

Building a 'square' image

WASHINGTON — If ever there was a man who built his own gallows for violating the moral codes of Square America, "Nixon's the One," to quote his 1968 campaign slogan.

Let me spin through the litany (before switching it into an indictment).

In politics, it's been pursuit of the Eisenhower mystique (although the old general didn't much care for his five o'clock shadow protege). Daughter Julie married David Eisenhower, and no family re-union has been complete without some salute to Mamie. Then there are the flag pins and Lincoln busts.

At first, Nixonian religion focused on the middle-class Protestantism of Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, author of "*The Power of Positive Thinking*." But in the later Sixties, Mr. Nixon broadened his Middle American imagery to include the Southern Baptist fervor of Billy Graham — conspicuously shown as the President's "moral counselor" — and the ethnic Catholic strength of New York's Cardinal and Philadelphia's Cardinal. Sunday prayer services were also used as a White House display case.

In sports, of course, Mr. Nixon embraced football, calling this or that coach in the locker room after the big game. Son-in-law David Eisenhower became a sports columnist, and daughter Julie went to work for — what else? — the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Even in media terms, Mr. Nixon's pursuit of the Square Majority archetype has been unrelenting. His favorite magazine is the "*Reader's Digest*," forum for finding God, rewarding Horatio Alger virtue and

hailing the FBI. One of his appointees to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting owns the "Lassie" television show and once owned a major interest in the Muzak Corporation.

Not surprisingly, Mr. Nixon's most favored vehicle of communication has been advertising, witness the make-up of his basic White House staff. What is more, most of these advertising people were involved in merchandising to Middle America, e.g., H. R. Haldeman was Los Angeles vice president of J. Walter Thompson and Ron Ziegler was an account executive for Disneyland.

At the risk of overstating my case, food and lifestyle are also part of the image. The President's January, 1973, Inaugural Chairman was J. Willard Marriott, owner of the Hot Shoppes chain. One of the biggest 1972 Nixon contributors was Ray Kroc of MacDonald's hamburgers. And for many years, one of the men closest to the President has been Pepsico Chairman Don Kendall.

Shortly after I left the Nixon Administration in 1970, I argued at intervals that Mr. Nixon's commitment to Middle America was plastic and image-based, and that the administration was betraying its electorate (and aborting the GOP opportunity) by using Madison Avenue techniques.

Now that Mr. Nixon's attitudes have been forced to the surface, his whole flag-pin-Lincoln bust-Billy Graham act, far from buoying his cause, really ought to be a part of his indictment. To try to keep a mistaken political burglary from being found out is forgiveable; to relentlessly translate America's history, culture and institutions into a camouflage for banditry is obnoxious.

John Roche is on vacation