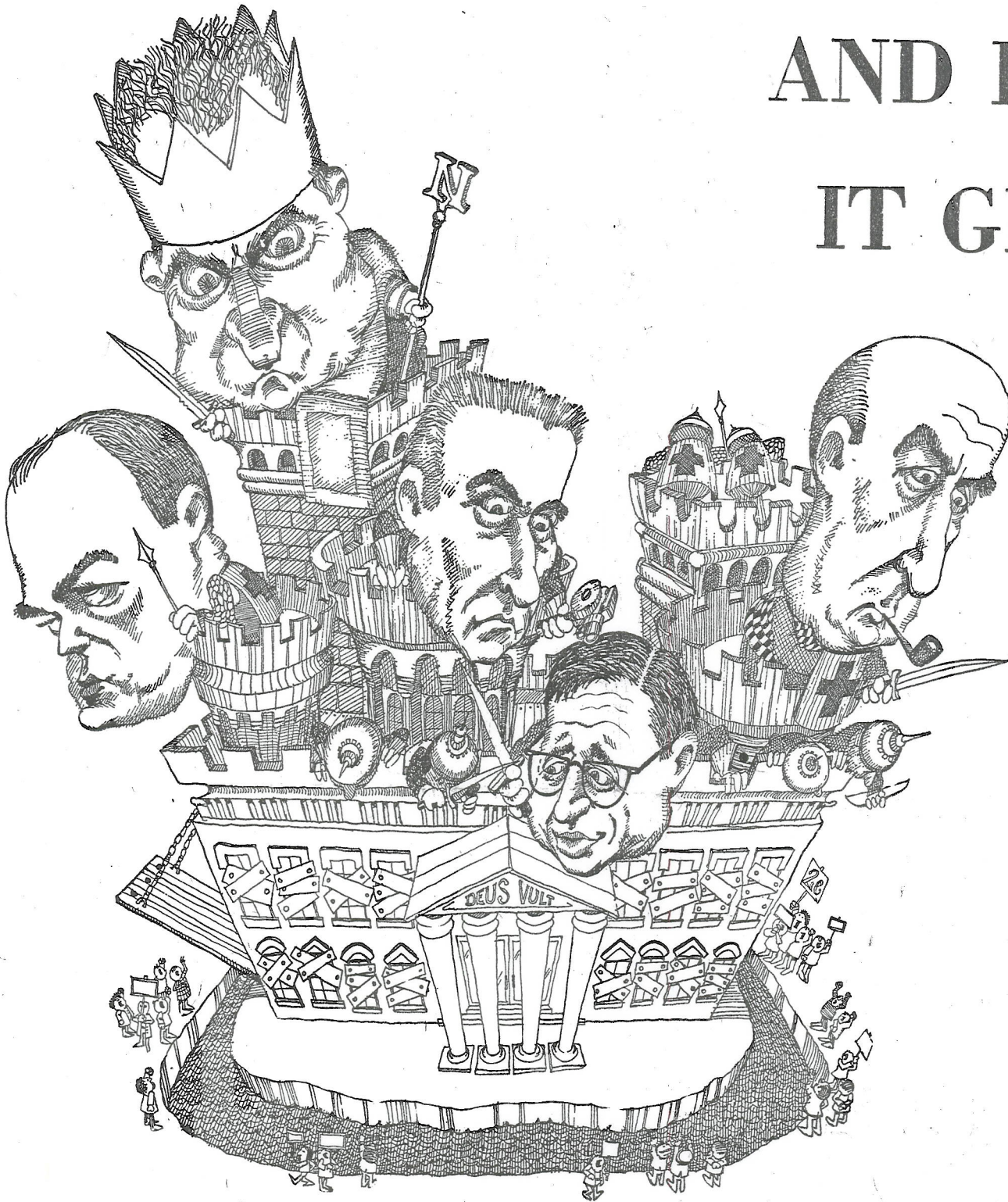


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# THE SIEGE PSYCHOLOGY AND HOW IT GREW



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By John Twohey

"No one who had been in the White House could help but feel he was in a state of siege."

—Tom Charles Huston

**T**HE FIRST OCCUPANTS of the Nixon White House do not remember it as a government citadel under siege. The White House of their memory is a happier place than that, a good place to work and to govern. They are gone now, these men (gone, too, the men who replaced them) but they look back at the springtime of 1969 as the halcyon time when bright ideas abounded and the dialogue had yet to disappear.

"It just wasn't a place of extreme paranoia then," recalls Stephen Hess, the onetime Eisenhower speech writer who is now at the Brookings Institution. "If anything, the model would have been more early Roosevelt. Moynihan had a shop of young, bubbling intellectuals. Arthur Burns and his people were different but very, very good. There was a clash of ideas."

**T**HE FIRST STIRRINGS of trouble were with the Congress. "At first it all sounded great," says Sen. Bob Dole of Kansas, who would become the administration point man in some of the President's toughest Senate battles. "We went down to the White House for a reception with the early birds, those who were for Nixon before the nomination. We thought we were in clover. But nothing happened."

Perhaps the Nixon administration expected both too much and too little from a Congress controlled by the Democrats. Too much because the President's men expected an opposition Congress with its own myriad constituencies to take direction from the White House. Too little because the administration failed to understand the political needs and human sensibilities of the Nixon loyalists in Congress.

Many Republican congressmen recall painfully the unwillingness of White House staffers to plan strategy with the GOP congressional minority. They didn't understand, says Dole, "that the loyal Nixon people in Congress were for Nixon because they wanted to help things move, because they wanted to get in on the takeoff as well as the landing."

Most of all, the White House aides were inexperienced. "There was nobody on the White House staff who had any experience whatsoever," says Rep. John S. Rhodes (R-Ariz.), who came to the House during Eisenhower's first term. "They didn't know anything about the operation of Congress." Rhodes makes an exception for Bryce Harlow, the resident expert from Eisenhower days, and, afterward, for Clark MacGregor. But MacGregor was still in Congress and Harlow was spread thinly among many duties and requests—far too thinly, as it turned out.

"They were knowledgeable and intelligent people but they had no political experience," says Rep. John Anderson of Illinois, chairman of the House Republican Conference. "The reins of power were concentrated almost exclusively in people who had never been elected to office, didn't deal with politicians, simply didn't know. John Ehrlichman was a very intelligent, capable man but he had no knowledge of politics. (H. R.) Haldeman might as well have been on another planet."

**S**OMETIMES IT WAS the little things, like wanting to see the President in person. President Eisenhower, recalls Rhodes,

Supreme Court nominees Clement Haynsworth and G. Harrold Carswell, complained of being isolated, the chief consequences of the isolation were within the White House itself.

"There was a sense in which White House people were cut off from other institutions, institutions which enable you to cushion differences," says a longtime White House aide who has stayed on after Watergate. "These institutions were Congress, the press, the Republican Party, the civil service and Washington social life, by which I mean not high society but the society of Washingtonians. This had profound effects on the mentality and

outlook of the administration. If you see a liberal senator once a week over a drink, it's going to be difficult to regard him as the incarnation of evil. But they formed their opinions from speeches or from stories they read in the newspapers and, for the most part, they never learned the nuances. Not knowing Washington, they never became a part of it. They worked 14 hours a day and talked only to themselves and their families. What they did become a self-fulfilling prophecy."

**N**O ONE CAN POINT to a moment when the dialogue disappeared in the White House. No one awoke one day to find that the men of substance had departed and that

had "paid attention to the freshmen congressmen by having them up for breakfast, things like that." Another Republican, commenting late in 1971, decried the absence of personal and human contact with the President. "LBJ at least poured you a drink when you had a tantrum," this congressman said. "I used to see him every month or so, and I'm of a different party. I see much less of Nixon."

One consequence of this isolation was that it prevented the Nixon staffers, even the brightest of them, from gaining the experience they lacked. Although congressmen, particularly after the Senate rejections of

the operators had taken control. Former Interior Secretary Walker J. Hickel says that the first time he noticed an "isolation of thought" was when he questioned the wisdom of high interest rates at an April, 1969, Cabinet meeting. He was met by an embarrassing silence, which ended when the President politely made it clear that he didn't want any substantive discussion of the issue.

There was, however, a genuine struggle of ideas within the White House during that first year. Much of it focused on the conflict between Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Arthur Burns over the welfare reform measure known as the Family Assistance Plan. Tom Charles Huston, a conservative young attorney and a member of the Burns faction, says that it only gradually became clear that both the Moynihan liberals and the Burns conservatives were being displaced by the "technocrats."

These technocrats were impatient with the conflicts of the idea men, who gradually banded together. "We had fundamental policy differences with people like Moynihan and Lee Huebner but we were natural allies against the technocrats," recalls Huston. Huebner, still a speechwriter at the White House, says that "the bedrock conservatives and ourselves had a feeling of rapport. At least people like Huston and myself wound up asking the same questions, even if we gave different answers."

*"It is ironic that Moynihan should win the battle over FAP but lose the war over who should control formulation of domestic policy," Huston wrote in a recent issue of the conservative magazine, The Alternative.*

*"The President, however, abhors confrontations, most particularly those based on philosophical convictions. When it became obvious that Burns and Moynihan were at odds over the most significant of the President's initiatives, he turned immediately to a mediator, Secretary of Labor George Shultz, to work out a compromise.*

*"Tactically, this was a victory for Moynihan and all the players recognized it as such. Strategically, it was the beginning of the end . . . In a matter of months, Moynihan was stripped of his staff and operational responsibilities and kicked upstairs to counsellor (the value of a title . . . depreciated as rapidly under Nixon as the dollar; in 1970 five persons held the superficially lofty rank of counsellor to the President). Burns, in the meantime, had departed for the Federal Reserve Board. The winners were Shultz . . . and John Ehrlichman, who became assistant to the President for domestic affairs. Ehrlichman and his staff of young lawyers with little political experience and no disposition for principled decisions guaranteed that the President would never again be bothered by the inconvenience of a substantive in-house disagreement over matters of public policy."*

**O**UTSIDE THE WALLS of the White House, the country remained in ferment. Demonstrations and bombings rocked campuses, many of them directed against the unending Vietnam war. In one 24-hour period there was 400 bomb threats—if not explosions—in New York City alone. On March 6, 1970, an accidental dynamite explosion in Greenwich Village killed three members of the Students for a Democratic Society and led police to a basement bomb factory.

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## CLIMATE, From Page C1

A week later, The New York Times editorialized:

"The actual and threatened bombings of the past few days must not be glossed over as the action of idealistic if misguided revolutionaries; they are the criminal acts of mad bombers . . . The mad criminals who threaten and burn must be recognized for what they are and prosecuted with the full force not only of the law but of the community they would rule and ruin."

Despite bomb threats and the bombings, the turmoil that disfigured many of America's cities during the Sixties was subsiding in 1969-70 by almost any social measurement. But this was not the view from the White House, where there was no intention of "glossing over" dangers either real or imagined.

Early in 1969, Ehrlichman approached John Caulfield, a New York cop. Caulfield says that Ehrlichman asked him to set up "a private security entity in Washington for purposes of providing investigative support for the White House." Instead, Caulfield went to work on Ehrlichman's staff.

Then came a series of hammer blows to the mental health of the Nixon administration. On April 30, 1970, President Nixon ordered American ground forces into Cambodia alongside South Vietnamese troops in an attempt to clear out Communist sanctuaries and cut supply lines. Student demonstrations, both peaceful and violent, erupted across the country. Forty-two demonstrators were injured at Stanford and more than a score wounded in a clash with police and National Guardsmen at Ohio State University.

The President appeared before a group of Pentagon employees and declared: "You know, you see these bums, you know, blowing up the campuses. Listen, the boys on the college campuses today are the luckiest people in the world . . . and here they are burning up the books, storming around on this issue."

Three days later, on May 4, 1970, four Kent State University students were killed in clashes with guardsmen. "This should remind us all once again," said the President, "that when dissent turns to violence it invites tragedy."

*"No one who had been in the White House could help but feel he was in a state of siege," recalls Huston in looking back on those days from the quieter confines of an Indianapolis law office. "They were dumping on you from all sides. It seemed that no one ever liked what was done in Vietnam.*

*"Few people in the White House were concerned with issues of substance and those who were became overwhelmed by people who had nothing to do but put out crap, by public relations people and by special interest group people.*

*"The enemies list stuff was all internal. I don't remember ever contributing to one but it's possible because people would come to you and ask you for a name or something. I don't need an enemies list. I've got a brain. (Charles) Colson had so many people working for him that they put out this self-perpetuating crap for themselves. (John) Dean's absolutely right. You threw it in the file and forgot it."*

**B**UT ONE IMPLICATION of the Watergate testimony is that the Nixon administration, including the President, forgot little and forgave less. A year and a half after the "siege" of 1970, the President looked out of his White House windows and saw Monroe Cornish, a Maryland schoolteacher, with

*Some of these events in 1969 and 1970 included hundreds of bombings of public buildings, a highly organized attempt to shut down the federal government, intensive harassment of political candidates and violent street demonstrations which endangered life and property.*

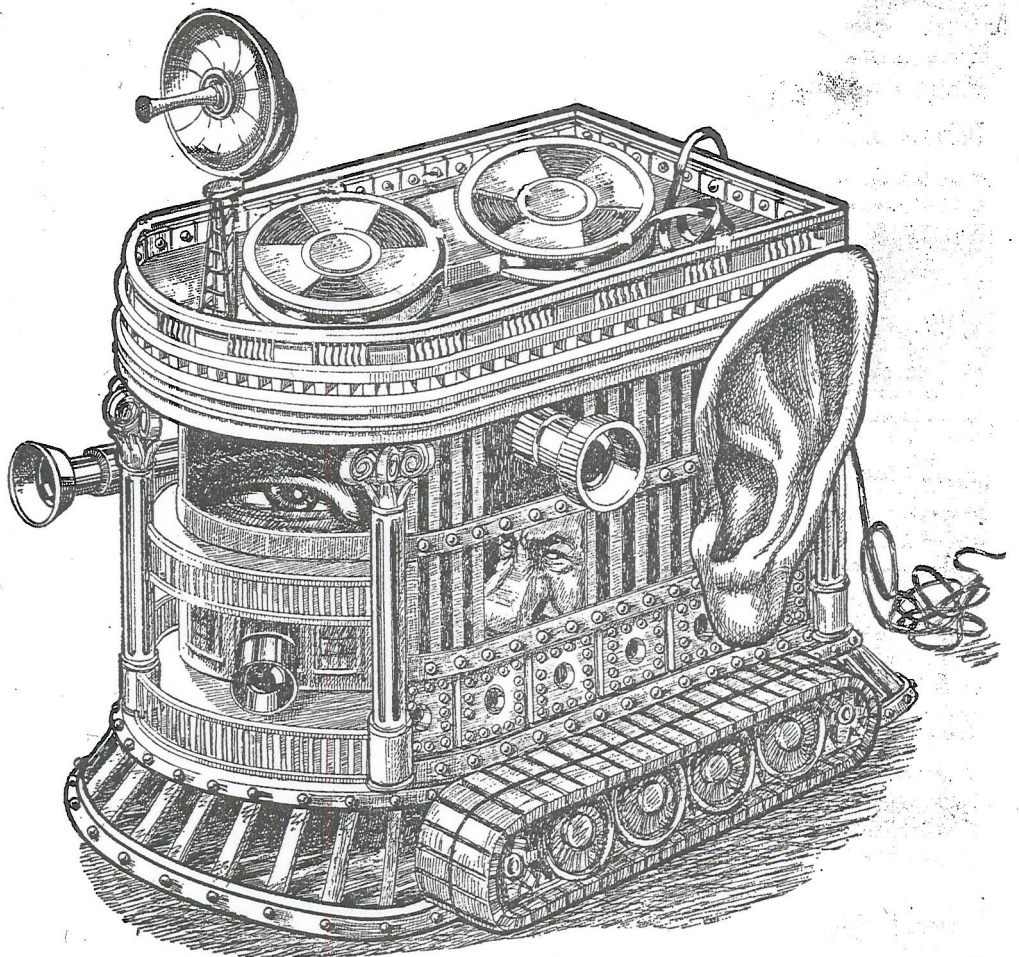
*Taken as isolated incidents these events were serious. Taken as part of an apparent campaign to force upon the President a foreign policy favorable to the North Vietnamese and their allies, these demonstrations were more than just a garden variety exercise of the First Amendment.*

—John D. Ehrlichman, in a statement before the Senate select committee investigating the Watergate affair.

a 10-foot banner stretched out in front of Lafayette Park. "Mr. (Larry) Higby called me to his office to tell me of the President's displeasure with the sign in the park and told me that Mr. Haldeman said the sign had to come down," Dean told the Senate Watergate committee.

If a lone man with a banner could stir such emotions in the White House, it is not difficult to comprehend the deeper passions set loose by the events of 1970.

"Rioting and violence on college campuses reached a new peak after the Cambodian operation and the tragedies at Kent State and Jackson State," the President said this year in recalling the events of that turbulent spring. On June 5, 1970, the President met in the Oval Office with FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and the directors of the Central In-



telligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency. Hoover was made chairman of a committee that was to make recommendations to improve the gathering of domestic intelligence.

The climate in the White House was one of wartime, and the new committee responded quickly. Within three weeks a working group headed by Huston had prepared a 43-page report that proposed, among other things, increased electronic spying on Americans and foreign diplomats, more campus informants, illegal opening of mail and creation of a new super-security agency.

The most controversial recommendation was for "surreptitious entry," a proposal that Huston himself realized lacked constitutional sanction. "Use of this technique is clearly illegal," the report said. "It amounts to burglary. It is also highly risky and could result in great embarrassment if exposed. However, it is also the most fruitful tool and can produce the type of intelligence which cannot be obtained in any other fashion."

The plan was approved by the President and put into operation on July 23. It was rescinded five days later because of Hoover's objections, but it faithfully reflected the state of mind within the White House fortress.

*"The thing that is completely misunderstood about Watergate is that everybody thinks the people surrounding President Nixon were drunk with power," former White House special counsel Colson said in an interview with J. F. Ter Horst of the Detroit News. "... But it wasn't arrogance at all. It was insecurity. That insecurity began to breed a form of paranoia. We overreacted to the attacks against us and to a lot of things."*

**O**VERREACTION has frequently flourished during political campaigns and never more than during the congressional elections of 1970. Mr. Nixon, following his pattern of the past, took an active role in formulating the strategy that identified Democratic opponents as "radical liberals" and "extremists" who were soft on law-and-order and violent protests. Republican National Chairman Rogers C. B. Morton met with the President and kicked off the campaign by announcing that "Democratic permissiveness has contributed to crime, violence and campus unrest." Newspaper ads across the country identified incumbent Democratic senators as anarchists or radicals, and Mr. Nixon took the stump with appeals to Americans to reject "obscenity and violence."

When police security broke down and demonstrators hurled rocks at a presidential

entourage in San Jose, the President responded by giving them a V-sign and saying, "That's what they hate to see." Sen. George Murphy, riding in the presidential car, was asked if the demonstration would help his reelection campaign against Democrat John V. Tunney. "It can't hurt," Murphy replied. Two days later the President spoke from an airplane hangar in Phoenix and declared: "No band of violent thugs is going to keep me from going out and speaking with the American people."

*President Nixon, said Attorney General John N. Mitchell in an interview with the Los Angeles Times on Sept. 20, 1970, is "probably the most informed President there's ever been. He reads everything and remembers it all. I really can't understand how people can call him isolated. He's aware of everything that's going on. I'll tell you who's not informed, though. It's these stupid kids. Why, they don't know the issues. They pick the rhetoric they want to hear right off the top of an issue and never finish reading to the bottom . . . And the professors are just as bad if not worse. They don't know anything. Nor do these stupid bastards who are running our educational institutions . . ."*

**A**FTER THE 1970 elections, Republican Sen. Mark O. Hatfield accused his party of practicing "the politics of revulsion."

But it had not been the politics of victory. Republicans gained two Senate seats, but missed most of their more tempting Democratic targets. The Democrats gained 13 governorships and 12 House seats. Several of the GOP's most promising Republicans were sacrificed in futile Senate races against entrenched Democrats. One of these rejected Republicans, Clark MacGregor, became the White House congressional liaison man, replacing Bryce Harlow. But there were few others in the White House with political experience or substantive concern for domestic issues. Moynihan, Burns and Harlow were all gone. The dominant figures within the administration were now Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman, the President's chief of staff.

Haldeman had served with the President in victory and defeat in California and he was, more than anyone who ever worked for Mr. Nixon, the President's man. "It would be difficult to find a man more suited to the President's needs," says one person who has known Haldeman for years. "If Haldeman has a weakness, it's this: When the President wants something done, there's never any argument—even when it is not in the best interests of the President."

Under Haldeman, access to the President was sharply restricted, and requests from

Cabinet officials reduced to writing because the President disliked "the laying on of tongues." As the President's preoccupation with foreign policy deepened, particularly in the months before the China visit of February, 1972, even top staffers saw less and less of the President. They also saw increasingly less of Haldeman, who dealt with others through his chief aide, Larry Higby.

At first, Haldeman may not have realized his own power. "It probably never entered Bob's head that he was in a policy job and that the person who controls the flow of information also controls the outcome," says one former White House staffer. "The press had to tell him that." But Haldeman mocked what the press tried to tell him. In a speech to UCLA alumni he described the stories about the "isolation of the President" as the product of an Eastern Establishment press cabal which met every week in a "secret nerve center" somewhere in "the jungle labyrinth of Manhattan Island."

The President mocked the stories about his isolation, too. In a rare social meeting with reporters on the last day of 1970, the President said, "That's a lot of nonsense that the presidency is the loneliest job in the world."

*"I assumed for years that the President was aware of everything he had to be aware of," says a White House aide. "Today I'm not so sure. It wasn't that it was so important for him to have human contact—I can't judge that. What happened was that limited access to the President made access not only to the President important but access to those at the top a prize to be sought. People may have striven for the approval of Haldeman and Ehrlichman more than they would have if the President had been open to the free expression of many voices. People like me may have thought when we did not accomplish something not only about the President but, 'What will Haldeman or Ehrlichman think?'"*

**T**HOSE WHO FAILED to think in terms of Haldeman or Ehrlichman were quickly suspect. So were those Republicans who understood the distinction between seriousness of purpose and taking oneself too seriously. In the siege perspective of the White House, GOP Chairman Bob Dole was suspect on both counts. His favorite story at party rallies was to tell people he had called an "assistant President" and said he wanted to see President Nixon. The "assistant President" always replied, "You can see him tonight on Channel 4." Worse still, Dole made an unforgivable remark when a microphone failed at a post-Watergate press briefing before the GOP convention. "Some of our sound men are busy," he quipped. Eight

months later the remark was still recalled without a smile at the White House.

*There has been little to laugh about since Dole left the party chairmanship. But there was laughter in the Senate hearing room last week when Gordon Strachan, the former Haldeman aide, testified about his own involvement. Sen. Joseph Montoya (D-N.M.) had received letters from Strachan's relatives favorably describing his character, and the senator was trying to show his sympathy. In response to Montoya's friendly questions, Strachan confided his excitement at "being 27 years old and walking into the White House and seeing the President on occasion, and Dr. Kissinger, and it's a pretty awe-inspiring experience for a young man." The crowd laughed. Then Montoya asked Strachan to advise other young people seeking public service careers. "It may not be the type of advice that you could look back and want to give, but my advice would be to stay away," Strachan replied.*

*The crowd laughed again, but the witness did not laugh with them. Strachan was fighting back the tears.*

**I**NEXPERIENCE. INSECURITY. Over-reaction. The isolation of the President. These were the components of the mental climate in the higher reaches of the White House in the months when the Committee for the Re-Election of the President was created, the political intelligence network formed, the Watergate burglary planned and executed. It was an atmosphere more suitable to a suspicious monarch than to an American President and it took heavy psychological toll.

Could Watergate have been avoided, given the climate of suspicion and siege? The former White House staffers who remember the halcyon days, the happy days of 1969, look back at their own experiences and at the daily revelations of wrongdoing and ask themselves the question. None of them is certain. One ex-aide answers it this way, and his own answer is less an answer than a more fundamental question about the entire administration:

"The people who assumed command were terribly smart people," this ex-staffer believes. "But they were not people who liked the play of ideas. When they assumed command, they didn't bring any ideas with them. What, after all, is the difference between a Haldeman man or a Mitchell man? Was it issues like welfare or food stamps or starving people? If they had been fighting about something that was important, they would have been anchored to something. The battles would have been on a different level. Instead, power became an end in itself. That's the troubling thing as you think about it. What the hell did they stand for?"