

Michael Davie 26 April 73

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Orange County

Spirit Shapes

Nixon Staff

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The character of the White House staff has been determined by the peculiarities of life on the West Coast, and it is in Southern California that the roots of this administration may be found. Perhaps one may look there for a generalized explanation of the Watergate conspiracy.

Californians are often thought of as opened-minded, relaxed, experimental people, but these White House Californians belong to a different strain. They exemplify instead the spirit of Orange County, Los Angeles, which is one of the most conservative regions of the U.S.: suburban, prosperous, new fast-growing, white, intensely orthodox, patriotic, church-going, often puritanical, often rootless, often heavily mortgaged, and often fearful that

The writer, who has long followed American affairs, is an associate editor of the London Observer, from which this article is excerpted.

something unpredictable may happen—factory closures, space agency cut-back, tax increases—to put the citizens on a slide that will put them back into the ranks of the poor from which many of their parents escaped.

The White House staff do not all come from Orange County in fact, but they do so in spirit. A new generic term is needed to describe them, as 'Ivy League' is applied to well-off, privately educated, Europeanized products of the East Coast. These Orange County boys are proud of being Californian, yet they also often feel inferior to and suspicious of eastern Americans, especially Ivy Leaguers. Nixon, in his youth, used to stand on the railway line at home in Whittier, outside Los Angeles, and gaze longingly down the tracks towards the east; Californians often feel that they need to go east to prove themselves.

The White House staff had their first political experiences as part of the swing to the hard right in California—provoked by black riots, students rebelliousness, and high taxes—that made Reagan Governor. "It is time to get big government off your back and out of your pocket," said Nixon in his budget address last January. Here is a theme of the administration that might have come straight out of Reagan's 1966 Campaign Handbook. Caspar Weinberger, a principal architect of Nixon's new budget, which cuts social welfare provisions, used to be budget director for Reagan. Nixon has always liked fresh blood. His present aides joined him some 10 years ago and have come up with him very fast, recruiting friends on the way.

"Their view is professional, managerial. California is the first suburban state and I don't think Haldeman and Co. are aware of what real social problems are," a southern Californian congressman told me. "They still have a kind of Puritan ethic—my father made it, I made it, so if I can do it why can't others? They have a very tough ideological approach. They have preconceptions. And they are defensive. They don't trust the people in government, the Civil Service, and they're filling more and more slots with people in their own mould."

They move around very little in Washington. "You never see them at private functions," a girl who moves around a great deal told me. "If there's not a head table, there won't be any administration people. They don't like it. Nixon doesn't like it. They socialize only in the way of business. They have very few social graces, and they are no good at small talk."

The one important administration figure with a light social side is Dr. Kissinger; but the contrast between him and most of his White House colleagues is more than purely social. Gossiping the other evening to Mrs. Alice Roosevelt Longworth, a fine old lady who is President Theodore Roosevelt's daughter, now 89, the pair of them seemed to belong to another world, as, indeed, they do.

Kissinger is the only White House person whose socializing is tolerated; and the only one who has dared to make jokes about Haldeman. "When I handed in my work-sheet to Bob Haldeman before coming out . . ." In a speech last week he seemed to be making public signs that he is uneasy about the administration's aims. After some jokes, he became serious. He called for a national debate on national priorities, following the end of the Vietnam War. "Without knowing where you are going," he said in his deep lecturer's voice, "you can administer a country but you cannot govern it," a remark that some of those present took to be a comment on the President's domestic posture.

The Californians make enemies, which Kissinger tries to avoid. At the time of the election, he dined happily with Frank Mankiewicz, who was McGovern's campaign manager, in company with several fierce critics of the Vietnam war. Haldeman, by contrast, described critics of the war as "consciously aiding and abetting the enemy of the United States," which was very close to accusing them of treason. He repeated his view after it was pointed out to him that the critics included many U.S. senators.