

White House Once Place That 'Belonged' to Public

By RICHARD D. LYONS MAY 9, 1970
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WASHINGTON, May 8 — The White House, the focus of tomorrow's antiwar protests, is surrounded by an aura of power plus gates, fences, guards, flood lights and a chain of legal documents forged to keep out intruders and discourage demonstrations.

Such tight security did not always exist. Until after the Cuban missile crisis there was not even an adequate security fence enclosing the Executive Mansion and its complex of buildings. For years almost anyone could wander in, and sometimes did.

Half a century ago the almost unguarded White House was often pointed out by parents to their children as a symbol of the freedom enjoyed by Americans.

"It's the only place in the world," one now middle-aged Washingtonian told his grand- father last year, "where the head of the state is afraid of the people."

But in recent years the symbolism of the White House has changed radically, and it has

fast-ins, kneel-ins, pray-ins and even sleep-ins.

Leaders of action groups such as the New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam have come to realize that involving the President's official residence in their rallies calls immediate attention to their causes.

Ron Young, a "New Mobe" coordinator, said the Executive Mansion was chosen as the keystone of tomorrow's activities "to lay the blame for what's happening in this country at the gates of the White House."

The effect of demonstrating on the Washington Monument grounds several hundred yards away, Mr. Young said, would be to "insulate" Mr. Nixon from the protests.

Yet this is what the Justice Department, the Secret Service and the White House police have been seeking to do. In short, they protect the President.

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bolism of the white house has changed radically, and it has become the focus of expressions of discontent.

On almost any given day, the White House and its 18-acre estate, plus Lafayette Park that fronts it, is the target of demonstrations: sit-ins, stand-ins,

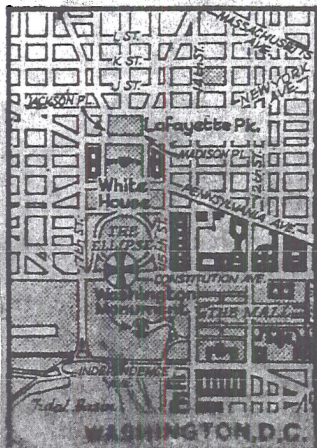
Security at the Executive Mansion was so lax during the Hoover Administration that a sightseer from Philadelphia strolled into the White House dining room while the astonished President and Mrs. Hoover were having supper. The intruder was ejected by butlers so quickly that his identity was not determined.

Perhaps because of the incident, that Administration saw the end of one of the most cherished customs at the Executive Mansion. For more than 100 years, thousands of Americans considered it their civic duty to go to the White House on Jan. 1 to shake hands with the President. Sometimes the lines stretched for blocks.

Protest by Suffragettes

What was probably the first White House demonstration took place in 1917 when suffragettes chained themselves to the gates, a demonstration that shocked the nation for its daring.

Since then, and especially in recent years, as the demonstrations have mounted in frequency and intensity, so have fears for the President's safety.



Today's rally will take place at Ellipse (cross).

In recent years political activists or deranged persons have tried to set fire to the White House, rammed through the gates in a truck, and climbed fences to be caught on the lawn. One pilot with a grievance even threatened to smash his plane into the Executive Mansion.

As the White House and the men in it have increased in importance and power, so has the number of visitors. About 10 million people come on official business each year, plus two million tourists.

In 1963 a stouter, higher fence was built, bulletproof guard boxes erected and more sophisticated communications equipment installed. The White House bomb shelter was enlarged, war floodlights and other generators

added. Visitors such as White House aides and newsmen were issued special badges. It may require an hour or more before irregular visitors, going to the Executive Mansion on official business, are allowed to enter after clearance by the White House police and Secret Service.

James J. Rowley, the Secret Service director, listed last year dozens of incidents that had caused alarm to security forces. During the Arab-Israeli six-day war in 1967, for example, 30,000 Jews demonstrated in front of the White House.

Mr. Rowley's list was contained in an affidavit of the United States District Court here supporting plans by the Government to restrict picketing near the White House.

The American Civil Liberties Union and other groups have countered that demonstrations near the White House have almost invariably been nonviolent and that the restrictions are unnecessary.