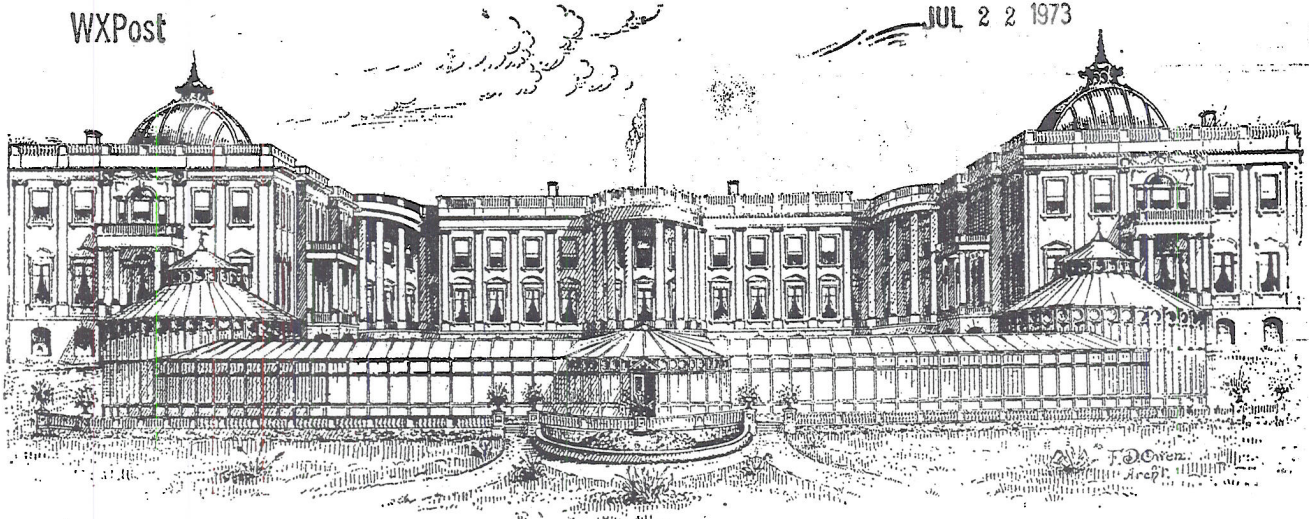


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The White House, as seen by Mrs. Benjamin Harrison's architect /Library of Congress

Jack Anderson

The Grandeur That Is Home

On the day Thomas Jefferson was inaugurated third President of the United States, he arose in a small Washington rooming house, dressed himself plainly, walked like an ordinary citizen to the site of the inauguration ceremony, delivered a speech about subordination of government to individual rights, and then walked back to his boarding house.

Upon entering the dining room, he found that all the seats at the table were occupied. No one was asked to give up his seat, and no one offered the new President a place. Accepting the democratic principle of first-come-first-served, Jefferson went up to his room without his dinner.

He was not a clodhopper, unused to the amenities, but one of the world's sophisticates, a man of wealth, the master of a great plantation. Yet in his public capacity, he was determined to

impart an example of simplicity and subservience.

Somewhere between Thomas Jefferson and Richard Nixon, our homely tribunes have developed a hankering to transform the American republic into a monarchy and themselves from servants into sovereigns.

Consider the scene at one of President Nixon's state dinners. His entry into the East Room of the White House was heralded by the blast of trumpets. The Marine Buglers wore scarlet tunics festooned with gold braid; banners were draped from their elongated trumpets.

At the sound of the fanfare, the President descended the grand staircase, with the First Lady on his arm, while the Marine band played him down with processional music. Mr. Nixon took deliberate, measured steps, beaming benevolently in the manner of monarchs. As he entered the East Room, the band snapped into "Ruffles and Flourishes," followed by the traditional "Hail to the Chief."

Later, when the Nixons passed from the East Room into the dining room, trim military aides bedecked with medals and braids stood starchily at attention in two rows. The dinner guests were surrounded all evening by an impressive swirl of military uniforms. In addition to the dashing military aides, various military musical units serenaded the guests. All the while, white-gloved waiters scurried about with trays full of delicacies.

We may not fully perceive the moral degradation inherent in all the splendid monarchical trappings now surrounding the presidency, complete down to the detail of medieval trumpets, until we look back toward our national origins.

Sixty years after Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln continued the example of simplicity sufficiently that a British ambassador could be shocked by coming upon Lincoln in the White House shining his own shoes. Lincoln would often answer the White House door. He would travel on foot to the various departments to deliver his instructions and to get their reports. For recreation, he did not repair to kingly estates across the continent but contented himself with riding on horseback alone around Washington, quite unprotected, even though he had been shot at and knew men were out to kill him.

It was painful for Lincoln to refer to himself as "the President," and he would go through great circumlocutions to get around that phrase. He signed his letters "your obedient servant." Though compelled by events sometimes to assume almost dictatorial

powers, he was one with Jefferson in glorifying not the government of majesty and omnipotence we see today but, as every school-age child knows, government "of the people, by the people and for the people."

Material perquisites have now become an index of greater and greater accretions of power over the public. The reductio ad absurdum was Martha Mitchell with her own office and staff, FBI agents ironing her frocks, government limousines and chauffeurs at her beck, while her husband presided over the plan to break in, burgle and wiretap his political opponents. Or Chief Justice Warren Burger asking that a gold carpet be rolled out before him as he entered the Supreme Court chamber and for a government mansion to house his imperial presence.

Permeating it all is the odor of pseudo-divinity with which government these days surrounds itself; its denial, wherever it can get away with it, of the right of the citizen to know or of the press to publish; its reflex hostility to every attempt to hold it to account or even to question its motives.

The nadir of this movement is seen in the Nixon administration: the inaccessible President trying to evoke a Gaulist presence; the programmatic lying to the public; the scorn for the press; the battalions of courtier-sycophants, loyal only to "the presidency"; the claim of inherent power to bomb, make war, impound money, spend without appropriations; the wallowing in the panoply of neo-Kaiserism down to the comic opera uniforms, with white jackets and pointed plastic hats, that Nixon once presumed to deck the White House police in.

Around the Kaiser are grouped the bureaucratic princes who each year are more impenetrable, more impervious to public control and more prone to Mussolini-style suites; and the congressional barons, ever building their private fiefdoms while surrendering legitimate powers of the people to the executive.

There is still an occasional Senate elder, like Sam Ervin (D-N.C.) or George Aiken (R-Vt.) who lives simply in some hostel near the Capitol and goes about his business with a minimum of pomp, presumption and free-loading. But the ancient regime restored can be seen in most government enclaves.

There is sore need for a new skepticism toward the claims of omniscience and omnipotence which politicians are wont to make. So should it be with every citizen of the republic, and especially with every journalist.