

## The Young Men

Most of the witnesses before the Senate Watergate hearings have been notable for their youth, their attractive appearance, their exemplary manners and their laudable goals of public service. Their involvement in this sordid affair seems an aberration. Even their ambitions generally look like those that have been considered desirable in young men ever since McGuffey's Reader pointed American youth on its way to success.

The Senators themselves have repeatedly wondered why such fine young men would participate in such detestable enterprises without ever voicing moral doubts. Yet these young men, so similar in type, reacted with astonishing similarity to what they call their "problems."

What has become increasingly apparent, but not yet adequately acknowledged, is the pattern of use to which these youthful aides were put in the high counsels of the White House and the Committee for the Re-Election of the President. They were not appointed to their impressive posts because the Nixon Administration harbored a special love for youth. No such partiality has been demonstrated in filling positions of real power.

The consistency in the pattern of giving them high prestige posts, immediately below the level of those who made all the real decisions, suggests strongly that the younger men were type-cast for their roles precisely because they could be expected to follow any line in return for the high excitement of apparent power now and the promise of real power later.

Such cynical veterans as John N. Mitchell and Maurice Stans and such hard-nosed White House first sergeants as H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman are not likely to have hired these clean-cut Young Republicans because of ideological commitment to "youth power." They must have expected that the young men, blinded by a mixture of ambition and idealism, would exhibit the ~~why~~ zeal that made them such efficient tools of those who actually called the shots and wielded the power. Only men fresh from the pep talks of their college coaches could have stomachached such appalling homilies as Mr. Mitchell's response to one troubled conscience: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going."

The calculated exploitation of these young men's zeal, honed in an atmosphere of a public relations mystique that cannot distinguish between ethics and success, may not be exactly the equivalent of corrupting the morals of minors. But in terms of political power, the similarity to that offense is inescapable. It has been a part of the scenario at least as evil as the Watergate plot itself. The Senate investigators might well focus on this deliberate corruption of young men as much as on the tragic question why they defaulted on their ethical ideals.