

WXPPost MAY 26 1974 Youth and President Nixon:

By Ann Blackman
Associated Press

Five years ago, dozens of young people flocked to the White House to serve President Nixon. They had supped on the headiness of the 1968 campaign and were full of energy, ambition, ideas and ideals.

It had been, as one of them put it, "an extraordinary vantage point," a chance to be involved in the highest levels of government, a tremendous career boost, an ego trip beyond their wildest dreams.

Today most have departed, their rose-colored vision shattered or shredding at the seams. And they are bewildered, saddened, betrayed and confused by the complexities surrounding the Watergate scandal. And, with the release of the transcripts, it is soul searching time again, more whats and whys and hows.

"You got so carried away in that place with a feeling of moral righteousness that it's understandable some thought what they were doing was good for the country," said one disillusioned former Nixon aide. "I found myself saying so many times, the bureaucracy isn't going to help these people. I'm going to help them with the power of the White House. But it was illegal. Where do you draw the line?"

"If you did it by the rules and regulations, you'd be there 25 years. We didn't have that time. So sometimes you'd fudge and say, 'The President wants this done.'"



GORDON STRACHAN
... "stay away"

Even so, the aide and most of his departed colleagues do not agree with Gordon Strachan, the tall, sad-eyed young man who fought tears as he told the Senate Watergate committee last summer that based on his experience at the White House, he had this advice for young people interested in government service: "Stay away."

The White House often pointed out that almost one-third of the President's staff was 30 or under. In 1969 a reporter interviewed some of 30 White House aides with the title of staff assistant, deputy secretary or research assistant. Today, only about a half dozen remain.

John R. Price, a former executive secretary of the Ur-



LEE W. HUEBNER
... sad and depressing

ban Affairs Council and special assistant to the President, left the administration in 1971. Price, now 35 and a vice president of Manufacturers Trust Co. in New York, was interviewed after reading the edited transcripts of Mr. Nixon's Watergate conversations.

"It's very depressing there was not more leadership shown," he said. "The only things that came out of it is the instinct for survival..."

"The irony of the Nixon years was brought home to me by a memorandum Daniel P. Moynihan wrote to Nixon just before he was inaugurated. The gist of it was that it was Nixon's task to restore confidence and respect to the office of the presidency and American institutions."

Then Price added: "It is time for the President to step aside in favor of Vice President Ford."

Of the dozen former Nixon staffers interviewed, all between the ages of 28 and 35, most said they left the White House with mixed emotions: proud of having worked for the President of the United States, sickened to see so many of their colleagues facing indictments, court trials and jail, and relieved not to have been sucked into the whirlpool themselves.

Lee W. Huebner, a former Nixon speechwriter, offered these reflections on his five years in the White House: "When I first came to Washington, it was a great, glittering, glamorous and exciting place. When I left, it was sad and depressing."

"Everyone who remembers what it might have been is saddened it hasn't turned out the way we wanted it to."

Huebner, 33, now working for the Whitney Communications Corp. in New York, said he finds it hard to talk about his feeling on working for the Nixon White House.

The transcripts of the Watergate conversations are in Huebner's view, "one of the most depressing things I've read. People still have questions."

But of his experience in the White House, Huebner insisted: "It is an extraordinary vantage point. I feel lucky to have had the opportunity. I

See YOUTH, H4, Col. 1

YOUTH, From H1

met a lot of fine people there. I learned a lot."

He smiled at the memory, then shook his head. He was disappointed, he said, that Nixon didn't take a more active role in investigating the Watergate scandal: "From the day after the break-in, we kept waiting for someone to raise the roof. I regret he didn't take a stronger role from the start in condemning it and cleaning it up."

"For a time, I was mad as hell I didn't know more," said Robert C. Odle Jr., a former Nixon staffer and official at the President's re-election committee who was the first person to testify before the Senate Watergate committee. "They could have taken me into their confidence, but I'm glad they didn't."

Odle, a strong defender of

the President, takes offense at those who describe the White House "as a dark, fortress-like garrison where everyone went around with paranoia and frowns."

He scowled at the image. "It wasn't like that," he said, rising from his chair to pace around his ninth-floor office at the Department of Housing and Urban Development where he has worked since last summer. "It was a fine place. They were principled people, generally."

There were few affairs, little adultery, little drunkenness. Many of the people were church-going. I think a few individuals went wrong. One or two things were done improperly, and people attempted afterwards to cover up these things.

"You have to ask yourself in conscience. Might the people who covered it up not have done so if the vultures weren't waiting?"

In Odle's view, the edited transcripts "conclusively show the President had no more knowledge of the scandal than he said he had."

Should Mr. Nixon leave office or be impeached?

"I can't think of a greater national tragedy..." he said.

Some of the young people who, like Odle, carried the title, "Staff Assistant to the President," have been unable to find a job or found potential employers wary of anyone with White House connections. They view themselves as victims of guilt by association, even in cases where no evidence has surfaced to connect them in any way with Watergate.

Jeffery E. Donfeld, 30, a former Nixon staffer who worked for more than four years on Mr. Nixon's drug program, said he received less than red carpet treatment when job hunting last summer.

He received indications, he said, that congressional leaders had little interest in awarding high government positions to any attorneys who had worked on the White House staff during Mr. Nixon's first term.

At most of the law firms and corporations where Donfeld interviewed, officials insisted on knowing if he had done anything that would subject him to prosecution or unfavorable publicity.



ROBERT C. ODLE JR.
... "it was a fine place"

"Talk about resentment and disgust," said Donfeld, who now works for a Los Angeles law firm. "The fact that I served the President of the United States and committed no illegal acts and shouldn't be able to get a high position in government, I resent that."