

# Condemnation—and Pity— For the Palace Guard

There is, if one can reflect for a moment beyond the mind-boggling rush of daily disclosures in the Watergate case, something sad about the departure from the White House by Dwight Chapin, Jeb Stuart Magruder, John W. Dean, Gordon Strachan, Egil Krogh Jr. and all the other smooth-cheeked, square-jawed young men who once followed in President Nixon's footsteps like fawning courtiers of a royal entourage. It is sad because they were simply the hand-maidens of the powerful, servants to the princes of privilege and accessories to arrogant authoritarians. Now, suddenly, like spent jackals who once traveled among lions, discarded and disgraced at the penultimate of their careers, they seem to have lost their sleekness, their false courage.

It is not enough to say that they were victims of a political crush on Mr. Nixon, that their transgressions were the result of blind loyalty or youthful naivete and that their political education was woefully inadequate. After all, they were of voting age; all held university degrees, were the head of families and had at least a few years of business or professional experience. None has ever been elected to office but all had a yearning to actively participate and serve in the political process.

Nor is it enough to discredit them as "amateurs." There is no school which prepares one for assuming White House responsibilities; it is, unfortunately, a situation requiring on-the-job training. Yet, Bill Moyers, Joe Califano and countless others were young and inexperienced when they joined LBJ's White House and still acquitted themselves with distinction. Consequently, the misdeeds of Mr. Nixon's drummed-out aides cannot wholly be blamed on their youthfulness, nor can it be used as their defense.

Whatever prompted them to do what they did, they were unaware, as William Pitt the Elder once remarked, that, "There is something behind the throne greater than the king himself."

As much as anything, they were conditioned by the heady climate and monarchical atmosphere which permeated the Nixon White House.

It would take a strong man, indeed, to accept with equanimity the astronomical leap from J. Walter Thompson's Los Angeles office to the West Wing of the White House. Almost overnight, Mr. Nixon's subalterns found they were in demand by the press, that a word from them could make corporate tycoons tremble, that they could make members of Congress come calling hat in hand and that with a phone call they could relegate a Cabinet officer to the role of departmental roustabout.

They were, they soon realized, members of a small, exclusive fraternity arrayed like anointed knights around the President. Too soon, it appears, the era of faceless Presidential viceroys with a "passion for anonymity" faded with the emergence of instant communications techniques and the increased centralization of power by the White House. Modern White House aides have become members of the government's New Elite, protected by execu-

tive privilege and endowed with jurisdictional domains over which they exercise virtually unchecked and generally invisible influence. The status and prestige of their station were long ago perceived by Charles Dawes, the first federal budget director, who wrote in his diary that he once told President Franklin D. Roosevelt, "If I could take any office I would not want the position of Secretary of Treasury but that of an assistant secretary to the President."

Appointed without Senate approval and free from Congressional oversight, White House aides serve a constituency of one—the President. Left unresolved is the classic question as to whether they are "the President's men" or public servants, whether they serve the President or the Presidency. Chapin, Magruder *et al* resolved this ambi-

guity in favor of the former—in each instance, wrongly, it is now apparent. They surely were conscious of the fact that while Mr. Nixon preached reform and reorganization and decentralization, he was, in practice, fencing in the private province of the Presidency and fortifying the palace guard. Thus, in effect, Mr. Nixon transmitted to his aides his own notion of the regal Presidency. This certainly influenced them into adopting a noblesse oblige attitude, convincing them that their actions would be immune from noisome surveillance and outside independent judgment. They were, so they believed, untouchables because of their White House credentials.

Accordingly, within the White House hierarchy, position and privilege has been as rigidly defined and jealously prized as the royal blood line of the Rothschilds or a Kentucky Derby winner. Rank is recognized, if not pub-

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licly proclaimed, by those subtle and not-so-subtle accouterments which traditionally accrue to it: a chauffeured limousine, an elegantly-decorated office in the White House, a sizable staff and access to the President, the ultimate cachet of status. Even the meetings he attends denotes an aide's standing. During the Haldeman-Ehrlichman era, many White House officials were called to the 7:30 a.m. staff session. But few were chosen for Haldeman's 8:15 a.m. gathering of senior Presidential assistants. Its currency was enhanced by its exclusivity. Peter Flanigan, who attended both meetings, once noted that he went to the 7:30 session as "penance for my sins."

Generalities are dangerous but several common strains run through Mr. Nixon's junior lieutenants. Bright, attractive and industrious, they are earnest to the point of grimness, without flair or flamboyancy. Like plastic props, they fit in perfectly with Mr. Nixon's starched dignity and penchant for panoply and protocol. They possess an antiseptic Arrow Collar handsomeness reminiscent of the 1930's and 1940's. And amazingly, they seem to retain the simple values of that age. As Babbitts of the nuclear age, they put their faith in Big Business, the profit system and virtues identified with the WASP philosophy. There is a small-townish pride among them. They maintain, with justification, that Washington, the Eastern Establishment and the national press do not represent or reflect the real America. Yet, they are not willing to acknowledge that neither does Southern California, the San Diego Rotary Club and National Review.

They were never fully understood by the Washington press; neither were they accepted or catered to by the news community here, all of which contributed to the cold war which has existed between them.

Unable to handle the addictive power of the White House, they became hooked by it. Like all addicts, they failed to use it with temperance and civility. Inevitably, their petty vices became monumental offenses, if not in violation of the law than against decent human conduct.

Although it is unfashionable, certainly among the press which acts as giddy as a bride leaving church, the minority suggestion is made here that perhaps they deserve our pity as well as our condemnation. For them, the glory ride, which lasted only a moment in time, is over; there will be no fond farewells.

Ironically, their tragedy might have been avoided if they had taken to heart an observation by the 19th century Boston reformer, Wendell Phillips, who once remarked, "We live under a government of men and morning newspapers."