

# Mr. Nixon's American

By Russell Baker

WASHINGTON, Aug. 9—"Bring us together" and "law-and-order" were the first catch phrases of the Nixon men, and in the end they did bring us together in the cause of law and order, but not in the way the phrasemakers of 1968 had in mind.

The Nixon people would have said that what went wrong was the "scenario." At the end it simply "wouldn't play in Peoria." They talked like that. They were marinated in the faith of the public-relations quackers which holds that high gloss on a sow's ear will make it a big seller in the silk-purse market.

Their talk was public-relations talk. Weighing a problem, they discussed the "p.r." of the situation. They established, probably forever, the barbarous usage of "media" as a singular noun meaning "the news business."

In the early days they talked about "the input process." When the President listened to suggestions about things that ought to be done, they said "the input process" was going on.

In the tradition of public-relations talk, this kind of pseudo-learned jargon sounded impressive and in the words of the headwaiter justifying the flaming food in the pump room, didn't hurt the meat none.

Every Administration evolves its own prose signature. With John Kennedy we all talked about "charisma," "vigor" and "style" until we persuaded ourselves that this kind of talk was saying something trenchant. Lyndon Johnson suffered to the end from the suspicion that he lacked both "charisma" and "style," and often seemed deluded by the notion that but for their lack he could have raised a higher "Camelot."

Politicians will not revive "Camelot" for a while now. Every disaster has its bright side.

In the manner of the public-relations minded, the Nixon men understated unpleasant realities and overstated their case when it was weakest. Thus Watergate was dismissed at the beginning as "a third-rate burglary" unworthy of Presidential notice, and the Judiciary Committee's impeach-

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ment hearings were denounced as a "kangaroo court."

Both phrases were disastrously memorable. Pride in phrasemanship, an essential quality in good public-relations men, afflicted the Administration with phrases the public could not forget.

In Ronald Ziegler's agony, when the "third-rate burglary" turned first-rate, he fell into the most dismal trap of all and took the public-relations man's refuge in gobbledygook. Thus was born "inoperative." The "scenario" of the "third-rate burglary," Mr. Ziegler announced after the upgrading, had simply become "inoperative." He meant the official White House story had been a lie.

At this point, with cases going to court, the Administration desperately needed judges who might see that it was not "appropriate"—another Ziegler coinage—to press the White House too firmly with the law.

## Language

Unfortunately, it was too late for that. There was that wonderfully memorable phrase of the President's uttered in happier days when "law-and-order" meant an entirely different kind of courthouse "scenario"—the phrase in which the President had denounced "soft-headed judges" for leniency toward the criminal classes.

The White House was cornered by its own prose again, and in the last days Nixon men could only grumble privately about the judiciary's excessively unsoft head.

Gassy bloat, always present in public-relations talk, swelled the language beyond all comprehension as the "p.r." became more and more difficult. Bloat in language results from a breakdown between thought and expression. The more determined a person is to conceal his thinking, the wordier he becomes. Eventually there is a Niagara of words that communicates nothing.

Saying "at that point in time," when you mean "then," requires a lot of time and wears down the audience.

Talking about "seeing the constitutional process through to the end," when you really mean you don't know what you are going to do next, becomes an exercise in obliterating communication.

The private shop talk, which was fated to become public, was the breezy colorful shorthand commonly used by bright young men in business conferences devoted to planning ways to shear the customers. "Stonewalling" and "the hangout route" will become prominent entries in the lexicon of Nixonisms to be left to the country, and "modified limited hangout" will probably need a long footnote of explication, as well "the big enchilada," John Ehrlichman's term for John Mitchell.

The input process is ended now and the American language as revised by Richard Nixon is complete. It is tempting to say, "Now it belongs to the ages," and unless we are lucky, some last departing phrasemaker probably will.