

Yankees, Cowboys and Watergate

Who's to blame for Watergate? The President and his White House Guard? Or, as some critics claim, a bigger, badder scapegoat behind them: the nouveau riche defense contractors, oil men, land speculators, and Syndicate gangsters of the American South and Southwest—the Cowboys?

Reactionary right-wingers, fanatics, “nigger-haters,” and crude capitalists lacking in the moral sensibilities of the older Eastern money, the Cowboys are the bigwigs of the Southern rim—the part of America stretching from Bebe Rebozo's Key Biscayne through John Connally's Texas to Richard Nixon's San Clemente and C. Arnholt Smith's San Diego. They are the conspirators behind the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in the movie *Executive Action*, the money in the Military Industrial Complex, and the sponsors of the break-in at the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee.

As scapegoats go, the Cowboys are nearly perfect. They are defined so loosely that no one knows who's a Cowboy and who's not—from half the country to a cabal of Howard Hughes, Meyer Lansky, and the Teamsters Union. They are economic rather than “just political,” which pleases the vulgar Marxists. They are the source of all evil, which pleases the vulgar Manicheans. And they are the promise that America would be okay in the hands of some equally ill-defined Eastern Establishment, the Yankees.

But the Cowboys don't exist, at least not as they are pictured. For all their oil wells and defense plants, the new money of the sunbelt has never banded together to battle

Wall Street, nor have they dictated national policy—whether in Vietnam or at Watergate. It is perhaps comforting to believe that there's a “split in the ruling class.” But American capitalists are not waging any regional economic war, and believing that they are only blinds us to the real dangers of repression at home and intervention abroad.

The Cowboys were born in the spring of 1968, called into being by Carl Oglesby, past president of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Oglesby wanted the New Left to form “a meaningful relationship to bewildered Kennedy liberals,” arguing that the personal conflict between Robert Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson reflected a deeper, historical cleavage. Behind Kennedy were the Ivy-aristocratic, cosmopolitan, Europe-oriented, more dovish Eastern Establishment. Behind Johnson, the more racist, Asia-first war hawks of the South and Southwest. The Yankees versus the Cowboys.

Oglesby sketched out the idea in the *National Guardian* in April, but his best evidence came that summer. As he told it, he and a handful of other New Left notables had been meeting with the enemy—some high-powered executives from the biggest multinational corporations, led by Eldridge Haynes, president of Business International—a sophisticated corporate information service. The businessmen were desperately unhappy with the war in Vietnam, the threat of a new war against China, racism, poverty, and the hysterical anticommunism of American foreign policy. They feared that the national conventions of the Democratic and Republican parties would leave them with an

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unacceptable choice between the “rotten borough politics” of Hubert Humphrey and the “obviously reactionary” stance of Richard Nixon. They favored the “more rational” candidates—Eugene McCarthy and Nelson Rockefeller.

The leftists and the businessmen continued to meet, and as the conventions approached some of the executives made “a vague proposal.” They would do “whatever was possible” to help SDS stage a massive demonstration against Humphrey in Chicago and Nixon in Miami. SDS refused the offer, and left to others the leadership of the big Chicago protest. But Oglesby came away convinced that the Yankee Establishment was at war with the new-money Cowboys.

Given the probable ties between Business International and the intelligence community, Oglesby’s friends could as easily have been part of a CIA conspiracy to provoke a reluctant SDS into a violent confrontation, justifying a major crackdown on the organization. But whoever the executives spoke for, they did not represent any Yankee Establishment. By summer the majority of big business leaders from all over the country were moving toward Richard Nixon, who was something less than the “obviously reactionary” anticommunist war hawk, especially in regard to China.

The businessmen backed Nixon for good reasons. From the riot in Watts in 1964 to those in Newark and Detroit in 1967, big business leaders had created summer job programs for ghetto youths, organized special funds for ghetto investment, and thrown their support to the Great Society programs of that supposed Cowboy, Lyndon Johnson. They also backed the Urban Coalition, headed by former HEW Secretary John Gardner, now of Common Cause, and committed themselves to bigger public and private spending on housing, education, and a heavily subsidized social-industrial complex. But by the middle of 1968 the same business leaders concluded that spending would spur inflation and further weaken the international standing of the dollar. Inevitably, they chose to cut back social spending, curb wages, raise unemployment, and back the presidential candidate who most favored those domestic priorities—Richard Nixon.

According to available evidence, the top businessmen did not make their decision on the basis of Vietnam policy. Few of them liked the war or its cost; most seemed content with Johnson’s March 31, 1968 decision to stop the build-up of American ground forces. But only a handful, if that, were willing to “cut and run.” The vast majority wanted to get out of the war without getting out of Vietnam or compromising commitments to the more important Asian dominoes. Humphrey and Nixon agreed, and after the election Nixon committed himself to a “phased withdrawal” of ground troops over a two or three year period, abandoning hope for any “purely military victory.” Hardly a Cowboy’s call to arms.

Oglesby continued to talk up his Yankees and Cowboys, as did a few other writers and activists around the old SDS. But only after Watergate did the idea catch hold, as everyone from Eric Sevareid of CBS to the underground weeklies scapegoated the upstarts who had stolen the White House, while maintaining “a meaningful relationship” to Eastern good guys like Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, Attorney General Elliot Richardson, and Connecticut Senator Lowell

Weicker. Then came the clincher, an article in the *New York Review of Books* by Kirkpatrick Sale, author of *SDS*. An admirer of Carl Oglesby, Sale explicitly blames Watergate on Nixon’s Cowboy cronies.

[WHETHER TO CO-OPT OR CRUSH?]

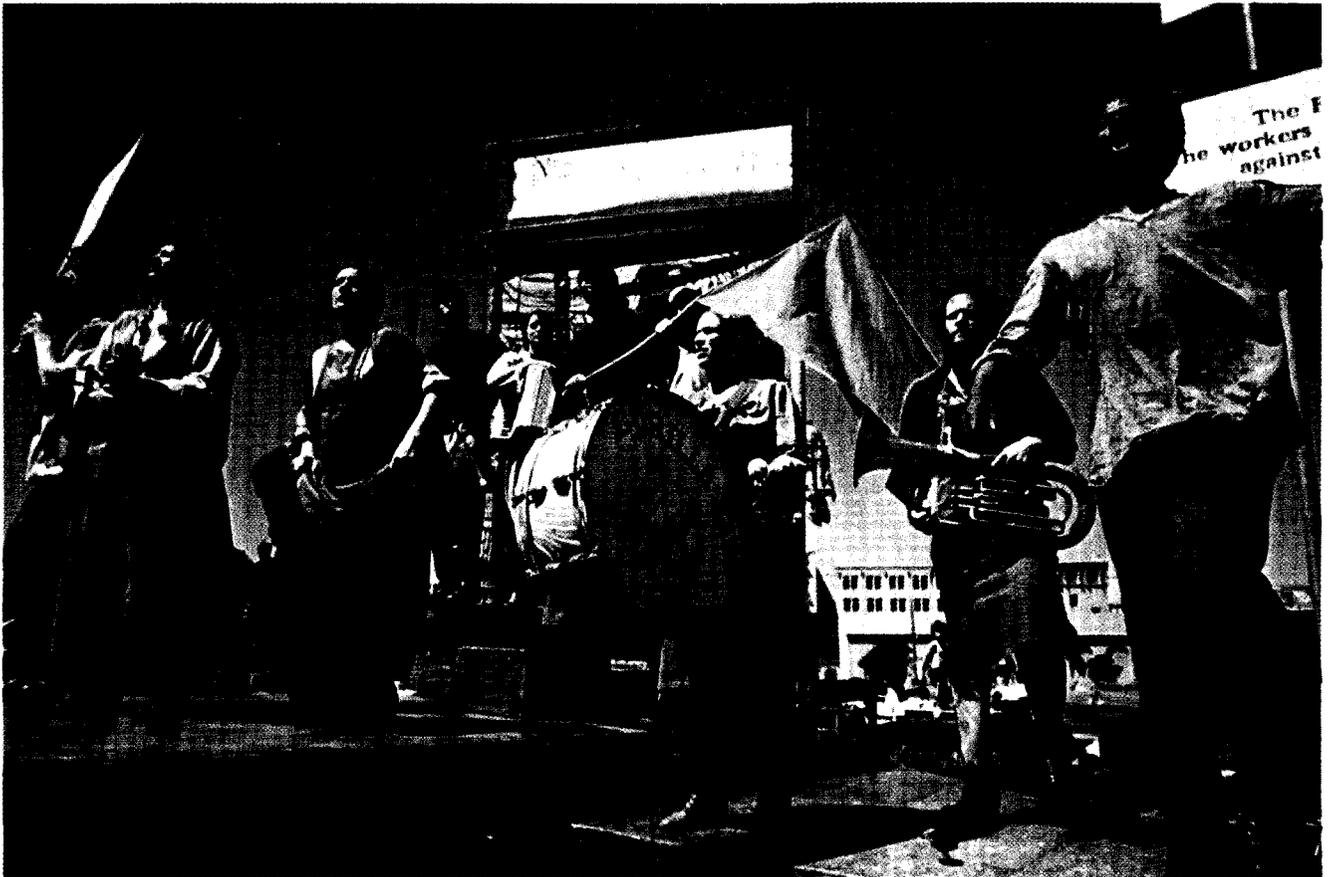
The more general belief that America’s corporate rich had seriously split over Vietnam also continued to gain ground, especially after the Moratorium against the war on October 15, 1969. The key organizers of the nationwide protest, a Boston envelope manufacturer and some former student supporters of Senator Eugene McCarthy, were themselves neither radical nor of the ruling class. They were mostly middle-class liberals with a lot of organizing skill and the gumption to demand an immediate and unconditional withdrawal from Vietnam. But as October 15 drew near, the TV networks and several national newspapers and magazines jumped on the bandwagon, along with over 80 Senators and Congressmen, who endorsed Moratorium Day “as a positive, constructive, non-violent means of protesting the war.” Wall Street joined in with its own Moratorium, attended by such notables as former Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric of the Cravath, Swaine, and Moore law firm; John R. Lehman of the Lehman Brothers investment house; and Kennedy family financial adviser Andre Meyers of Lazard Frères.

The top-drawer turnout was impressive. But the Establishmentarians muted the Moratorium’s demand for immediate withdrawal and dissociated themselves from the more radical November 13-15 Mobilization in Washington. Most of those in Congress fell back even further, supporting a resolution that applauded President Nixon’s efforts to achieve “peace with Justice” in Vietnam—the first major Congressional statement on the war since the 1964 Tonkin Gulf Resolution. The “split” seemed less about Vietnam than about the peace movement—whether to co-opt it, as many of the Establishment doves wanted, or crush it, as the Nixon hawks wanted to do.

When Nixon invaded Cambodia and Ohio National Guardsmen shot four students at Kent State in the spring of 1970, more top-drawer doves turned out, including a flock of Wall Street lawyers. The protest was again anti-radical, turning a militant outpouring on the campuses and in the streets into a polite and unsuccessful effort to pass the McGovern-Hatfield antiwar amendment in the halls of Congress. But whatever the motivations, the split over Vietnam in the ruling class now seemed even deeper.

What was really happening was more interesting. The Business Executives Move for Vietnam Peace (BEM), the most active of the business groups, had been around since the end of 1966, drawing support from all over the country and helping to legitimize the more radical antiwar movement. But even at the time of Cambodia, BEM’s sponsors included few executives from *Fortune*’s top 500 corporations or top 50 banks. The BEMers were rich, powerful in their own communities, and very decent human beings. But, with few exceptions, they were relatively small change, with little economic interest in America’s Asian dominoes and little policy-making influence within the big business community.

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Bertolt Brecht's "The Mother"

Bertolt Brecht wrote The Mother in 1931. It was the last of his plays to be performed in Germany before Hitler took power. Brecht called it a "lehrstueck", a learning play; for him it represented a new, practical, and scientific approach to playmaking. It was well received by German working class audiences, but the critics panned it: "primitive," "childish," "madness."

In America, The Mother has fared no better. The New York Theater Union adapted the play in 1935, putting it in a naturalistic style and watering down its political intent. Brecht called the production "Dreck" and "Scheiss!" Since then, most of Brecht's other plays have enjoyed increasing popularity in universities, repertory theatres, and on and off-Broadway. The Mother, however, has remained taboo. Here is a scene from the play as it's being performed by The San Francisco Mime Troupe.

*"Here is our comrade, Vlassova, a good fighter.
Hardworking, clever, and reliable.
Wherever she fights, she is not alone.
Others like her fight tenaciously, reliably, cleverly
In Tver, Belfast, Phnom Penh, and Chicago
Santiago and Teheran.
All the Vlassovas of all countries; good small moles.
Unknown soldiers of the revolution,
Indispensable."*

Adaptation by The San Francisco Mime Troupe

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