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Rehnquist will provide a chance to study a political throwback

WASHINGTON — A "throwback" according to the dictionary is "a reversal or backward deviation." It is most noticeable under the microscope and occurs rarely in politics because politics place such enormous value on what New York's Gov. Nelson Rockefeller once called "the mainstream."

But occasionally politics do offer us a throwback, and Mr. Nixon's newest appointee, William Rehnquist, will give us the opportunity to study the genus, probably for the rest of our lives.

There will be a certain satisfaction in the study — even perhaps a certain fun. It is interesting, for example, to speculate on what grandfather's grandfather would think of our world. What ideas would he espouse? Rip Van Winkle must have been the brainchild of just such speculation.

It is important not to confuse the throwback with the conservative. Grandfather's grandfather may or may not have been a conservative. The point is that if he were alive today he would be putting forth ideas which are out of context, ideas which have been discarded by the process of growth.

Let us imagine an example: He might suggest a means by which a slave could pick more cotton in a day. It might be a brilliant idea, testifying to his powers of observation, logic, even perhaps (supposing his suggestion incorporated social betterment as incentive) to his liberal frame of mind. The point is that it would not be pertinent. We should have to explain to him that there was no such thing as a slave and that cotton was no longer picked by hand.

What would he do then? Would he settle down to grow into the new age? Or would he fight for the old? Would he argue that we should have slaves and pick cotton by hand? It would be an interesting study in what the psychologists call atavism, and since we cannot study the behavior of grandfather's grandfather, we can study William Rehnquist instead.

It is hard to believe that Rehnquist,



William Rehnquist

An interesting study

once on the court, will "discipline himself intellectually" as his backers suggested, putting aside his personal opinion in order to conform to the facts of life. It is hard to believe he will do this because he never has done it.

In 1952, when he was 27, he was urging his fellow townspeople to stick with segregation. Twelve years later he was arguing against letting black people eat in drugstores. A local (Phoenix, Ariz.) ordinance requiring stores, restaurants and other public accommodations to serve citizens without regard to color was, Rehnquist argued, "an assault on the institution (of private property)."

And in 1967, he asserted that those who argued in favor of desegregated schools "assert a claim for special privilege for a minority."

Rehnquist is a different kind of throwback. It is his thought which is archaic and he does not wish to be left alone; he wishes to stick the rest of us with what he thinks.

He promises to be an interesting reminder of the Nixon Administration for many years to come.