

Reflections On the Men With Power

Keeping Roosevelt, Marshall, Eisenhower, a couple or McCarthys, Eden, Stevenson, Chou En-lai, Kissinger and dozens of others in perspective must be considered a formidable task.

But the effort was undertaken in a spirit that can be described as both joyous and thoughtful in "Witness to Power," the 15th book by Marquis Childs, the much-honored columnist who is erroneously described by his publishers as "dean of the Washington press corps."

The description fails for three reasons: Childs is not the oldest working correspondent in Washington (Richard L. Strout is five years his senior), he bears his 72 years far too jauntily to warrant an old man's title and, most importantly, he is as much at home in the present as in the past.

The talk in an interview yesterday ranged from Childs' arrival in Washington during the second year of Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency to a recent visit by the Henry Kissingers to the Childs home in Georgetown.

"Roosevelt was about the most fascinating human being I have ever known," Childs said.

"Covering Washington was more fun then, partly because of the personalities of Roosevelt and Mrs. Roosevelt and the people they had in their administration. They were kind of open and not so concerned with creating some sort of prefabricated image."

There were others:

General George Marshall, chief of staff in World War II: "One of the very few people to whom I apply the dubious word, 'patriot,' and who was so badly treated by his country in the McCarthy era." (Marshall waited for support from Dwight Eisenhower, but the hoped-for words never came.)

Eisenhower: "He gets good marks from resisting the pressures to get us to bomb Indochina, but he had such great influence and failed to use it at a time when he could have helped in civil rights."

Senator Joseph R. McCarthy: "A gutter fighter ... who wanted to be 'in.' This was one of the weaknesses of the anthero, the need for an image, always self-admiring."



MARQUIS CHILDS
Author and columnist

Senator Eugene McCarthy: "He had sensed the mood of the country, though in truth he was not a politician at all — perhaps a poet, a dreamer ... a gentle bull smashing a china shop."

Anthony Eden: "A fallen hero (whose defeat in the Suez adventure came) because he didn't understand what he could do and could not do."

Stevenson: "The quality of the man (was suited) to an earlier time."

Chou En-lai: "In hours (a private interview) I found myself marveling at the ability of this man to govern that huge country."

Henry Kissinger: "We shoot secretaries of state down, but he said, 'I'm going to stay.' He has an enormous ego but along with it a marvelous sense of humor. He can accept criticism. When he disagreed with something I've written he 'You were mistaken about that, but pay no attention because it wasn't important.'"

Once in awhile, Childs said, he

has yielded to the impulse to give advice to those he has interviewed, but it nearly always turned out to be a mistake. His role has been to be a critic — sympathetic perhaps but detached.

Even so, Childs added he did have a suggestion for former President Richard M. Nixon: "I wish he'd be quiet and just write his memoirs — which I'm sure will not tell us much."