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Haldeman Wields Vast Power

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Harry Robbins (Bob)

Haldeman, the abrupt Californian who marks his 47th birthday this week, is President Nixon's closest and most trusted personal aide.

Less visible to the public than Henry Kissinger, the President's globe-trotting foreign policy adviser, or John Ehrlichman, the domestic policy chief, Haldeman is rated on a par with both in most versions of the official White House pecking order.

The crew-cut one-time vice president of the J. Walter Thomson Advertising Agency is the White House chief of staff: the man who decides whom the resident will see, for how long and on what subjects.

He also controls most of what the President reads: policy and planning papers as far afield as the intricacies of revenue sharing and the future of the Middle East. If Haldeman disapproves, White House regulars say, papers get sent back for more work.

Around the White House, Haldeman is known for his tough, unsmiling bluntness and his willingness to put in very long hours to keep things running smoothly—efficiency being one of the standards by which he is said to judge himself and others.

The other standard by which the staff is to be judged, in Haldeman's view, is loyalty to Richard Nixon.

In his book, "Catch the Falling Flag," former speechwriter Richard Whalen quotes Haldeman as

saying: "Every President needs a S.O.B. — and I'm Nixon's"

Haldeman describes himself as "right of center" but little is known about his political philosophy and he rarely discusses it. When he does speak out, his remarks can be as hard-nosed as his manner.

"Most of what is accomplished is done by a few achievers rather than the general population," he said in an interview with this newspaper in January, 1970. "I want to make sure we don't enforce a common level of mediocrity by putting through programs that tend to lower everybody to a standard which can be attained by the majority."

Last February, Haldeman caused a brief flap when he told a reporter on the NBC "Today" show that the Democratic critics of President Nixon's policy were guilty of "consciously aiding and abetting the enemy."

It was reported at the time that Haldeman had made the decision to go public without consulting anyone. More revealing perhaps, it was said that if Haldeman were to be scolded for accusing leading Democrats of treason, the only person with sufficient authority to do it was Mr. Nixon himself.

H.R. Haldeman was born in Los Angeles on Oct. 27, 1926. His grandfather had moved to California from Indiana shortly after the turn of the century where he founded a pipe and building supply company. Later, the elder Haldeman was an organizer of the Better America Federation, one of

the earliest anti-Communist groups.

Young Bob Haldeman studied at the University of Southern California (where he befriended Ehrlichman) and graduated from UCLA with a degree in business administration. He joined the Los Angeles office of J. Walter Thompson (his clients came to include Walt Disney, 7-Up and Black Flag Insect Spray) and became involved in GOP politics.

His interest in politics soon brought him in touch with another Californian: Richard M. Nixon.

In 1956, Haldeman was an advance man for Vice President Nixon and was elevated in the 1960 presidential race to chief advance man. In Mr. Nixon's unsuccessful try for governor of California in 1962, Haldeman was campaign manager.

Then he was a strategist for Robert Finch in the 1966 race for lieutenant governor and was appointed by Ronald Reagan to be a regent of the University of California and chairman of the board of trustees of the California Institute of Arts.

In 1968, Haldeman was late in joining the Nixon campaign team, apparently finding it hard to leave his job as head of J. Walter Thompson's important Los Angeles office.

He did sign on in May and despite his lateness in joining the drive was given the title of Mr. Nixon's personal chief of staff.

In an official GOP biography of that period, he was described as "the coordinator of a traveling staff which has been hailed as the

smoothest working team to travel in a campaign. He has been with Richard Nixon almost constantly and has carried out a key strategic role."

After the election, Haldeman undertook the planning of the White House staff. His involvement in technical details frequently led to an underestimation of his real clout.

"Early in the administration," Washington Post reporter Don Oberdorfer wrote in January, 1970, "Haldeman was generally described as the gatekeeper for people and papers on their way to the oval office. This seriously understates Haldeman's role."

"It was easy enough for other staffers to err in minimizing Haldeman's stature and importance," columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak wrote in their recent book "Nixon in the White House."

"He seemed to be playing the role of flunky, carrying in a cup of coffee for the President . . . He and his young assistants, short-haired and bright faced in Haldeman's image, brought to Washington by him from J. Walter Thompson's, rushed about with such Boy Scout enthusiasm and determination that they were given the lasting designation of the Beaver Patrol by more sophisticated colleagues."

The key to Haldeman's power, the pundits came to agree, was not his influence over policy—that remained relatively small—but his position tight by the President's side.