

Past and Present--Images Conflict

The Other H. R. Haldeman

By Leroy F. Aaron
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Washington

This week, for the first time, elusive, once-feared Harry Robbins Haldeman—deposed chief of staff for a President whose administration is bent under the weight of scandal—is being exposed to millions of Americans under the glare of television lights.

Whether the scrutiny afforded by several days of testimony before the Senate Watergate committee will "humanize" Haldeman for his audience is doubtful.

Certainly, most Americans for the first time will learn to distinguish between Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, those White House "twins" whose identities, before Watergate, seemed fused.

CHANGE

But will they come to distinguish between the earlier Haldeman and the Haldeman of the White House era? There are differences: an odd muddle of contradictions that emerged after a



PRESIDENT NIXON AND H. R. HALDEMAN WHILE HALDEMAN WAS CHIEF OF STAFF
They first worked together in 1956, when Haldeman served as an advance man for the then vice president

week of interviewing people who knew Bob Haldeman from the days of military school through UCLA during the ad agency years and when he was a member of California's Board of Regents, the state university governing body.

What emerges is an anomaly, a man who either was changed by power or whose instincts, suppressed in early years, flourished when granted the mace of authority.

In the post-Watergate media image, Haldeman comes across as a man suspicious of the press and insensitive to social problems. Yet as president of the UCLA alumni, he defended against strong opposition an editor's right to print an article about civil disobedience during the civil rights movement of the mid-1960s.

Some other examples:

- Tagged a Prussian whose inclinations are military and authoritarian. Haldeman is remembered by a younger military school mate as one of the older student officers who was unusually kind to lower-classmen.
- Described as paranoid on the subjects of radicals and student demonstrators. Haldeman was among the few who "kept his cool" on two occasions when California regents were temporarily held hostage by campus protestors.
- Suspected of "dirty

tricks," both in 1962 Nixon campaign for governor and ten years later in the presidential campaign, Haldeman was described in his ad agency years as scrupulously honest, the kind of person who would fire an underling for accepting a junket to Las Vegas.

The tendency, in the light of later events, might be to dismiss these as isolated examples — except that the thread was consistent through nearly all of the interviews, whether the contacts were conservative, moderate or liberal, whether with close friends or those who would be expected to be antagonistic to Haldeman's views or his style.

Most were surprised by the recent events involving Haldeman, some shocked and many saddened, not unlike the neighbors of that quiet boy one so often reads about who suddenly gets into trouble.

There were two other threads: one, that Haldeman is bright but not brilliant, an organizer and administrator but not originator; and, two, that his devotion to Mr. Nixon, from 1956, when he advanced the vice presidential campaign, was single-minded if not fanatical.

BACKGROUND

Haldeman was born nearly 47 years ago, on Oct. 27, 1926, the child of well-to-do parents who had homes in Bel Air and Palm Springs, Calif., and a quarter-horse in Malibu.

His father operated an air-conditioning business, which is still in the family, and his grandfather founded one of the first anti-Communist organizations,

the Better American Foundation.

Although very bright (at age 6 he took a dictionary to summer camp for spare-time reading), Haldeman was getting mostly Ds in public school, so his parents switched him to the Harvard

'Both he and John were kingmakers'

School, an Episcopalian-run military school in the San Fernando Valley.

There he flourished, rising to the rank of captain in the school ROTC.

His friends remember him not as the humorless martinet of contemporary image but rather as a gregarious type with an instinctive taste for power and authority.

MEMORY

John Leisure, a classmate, now an insurance agent, recalls Haldeman as "one of the funniest people I've known."

Haldeman would break up his friends with mock readings from popular books of the day, like the comic novels of H. Allen Smith.

"He would be the center of everything, a natural leader," said Leisure. "When you wanted things organized, he would be the only one who could do it."

Ken Brown, another friend of those days, added, "He had a lot of power. I guess some people might have found him arrogant. In our group, he was top dog. He called the shots."

Another Harvard School alumnus, six years behind Haldeman, now a liberal Democrat who supported Senator George McGovern for president in 1972, remembered that Haldeman was one of the senior student officers with a "benign attitude toward lower-classmen."

UCLA

From Harvard School, Haldeman moved on to UCLA with brief stopovers in the Navy V-12 program and a couple of other colleges. At UCLA, he joined Beta Theta Pi, known then as the elite fraternity for the socially conscious.

It was at UCLA that he met and befriended John Ehrlichman. The two became involved in campus politics as behind-the-scenes operators, supporting fraternity candidates for campus offices and serving later as advisers and consultants.

They were consistently conservative and remembered by classmates like McGovern campaign aide

Frank Mankiewicz as actively anti-Communist, but there was no recollection of McCarthy-era Red-baiting or fanaticism.

"I felt he was a prime mover," remembered Margie Hellman Muller, a classmate in the class of 1948. "He had a sharpness and perceptiveness that enabled him to promote people to success. Both he and John were kingmakers; they had a lot more to do with politics than people realized."

DIFFERENCE

Ehrlichman, by all accounts, was the intellectual, bordering on brilliant, removed from the fashionable campus mode.

Haldeman, crewcut then as now, was more the operative than the policymaker. He managed the campaign of Ehrlichman's wife-to-be for student vice president. She lost to Margie Hellman.

The difference between the two was reflected in the class yearbook. Bob (Happy Harry) Haldeman is listed as the chairman of homecoming and organizer of the student sing "who proved he really has brains under that ever-visible scalp."

Ehrlichman is described as "pulling wires behind the scenes" and "a potent political power."

Nowhere is there any evidence that Haldeman or Ehrlichman played any of the dirty political tricks for which certain younger Nixon Californians became retroactively famous at the University of Southern California.

In fact, Mrs. Muller, who is vice president for public relations at Maryland National Bank outside Washington and is a Democrat, still finds it difficult to believe "Bob could have done something dishonest or illegal."

JOB

After college, where he met and married his wife, Joanne Horton, Haldeman joined J. Walter Thompson, where he rose to vice president of the Los Angeles office and remained until 1968.

Beginning in 1956, he took frequent leaves of absence to become involved in various Nixon campaigns.

The firm didn't seem to mind, probably because Haldeman was a star in the advertising field. Extremely efficient, all business, a non-drinker and a practicing Christian Scientist, he seemed a little strange to the hard-boozing advertising species.

But he was highly respected.

"He's the only goddamn honest man I knew in the advertising business," said Russ Covert, retired account executive for the Boyle

Midway Co., whose account Haldeman serviced.

"... I don't know how the hell he got mixed up in this Watergate. I go to Washington now and I never met so many people who hate Bob Haldeman. I blame Nixon, or maybe it was just too much power for a very young man."

Added Hoyt Adams, who worked for Haldeman at Thompson: "Bob was the original Boy Scout, the most straight arrow guy I've ever seen in the agency business. With Bob, anybody who even accepted a trip to Vegas would be fired."

VIEW

To at least one ad executive, Pat Shannon, of Newsweek's Los Angeles office, Haldeman even then fit the "Prussian general" image.

"There was never any real emotion to the man. You could never say Bob Haldeman was ever loose," said Shannon. "Some people look at you with their eyes, others through their eyes, with feeling. I don't think he ever looked through his eyes."

Haldeman's first involvement with Mr. Nixon was in the 1956 campaign, where he served as an advance man for the vice president.

By 1960, he was chief advance man under Robert Finch, Mr. Nixon's campaign manager. Finch remembered him then as "very competent, very buttoned-down, very organized. He brought in his own advance team, including Ehrlichman."

SUIT

By 1962, Haldeman had become a Nixon favorite, and was chosen to run the ultimately disastrous California gubernatorial campaign.

Afterward, in a little-publicized lawsuit, a judge found that Haldeman and Mr. Nixon had been involved in a phony postcard poll scheme to lure Democrats away from Governor Edmund (Pat) Brown and siphon campaign money into the Republican fold.

While Haldeman was cited, the judge noted that the postcard scheme was "reviewed, amended and finally approved by Mr. Nixon personally."

Between campaigns, Haldeman continued at the ad agency and was active in UCLA alumni affairs.

In 1965 he led the successful drive to raise \$1 million for a new building and in 1966 became alumni chairman.

MAGAZINE

He took office during a controversy over an issue of the alumni magazine devoted to civil rights.

There were objections to a story about five UCLA professors involved in a freedom march on Montgomery, Ala.

Nancy Naylor, editor of the magazine, remembered that Haldeman read the article and declared, "Run it, it's great!"

"He thought it was important for me to have more support," she said. "I thought he was an excellent leader. He had a very strict attitude, unsmiling, but we needed that at the time."

"When all this recent stuff happened, up to the last minute I couldn't believe it — I couldn't believe he was anything but honest and upright. I've concluded he must have two faces. It's very sad for me."

REGENT

After the alumni stint, and Republican Governor Ronald Reagan's 1966 election, Haldeman was named to the state Board of Regents at Finch's recommendation.

"I think he showed great qualities of compassion," says Finch, "much at variance with what appears to be the image of a cold, mechanistic guy."

Haldeman's term began at a time of turmoil for the university system. Students were demonstrating, police with gas and guns were common on campuses, and Reagan was determined to

'I've concluded he must have two faces'

purge the so-called bleeding hearts who countenanced disruption.

While he voted consistently with the board's conservative bloc, Haldeman is remembered mostly as a broker between factions, a conciliator.

PROTEST

Noted Fred Dutton, another regent, who has been a political adviser to the Kennedys and to McGovern, "we were twice under siege by students on campuses. In fact at UCLA once, police were called in."

"Haldeman never got uptight, he kept his cool. Reagan was getting red in the



JOANNE HALDEMAN AND HER HUSBAND
They met at UCLA, married after college

face and wanted to call the guard out but Haldeman was always patient, more apt to say, "How ridiculous?"

"He made an attempt to be a bridge. I saw him as a bridging, mollifying functionary, always very agreeable and pleasant."

Finch, the man who faltered as HEW secretary and fell out of favor with Ehrlichman and Haldeman in the White House, supplied part of the answer in a recent interview.

"Back in 1968," he said, "in the Pierre Hotel, when we were outlining the administration, Nixon said repeatedly he did not want another Sherman Adams in the chief staff job."

(Adams, who had enormous influence as chief aide to President Eisenhower, was forced to resign and charges of accepting favors from business interests).

"Bob deliberately tried not to get into that role. From the beginning with Nixon, he conceived his job was to serve totally and inclusively." He subordinated his impulses totally.

"He didn't see his role as going in and arguing, as Ehrlichman saw his role. Haldeman quite deliberately tried to subordinate his instincts."

"I don't see Bob originating ideas of surveillance," Finch said. "I can see him adopting something. I don't see him initiating dirty tricks. If anything, I think he would try to protect the President."

"The whole thing that has surfaced now, that he would tolerate it astonishes me. His public relations sense should have alerted him. On the other hand, I see him knowing and opting not to get in and kill it. But I don't see him having conceived it."

PROFILE

Sally Quinn in a profile of Haldeman published in the

Washington Post last fall quoted a White House official as saying:

"He probably thinks it's demeaning to show a sense of humor much around the office. When you're the President's alter ego or whatever he considers himself, you take yourself and your job seriously. It's a tense job and he's an extremely precise man, intolerant of bad staff work."

"I think his staff holds him in awe and regards him with great fear. I'd be surprised if anybody regards

'When you're the President's alter ego . . .'

him as a person at all. The problem with Haldeman is that he is intensely devoted to the President. He can't see anything else."

"His staff is the same way. Everybody else is judged by how loyal they are and how long they've known the President."

OTHERS

Miss Quinn found others, however, who spoke of Haldeman's quiet humor, of his dislike of Washington social life, of the strong ties that existed among the Haldeman family, of his guitar playing, his love of country music.

So the image is confused.

Haldeman the floor manager, Haldeman the unfeeling gate keeper at the White House.

Haldeman the loyal major domo to the President. Haldeman the ad man, the alumni chairman, the regent, the friend, the father and husband.

He is seen through many prisms, and now the television networks will bring him into the home of America through the special prism of Watergate.