

Agronsky and Company
(Hugh Sidey, moderator; George Will,
James Kilpatrick, Peter Lisagor,
Carl Rowan)

W/gate

15 Feb 76

KQED - transcribed from tape

(On Nixon's trip to China:)

Sidey: Gentlemen, if we can turn to yet another subject, China. Lo and behold, we awakened one morning and not Teng but Hua was the head man over there, and not Mr. Ford was going but Mr. Nixon was going to visit China.

Lisagor: Well, Hugh, since we're all ignorant on this subject we can speak freely about it [garble] --

Sidey: Well, we're not ignorant about Nixon, let's put it that way. Why would he accept? Let's start with that.

Lisagor: Well, I suppose he's on the road to rehabilitation for himself and I think that this is an ideal way for -- the crowning moment of his presidency was his trip to China and he's going back to the scene of his former triumph -- [Unintelligible interruptions by other speakers.]

Sidey [In a joking manner]: But he's a disgrace. Aren't you humiliated that you have a would-have-been criminal that's going to represent yourself and this country on the world stage?

Kilpatrick: Why is he representing this country on the world stage? He's going [garble] as a private citizen.

Sidey: Oh come now, Jack.

Lisagor: The Chinese delivered the invitation to the White House, Jack. There's so much about this thing that removes him from the area of a private citizen. He is a former President, and even President Ford now says that he would expect former President Nixon to report back to him on the changes in the Chinese leadership [remainder of sentence garbled].

Kilpatrick: And Nixon is very knowledgeable about foreign affairs. We ought not to take that away from him. And, Hugh [garbled], he [might bring back?] something constructive or [helpful?].

Rowan: Yes, but Ford cannot remotely - or even appear to - have Nixon as his emissary in China, on the verge of an election. All of those people, including myself, who are still outraged that he pardoned him in the first place are going to be doubly outraged if he makes the slightest gesture --

Kilpatrick: But you're going to be outraged anyhow. The sun would fall out of the sky before you would vote for Gerald Ford for anything.

Rowan: Oh, I wouldn't say that. It depends on whether one of your other men is coming up.

Lisagor: Jack, how would you feel if Nixon asked for asylum in China? How would that strike you?

[Laughter.]

Rowan: He's going to come back with acupuncture in his pocket, and come back the New Nixon.

.....

Rowan: And furthermore, the Chinese have been very strange where Nixon is concerned. There is considerable evidence that they are not eager to have come in or bestow any favors on anybody who's harshly critical of Richard Nixon.

Sidey: Does this fit? - Is the Nixon invitation connected with the appointment of Hua, do you believe? In other words, to have him be the first American that will probably see the new man in action, and report back?

Lisagor: The Chinese, Hugh, as you know, deal in symbols of all kinds, and they deliver messages through symbolic acts. I think that they are doing that with the invitation to Nixon. Don't ask what the messages are. I think they're delivering one to the Kremlin, one to the White House, one perhaps to their own people. When the experts finally sort this out in terms of history we may know, but we don't know now.

[Panel turns to another subject.]