

David S. Broder

The 'Nixon People'

This has been a grim week for many people in Washington, but particularly for those men and women who worked in Richard Nixon's White House during the past five years.

Some were still there on Monday, when the President belatedly admitted that he had kept from them, and from his lawyers and from his congressional defenders and from the American people, the full truth about his involvement in the Watergate cover-up. These men and women looked ruin in the face right along with him, and felt the added pain of betrayal.

Others were working elsewhere—some of them having left the President's service by their own choice and some of them having been driven out by others who, in their arrogance, had convinced Mr. Nixon that the exiles were not "team players" by the peculiar standards of fitness those formerly mighty presidential aides chose to define.

Wherever they were and however they had come there, last week these men and women shared a common burden—the knowledge that for the rest of their lives, they would always be identified as "Nixon people."

For them, there is a special irony in the title of Carl Bernstein's and Bob Woodward's fine best-seller about the Watergate case, "All the President's Men." They know—if no one else does—that it was only a handful of the President's men and none of the President's women who were responsible for the scheme that brought their administration to ruin.

And they know, with a special poignance that no outsider can fully share, that it need not have been.

"What I still can't understand," said a presidential aide seated in a West Wing office at mid-week, "was how such stupidity and such superb accomplishment could exist side by side for so long."

Those who were still working for Mr. Nixon this week, when the roof caved in on their last hopes that the evidence might somehow exonerate him, face problems in the future as difficult as the task of rationalizing the past. "Face it," one of them said, "this address is not exactly the best reference to give your prospective employer."

But those who covered the White House during the years of Richard

Nixon know that there was as much devotion and dedication to public service in that building as there has been in past administrations. And the historical record would be more than incomplete—it would be grossly distorted—if those guilty of the grossest arrogance and abuse of power in the Nixon White House were allowed to stain the reputations of those who set a far different standard for themselves.

Any reporter who worked there could do what I have done just these past few minutes: jot down on a piece of paper the names of those he admires for their work for Mr. Nixon and the country.

The problem is that any list is partial and prejudiced—and there is a danger that those omitted may be damaged unwittingly by the implication that somehow they are less deserving of praise. But let me take that risk and enter the blanket disclaimer that those mentioned here are exemplars of many more who served their country well in the Nixon White House.

One thinks of those like Bob Ellsworth and John Sears, who joined the Nixon cause in the mid-1960s, when there were more risks than rewards in doing so, and were rewarded for their loyalty by being exiled early from the White House by men who were not their moral or intellectual peers.

One thinks of Bryce Harlow and Mel Laird and Herb Klein and Bob Finch and John Davies and Jim Keogh and John Whitaker, friends and associates of Mr. Nixon long before his White House days, who somehow were elbowed away from influence in the Oval Office.

One thinks of the congressional liaison staff, of Bill Timmons and Ken Belieu, and Dick Cook and Gene Cowen, of Bill Gifford and Max Friedersdorf and Tom Korolgos, men who earned the respect of the lawmakers with whom they worked, despite their constant uphill battle for recognition within their organization.

One thinks of the domestic policy staffs from Pat Moynihan and Steve Hess and John Price through Ken Cole and Ed Harper and Lew Engman.

One thinks of the writers, like Lee Huebner and Ray Price, and the lawyers, like Len Garment and Fred Buzhardt, and of politicians, like Harry Dent and Bill Baroody and Jerry Jones and Anne Armstrong—who put in every bit of their effort and ability, but did not park their consciences at the door.

One thinks of Jerry Warren, suffering with few complaints in the no-man's-land of the war between the press corps and the President, but unfailingly courteous and patient in his own dealings.

He and many others not mentioned here deserved far better than they got. They worked their hearts out for the President, and it is sympathy—not a stigma—they are entitled to now.