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'A Politician Of the Seventies'

LOS ANGELES—The setting, the situation, the leading character are pure Hollywood—an early scene from another film like "The Candidate."

He is sprawled in a lawn chair in the garden of his bachelor pad, one of those mountaintop, floral oases of fresh air that make you forget about the million cars polluting the atmosphere of the basin below you. His slim, tanned face with the good features is set off by a mop of dark hair, with just enough gray at the temples to show that this 36-year-old may be mature enough to be governor of the largest state.

He's back from a black church meeting, and now he sits, tie loosened, sipping cider in his garden at twilight, while a woman friend fixes dinner in the kitchen for the two of them.

If you were writing the script, you might even make the young man the son of the former governor and have him trying to succeed the man who took the job from his father.

Secretary of State Edmund G. Brown Jr. is that man. If he can hold his lead over hard-charging Assembly Speaker Bob Moretti through the June 4 primary, he will indeed be the Democratic nominee to succeed Gov. Ronald Reagan (R). Eight years ago, Reagan snuffed out the senior Brown's bid for a third term in Sacramento.

But once you are past the cliches of the situation, candidate Brown turns out to be anything but a Hollywood hero, as unlike Robert Redford as he is dissimilar from the former governor whose good name has given him much of his political credibility.

Jerry Brown (as the young man likes to be called) has none of the bluff charm that made Pat Brown such a favorite. He is a cool, reflective, rather withdrawn and ascetic former seminarian. He came to politics via the Movement, demonstrating against capital punishment, segregation, the exploitation of farm workers and the Vietnam war, then helping Eugene McCarthy in his California primary campaign.

A visitor finds Jerry Brown thinking about the way those experiences set

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him apart, not only from his father's generation but from the man he likely would face in November, Republican State Controller Houston I. Flournoy. Flournoy is 44, only eight years Brown's elder, but Flournoy entered the California Assembly in 1961, while Brown was still in college. To Brown that means "he's a politician of the '60s and I'm a politician of the '70s."

What's the difference? "He started politics with Camelot," said Brown, "and I came to politics out of the Vietnam war, the Great Society and Watergate."

His linking of Lyndon Johnson's great domestic dream with the twin catastrophes of Vietnam and Watergate would jar most Democrats of more advanced years. But Brown is, like so many liberals of his generation, wrestling with a redefinition of government's role.

"I've seen government all my life," he said, "and I'm not bemused by it. I read Commentary and The Public Interest and, like them, I take a somewhat jaundiced view of the ability of government to perform."

"But I also know American society is not going to survive without strong leadership that will help us adjust to the limits that resources and population and the environment will increasingly apply."

"My father was a very active governor and the state government grew enormously in those eight years. When Reagan came in, people had had enough. Reagan has had a concept of a 'creative society,' which really means relying on the market mechanism, and it just hasn't worked."

"His basic philosophy has made it very difficult for him to let state government take a positive role in planning, and planning is essential to deal with the issues of energy and land use and the environment."

"With the failures in Washington in the '60s and the start of general revenue-sharing, it's clear the states are going to have to do much of that planning. We have the sophistication here to do it, to develop our own transportation and housing and resource plans. The talent is here, in our universities and our industries, and if we get the leadership, California can be the leader of the country in these areas."

The visitor was still not certain he understood how a "politician of the '70s" would approach those problems in any way that differed from the men — including Pat Brown — who had tried earlier.

Are there any models around? "I don't see any," the candidate replied, "and that's one of the problems. But that's also what makes it exciting. We may create the new model here."