special depth that Jefferson perceived. One wonders about the Watergate criminals and whether things would have been different had these men had other interests with which to soften and better interpret the purpose of power.

It may be that 200 years of growth have made this impossible. Men of modern power perhaps can be nothing else, so exigent and awesome are the demands upon them. Yet our best Presidents have clung to small pleasures that tied them to the ground and their fellow citizens. Lincoln told stories. Theodore Roosevelt relished the outdoors. His cousin Franklin collected stamps and ship models. Truman devoured biographies. Perhaps the last President not consumed by power was Dwight Eisenhower, who found something special in painting, fishing a quiet trout stream or being on the golf course. Some doubt his legislative contributions, but we can now by contrast see how much his spirit meant to the nation.

It is a reminder in these somber times that cheers and manufactured banners and distance and speed mean nothing unless there's a human dimension beneath and beyond the spectacle. And that is the continuing shadow across the restless trail of Richard Nixon.