

Cox's Team of New Frontiersmen

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The fact has been little remarked upon, but it is clear nonetheless: President Nixon has put the responsibility for the Watergate prosecution with all its peril for his own future into the hands of a band of New Frontiersmen—men whose political activities have been

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closely intertwined with the Kennedy family that Mr. Nixon has fought so long.

The special prosecutor, Archibald Cox, is a Harvard professor who came to Washington in 1961 and served for four years as Solicitor General. His Kennedy ties are hardly a secret; in fact, both Senator Edward M. Kennedy and Mrs. Robert F. Kennedy attended his swearing-in as prosecutor last month.

All four of his first major appointments also have ties to the Justice Department in the era of Robert Kennedy and Nicholas B. Katzenbach.

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James Vorenberg was the first director of the Office of Criminal Justice; Philip B. Heymann was one of the dozen or so lawyers, considered a kind of elite, who worked in Mr. Cox's office; James Neal was one of the original prosecutors of James R. Hoffa, a special project of Robert Kennedy, and Thomas McBride worked in the department's organized crime section.

Another Justice Department veteran of those days was offered a job as a press spokesman for Mr. Cox's office.

4 Key Aides Picked by Prosecutor Have Ties to Kennedys

This is not to say that Mr. Cox and his aides intend to conduct a "political" prosecution, but it is one measure of the degree of the President's distress that he was willing to give Mr. Cox such a free hand. Another was the White House's prompt reversal last week when Mr. Cox demanded that the logs of Mr. Dean's meetings with the President be made available to him promptly.

'Symbol of Independence'

"We needed a symbol of independence," one White House official said. "Not someone who we said was independent, but someone who everyone would know was independent. Cox gave us that, and we can hardly complain when he doesn't hire Nixon Republicans."

In fact, however, the Cox group is eager to recruit some Republicans to promote "balance." Mr. Vorenberg said in an interview that one such lawyer, whom he described as a Main Line Republican from Philadelphia, would be named this week.

"We recognize that what we have now is a temporary staff," he said. "When we have built the permanent structure, this staff ought to be balanced in every way, political and otherwise. We're working on it."

Both Mr. Vorenberg and Mr. Heymann plan to return to Harvard before the end of the summer. It is not certain how long Mr. Neal and Mr. McBride will stay, so there could be an

almost complete turnover fairly soon.

Sources in the prosecutor's office cited three reasons for the Kennedy flavor among the early staff recruits:

¶ Because so many of the possible Watergate defendants had a connection with the Justice Department during the Nixon Administration, it would not have been appropriate to dip into the department's present staff for personnel; that would have blown Mr. Cox's independence out of the water almost before he started.

¶ The prosecutor had to put together a temporary working group on a few days' notice, so he naturally turned to people whom he had known during his earlier stint in Washington.

¶ The Justice Department was focus of a lot of the action in Washington in the early sixties, with the civil rights movement and a drive on organized crime; bright young lawyers were attracted to it, and they are now just reaching their prime.

But won't the prosecution team's ties to the Kennedy family influence their work, especially since Edward Kennedy is almost universally considered a possible Democratic Presidential nominee in 1976?

The lawyers argue that it will not, and two of them mentioned privately but pointedly that their loyalties were to John and Robert Kennedy, not necessarily to Edward. But appearances count for a great deal, especially in the Watergate case, and thus the search is on for Republicans to even the picture out.

"Mr. Cox," one associate said, "is aware of the problem."