



Anita Siegel

Touch of California, Bit of Dayton

By Carey McWilliams

Michael Davie of The London Observer, Eric Sevareid and other pundits are spreading the libelous notion that the roots of Watergate can be traced to the politics and sociology—what they call the “peculiarities”—of Southern California, more particularly Orange County. This notion is pure rubbish. My credentials for offering a rebuttal include several books about California, the advantage of a long and close observation of the local scene denied Messrs. Davie and Sevareid, and a deep affection for the region which 22 years of exile in Manhattan have not extinguished.

With an eye on the 1972 election President Nixon resumed legal residence in California, opting for San Clemente in Orange County, the purpose being to insure his dominance of the California delegation. But he has few ties with the county, the region or, for that matter, the state; most of his political career has evolved elsewhere. He has long distrusted the California electorate and with good reason. It seems to have been forgotten, for example, that Senator McGovern carried Los Angeles.

As to Orange County, it had no special significance in California politics until after 1960 when, as part of the county's phenomenal population expansion, Birchers managed to gain control of several local Republican clubs. When the great population ex-

pansion began, Orange County was deeply conservative but it has recently begun to swing and sway to the familiar long-term California rhythm. (In selecting Orange County, Fla.—Florida Technological in Orlando—for one of his rare post-Watergate public appearances, the President knew what he was doing. It much more nearly fits the “Orange County” stereotype of Messrs. Davie and Sevareid than does present-day Orange County, Calif.)

The fact is that Richard Nixon has few roots in any part of California and is not a typical product of its politics. The Nixon story begins in 1946 with his defeat of Jerry Voorhis who was seeking a sixth term in Congress. Voorhis' liberalism—he had been a Socialist briefly in the 1920's—did not jibe with the mores of the district, the 12th, which was more conservative than today. It is a tribute to his fine personal qualities and the high esteem in which the Voorhis family was properly held for its high sense of social purpose that Jerry held the seat as long as he did. But by 1946 he was living on borrowed time.

His defeat was therefore not surprising nor can it be attributed solely—or even largely—to the smears that Nixon, aided by Murray Chotiner, directed against him. A reaction against the New Deal had set in and it swept Nixon to re-election in 1948. In 1950 Nixon defeated Helen Gahagan Doug-

las for the Senate. Here, too, “red smear” tactics were not the basic reason. The Californians were simply not ready for a woman—much less a Hollywood actress—to represent them in the U. S. Senate in 1950.

In 1952, Thomas E. Dewey hand-picked an eager Nixon to be the Republican Vice-Presidential nominee. The California delegation, which included Nixon, was pledged to Earl Warren but since the President and Vice President cannot come from the same state, Nixon proceeded to double-cross Warren. In 1968 and again in 1972 Nixon did not really win the Presidency so much as his opposition lost it on both occasions. Both campaigns, incidentally, were badly managed for Nixon by John Mitchell of Lower Manhattan.

It must be emphasized that Nixon was defeated in the only campaigns in which he had strong opposition: by John Kennedy in 1960 and by “Pat” Brown in the California gubernatorial election of 1962. Much more than Lyndon Johnson, Nixon is “the accidental President” (the title of Robert Sherrill's book about Johnson). He has been lucky, available, diligent, pliable, and passionately persistent. But he did not work his way up through the ranks of the Republican party in California.

The power figures in the party—the

Chandlers, the Knowlands and the others—never liked him and never trusted him.

Hiram Johnson was the Progressive party in California. By contrast Nixon was never a central much less a dominant figure in the G.O.P. in California or southern California or, for that matter, in Orange County. The point about Nixon is that he has no roots anywhere, not even in Yorba Linda where he was born.

True, California has an exceptional political tradition and has shown a fondness for some "peculiar" devices such as the cross-filing system. Cross-filing, weakness of party structures, and an electorate which has always included many recent in-migrants have made for a "star system" in which state politics has been dominated by popular personalities. Warren, Reagan and Brown are far more representative California political types than Nixon.

The press would have us believe that Nixon's entourage is made up exclusively of Southern California. But Nixon did not pick up Ehrlichman, Charles Colson, G. Gordon Liddy, E. Howard Hunt Jr., Tom Charles Huston, Hugh W. Sloan Jr., Jeb Stuart Magruder, John Dean, Herbert W. Reisner, Howard Phillips, Frederick LaRue, Maurice Stans and John Mitchell "south of Tehachapi." Kalmbach, Porter and Haldeman (a third generation Angeleno) are from southern California; and so are Ziegler, Chapin and Segretti, all of whom went to U.S.C., but then so did Art Buchwald and I.

In one sense only is the Nixon-Haldeman-Chotiner style of politics related to the California background. The opposite side of issue-oriented politics is "the smear." But the smear is not a California invention. Witness what happened to Pepper in Florida, Graham in North Carolina and Tydings in Maryland when they were literally "smeared" out of their Senate seats. So don't blame Orange County for Watergate. And, please, don't blame California for Richard Nixon.

Carey McWilliams is editor of *The Nation*.

By Alvin P. Sanoff

DAYTON, Ohio—I recently returned from a brief visit to Boston, where car bumpers are dotted with stickers saying "Impeach With Honor," and "Don't Blame Me, I'm From Massachusetts," where Watergate is Subject No. 1 in most conversations and where people keep asking me how Middle America feels about the most sordid political scandal in the nation's history.

My response to the frequent queries about Middle America's psyche was uniform: "I really don't know." I said it with certainty.

That was a few weeks ago. Now, if I were asked the same question I would say that people in this part of the world are concerned about Watergate. Perhaps not to the degree that proper or not so proper Bostonians are, but concerned nonetheless.

My conclusion is based on a recent poll taken for my newspaper by the Dayton-based Public Opinion Center, a group well-versed in polling techniques. A telephone survey of 602 Dayton area residents found that 62 per cent of them viewed Watergate as "a very serious matter," and not just a case of politics as usual. And 59 per cent said they thought Watergate is "more serious" than other political scandals.

True, if one views the results of the poll from the other end of the telescope it has to be profoundly disturbing that 32 per cent of those surveyed regarded Watergate as "just politics" and that 33 per cent found it less serious than or not at all different from other political scandals.

But these are a clear minority. Their numbers hardly provide ground for believing that Watergate is an issue that ends at the water's edge, the water being the Hudson River and the Atlantic Ocean.

And it should be of little comfort to the press-baiters around Mr. Nixon that by a margin of more than 2 to 1, residents of this area believe that the

media have treated Mr. Nixon fairly in handling Watergate.

The concern about Watergate in these parts is not reflected in anti-Nixon bumper stickers. Nor is it demonstrated in casual conversation. Watergate still runs a poor fourth to the weather, inflation and the state of the Cincinnati Reds.

But that is to be expected. For people in this city that market researchers and political analysts view as "typically American" are not much given to talking about politics, matters intellectual or most other subjects that arouse deep-seated passion. They are undemonstrative and easygoing and prone to talk about things that will not offend their neighbors.

So Watergate has not visibly intruded on their lives. But the surface indications are deceptive. Middle Americans, in their own way, do care about Watergate.

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