

To Nixon Loyalists in the South,

By ROY REED

Special to The New York Times

JACKSON, Miss. — The surface differences diminish year by year. The River Hills Club would fit as comfortably in Hartford or Schenectady as it does in Jackson.

Except for the weather and the accents of the doctors and investment brokers sitting around the clubhouse, the Southern seniors tennis tournament at River Hills on a recent weekend might have been taking place in any middle-class suburb in the United States.

The men drank Budweiser from cans, the kids drank

This is the second of several articles exploring the attitudes of President Nixon's supporters in communities around the country.

Cokes on crushed ice and the women tanned their legs on the balcony as they watched the middle-aged players volley and sweat on the courts below.

But on closer scrutiny it becomes apparent that there is still some difference and that it runs deeper than early summers and slurred R's.

The national polls have touched on it during this year of Watergate and Presidential crisis. They have shown consistently higher support for President Nixon in the South than in other parts of the country. As Mr. Nixon's popularity has faded, it has faded more slowly in the South than elsewhere.

That can be seen at the River Hills Club, a middle-class stronghold of Nixon support. Even here, the support seems to be going soft. But, like the Rebels of Ole Miss, the Nixon stalwarts give up every yard grudgingly.

There are several reasons



The New York Times/James A. Bonney

Fred and Susan Craig in the kitchen of their home in suburban Jacksonville, Miss. They support President Nixon, as do many Southerners, and seem to feel that a President should get special treatment.

for the stubborn loyalty of Southerners to this beleaguered President but a common thread runs through them all. In spite of the growing Americanization of the

South, many Southerners still perceive themselves, correctly or not, as different—even in the way they react to political events.

Fred and Susan Craig had

'Right or Wrong, He's There'

left the tennis tournament at sundown and had retired to the evening coolness of their huge suburban home. They and a visitor sat with liqueurs and coffee at a kitchen table overlooking a dimly lit atrium. Mr. Craig is a building contractor. His wife is a former college and elementary school teacher. He appears to be in his early 40's and she several years younger.

Mrs. Craig recalled how she felt when President Nixon visited Jackson in April.

"All of a sudden," she said, "there is President Nixon in Jackson, Mississippi. In the coliseum! And I just got chill bumps. I just got tears in my eyes. And that makes me look naive and stupid, but that's the way I feel." Southerners, she said, would like to have a king. A President — any President — fills that role.

Her husband expressed it a little differently.

"When Ross Barnett was Governor of Mississippi," he said, "he was criticized by everybody. The thought that was going through Mississippi was, 'Yes, he's a son of a bitch—but he's our son of a bitch.' We resent people criticizing our son of a bitch. Nixon, he's the President. He's there, he's it. Right or wrong, he's there. This may be something inherent in the Southern person, I don't know."

They offered other reasons for Mr. Nixon's continued support in the South, reasons heard from conservative whites across the region. They appreciate his expressions of sympathy on race, especially his opposition to busing for school desegregation. They are suspicious of

the national news media's "attacks" on him because they remember the same kind of "attacks" on the white South during the civil rights movement of the nineteen sixties.

But, at heart, the loyalty of people like the Craigs seems to lie in a belief that a President should be treated with greater respect and judged by different standards than other people. They regard that belief as peculiarly Southern, or at least as a belief held more strongly here than elsewhere.

Mrs. Hal W. Dale, the wife of a Jackson insurance executive, believes that Mr. Nixon should not be impeached even if he was responsible for Watergate and its cover-up. That is not an impeachable offense, she declared. If it was, she said, every President from George Washington on should have been impeached.

Stennis Support Cited

"I think it's a matter of motive," Mrs. Dale said. "I don't think Nixon would ever go up there and try deliberately to do something that would hurt his country."

She bases her conviction on evidence that continues to be relied on perhaps more heavily, or at least spoken of more openly, in this region than elsewhere.

"His wife and his children show a very gracious upbringing. And you would hardly find that in a home if the father was a very corrupt sort of person," she said. "He's been a close personal friend of Billy Graham and people like that, who certainly know character and are able to judge people."

She noted that Senator John Stennis, the Mississippi

Democrat, had spoken well of the President. "I don't believe that he would stand up for anybody that he felt like was really a dishonorable sort of a person."

But even among the Dales and the Craigs, and among others who have been staunch Nixon supporters — a highly regarded neurosurgeon at River Hills Club, an oil man and investment broker who works for the Republican party, the president of a mattress manufacturing company — there are beginning to be signs of doubt. They speak of his bad judgment in selecting advisers and aides. They think that releasing the tape transcripts damaged his image, especially in the "Bible belt" where profanity is outwardly condemned.

Should he resign or be impeached? Fred Craig sat silent for several seconds, studying his brandy. Finally he said, "I think a heart attack would be terribly appealing. I think that if we could wave a wand over it and say, 'Poof,' and he were gone, I think the country would be better off."

Did he believe Mr. Nixon to be guilty of something, after all?

"I think he's guilty of conforming to the political system. I think he's in the trap that any politician falls in national politics, to be elected."

Then why single out Mr. Nixon for removal, by fate or otherwise?

His voice rose for the first time. "Hell, impeach them all," he said. "Have them all resign. If they're going to subject him to the scrutiny that they have, put them all through it. Put the whole damn smear through it."