

# Something's Up in Orange County

By Ralph J. Gleason

BERKELEY, Calif.—A senior citizen of my acquaintance who lives in a mobile home park in the Fullerton-Santa Ana-Whittier area of Orange County, the heartland of Western American conservatism, has just provided me with an unexpected reaction to the Watergate affair.

Mr. Nixon, he says, knew at least of the cover-up and is therefore guilty, or else he is a fool for having such people around him and not knowing it. Either dishonest or a fool, there is no other choice, he believes. Furthermore, his statement, he said, echoed exactly what was being said day by day in the mobile home park where he lives. That is what I find so unexpected and interesting.

This man is 89 years old, a lifelong Republican. To my knowledge, he has never voted for a Democratic Presidential candidate. Even when his wife supported Franklin D. Roosevelt,

he stuck to his convictions. What's more, he has lived for over 25 years in the atmosphere of Orange County, even being distantly acquainted with the family of its most famous native.

The entire Watergate episode, he says, is disgusting; a terrible, sick, frightening thing to have occurred. But, as a representative of that classic American type Grant Wood painted, he believes that in a situation like this, you face up to it, deal with it straight ahead and not, under any circumstances, do you equivocate. He has watched the President on TV, read his statements and scanned the papers every day. So have many of his fellow mobile home park residents, he says. And they are, if his report is to be believed (and in 35 years I have never known him to tell even a white lie), turning against the President they trusted.

Over the years my 89-year-old friend and I have argued about Mr. Nixon on every issue. He supported Mr. Nixon when he ran against Jerry Voorhis and Helen Gahagan Douglas, but now he's having second thoughts

about that. Perhaps, he feels, he was misled. And his reasons are the same as his opinion on Watergate: If Mr. Nixon is a fool, then he was always a fool and his followers were misled; and if he is a crook (to use the strongest language) then his whole career must be re-examined.

My friend finds himself now in the unusual position of agreeing with the six of his children who are not Republicans, as well as with his grandchildren. It gives his family a three-generation united front on politics for the very first time. He is not surprised, since he taught them the standard American virtues of honesty, responsibility, forthrightness and hard work which have always been his creed, as well as the creed of the fellow dwellers in his Orange County mobile home park. And on the rock of those standard conservative virtues is where Mr. Nixon has foundered.

*Ralph J. Gleason is senior editor of Rolling Stone and a columnist for The San Francisco Chronicle.*