

British View of the White House The 'Orange County' Spirit

By Michael Davie
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Washington

The character of President Nixon's 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 open-minded, relaxed, experimental people, but these White House Californians belong to a different strain. They exemplify instead the spirit of Orange county, which is one of the most conservative regions of the U.S.

Orange county is suburban, prosperous, new, fast-growing, white, intensely orthodox, patriotic, church-going, often puritanical, often rootless, often heavily mortgaged, and often

fearful that something unpredictable may happen — factory closures, space agency outback, tax increases — to start its citizens sliding toward the poverty from which many of their parents escaped.

The White House staff does not come entirely 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.

PROOF

Mr. Nixon, in his youth, used to stand on the railway line at home in Whittier, outside Los Angeles, and gaze longingly down the tracks toward the East; Californians often feel that they need to go East to prove themselves.

Mr. Nixon has always liked fresh blood. His present aides joined him ten

years ago and have come up with him very fast, recruiting friends on the way.

Dwight Chapin was personally recruited to the White House staff by Bob Haldeman, the President's right-hand man. I happened to meet Chapin in the White House in 1969 — an alert, pleasant, cool young Southern Californian who was the President's appointments secretary, a post he held until the abruptly left to join United Air Lines. He looked as clean and efficient as the White House interior, which always appears freshly painted.

Chapin was the White House contact of a young attorney, also from Southern California, named Donald Segretti, who was allegedly one of more than 50 undercover operators recruited to assist Mr. Nixon's reelection by infiltrating rival campaigns or feeding misleading information to voters.

From these two, the thread of Watergate involvement evidently leads higher up the White House staff, to Chapin's equally orderly colleagues. Several of these are Southern Californians, too. Most notable is Haldeman, who has been the President's hatchman since he took power. Others include Jeb Stuart Magruder and Gordon Strachan.

"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 mold."

SOCIAL

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 ta-

ble, 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 not good at small talk."

A sociable politician remarked: "It's the damndest thing. They're all cut from the same cookie-cutter, there's not a laugh in a car-load."

The one important administration figure with a light social side is Henry Kissinger, the only White House person whose socializing is tolerated and the only one who has dared to make jokes about Haldeman.

The Californians make enemies, which Kissinger tries to avoid. At the time of the election, he dined happily with Frank Mankiewicz, who was Senator George 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.

ABROAD

Abroad, Mr. Nixon still uses members of the old East Coast foreign policy establishment; their symbol is David Bruce, former U.S. ambassador in London, now en route to China.

But on the home front, which does not greatly interest the President, and which has been more open to the influence of Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, the President's closest domestic policy adviser, the liberal Republicans of Mr. Nixon's first administration have now, almost to a man, either removed themselves or have been removed.

Congressmen complain that the White House has no idea of the effect of its policies, or that if it does it does not care. The administration's evident lack of concern with welfare, for example, may be why the adjective "ruthless" applied to them may not be inappropriate. They tend to see the world in Orange county terms. People are either regular, striving Americans,

or bums, or enemies.

Among older politicians around town, one can discern a certain disdain, perhaps contempt would not be too strong a word, for the new White House breed. Murray Chotiner is Mr. Nixon's oldest political associate in Washington; he managed Mr. Nixon's campaign for the Congress in 1946, and has worked with him off and on ever since. In his time, Chotiner has been accused of practically every form of political chicanery, and I went to see him to hear his view of the Watergate.

He is a California lawyer in origin, now in his early 60s, but he looks like a Pittsburgh cab-driver, with a battered face and a nice big gold wristwatch. He has had four wives.

"First, the Watergate is stupid," he said. "Second, it's horrible, and third, they weren't going to find out anything anyway before the Democratic convention. Besides, it's ridiculous. It's the easiest thing in the world to find out what your opponents are doing in a political campaign."

ADVICE

Then he gave me his view of the men who have recently been giving political advice to Mr. Nixon. "They reached the top too fast," he said, "without seasoning or training. When Mr. Nixon became President in 1968, and the press was calling for him, Ron Ziegler came to me and said, 'Murray what shall I tell them?' He didn't have the experience."

"Ehrlichman was a tour director. Mitchell was only on the 1968 campaign. Haldeman was an advance man, chief of staff for the campaign workers, dealing with details, not judgments. When he became a campaign manager in 1962, he lost. There aren't the people in there who've had the political experience."

Still, I said, they did win by a landslide in 1972.

Chotiner grinned. "When I was in the White House I used to send notes round saying that the President would win in '72 in spite of the campaign. I predicted that he would win by a historical sweep. Haldeman hated me for those notes."

Chotiner looked out of the window in the direction of the White House. "Nothing

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is more arrogant than youth," he said.

Arrogance, too much money pouring in from suspect sources, a lack of any tradition to fall back on, amateurism, and an Orange county-style belief that any

methods are justified in order to defeat enemies and Democrats: these may turn out to be the links between the orderliness of the administration and the disorderliness of the conspiracy.



MURRAY CHOTINER
'Watergate is stupid'