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## Former Aides Law Unto Themselves

By BRUCE BIOSSAT

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Hand in hand with the relentless quest for new information about Watergate runs the search for better understanding of key participants. It leads now to new stress on what may be an important common characteristic: an extremely narrow and rigid outlook.

We have presumably already gained whatever value is provided by insights labeling President Nixon's top men as arrogant, unversed in the human realities of politics, contemptuous of adversaries they deemed too weak to stand out against them. There is more to be said.

In discussing these aides with a highly perceptive politician, the oft-heard matter of their evident arrogance inevitably came up. He responded:

"It's more than arrogance. They're marked by a rigid narrowness. It led them to believe that, once they had decided what was right in a given situation (like re-electing the President), they could do anything they wanted in support of that, and it would not be wrong."

The politician went on to say that men with this cast of mind really live in a separate world, one which in many ways is of their own making.

Having just heard this, I found it almost chilling to stumble onto words written years ago by the late Mark Sullivan, journalist-historian, after an interview in 1935 with Harry Daugherty, President Warren Harding's attorney general, a man twice indicted but never convicted for bribe-taking and other serious crimes while in office.

The evidence seeming to entangle Daugherty in some of the many scandals of the Harding era (but not the famous Teapot Dome affair) was tantalizingly strong, even though Daugherty escaped conviction, once through a hung jury. Yet he maintained his total innocence of wrongdoing until he died during World War II. After that 1935 interview, Sullivan wrote:

"I felt that he lived by a code of his own; if his code did not happen to be identical with the world's conventions, so much the worse for the world's conventions."

Now, at this writing President Nixon's top assistants have not been indicted, though there is strong prospect some will be as evidence more potent than hearsay piles up to suggest they may at least have obstructed justice in seeking to cover up Watergate and related spying and sabotage against the Democrats. Still, their public assertions that they will be fully vindicated reflect incredibly cool detachment.

For, the pattern forming before our eyes is one in which men serving Mr. Nixon seemed ready to do anything in his name.

In narrow allegiance to their vision of "rightness," they appear to have been willing to compromise the integrity of such highly sensitive agencies as the State Department, the CIA and the FBI, to attempt broadly to subvert the presidential election process, to violate many laws with cavalier disdain, to impugn the reputations of decent men, to act as the sole possessors and interpreters of the public trust.

To do all this consciously and deliberately did indeed demand more than mere arrogance. It required them to view the White House as a shrouded, impregnable island whose commander, the President, somehow was so miraculously empowered as to make it truly the center of the world.