

PEORIA—Poor Peoria. It deserves far better than to have been born with a funny Indian name, to have become the butt of bawdy vaudeville players and to be known today as the inspiration for a cynical remark by John Ehrlichman:

"Don't worry, it'll play in Peoria," Ehrlichman once said when both he and Richard Nixon were riding high.

Ehrlichman was implying that no matter how unpopular a certain presidential action might be among liberal Easterners, back there in Peoria beats the strong heart of Middle America. *They* would be supportive, always, of anything their President does.

Since then, strange things have happened to Ehrlichman and the President and the country and Peoria. Now members of the mass media are tripping over themselves—from CBS and ABC, the Los Angeles Times and the Philadelphia Inquirer, the Christian Science Monitor and the Atlanta Constitution, the Times of London and the Japanese broadcasting people — all trying to find out precisely what is playing in Peoria. More specifically, of course, what is playing in regard to Richard Nixon.

The answer is not so surprising. What's playing in Peoria is also playing all over the country. Concern. Confusion. Uncertainty. Dismay. Disgust. Anger. Apathy. Numbness.

Indeed, the media could have been saved time, money, film and shoe leather by writing for the results of a local poll of Peorians, as Ronald Ziegler did last February, long before the presidential transcripts were released and the impeachment proceedings began in earnest.

The poll, while no Gallup or Harris, showed that even then 51 per cent of the citizens favored impeachment proceedings, that 50 per cent held the President in "sharp disfavor," that 17 per cent viewed him in "slightly less esteem," and that 33 per cent still felt as highly about him as before the election. Nothing present in Peoria today would contradict those findings. If anything, the President has fallen much farther. Certainly there is little here to give him any comfort. Ironically, his only visible and vocal support comes from the local newspaper, and there the judgments are muted and sometimes critical. The paper seems more disturbed about the sins of the mass media than by the role of the President.

But if all that matters about Peoria is a consensus on the President — and the strong feeling seems to be that for him to remain in office for two more years would be disastrous for the nation — this story could be told in a few simple statistics from the latest reliable poll. The Peoria story is more important than that.

The View From Peoria:

It's Not Playing Well

By Haynes Johnson

Johnson is a Washington Post staff writer.

Ehrlichman and the old-time vaudeville players notwithstanding, Peoria does say something about American character and capacity to deal with problems. Part of this stems from Peoria's geography, demographics, history and traditions.

PEORIA SITS in central Illinois, along the banks and bluffs of the Illinois River, a city of some 130,000 in a congressional district encompassing nearly half a million. Economically, one foot stands in industry, another in agriculture. Historically, Peoria's affections are divided between its early New England settlers and its Southerners. In the days before the Civil War, the slavery issue tore the small town apart. Lincoln debated that question here with the Democratic Party leader Nathaniel Wright Stephens, but Lincoln, the neighbor from Springfield, did not play well in Peoria. He lost here twice, once by 212 and the second time by 190 ballots.

Over the years Peoria grew and prospered and settled into a self-satisfied pride in itself. Sinclair Lewis could have just as well have taken it for his model of Main Street, USA. Somewhat smug and boastful (its official city slogans were jingoistic and grandiose: "Where Land, Sea and Air Travel Meet," adopted in 1923; "Peoria — Treasure Chest of the Middle West," adopted in 1941; "Peoria, Pledged to Progress," adopted in 1959), Peoria also was wary and faintly envious of Easterners and supposed Eastern ways.

Vaudeville players may have first perpetuated the idea that what goes in Peoria will go in the country, but there is a more practical reason for that notion. Peoria became

a prime American test market; businessmen discovered that if it sells here, it will sell across the country.

The same can be said of Peoria's politics. Although in today's political mythology Peoria has become something of a symbol of unregenerate Republican conservatism, the election results do not bear out that stereotype.

Mr. Nixon did carry this district in 1968 and 1972, each time by about the margins of the final national vote. In 1968 he got 51 per cent of the vote here. Four years later he defeated George McGovern by 66 to 34 per cent. Yet in 1970, when the President made law-and-order and permissiveness the key issue, Peoria rejected the hard-line Senate campaign of Ralph Tyler Smith, Everett Dirksen's successor. Adlai Stevenson III, although attacked as a prime example of a dangerous Democratic radicalism, carried both Peoria and its congressional district.

What comes over most strongly today is not Peoria's preoccupation with Mr. Nixon and Watergate; that does not exist. Peoria is much more interested in its own problems — and it is demonstrating ability in solving them. Peoria is wrestling with questions that undoubtedly are of most concern to most Americans: the role of the churches, the role of woman, the role of blacks, the role of youth, the role of community leadership, the role of business, and, yes, the threat of corruption.

One example: A year ago in April at the time when President Nixon was stating publicly there had been "major developments in the Watergate case," Peoria was in the midst of what its citizens now call their own "mini-Watergate scandal."

F. Michael O'Brien, who had been mayor from 1969 to 1973, was arraigned on charges of bribery in connection with

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The Washington Post

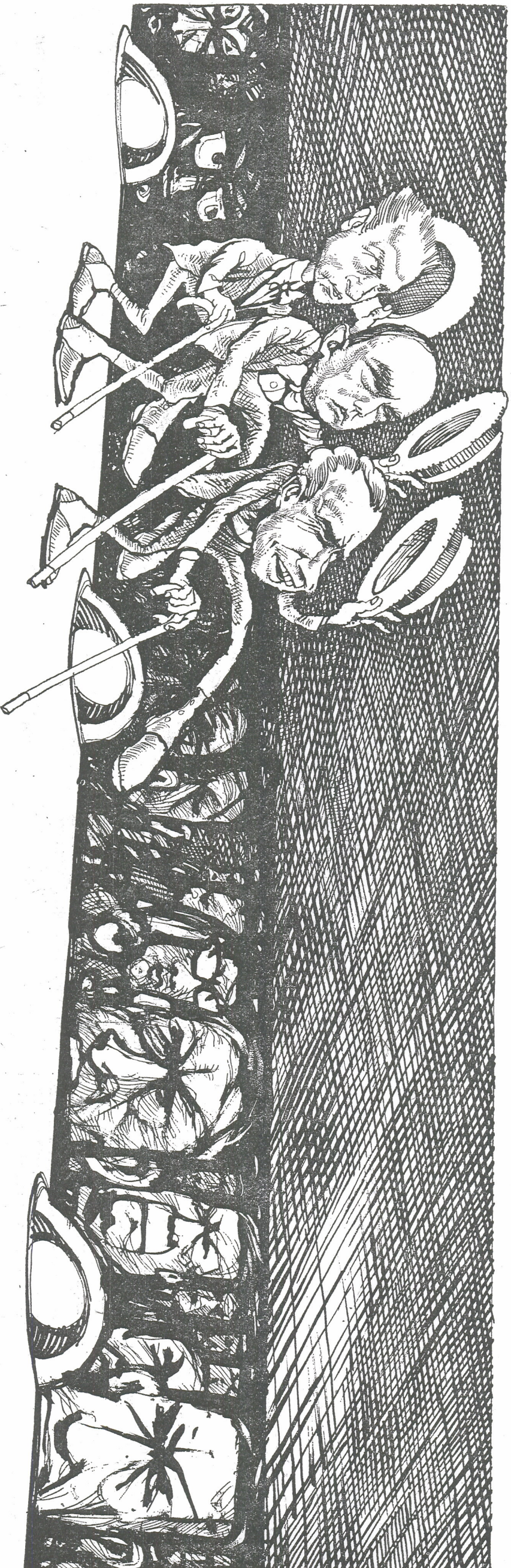
OUTLOOK

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Editorials

Columnists



the issuance of liquor licenses during his administration. A classic case of municipal corruption. Another element even more vividly made Peorians think of Washington and Watergate. It turned out that four policemen had been bugging O'Brien while he served as mayor. Last fall a Peoria city policeman, a state trooper, a Peoria County deputy and a member of the Illinois Bureau of Investigation were tried on charges of illegal eavesdropping. All were found guilty, but one later was acquitted on appeal.

Now Peoria has what everyone agrees is an aggressive, effective city government headed by an attractive young mayor.

"We have presently what is widely believed to be a very fine city government," said one community leader. "Some of us thought the preceding city government wasn't so fine, and I was among those who said so publicly. So what is the answer? If there is corruption in government, throw the buggers out! And that is what we did a year ago."

But if Peoria is primarily concerned about its own affairs, an undercurrent of disquiet exists about the nation, and particularly about Washington. In the end, nearly every conversation comes back to troubling questions about impeachment, the President, national leadership — especially the Congress — and the mass media. No one comes out unscathed. The people also recognize that their problems, whether with inflation, overseas markets or programs aimed at assisting Peoria, inevitably are linked to what happens in Washington. It is common to hear them describe the country as being enveloped in a poisonous atmosphere.

Meet, then, some of those who are really moving Peoria and hear what they have to say.

The Power Structure

WE MET IN the board room of a bank, just off Main Street. Present were many of the men, some 10 or 12 of them, who run Peoria. All had voted for Mr. Nixon the last two times. They began in what was to become a familiar pattern, by expressing misgivings about the role of the mass media.

In fragmentary form, individual comment by comment, the conversation went like this:

"From the Midwest point of view, the media pushed it much too far and wrung out of it all they could get, until new people are absolutely fed up. The media carried it on too long and too far. Nothing that really came out is something that hasn't been developing the last 10 years in this country in other administrations."

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PEORIA, From C1

"The impeachment process is OK if it's kept within bounds. But it's so highly publicized and there's no control over the leaks of national security material that should be kept confidential."

"I think people have very mixed feelings about the press. They admire the investigative reporting, but they also feel that journalism is colored, biased, and snide. These TV press conferences are very upsetting things, and it's hard to separate news from editorials. I'd like to have more faith that the leaders of journalism are objective, but instead they often seem like a pack of snarling dogs. The reporters you see on television obviously dislike the President intensely. This is a very, very unsettling thing. Where's the morality of a government official who has a cable marked confidential and then leaks it to a journalist who in turn can't wait to get it in his paper? The Judiciary Committee is acting in the same way. There seems to be a strong incentive in the media to be first, even if it's only a first with a rumor. I'm just absolutely dismayed at what's happened to Kissinger. He seems to be our last hope and if he happens to become a victim of the poisonous Washington atmosphere, it's a tragedy for the country."

After several minutes more of this, the conversation changed. They began discussing the economic problems — steel production declining, inflation rampant, no leadership in Washington, overseas markets difficulties — and related them directly to the President and the Congress.

Again in isolated fragmentary form some of their remarks:

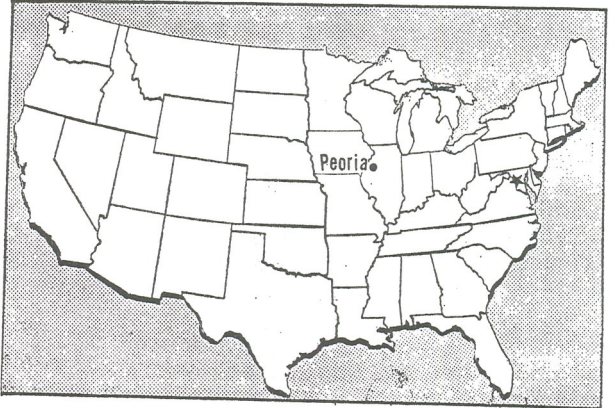
"The much more fundamental question than Watergate is: Can America survive?"

"We're not going uphill, that's for sure. The political confusion we have in the country makes it doubtful we're going to be able to surmount some of the problems we have." "Our morality is being eroded. It's frightening to see it happening, and to see the impact it has on our own children."

"Have we reached the point where there's a stigma attached to anyone going into public office?"

"I think both (political) parties are in trouble, great trouble, and so is the federal civil service. You know, they really run the country."

"The undermining of the political parties is a tragic thing. You have to say that one of the reasons for Watergate was that the Republican Party was not strong enough to with-



By Joseph P. Mastrangelo—The Washington Post

stand the apolitical, amoral men in the White House. We need stronger political parties, not weaker."

"It's the lust for power, that's what's at the heart of Watergate."

"I was a strong Nixon supporter until I read those transcripts. My conclusion is he's no better than the rest of us. No damn smarter and perhaps too busy to take the time to do what had to be done. And I never get the sense that he thought Watergate was all that important, that somehow it would all go away, and therefore the less he knew about it the better."

"The Wall Street Journal said the President acted like a sharp Wall Street lawyer—and a President shouldn't act that way. And that's right."

"Those deals with Abplanalp and Rebozo were sickening."

"The taxes really disturb me more than anything else. The whole thing gives business and executives a black eye. And his lack of charity! What did he give to charity? \$250? That's a disgrace for a man in his position."

(Here there was general laughter, and one man said: "You don't think he'd sell well in Peoria, do you, George?" More laughter, and then the answer: "No.")

"The real problem is the effect on the people. They lose confidence in everything. They can't believe in anything any more."



“You still have to say that it’s the worst scandal in the history of the republic.”

“I guess so. We just have to try to get this off the back of the Republican Party and onto the back of CREEP.”

“It’s perfectly obvious. That gang was chosen because of their similarities to each other.”

“Lou, whatever became of the cabinet?”

“Not many of our institutions have escaped. Certainly business has suffered. Even the corporations found ways to siphon off large amounts of money and to cover it up. It’s just as bad a situation as could exist.”

“And the idea of going into private income tax records and compiling enemies’ lists really is hitting below the belt.”

They were asked what they thought would happen if the President survives impeachment and remains in office for two more years. The response was instantaneous.

“Terrible.”

“That would be the worst thing that could happen to the country.”

As for the future, despite their present worries they seemed optimistic:

“Aren’t we where we were not long ago in Peoria — corruption and it looked like we were going downhill? But a good man came and as elected and we’re back on course.”

The Middle Managers

THEY WERE IN their 20s and 30s, and women and three blacks were included in this group. They worked in city agencies. In volunteer programs, in private industry, taught at Bradley University; two were city councilmen and one was a policeman.

Again, the conversation began with critical remarks about the press and national preoccupation with Watergate to the detriment of the country; but these people were more vocal. They seemed more disturbed and angry.

“Most people felt like I did. [This was the policeman speaking, a man who had twice voted for Mr. Nixon.] They held the presidency in the highest esteem. Now I’m afraid that someone else will raise that law-and-order flag again and say ‘Follow me’ and we’ll all go down the primrose path again.”

“I want the politicians to be forced to take a stand on something. I think they’re all avoiding it.”

(This, by the way, was a common theme. A strong reaction appears to be building against lack of decisive congressional action.)

“Yeah, and it’s also the apathy of the everyday voter. I remember Nixon referring to the American people as his children that he would mold. Unless the people begin to make their votes mean something, we’re not going to solve our problems.”

“But the politician needs support, he needs to know the people are behind him so he can’t be bought by the big interests. We’re all responsible for what happened in Watergate. We, the citizens, are responsible.”

At the end of nearly two hours of conversation, each was asked what troubled them most. Their replies from around the table were:

“Nixon’s total disregard and unwillingness to cooperate with the system. He takes me for granted while he’s in a personal fight for survival.”

“This big hypocrisy is finally revealed: Justice and equality for everyone. Now it all comes out! It’s a revelation. Hopefully, we’ll make some changes.”

“People like Nixon and Agnew who know they’ve been wrong and they try to pretend they’re not. That’s absolutely shocking. They sit there and play with you and that’s wrong. It’s just wrong. You sort of sit there flabbergasted.”

“It’s the complete and total disregard for the intelligence of the American people, for us, the people. When a

politician gets on the tube and outright lies and expects us to believe—well, that’s the nub of it.”

“I’m really surprised. I expected to see a representative group of Peorians here, conservative and supportive of the President. But what we’ve been saying here just amazes me. Maybe I didn’t know how we really felt until we began talking. If I read us right, we’d all be in favor of the House Judiciary Committee voting in favor of impeachment. That changes my mind about Peoria.”

“My feeling now is that the sad thing is it doesn’t seem to be getting any closer to resolution. So many things need to be done in the country that aren’t being done. I just wonder how long Nixon can continue to take it—and I wonder just how long we can continue to take it.”

“The foreign trips are like another coverup. But I do feel positively about Kissinger’s role.”

“Probably the word I would use is the audacity of the President to inflict his will on us the way he has.”

“His credibility is shot. It seems to me impossible for him to function as a President. And if he really has the best interests of the country at heart, he’ll resign.”

“As a guy who voted for him two times, I have to say he’s either crooked or stupid. That’s the kindest thing I can say. I’m very disappointed.”

“Where Nixon really has an Achilles heel is in the business of inflation and the economy. I don’t think Nixon or Butz or anybody has any idea about what to do about inflation.”

The Editor



Associated Press Photos

C. L. Dancey:
“I don’t believe we can escape the massive public impression that the media accomplished it. It places us in the public mind as being at the very apex of power, as being king-makers and king-breakers.”

LIKE MOST AMERICAN CITIES, Peoria is a one-news-paper town. The Peoria Journal-Star is an amalgamation of The Transcript, founded in 1855, The Journal, 1877, and The Star, 1897. For years, the Peoria Journal-Star has been edited by C. L. Dancey, who is regarded as one of the major opinion-makers in the city.

Unlike many editors, he not only writes the long, lead editorials, but signs his name to them. You always know where he stands.

Dancey is a product of neighboring Pekin, Everett Dirksen’s hometown. He began work in Pekin as a Peoria correspondent after graduating from the University of Illinois and then, before Pearl Harbor, enlisted in the Marines. “I said, hell, if I’m going to fight sooner or later, I might as well learn what this is all about.”

He came out of World War II—and later Korea—as a Marine colonel. As a reporter back in Pekin, he also served on the city council (“a dumb thing,” he says, meaning that it was a clear conflict of interest).

In the last two years, he has earned the reputation of being among Mr. Nixon's staunchest defenders in the press. That may be an unfair characterization, but Dancey's editorials are aimed much more at the performance of the mass media than with the President. The Washington Post, in particular, is a favorite target; he has accused the Post of "McCarthyism" in its use of unnamed source stories that are "selectively leaked."

In private conversation, however, Dancey appears much more ambivalent about the President.

"We don't have the sense of knowing things in your own back yard, as you do in Washington," he said. "We've

tried to establish certain basics before we got emotionally involved. So as soon as the question of possible presidential misconduct came up we immediately went to the Constitution. I first read three or four books on the Johnson impeachment, and then I read several books on presidential staffs. As a result when I watched the Senate hearings I was already thinking of the senators as jurors. Frankly, I was horrified at what was happening.

"We are very conscious here that all angles must be put before our own people, and this grows out of the fact that we are the only daily paper in our community. We don't want to be the monster on the hill and try to run the town. And that leads to our observation of The Washington Post and the Eastern establishment—and that business about believing in a conspiratorial Eastern establishment definitely is a lot of crap.

"I suspect that the Post has developed in somewhat the fashion that The Chicago Tribune did over 60 years ago. It paid good money for good people, but it picked people who thought the same way they did. They hired people from wherever they had to get them who thought the same way. I think that the real problem is when circumstances make you a participant. When that happens you're in a hazardous position."

While he believes the President to be "essentially pragmatic and devious" and has used both terms publicly, he worries about the consequences of impeachment—and particularly the impact on the press.

"What are the consequences of that? What are we building into this for the next round? In terms of my concern about the Post—and the Post really is a symbol of the whole thing—rightly or wrongly I don't believe we can escape the massive public impression that the media accomplished it. It places us in the public mind as being at the very apex of power, as being king-makers and king-breakers."

The Feminist



Barbara Holden:
"We have a better chance now to be involved in political life. After all, women were not involved in this mess we're in."

At 27, she heads the Peoria chapter of NOW, the national women's organization. She organized the chapter with 11 other women a year ago. Now it has grown to 83 members and some 250 active supporters. They already have had an impact in Peoria.

"We've been awfully successful," she said. "We've picked our own priorities and found that people here have treated us as though we have a lot more power than we really do. It became very evident, for instance, that the people at Caterpillar Tractor Co. [which has its international headquarters in Peoria] really were frightened of us. What we really have found out is that every area in Peoria needed our help.

"We have operated like the last thing in the world as women's libbers because, I can tell you, that simply doesn't play in Peoria. We are involved in credit investigations and employment cases. We strictly stay out of things like the abortion fight. You do not go out and advocate free love and abortion, because that really will not play in Peoria.

"I'm married to a physician, to a boy who graduated from school the same time I did and who was encouraged to become a doctor. In my heart beats a militant—kind of. But I think in terms of me that I have a good sense of humor, and I don't take everything too seriously. I do understand the fear of the silent majority, disgusted

by seeing everybody, everywhere, always protesting. I'm afraid I'll never be completely attached to the 'sisters.' There's a lot of aggrandizement, a lot of jealousy and ego trips there. Not all women are interesting, but some are.

"But at the same time women going into the feminist movement can find love and support from the sisters. But a woman had better be careful. What I so object to is rhetoric as a substitute for intellectuality, imagination and originality. I wear make-up, I wear nail polish, I wear a bra, I shave my legs, but since I've been somewhat effective I guess I'm accepted. I might not be if I lived in New York where, as I hear, the debate is about 'how can I be a feminist without being a lesbian?'

"I don't hate Peoria, and don't hate the Midwest, and I don't hate living here. I'm very tired of hearing people say, 'Oh, how could you live in Peoria? There's no activity, no culture here.' I guess I did feel something of that when I was an adolescent, but I've realized that I like the mechanics of living here. I like going to a jeweler I know, I like being with neighbors I know. I don't want to feel paranoid about living somewhere like New York where you really have a right to feel paranoid.

"I do believe very sincerely that feminism can lead to humanism. With all the troubles in the country right now, I do think this is a time when women have something positive to contribute. I think we can go back to values that are essentially feminine, esthetics, nurturing, compassion. I think it is time we turned away from technology—and I think women have a tremendous opportunity now to share these things with men. Not to emulate them, but to hold up our best virtues, to be loving and gentle and kind.

"And I see an upturn there now, a desire to want to clean things up, and a recognition that we have a better chance now to be involved in political life. [She herself plans to attend law school and is thinking of entering politics later.] After all, women were not involved in this mess we're in. If women don't make the fatal mistake of trying to out-men men, we have a chance to do something positive for everybody. I see this as a natural outgrowth of the feminist movement. I just hope that when our time comes we won't make the same mistakes as the men."

NOT SO LONG AGO a male reporter interviewing Barbara Holden invariably would have described her in print as "an attractive, slim brunette." The adjective "shapely" also probably would have been used. Such terms are slowly becoming obsolete, and Barbara Holden is one of the forces creating that type of change.

The Bishop



Bishop
Edward W. O'Rourke:
"If things are messed
up in Washington,
well, we have to
work a little harder
in Peoria."

BISHOP EDWARD W. O'ROURKE, slim, gray-haired, soft-spoken, was born on a farm in Illinois during World War I. He says his first mature memories were of the depression years, of a horrible drought and then of seeing the land almost blown away during a dust storm in 1934.

Now, as a Catholic bishop, he oversees a diocese that covers 26 counties and includes 218,000 Catholics, 217 churches and missions, 10 Catholic hospitals, 10 Catholic high schools, six Newman centers, five mother houses for religious women, one provincial house for religious men. About one-third of the population of Peoria is Catholic.

"Although we're concerned, essentially life goes on. I've been bishop three years and I probably talk to more people face-to-face than anyone in Peoria. I'd estimate I see about 2,000 people a week in one way or another. It would be a serious mistake to think that the vocal minority is the majority. In the press that which is negative, that which is bad, gets emphasized. But the vast majority of people in Peoria are not affected. They are not totally preoccupied with Watergate. They are worrying about their sons not going to church, or not being able to raise enough money to send their children to college. I'm amazed at how often it's the positive things that wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel as news.

"There is, perhaps to a fault, a Midwest point of view

that is different from the rest of the country. 'I'd rather do it myself, please, mother.' It's the old carry-over from a rural tradition, because so many of us lived on farms and on a farm no one is going to take care of your weeds unless you take care of them, no one is going to take care of your garbage unless you do. It's the old biblical injunction, 'As ye sow so shall ye reap.' We like to do at the local level what can be done at the local level.

"You know, we Midwest people never had any illusions about the ability of the federal government to create a utopia. We have never staked our future on what the federal government can do for us. Now I find myself in somewhat disagreement with some of my neighbors in Peoria on the efficiency of the federal government. We can't do without government. I know both the possibilities and the limitations of the government, though I probably have more confidence in it than most Peorians.

"The consequences here of what the President has done have been to create some misgivings, some cynicism, some mistrust of politicians, and inevitably this affects the way people feel about some religious leaders and some municipal leaders. Now, having said that, we don't wring our hands. So what I'm saying is there are lessons here. First, the lesson of avarice—so many people prepared to sacrifice everything for money and power.

"Now, again, this mad quest for power. I have just led people through 18 months of a diocesan synod, a thoroughgoing reassessment, and emerging from this is a council that will continue this, you might say advisory role, in attempting to inspire what we call in our church shared responsibility. Does that mean I don't intend to be a leader? Not at all. I'm prepared to stand up and be counted. The third Sunday in April I issued a letter to all parishes urging participation in the lettuce boycott. Understandably, this didn't please everyone. During the '72-'73 year I chaired

a commission in trying to get new priorities for Peoria.

"We have here a fine organization on the near north side, an action group, a self-help group working at the grass roots. It is probably the most effective organization in Peoria. We stick together. We lobby for cleanup campaigns. We lobby for better government. We lobby for all the things we have to do to make Peoria a better place to live.

"We have presently what is widely believed to be a very fine city government. Some of us thought the preceding city government wasn't, and I was among those who said so publicly. So what is the answer? If there is corruption in government, throw the buggers out! And that is what we did a year ago. So if things are messed up in Washington, well, we have to work a little harder in Peoria.

"Now, I'm no fan of Mr. Nixon. So many things I labored for he helped undo—the Office of Economic Opportunity, the agricultural workers in California. On so many things we are poles apart."

He talked about the presidential transcripts and the President himself.

"Those which I read reflect an almost amoral attitude toward the responsibilities of office, both on his part and on the part of some of his advisers. This, I think, is one tragedy. Second, the expletives deleted are not edifying, either. I hope for a better day at the White House.

"If you make the ends justify the means it's deadly. And that seems to have been the President's morality. You know certain societies rise and fall. As you know, 21 societies have risen and fallen. And so we wonder if we will be the 22d. I don't know. Not only the clear unethical conduct, but the softness we sometimes seem to have. I'm preparing a lecture at St. John's in Brooklyn next week on the priest as leader. There has to be a demonstration that there is a better way. We have to be almost like John the Baptist to come off as a leader today. Take Mahatma Gandhi, with his homespun loincloth. Man, he said it!

"But it has to be a team. I look at the team that people bring in. This is one of the things that disturbs me most about Nixon. Nixon got a lousy team.

"One of the most revealing things you can say about Nixon is that he had unbelievably bad judgment in getting together his team. And they didn't improve by association with him. And that is the ultimate tragedy of Watergate."

Then, a word about the press:

"Let me give you a stock comment: 'temperance.' Be somewhat between the extremes. Not to have reported a misdemeanor or crime would have been wrong; so would not to report some of the more positive aspects in better perspective.

"Evil happens so quickly and dramatically, whereas good happens so slowly and undramatically. It's awfully hard to tell the story of good in the context of our modern media.

"You know, we Midwesterners sat here for years and read Col. McCormick's editorials [in The Chicago Tribune] and didn't really believe them, either. After all, they carried on their masthead every day the slogan, 'Our country, right or wrong'—and we didn't really believe that, either."

As the conversation concluded, Bishop O'Rourke pointed out a peace pipe, made by Indians in Minnesota, mounted on a wall behind the desk in his study. "That's the same kind of peace pipe that saved Pere Marquette from the tomahawk," he said, recalling the explorer-priest's voyage upriver in the late 1600s through where Peoria now stands and on to the north.

"Marquette came here preaching justice and charity and brotherhood, and people say he failed. I certainly don't think so. If I have a mission here, it is to try to complete the work Marquette began."

The Black

John Gwynn: "It's a shock, and it's leaving our country wide open. If things don't change the attitude is, 'Well, nothing's going to change and I'll free myself my way, any way I have to.'"



JOHAN GWYNN, 40, president of the Peoria and Illinois NAACP, grew up in a small town near Memphis. He went to a black college in Jackson, Tenn., and became a resident of Peoria after his parents had moved here while he was in school. About 13 per cent of Peoria's population is black.

"I had no intention of living in Peoria," he said. "I was born in the South and I felt I should be involved in the civil rights movement there because it was so much greater. I thought Illinois was kind of the land of Lincoln and I wouldn't have these problems living here, and I wanted to be involved where it would be most meaningful.

"In '53 there was only one place in the downtown area where a black person could even eat, and as late as '63 we were still fighting to break the barriers in the downtown restaurants. One of our first arrests was when six of us went to an eating establishment called Bob and Pearl's restaurant and we ordered six Cokes, three hot dogs and three pieces of pie, and they charged us \$30 even though the price on the wall showed 15 cents for hot dogs and pie for 15 cents apiece.

"We paid the \$30 and I asked for a receipt and he said he was not going to give us a receipt and if we didn't like it he was going to call the police—and he did and they arrested us. We were in jail till the next morning and then we had our trial. We were found not guilty of disorderly conduct and from then we began testing eating establishments, barber shops, beauty shops and all the public accommodations and we ran into a number of conflicts."

These and earlier problems—seeing his fellow plant employees, all of them white, get up and leave the minute he sat down to eat beside them in a cafeteria—"made me realize that Peoria wasn't any better than the South." He stayed, and led demonstrations from 1957 and on throughout the Sixties. In the process, Peoria has changed.

"Basically where I think we are now is we have broken through what we considered the major barriers. Now it has become the time to implement the kinds of programs that would totally integrate this community. Peoria is now becoming one of the most prosperous communities in the country from the building standpoint. What we are demanding is that Peoria deal with race relations programs just as they are dealing with improving the building structures of this community—the medical center, the downtown renewal, the Caterpillar Co. addition. And we intend to be a major part of the improvement of the city. Then Peoria could be the kind of city that we can all look up. Then it'll really be playing in Peoria.

"We have in this particular city the mechanics to deal with the problems that exist. I feel we have the type of leadership so that we can carry out race relations programs in as sophisticated a manner as anywhere. I would consider us 10 years ahead of other cities around here where they're still talking about employing black sales clerks. That seldom crosses my mind now. So I feel the legal battles we're into now will just about completely break the barriers in Peoria."

He spoke of Watergate and its impact on the black community in Peoria.

"Black people are very concerned about Nixon and Watergate. Through the years they came to feel they didn't get as fair a shake under the Republicans and then when this type of thing came up you'd find people even staying off work to watch the hearings because these kinds of things were unbelievable. It gave people a better feeling of what was really going on in Washington.

"Most of the black people felt that an FBI man was 99.99 per cent a real person. They didn't think he could make a mistake. They thought he couldn't stand for

anything more than just the facts and what's right. And now they are beginning to think that with what's really going on it isn't a true sense of justice. It's the feeling this community has.

"Our church-going people have got very emotional over, you know, where can they turn to now? To give you an example, back in April—maybe it was May—we had a songfest in the NAACP and the minister during that time mentioned several things concerning the Nixon administration, how many of the evil things seemed to be creeping up and taking over. You know, 'How long, Lord, must we wait.' And following that a number of songs were sung and this was the first time in the history of our NAACP meetings that people were so emotional. They were getting up and screaming and crying out and running down and even passing out. And it came from being oppressed and depressed by things that were happening in our country. And it came from not knowing too many ways to turn.

"Where do we go? We've been told that people must follow federal guidelines and we've been looking to the Justice Department to come in and take action when justice was not done—and we have looked for action in fair employment practices—and if the federal government is in that position this gives that man the license to do whatever he wants to. So we are left to do on our own. And what can we do alone? And then what does the law really mean? That is the cry.

"Like I had a Justice Department man down yesterday and he was the mediator between the city and the black community and the people along with the leaders just feel that it's been a real loss of confidence. Where we had hope, there is no hope any more that the Justice Department is going to act favorably. They talk about it all the time.

"My work now actually runs a lot into counseling. We average at least three an hour. There have been quite a lot of problems with some of the young blacks coming out of school that have been good students. It's difficult for them to adapt to the kind of system that we have working.

"They believe that if the Justice Department finds something wrong they should act on them—and it distresses them greatly to see that isn't true. They feel the law is the law and if they are asked to abide by it everybody should be asked to abide by it.

"You see, even though they've been denied opportunities all their lives, blacks still had more confidence in the federal government in bringing about justice. Even though it was a slow process, they would stay with it. It's a shock, and it's leaving our country wide open. If things don't change the attitude is, 'Well, nothing's going to change and I'll free myself my way, any way I have to.'"

The Businessman



*Roger Kelley:
"If we had five
more Peorias, we
wouldn't be in such
bad shape as we
are in now."*

ROGER KELLEY came back to Peoria a year ago from his service in Washington. In the Defense Department, Kelley had been the military manpower chief, and had played a critical role in creating a volunteer Army. Now he is back at Caterpillar Tractor Co. as a senior executive.

He is thoughtful, articulate and disturbed at what is happening to the administration he served. He will not defend the White House, only the job he did in the Pentagon.

One day Kelley was at a White House meeting. John Ehrlichman referred to Peoria in a deprecating way, assuring those present that, once more, it would play in Peoria. Kelley was angered. When the meeting broke up, he called Ehrlichman aside. "John, what do you really know about Peoria?" he said. Not much, Ehrlichman answered.

"That's too bad," Kelley said, "because if you really knew something about Peoria you wouldn't make those kinds of comments. I think if we had five more Peorias we wouldn't be in such bad shape as we are in now."

There, Kelley appears to have had the last word.