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# 'Using the Media To Castigate the Media'

"Christians have their Pilate, Jews have their Haman, and Nixon has the media. Somewhere there may be a connection."

Rabbi Baruch Korff

"The Personal Nixon: Staying on the Summit."

By Sally Quinn

"I must have been asked 100 times, 'Rabbi, what is your angle? You must have an angle.' And frankly speaking I wish I had one. It would make these discourses easier. But I am an enigma . . . The President asked me if I would like to see his house. I said, 'No, I don't want to enjoy your hospitality. Just seeing you is enough . . .' The President asked me on the 22nd of February, wouldn't I want to give a sermon in the East Room. I said, 'I don't want to benefit to this extent . . .' He said, 'I never met anyone like this who doesn't want anything.'"

Rabbi Baruch Korff is the president and chief executive officer of The National Citizens' Committee For Fairness to The Presidency, Inc., which he founded a year ago with \$1,200 of his own money.

Starting with what he calls "the grass roots," Rabbi Korff claims to have picked up over 2 million followers and 233 supporting groups around the country "with 25,000 to 30,000 joining the bandwagon each week."

President Nixon, grateful for the support of this personable, even jolly, retired rabbi, has embraced

him enthusiastically—well, sort of. The President reportedly isn't exactly sure just what Rabbi Korff is all about. He isn't altogether sure Rabbi Korff doesn't, in fact, have an angle. So he has William Baroody, one of his special assistants at the White House, more or less monitor the rabbi's activities—have lunch occasionally with him and chat, just to make sure everything is, as the rabbi would say, kosher.

How can Mr. Nixon be sure the rabbi is not a kook?

"He can't," laughs the rabbi.

One thing for sure, Rabbi Korff is an adamant believer in the President. Or rather the presidency. "There is no difference between the presidency and the President," he'll say, in his thick Ukrainian accent.

In 1960 he voted for Jack Kennedy because "I was influenced largely by the media and because I had a personal liking for Kennedy. Nixon seemed remote."

He insists that he would have come to Mr. Kennedy's aid in a similar situation. "It's the inequity of the thing," he says. "I hate to think what would have happened if Nixon had done the things that Lincoln did, or Adams, or Roosevelt, for whatever the reason. You might have found a lobster reddened by Johnson and Eisenhower and the language they used. What went on in Nixon's White House is child's play, pabulum, compared to other administrations."

The rabbi closes his eyes occasionally as he gets

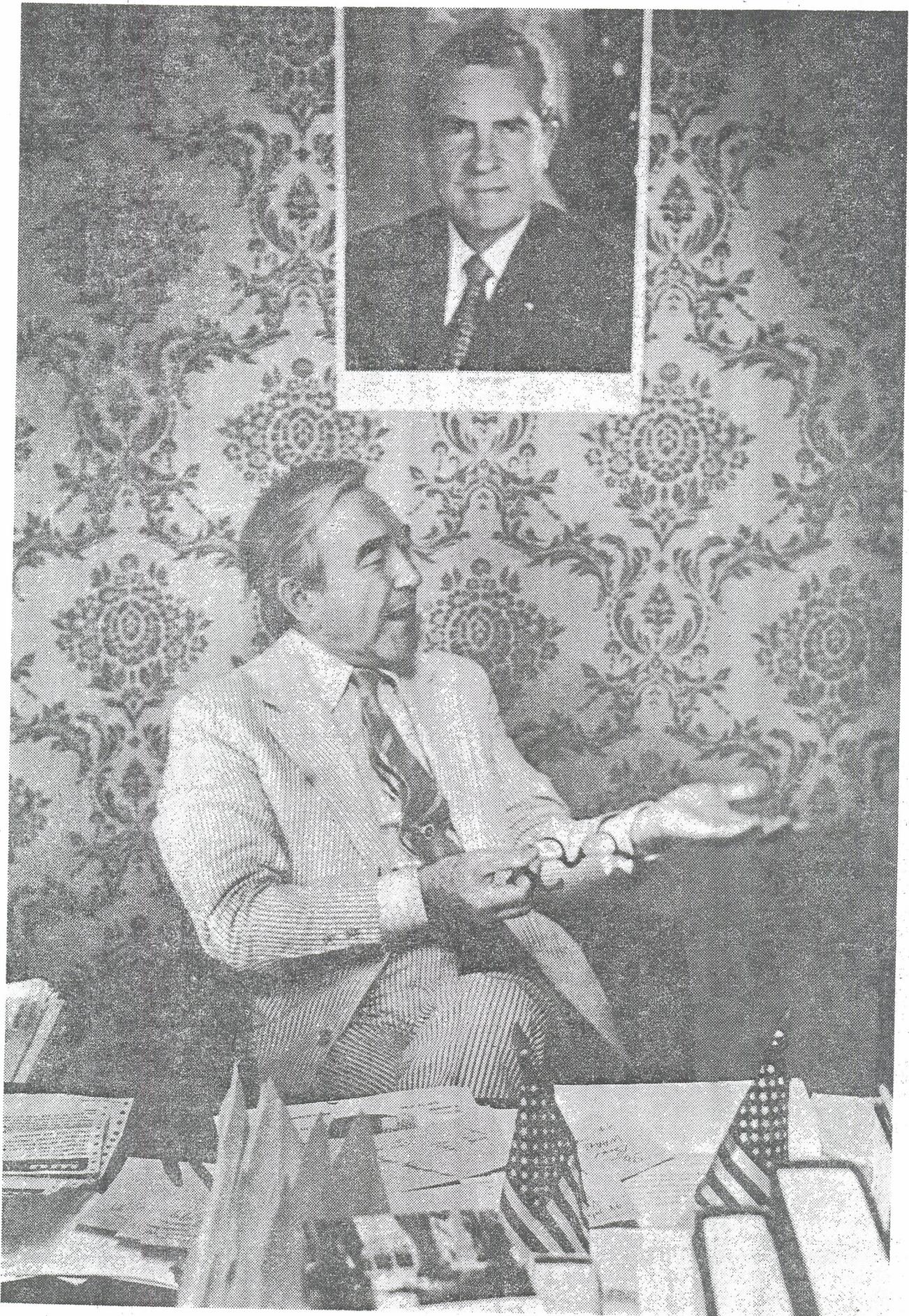
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By Charles Del Vecchio—The Washington Post

Rabbi Korff, below a portrait of the President, says he feels "There is only one thing the President could do that would drive him away. 'Treason.'"

wound in these sessions, or leans forward waving his hands emotionally, depending on who he is talking to and which approach for them would be most effective. He never gets around to what exactly those horrible things were that the other Presidents did. But he will say:

"I will not speculate on the President's guilt. They have not established a single point against him . . . but hell, (and the word hell by the way is in the Bible so don't tell anyone I use bad language) what government agency doesn't run a covert operation? If they didn't we'd be out of business. George Washington did. And what is all this about perjury?" The rabbi shrugs, bringing his shoulders up around his round face. "So what's perjury? People commit perjury every day, wittingly and unwittingly. It's a catchall. It is this holier than thou attitude that kills me." He rolls his eyes to the ceiling for effect, and intones his favorite line, "Save me, oh Lord, from the saints that haven't been caught."

Rabbi Korff says there is only one thing that the President could do that would drive him away. "Treason. And it will have to be proved beyond a flicker of an eyelash. Nothing else will make me turn against him. There isn't a President worth his salt who hasn't done things for which an ordinary citizen would go to jail. And I mean George Washington."

Speaking of saints. "I don't actually say the man is a saint. Nor am I claiming King David is a saint. King David sent his general into battle so he could steal his wife, but we recite the Psalms of David every day. But Nixon is one of the most straightlaced Presidents ever. He's not sophisticated like Kennedy. He was brought up a Quaker. Were he more sophisticated and cunning it never would have reached this stage. Nixon is not gregarious. He's not engaging. He's too straightlaced, too aloof. I didn't tell him that because I told him enough that was presumptuous. But here is a man who can send a love letter to someone and sign it 'sincerely yours.' Even so, I regard him with the highest esteem, as my President, a man who has been vilified, savaged, brutalized, whose blood has been sapped by vampires. I see him holding out against willful people who are unworthy of polishing his shoes."

The rabbi leans back and puffs on his cigar for a moment, thinking. "They used to shoot at Nixon with rifles, now they use cannons. That's a good quote," he says, pleased, jabbing at the air. "Darling, with me you only get good quotes. If you stay around me for more than a day you will have a paperback."

To stay around Rabbi Korff for a day is to participate in a media circus. His tiny gilt-and-flock wallpapered office on Connecticut Avenue was filled with cameras, tape recorders, photographers, film crews and reporters all

day long, the day a picture of him with President Nixon appeared on the front page of the newspapers.

The rabbi is a short, stocky man with a full head of white hair, black bushy eyebrows, freckled hands, a constant twinkle in his eye and a cigar or pipe in his mouth at all times. His accent is so thick that he seems to be putting it on at times, and he comes across as a Jewish comedian, Myron Cohen, perhaps, or a yiddish Kris Kringle. He is always laughing or smiling, quipping, or patting someone affectionately. He seems like a nice "small-town Jewish rabbi." Just what he insists he is.

Rabbi Korff was born in the Ukraine, the son of a rabbi who fled during the upheaval following the Russian Revolution (leaving his family behind) and came to America where he served as a rabbi in Massachusetts.

Shortly after his father's escape, Korff's mother was killed in a pogrom,

but managed to protect Korff and his sisters and brothers.

"Perhaps this earlier incident had a lot to do with my present pursuits," he says. "That particular night had enough trauma on which to feed for the rest of a lifetime. Inherently I developed a resistance to upheaval, any form of anarchy."

During World War II Korff worked with a movement which paid for the exit of Jews from Nazi Germany. Later, already a rabbi himself, based in New York, Korff was associated with the terrorist Stern Gang dedicated to ousting the British from Palestine. He now says he disapproved of the group's violent tactics.

In 1947 he was arrested in Paris for implication in a Stern Gang plot to bombard London with pro-Zionist leaflets. He has said that he was cleared of direct complicity in the plan, but that he had sanctioned it.

He retired—because of a heart con-

dition—from his post as rabbi in Rehoboth, Mass., about a year ago.

Korff's Washington office has one paid worker, and several young volunteers sitting under a picture of a smiling Pat Nixon with a bouquet of roses. His desk is piled with file folders (one of them marked "ego boosting material") American flags, a picture of Mr. Nixon, a copy of the Nixon transcripts, and "The Drew Pearson Story."

After several telephone radio interviews, the rabbi turns to a reporter as CBS News is setting up its cameras and begins his now-memorized litany of anti-media recriminations.

"The press feeds on banalities," he says and waits for his words to be carefully recorded. "It's the lynching mob syndrome.

"The media is simulating crimes. We maintain large segments of the media made an investment for power and profit and credibility and now they are protecting their investment... they



By Joe Heiberger—The Washington Post

*Rabbi Korff holds the phone so that President Nixon, in San Clemente, can hear the cheers of the audience at a dinner of the National Citizen's Committee for Fairness to the Presidency.*

are striking at the jugular of freedom of the press... the entire administration is held captive by The Washington Post... I feel like I am in Hanoi and not in Washington... "

He waits for the effect. The cameras whirl, pencils scribble, lights flash. The rabbi beams. He's onto a good one. He's using the media to castigate the media. What a terrific number.

A worker arrives with copies of his book, "The Personal Nixon: Staying on the Summit." The tiny book, he says, is a tape recorded interview with the President. "You don't need large volumes to tell the truth," he says. And says it again for CBS once the cameras start rolling. He got the interview with the President, he says, because otherwise "my book wouldn't sell." The money, he says, is going toward his committee. He pockets no money, he says, and has used \$14,000 of his own retirement pension. It all sounds very believable. He waves papers around to prove it. "I always tell the truth," he says. "It is my vow as a rabbi."

He produces a telegram from King Hussein regretting his inability to attend the fund-raising banquet for the Fairness committee last night.

He instructs a worker to send one copy of his book to the Vice President.

"Just one. If he wants more he has to pay. I'll autograph it for him. He will see in the book I didn't misquote the President. I am not afraid to make categorical statements, unlike the Vice President." (Ford refused to say categorically to Korff that he would not accept the presidency if Nixon were impeached.)

Daniel Schorr of CBS arrives. Korff apologizes for not having shaved because he's just arrived from California. He never shaved all day and later explained, "Most people would shave under these circumstances. But I couldn't think in those terms. The Cause is far too compelling to think about appearance though I suppose appearance helps the cause.)

"Is my ego showing?" he asks Schorr. "It's been showing for two years," Schorr shoots back.

Korff laughs. "That's a good one."

Schorr asks him about the President's antisemitic remarks. Korff answers, "I don't go by the transcripts, I go by what he has done. And frankly, I have referred to my friends as that goy (*non-Jew*) or that shiksa (*non-Jewish girl*)."

The CBS interview over, the rabbi goes down to Bixby's for a quick lunch. ("Rockfish, it's kosher").

Over lunch Rabbi Korff talks about his other favorite subject besides the President. Women.

"We all have our hang-ups, in the American vernacular," the rabbi says. "The American family is more matriarchal than in other countries. It's a plague. The man becomes subservient outside the home where he should be aggressive and domineering, and then

the sons see their fathers yield to their mothers. It's not good."

In fact, the rabbi has a theory that what's happening in Watergate could have stemmed, in part, from this.

"Take, for instance, females of this country. If it were JFK being persecuted in the same situation as Nixon, the media would have a hard time to convince the ladies that JFK is anything but JFK. And if they don't convince the ladies then, well..." Then he moves along to another subject. "If ever I'm found guilty of anything it will be for a polygamous state of mind.

"I have been married twice and if you ask me if I have relations with other women besides, I would say 'yes.'" He assures one that there is no matriarchal situation in his home.

The rabbi, who is now 60, has three children, two by a former wife, and a 7-year-old daughter by his current wife, Rebecca, who is 35. His wife is his researcher, but according to the rabbi she wasn't always. "I was going off to the Middle East with a beautiful researcher but my wife said, 'This much authority I will have,' so she went to the Library of Congress school of research and took a course. She knew me well enough to know I might have digressions. I would not keep any digressions from her if she asks, but she doesn't ask."

Rabbi Korff has only spent one night at his farmhouse in Rehoboth, Mass., since February. "My wife calls me a lot and she comes down when she can save enough from her allowance to pay for it. You know, this concept of sexual relations is part of the human psyche and chemistry. It is essential to the makeup of the individual. I'm a poor preacher. I always believe in examples, not preaching... but all this is detracting from the presidency."

Ah, yes. The presidency. Back in his office for two more television interviews, the rabbi gets back to the presidency.

"I told the President he must insult himself. He said, 'I don't like this thick skin concept.'"

"I said to him, 'There is no living President to defend you.' He said, 'When I complete my office I will defend every successor.'"

"I advised the President, 'Mr. President, I have only one reservation. You should have made a bonfire on the lawn of the White House and burned all the tapes. He said, 'Where were you when I needed you?'"

Rabbi Korff is there. And he'll hang in there, giving his all, "Until the President is absolved," though all he really wants, he says, "is to go home."

So what's his angle?

"If you were to ask if I'm an egotist I will say, 'by all means I am.' If you were to measure my ego in terms of mileage, mine is quite an ego."