

Ex-Counsel to Nixon Is Sought as Lawyer

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WASHINGTON, March 28—At a dinner party here not long ago, an old hand in this city's legal circles was talking about a fellow lawyer who tells clients he has connections at the White House.

"The truth is the guy's never been inside the place," he continued. "But the customers like the idea, and he takes home a bundle every year."

That, of course, is definitely not the kind of perfidious gimmickry Charles W. Colson, a genuine White House insider and Oval Office intimate, will either practice or require in his brand-new role as a Washington lawyer—but it is precisely the kind of image-building that characterizes the arena he has entered.

From The Capitol dome to the Pentagon basement, this city's most precious commodity is influence, and even the appearance of it can be worth its weight in six-figure retainers.

It is a world where the most successful lawyers seldom, if ever, appear in court.

It is a world in which a lawyer's relationships are often in greater demand than his legal abilities.

It is a world where a telephone call or a casual conversation over cocktails can sometimes be more productive than a well-written, thoroughly researched brief.

The Connection Is King

It is a world populated by lawyers whose connections are their stock in trade and by teeming-with-affluence clients who believe that is how things are best done in Washington.

It is Charles W. Colson's new world—and he seems altogether happy with his choice.

"What I miss most," he conceded in a recent early-morning interview at his new offices three blocks from the White House, "is the opportunity to be with the President and talk with him every day."

The 41-year-old former Bostonian, who served as Mr. Nixon's special counsel from 1969 until just a few days ago, is not the first former White House lawyer to enter private practice here, nor is he even the first of the Nixon-lawyers to hang up his shingle.



The New York Times/Mike Lien

Charles W. Colson, Special Counsel to the President until a few days ago, is now a lawyer in capital.

But Mr. Colson is the first bona fide member of the President's inner circle to make the move and, as such, he has come to occupy a fairly special niche.

He is, for example, a deeply committed, instantly identifiable, high-visibility Nixonian Republican set against a power-landscape—the Congress, the Federal bureaucracy and the legal establishment itself—that is predominantly Democratic and sometimes downright hostile to the President.

Doing Quite Well

Nevertheless, Mr. Colson is already doing quite well.

Not long after he announced late last year that he would soon be leaving the President's staff for a partnership at Morin, Dickstein, Shapiro & Galligan, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters announced that it would drop Williams, Connally & Califano as its counsel and take its large business and chunky retainer over to Mr. Colson's chosen firm.

Some thought that switch had something to do with Mr. Colson's alleged involvement in the release from Federal prison of James R. Hoffa, the former president of the teamsters, but Mr. Colson insists that simply is not so.

become the silver-haired, smooth-tongued prototype of the Washington lawyer.

Others who have made similar transitions take the same tack.

Thomas Corcoran, the venerable product of Franklin

Roosevelt's White House, avoids the word "influence" and prefers instead, "entree."

Joseph A. Califano Jr., one of President Johnson's men who is now with the teamster's former law firm, calls it "access."

"But they may have thought I was a pretty good lawyer," he said, "and there were quite a few people who more or less assumed that I was coming to this firm—so I guess it was no secret about my destination."

Moreover, from almost the very moment he made known his decision to leave 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, he began to get calls from several companies and corporations asking him to represent them.

Told Them to Call Back

"Well, of course, it would have been most improper for me to have talked with them about such matters while I was still on the Government's payroll," he said, "so I just told them to wait until I was officially out of the Administration and then call back."

Now he is and they are.

In fact, after less than three weeks at his new desk, the list of new clients who have retained his new firm is reportedly growing faster than the national debt—and Mr. Colson seems well on his way to becoming one of the busiest and best-paid lawyers in Washington.

Not that success in private practice is new to him. After working for Leverett Saltonstall, the former Senator from Massachusetts, he formed his own Washington-Boston law firm, and, although he was a senior partner, it bore the name of Gadsby & Hannah—the two men "who were better known around here and better able to serve as the 'front' men," he explained.

Then, for several years, he earned six figures a year, he recalled—with a car and a driver every day—before he took the White House assignment in 1969, a job that paid him substantially less than what he was accustomed to making.

It was during those years that he acquired the reputation of serving as Mr. Nixon's Mr. Fix-it—a highly competent lawyer, to be sure, but a man whose value to his President was measured more in terms of his political savvy than his legal acumen.

Still, politics was not the only matter on Mr. Colson's quick, fertile mind during those months, for with the pragmatic shrewdness for which he became famous within the White House, he began to plan for his future outside the White House.

He dispatched his assistant, a young lawyer named Henry Cashen, Detroit-born and labor-oriented, to the law firm his old friend and partner, Charles Morin, had helped found.

Mr. Cashen had been responsible for several years

for the White House liaison with trade-association groups in Washington and across the country.

Then, two of the lawyers with him in his old offices joined the firm Mr. Colson ultimately had decided on, Morin, Dickstein, Shapiro & Galligan.

The firm also grew with an influx of lawyers from various facets of the Federal bureaucracy. A Deputy Solicitor General of the United States, an attorney for the Securities and Exchange Commission, a director of the Office of Energy Programs for the Department of Commerce, and a staff counsel for the S.E.C. enforcement division.

Now the firm has a change of name. A total of 19 lawyers with offices here and in Boston and New York City—and with its newest member, its name has been changed to Colson & Shapiro.

"I guess you could say I'm the new 'front' man," Mr. Colson conceded rather reluctantly, adding that he believes that his White House experience "made me a better lawyer" and "maybe, just maybe, it gives you an advantage."

"God, is that the truth," said one lawyer who had been in Washington for more than 10 years and done very well for himself, "but not half as well as Colson will be doing in the first three months because he's been in the White House."

Another non-White House graduate agreed. "He knows where the buttons and the levers are," he said, "and you can bet he's going to be pushing and pulling."

Mr. Colson disagreed.

"That's a myth," he said.

"The largely Democratic legal establishment that built up here during the nineteen-thirties dearly loves to leave the impression that they have influence and that influence is important," he said. "It isn't."

Still, all around him in his new offices were the mementos of his touch with power: photographs of him and the President, a signed portrait from Mr. Nixon to Mr. Colson, a crystal chess piece from his old White House staff, and from the deep, rust carpet on the floor there seemed to emanate the aroma of influence.

But it is a word and a concept that bothers him.

"I want to do everything I can to avoid the Clark Clifford syndrome," he said, referring to the man who has

And Mr. Clifford, who emerged from the Truman Administration, says, "I tell clients that I don't have any influence. I don't know what it means, but whatever it means, I don't have it. What I do have is merely a record of associations."