

William Raspberry
 In the Style
 Of Mr. Nixon:
 Adam Powell

It may be insulting to both men to say it, but there are some striking similarities between Richard Milhous Nixon and the late Adam Clayton Powell.

Not in their politics, to be sure. They believed in very different things. But in their manners and attitudes and to a large degree in their morality, they aren't as far apart as you might think.

Take their contemptuous attitude toward their political opposition (which, for both men, included the press). For neither man was it enough to win; it was necessary to rub it in.

That V-sign that Richard Nixon flashed at peace demonstrations during his California campaign trip, for instance, was pure Adam. Give it back to them and smile at their helplessness to do anything about it. Powell had more style, of course—in his dress, his gestures and his wickedness. He surrounded himself with beautiful women and swinging people while Nixon prefers the company of the drably powerful. Every man to his own esthetic.

But if they parted company on the question of taste, they were brothers in their insistence that they would not permit outsiders to set limits on them. And their common rationalization: precedent.

Every excess that Adam Powell was

ever accused of was shared by some other member of the Congress. Did he womanize? Well so did some other well-known congressmen. Did he put his wife on the congressional payroll? So did some others. Was he too fond of scotch? Well, what about old So-and-So who was always being hauled out to Bethesda Naval Hospital to dry out?

There was precedent for every single excess. But Powell committed them all.

And so it is with the President.

So he taped a few conversations. Well President Kennedy had "the capability" of taping conversations. He turned the IRS on his political enemies? Hey, man, that's been going on for years! He's picking up a little real estate here and there and getting the government to fix it up? Well, what about JFK and LBJ and maybe even DDE? Has any president left office less well off financially than when he came in?

A major element of the President's Watergate defense, in fact, is that he didn't invent dirty politics and spying and cheating and lying. He didn't. Every single item connected with Watergate had some sort of historical precedent. But Nixon did them all.

And not just did them, but, like Powell, improved on them. What some of his colleagues sneaked around and did, Powell did openly and more grandly.

Nixon, seizing on the precedent of some of his predecessors spending a little government money to make home a little more comfortable, goes all the way and winds up with outlays approaching \$10 million on real estate holdings his income couldn't begin to justify.

For both of them, morality is defined as what you can get away with. And what you can get away with in politics depends on the nature of your constituency. It's the difference between their constituencies, in fact, that

makes these two very similar men seem so different.

Nixon's people would never countenance his chasing around with women; Powell's wouldn't have let him get away with accepting financial favors from rich industrialists.

But none of that has anything to do with morality.

I don't mean to say that immorality is all that Richard Nixon and Adam Powell are about. Obviously neither

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man could have formed such a loyal constituency just on the basis of being bad. No, they both paid their dues, Nixon by being faithful to the conservative cause and attacking the conservative's enemies; Powell by being in the front ranks of the early civil rights movement and being sassy with powerful white people. Their efforts on behalf of their respective constituencies won them both loyalty and great admiration. But even in this they have something in common.

It's easy to find people willing to declare their admiration for either man. But it's awfully tough to find someone who'll say: That's the kind of man I want my son to be.