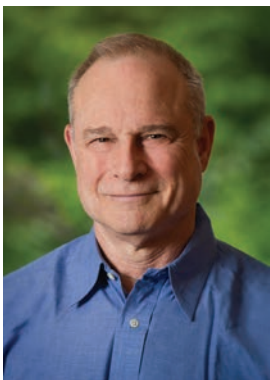


A Gamut of Leaders

White House Fellows Class of 1969–70 after 50 Years



by Lincoln Caplan



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lincoln Caplan is a visiting lecturer in law and a senior research scholar at Yale Law School. He teaches writing there and in the Yale English Department. He was a staff writer for *The New Yorker*, was a member of the editorial board of *The New York Times*, and is the author of six books. He was a White House Fellow in 1979–80. Members of the White House Fellows class of 1969–70, with the support of the White House Fellows Foundation and Association, commissioned him to write this essay.

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Members of the White House Fellows Class of 1969–70 gather behind President Richard Nixon in the White House for the swearing-in ceremony. *Photo by White House Photographer*

INTRODUCTION

In June of 1969 in the White House, Arthur S. Flemming, chairman of the President's Commission on White House Fellows, presented the new class of fellows to President Richard M. Nixon in the White House's East Room. There were 18 White House Fellows in the 1969-70 class, 16 men and two women. Theirs was the fifth class of Fellows, with 50 classes since then in the program's history. In a photo of the class taken at that moment, underneath a famous painting of Abraham Lincoln, listening as he leans forward in a chair, they look solemn, expectant, and somewhat misplaced: only hours

before, they had been told that they had been chosen as Fellows; now, they were at the equivalent of a swearing-in ceremony, at the most important location of American power.

The imbalance of men and women reflected the times. Other markers were unusual. The class is the only one, from the initial Fellows' class in 1965-66 until today, that had no members from the military. The administration of Lyndon B. Johnson, when it created the application for the '69-70 year, had judged that a rule barring fellowships for anyone

working for the federal government applied to anyone in the armed services. (The Nixon team removed the bar and, in the following year's class of 15, five were officers in an armed service and two others were veterans.) In addition, the class was unusually diverse for that era. Four were African Americans, one was a Native American, and one was Hispanic. All but one had a PhD or a graduate degree in law or business.

A more substantial distinction for the class resulted from the 1968 presidential election. For the first time, a class of fellows that applied while one major party held the White House ended up working in an administration of the other. In an angry, unruly contest, the Republican former senator and vice president Nixon defeated the Democratic former senator and incumbent vice president Hubert H. Humphrey, with 55.9 percent of the electoral college and 43.4 percent of the popular vote to Humphrey's 35.5 percent of the electoral college and 42.7 percent of the popular vote. Alabama's governor George C. Wallace got 8.6 percent of the electoral college and 13.5 percent of the popular vote. Two weeks before the final selection weekend was scheduled to happen, it was postponed for three weeks, until mid-June, so that the new members of the Fellows commission, like assistant to the president H.R. Haldeman and special assistant to the president Patrick J. Buchanan, could help select the new class.

A half century later, in the summer of 2019, when I was commissioned to write this essay and asked to interview members of the class and write about their experience as fellows, I met in Washington, D.C. with seven members of the class and spoke on the phone with four others. I also received written materials from relatives of four others. (I did not speak with seven members: four have died, two were too ill to speak with me, and one was unreachable by class members and me.) Based on those conversations and materials, it is safe to say that the year was unforgettable for almost every Fellow, yet affected their later lives in very different ways.

The class asked me to evaluate their experience in the program and what they made of it as Fellows, which meant reckoning with the question whether members had fulfilled its aspirations for them to develop into leaders. The conversations I was able to have with class members convinced me that I should not try to evaluate the career of anyone in the class I was not able to speak with. Without that input, I decided, my understanding would be too incomplete.

Class members differed about who should be included on the list of leaders. Everyone I spoke with agreed that the most meaningful arbiter would have been John W. Gardner, the author, long-serving foundation leader, and onetime cabinet officer, who died in 2002 in his 90th year. Gardner envisioned, shaped, and watched over the Fellows program as its visionary architect, attentive guardian, and constant beacon. He left an inspiring record of inspiring Americans, including many former Fellows. He sought to inspire them because he had very high expectations of them.

As Gardner wrote, "Skills and knowledge we give our young people—skills so intricate and knowledge so complex that all earlier generations of American youth seem half-educated by comparison. But what is there in the education to give them a sense of" the elements that Lyndon Johnson emphasized when he announced the program, "personal involvement in the leadership of the society, a vision of greatness for the society, and a sense of responsibility for bringing that greatness to reality?" Gardner went on, "The program described here should be so designed and so administered as to give these superbly qualified young people precisely those experiences."

The '69-70 class did not get to know Gardner as a class and was only superficially aware that they were beneficiaries and products of his vision as well as test cases of it, though they were. Yet it seems that Gardner was never clear about exactly what he expected of former Fellows—and his views about that seemed to change significantly in the quarter of



Preparing for the first foreign trip of the White House Fellows, 1969. *Photo courtesy of Landis Jones*

a century after he conceived of the program. Gardner asked at the outset where the equivalents were of “Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Monroe, Madison, Hamilton, Franklin, and others.” That was a doubly daunting standard—in the greatness Fellows were supposed to match and in how they were supposed to serve. The myth of the founding fathers was that they were farmers and businessmen thrust for brief periods into national leadership who then returned to their local lives. As Gardner envisioned the Fellows program, it sought to attract and develop leaders who would bring the valuable perspective of their far-flung experiences to national service when they were called back to duty.

Few of the members of the '69-70 class would have fulfilled Gardner's initial ambition for the program

and for Fellows in their careers—that the program develop national leaders. The program provided no training about leadership and said little about its expectations of them in the future. Yet a strong majority of the class fulfilled the ambition for the program and for former fellows that evolved out of his conception: some became leaders in their communities and in their professional fields, sometimes with national impact or contributions; a few became leaders on a national scale and represented distinct models for making valuable use of the Fellowship. For both groups, though, the significance of the program was not about what they achieved as Fellows or after; it was about how the fellowship changed the trajectory of their careers and spurred them to reach for greatness.

WHITE HOUSE FELLOWS CLASS OF 1969–70



Michael H. Armacost

At 32, he was a graduate of Carleton College and had an MA and a PhD from Columbia University in public law and government. He was the author of two books, *The Politics of Weapons Innovation* and *The Foreign Relations of the United States*.



Judge A. Dickson

At 29, he had been an Academic All-American Rose Bowl champion in 1961 at the University of Minnesota. He received his BA and his JD from the university and was a lawyer for General Mills.

C. Nelson Dorn

He was 32, with a BA from Brigham Young University and an MSEE and PhD from Stanford University. He was an assistant professor of electrical engineering at the University of Pennsylvania and an ordained high priest of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (widely known as the Mormon church) and a counselor to the bishop of Philadelphia.



Bobbie D. Greene (Kilberg)

She was 24, a graduate of Vassar College, with an MA from Columbia University and a JD from Yale Law School, and a member of the Yale Ripon Society, which was part of the national organization that today describes itself as founded on the values of Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt.



W. Landis Jones

A graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, with an MA and a PhD from Emory University in political science, he was 32 and an associate professor at the University of Louisville, in Kentucky. He was elected the 1968-69 Teacher of the Year by the students of the Arts and Sciences College.



William J. Kilberg

At 23, he was a graduate of the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University, with a JD from Harvard Law School, where he was a member of the Ripon Society, and had co-authored a book on the 1968 presidential election called “The Lessons of Victory.”



Michael Alan Levett

He was 25 and a graduate of UCLA with a JD from UCLA Law School, as well as a former editor-in-chief of the UCLA Daily Bruin. During the Democratic Convention in 1968 in Chicago, he published a daily paper written and edited by students from ten college papers.



Charles M. McArthur

At 32, he was a graduate of the University of Florida. He was chairman of the board and president of the Charles McArthur Dairies, in Okeechobee, FL, one of the largest milk producers in the world; was chairman of the board of Americable, Inc., a cable-television company; and was on the board of Goodwill Industries. (He died at 36 in 1973.)



Percy A. Pierre

He was 30, with a BA and an MA from Notre Dame University and a PhD in electrical engineering from Johns Hopkins University. He had taught at Johns Hopkins, the University of Michigan, and other colleges and universities and was a research engineer for the RAND Corporation.



Richard J. Ramsden

At almost 32, he was a college graduate of Brown University and had an MBA from Harvard Business School. He was a partner in an investment management firm in New York City and was treasurer and director of Project Broad Jump, for minority students in the city. (At 82, he has been ill for the past half-decade.)





Robert Sansone

He was 27, with a degree from Columbia College and an MBA from the Columbia Business School. He was a senior product manager for the General Foods Corporation, was an elected trustee of the Clarkstown, New York school district, and was a founding member and director of the Congers, New York volunteer ambulance corps. (He died in 1991 when he was 49.)



Pastora Esperanza San Juan (Cafferty)

Almost 29, she had a college degree from St. Bernard College, in Alabama, and an MA from George Washington University in American thought and civilization. She had completed the coursework for her PhD, which she received in 1971. She had also helped develop new Spanish-language teaching materials for Peace Corps volunteers without a college education. (At 72, she died in 2013.)



Geoffrey C. Shepard

At 24, he was a graduate of Whittier College, in California, with a JD from Harvard Law School. At Whittier, he was president of the student body. At Harvard, he was a member of the Harvard Voluntary Defenders, who supplied free legal assistance to indigent criminal defendants.



Woodrow B. Sneed

He was 31 and a graduate of Brigham Young University, with a JD from Harvard Law School. Though a Cherokee, he had been made the chief legal aid adviser for the Navajo Tribe and was associate director of the Indian Law Center at the University of New Mexico.



Victor H. Sparrow, III

At 24, he was a graduate of Kenyon College, with a JD from Harvard Law School, and a consultant to IBM. He had helped form Inner-City Systems, Inc., a nonprofit organization for training minorities in computer operation and coding.



Wilson K. Talley

He was 34 and a college graduate of the University of California at Berkeley, with an SM from the University of Chicago and a PhD in nuclear engineering from Berkeley. He was an associate professor at the University of California at Davis, as well as acting chairman of the Department of Applied Science. With Edward Teller, the father of the hydrogen bomb, and two other writers, Talley co-authored *The Constructive Uses of Nuclear Explosives*. (Talley died in 2017.)



Stuart A. Taylor

At 32, he was a graduate of Oakwood College, in Alabama, with a master of science degree from the University of Rhode Island and a doctorate in business administration from Indiana University. He was an assistant professor of management at Southern Illinois University. (Now 83, he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2009 and was told that he likely had the disease for at least a generation, or since he was in his late forties.)



George S. Wills

He was 33 and a college graduate of Penn State University, with an MA from UVA and a PhD in political science from Johns Hopkins University. He was public-relations director at JHU and an administrative assistant to the university's president, Milton S. Eisenhower. (Now 83, he has been seriously ill for about a decade.)

MODELS

Percy A. Pierre was the first African American to get a doctorate in electrical engineering. In the summer of 1968, with his PhD from Johns Hopkins, he started as a researcher for the RAND Corporation, the think tank in Santa Monica, California, where he deepened the work that was part of his doctoral thesis. The deeper he got, the more he became aware of his work's narrow focus on conceptual issues of mathematics. At 29, he wanted to have wider impact, to use his skills and training for the public good, especially for African Americans.

A month earlier, he had read about the White House Fellowship program in a local newspaper in Ann Arbor while he was finishing his postdoc at the University of Michigan. The article was about the return of Richard Balzhiser, the first Michigan football player to earn first-team Academic All-American honors, as a professor of chemical engineering after a year as a Fellow in Washington, D.C. The fellowship—founded “to provide gifted and highly motivated young Americans with some firsthand experience in the process of governing the Nation and a sense of personal involvement in the leadership of the society”—struck Pierre as a singular way to expand his influence and one that an engineer could win. He was picked for the fifth Fellows' class of 1969-70.

Michael H. Armacost, with a PhD in public law and government from Columbia University, was a visiting professor of international relations in Tokyo, where he taught in English and worked on learning Japanese. At 31, he was on sabbatical for the 1968-69 academic year as an associate professor of political science at Pomona College, in California. During that year, a senior colleague of his at Pomona suggested that he apply for the fellowship, for the benefit of getting a year of work experience at the senior level of the federal government. It seemed to him an adventure well worth pursuing.

For candidates chosen to be interviewed, the government paid for airfare within the continental United States, but not outside it. Twice, Armacost paid \$556 to fly roundtrip between Tokyo and Honolulu, for a total outlay equal to about \$7,800 today. He flew to and from the mainland at government expense—first for a regional interview in San Francisco, and two months later to the other coast for the final interviews at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, where he was also selected.

Bobbie D. Greene had started in a PhD program in political science but was bored by it. While she got her master's degree, she came to realize that she preferred to try to make history, not observe it; for anyone interested in American politics and government, the place to do that was the nation's capital. At that time, a woman with a college degree was likely to be hired as an administrative assistant in Washington, D.C., but Greene realized that a law degree could allow her to be hired as a legislative assistant with substantive assignments. (To be hired as a legislative assistant, a man needed only a college degree.) At Yale Law School, one of her classmates was Michael Walsh, who had been in the first class of White House Fellows. During their second year, Walsh told her about the fellowship and encouraged her to think about applying.

Yale law students were required to write a long research paper, often based on a second-year seminar. Greene chose one taught by two professors who appealed to her, without giving much thought to the subject matter. The professors were Alexander Bickel, a great constitutional scholar, and John Simon, who specialized in the laws regulating not-for-profit organizations. The seminar was on the legal rights of Native Americans. Greene's paper addressed community control of Indian education, as an alternative to the federal control that had long tried to move Indians to assimilate into the

wider culture. Because of her research paper, the law school in her third year sent her for a month to a Navajo reservation in Chinle, Arizona, where the tribe wanted help in taking control of its schools. The experience opened her eyes to how government works—and does not work—and made her eager for similar immersions. Like Walsh, Simon encouraged her to apply for a White House Fellowship. He told her that, based on her expertise about Native American legal rights, she should sail through the interview process. At 24, she did.

Pierre is now 80. Armacost is 82. Greene, known by her married name as Bobbie Kilberg, is almost 75. Each is quick to say that his or her powers of memory are not what they were, yet the recollections of all three about how they learned of the fellowship and, especially, about how it changed their lives five decades ago are perfectly clear.

Each attested that, had it not been for the fellowship, it is unlikely that they would have moved as quickly into early positions of influence or had such stellar careers. The statement of purpose about the fellowship when President Johnson announced it in 1964 said that it was for the nation’s “ablest young people” and insisted that “their horizons and experience must be broadened to give them a sense of personal involvement in the leadership of the society, a vision of greatness for the society, and a sense of responsibility for bringing that greatness to reality.” In different ways, Pierre, Armacost, and Kilberg each developed that sense and vision and took on that responsibility.

These three young people, in addition to notable ability, shared ambition and optimism, energy and purpose. They shared a belief that the national government was a positive force in American life. They were intensely curious about power and how it operated



Geoff Shepard, Bill Kilberg, Bobbie (Greene) Kilberg, and Landis Jones.. *Photo courtesy of Landis Jones*

in the nation's capital. They were idealists who had emotional intelligence enabling them to navigate the world skillfully as realists. Those common qualities eclipsed their substantial differences.

Pierre was born in 1939 in St. James Parish, Louisiana, 60 miles west of New Orleans. His was a tiny African-American community. His father was a laborer. His mother worked as a maid at a motel. He had been an advocate for civil rights since going to St. Augustine High School, an all-black school for boys created in 1951 in New Orleans. In his senior year, he was valedictorian and captain of the basketball team. The school was founded and run by the Society of St. Joseph, whose mission had been to minister to freed slaves and other African Americans after the Civil War. He remained an advocate through his time in college at Notre Dame. He was a Democrat.

Armacost was born in 1937 in Cleveland, Ohio, and grew up in Redlands, California, where his father was president of the University of Redlands and his mother was a homemaker. He was a golden boy at

Redlands Union High School (basketball captain, president of the senior class) and continued to be at Carleton College in Minnesota (baseball and basketball captain, president of the graduating class, Phi Beta Kappa, magna cum laude). He was a Republican who thought of himself as nonpartisan and independent.

Greene was born in 1944 in New York City and grew up in the borough of Queens. Her father was an accountant. Her mother worked full-time as an office manager. At Forest Hills High School, she was the secretary of a group called SING, which held an annual competition among the school's four grades for the best performance of a musical each had created. She was involved with making racial integration at the school work. She and her parents helped found a group of students and parents who welcomed new black and Hispanic students and their families.

At Vassar College, in Poughkeepsie, New York, from which she graduated magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa, Greene was in charge of inviting speakers to

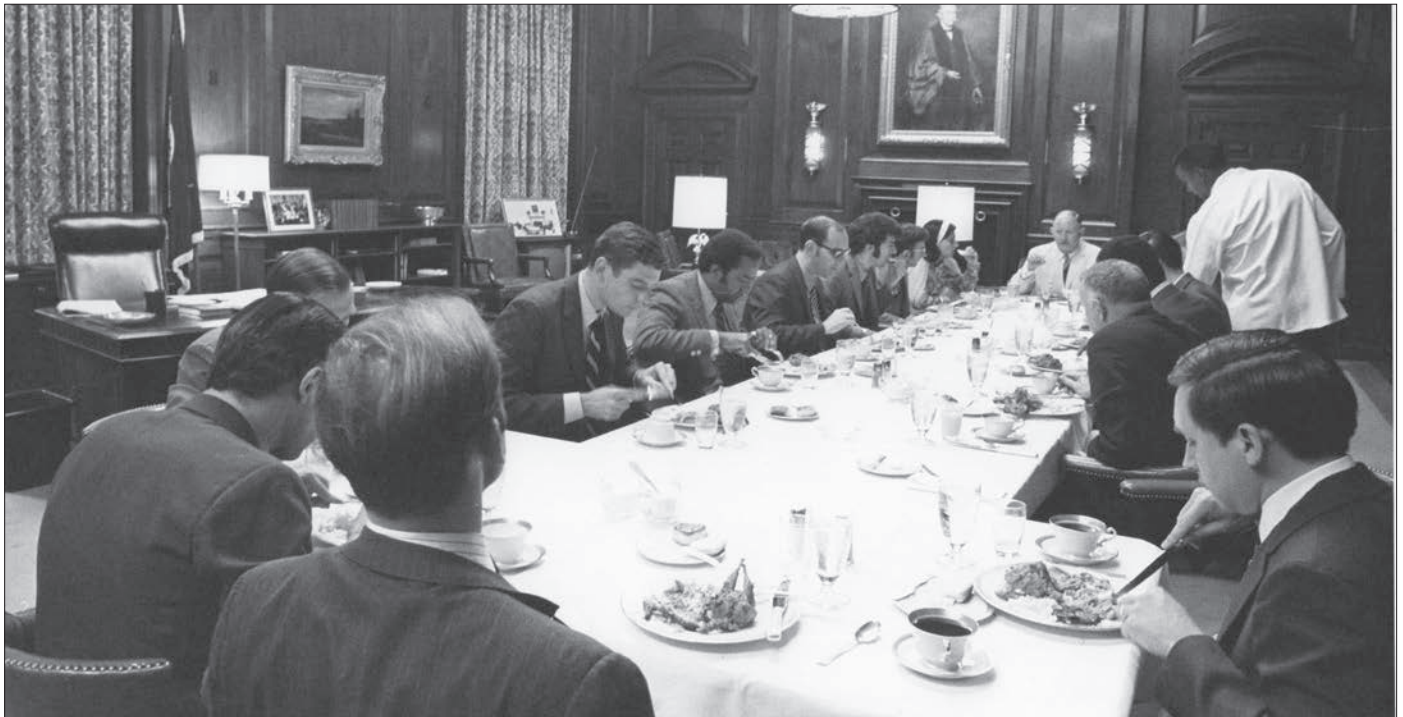


Photo courtesy of Landis Jones

campus as president of the Campus Speaking Bureau and was an officer of the Republican Club. In the fall of her senior year, her godfather, the one-term Republican senator Kenneth Keating representing New York, lost his seat to the former attorney general Robert F. Kennedy. Most weekends before the election, Keating and his team would pick up Greene in his campaign plane and fly to wherever in New York he was politicking for votes. Keating, who had a great memory for stories, had a hard time recalling names and reading name tags. Greene's assignment was to whisper the names of people he was about to greet. Then he would wow them with a story about how they had met.

How did they make use of the fellowship?

In 1971, at the young age of 32, Pierre became dean of the School of Engineering at Washington, D.C.'s Howard University. Two years later, while still dean, he also became a half-time program officer for New York City's Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, responsible for developing and carrying out a strategy for increasing the number of minorities in engineering. When Jimmy Carter took the oath of office as president in 1977, Pierre became assistant secretary of the Army for research, development, and acquisition, managing about \$12 billion each year for the development and production of weapons systems. The Army was seeking to replace all of its major weapons systems designed during the 1950s and '60s. He managed the completion of the design and the beginning of production of the Army's "Big Five": the Abrams tank, the Apache helicopter, the Bradley fighting vehicle, the Black Hawk helicopter, and the Patriot missile system.

In 1981, when the administration ended and Pierre was not enchanted by the offers he received to become a middle manager from defense contractors, he launched a consulting firm, with clients in the industry, like Raytheon and Westinghouse. Then, at 44 in 1983, he became president of Prairie View A&M University, the historically black university

about 45 miles northwest of Houston, Texas. At 50 in 1989, he stepped down to take a chaired professorship in electrical engineering at the same institution. The next year, he left to become vice president for research and graduate studies at Michigan State University in Lansing, Michigan. He remained there for 25 years, retiring at 76, unretiring, and retiring again at 80.

In 1970 at RAND, Pierre had tried and failed to raise money for a project to increase the number of minorities in engineering. As a Fellow, he had met and been impressed by James Cheek, a scholar in New Testament theology who, at 31 in 1963, had become president of the historically black Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, and, at 36 in 1968, had become president of Howard University, which he remained for the next 20 years. Pierre knew that Cheek had money from the federal government to support the School of Engineering. He knew that money was essential for what he aimed to do. Cheek, only seven years older, was as eager as Pierre was to increase the number of minority engineers at the school.

As a Fellow, Pierre worked for Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who chaired the Urban Affairs Council in the White House, as his deputy focused on the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, and Agriculture. As important, he met Clifford L. Alexander, Jr., who was six years older and had been head of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission during the Johnson administration. They were members of the Saturday Club—a group of African-American men in their thirties and forties who played basketball together most weekends. (A younger player who sometimes joined them recently recalled, "They were serious ball players, but they were also their own referees!") After Alexander was announced as Carter's nominee to be secretary of the Army, he asked Pierre to work for him as assistant secretary. Had he not met and clicked with Cheek, Alexander, and others during his fellowship, Pierre's career would have been very different.

Armacost was placed at the State Department for his fellowship assignment, where he worked primarily for Elliot L. Richardson, the under-secretary of state. Then 49, Richardson was attorney general of Massachusetts when Richard M. Nixon was elected and Richardson joined the new administration. Richardson asked Armacost to stay in the department when his fellowship ended as a member of the policy planning staff. From there, at 36, he moved to his first diplomatic post, as special assistant to the U.S. ambassador to Japan.

When Carter was elected president, he chose Zbigniew Brzezinski to be his national security advisor. Brzezinski had taught Armacost at Columbia. He hired his former student, then 40, to handle East Asian affairs with Michel Oksenberg for the National Security Council. In the Reagan administration, Armacost, at 45, became U.S. ambassador to the Philippines and then under-secretary for political affairs, the department's highest post for a career officer in the foreign service. In the George H.W. Bush administration, Armacost, then 52, became U.S. ambassador to Japan. At 58, after 26 years in government, he left the foreign service to serve as president of the nation's oldest think tank, the Brookings Institution, in Washington, D.C., which he worked to make more influential by making it less partisan. He retired at 65 and moved back to California to undertake a fellowship and occasional teaching at the Asia-Pacific Research Center of Stanford University.

During his term as ambassador in the Philippines, which was making a fateful shift from autocracy to democracy at the time, Armacost summarized for a journalist his dispassionate approach, which earned him respect throughout his foreign-service career: "The hardest thing for a diplomat is both to display empathy for a foreign government and people, and, on the other hand, retain the detachment you need, the hard-headed thinking necessary to advance U.S. national interest."

Greene was assigned to the White House. For the first few months, her job was to make sure that every senior official with a stake in the substance of a memorandum headed to the president signed off before it went into the Oval Office. She was invited to senior staff meetings. One morning in October of 1969, John Ehrlichman, assistant to the president for domestic affairs, said that Nixon wanted the administration to propose a major reform of federal policy affecting Native Americans. He asked who in the room knew anything about the subject. He was greeted by silence. He asked again and Greene mentioned her law-school paper and work with the Navajos. Ehrlichman put her in charge, with supervision from the president's special consultant and former law partner Leonard Garment.

The effort culminated, in July of 1970, in Nixon's "Special Message on Indian Affairs." The speech addressed widespread problems of the "first Americans" as "the most deprived and most isolated minority group in our nation." Nixon proposed vast changes in policy. *The New York Times*, in the lead story of the paper one day, characterized them as seeking to give Indians "control over their own destiny." When Kilberg walked into the senior staff meeting after the *Times* coverage, she got a standing ovation. Ehrlichman asked her to remain on the White House staff when her fellowship ended. (After it did, she married Bill Kilberg from the '69-70 class.) In December of 1970, once Congress approved the return to the Taos Pueblo of 48,000 wilderness acres of sacred land, including Blue Lake in the mountains of northern New Mexico, Nixon thanked Bobbie Kilberg in a private moment at the White House ceremony where he signed the bill into law. She stayed on staff until June of 1971, helping to turn proposals of the president into policy.

At 30, she returned to the White House for 18 months as associate counsel to President Gerald R. Ford. At that time, she had one young child. At 44, when that boy was a teenager and she had four

other children, she returned again for four years, first as deputy assistant for public liaison to President George H.W. Bush, then as deputy assistant to the president and director of the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. She also ran for public office twice as a Republican in Virginia. In 1987, before working for Bush, she lost a race to unseat Clive L. DuVal, II, a longtime Democratic state senator. *The Washington Post* called the contest “one of the toughest political races of his life.”

DuVal was night blind and could not easily drive to his evening political events. Kilberg would pick him up, drive him to events, and drive him home. She told the *Post*, “He often joked that our race was so courteous that we got no press coverage.” In 1993, she ran for lieutenant governor of Virginia, losing the

Republican nomination to Michael P. Farris, from the Christian Right, in part because she was not conservative enough. He lost in the general election, in part because, while gracious in her concession to him, she would not endorse Farris and his extreme views.

For more than two decades, beginning in 1998, with her retirement now planned for June of 2020, she has been president and chief executive officer of the Northern Virginia Technology Council, the leading organization representing the economic engine of Virginia, which is considered one of the best states for business in the United States. She has been listed among the “tech titans” of the Washington, D.C. area and as one of its most powerful women and has been honored as the region’s business leader of the year.



Photo from original White House Fellows booklet, 1969-70

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

John Gardner was focused elsewhere during the fifth year of the fellowship. He had grown alarmed that public officials had separated citizens from the national levers of government power, that a small group was controlling those levers, and that huge amounts of money were buying and corrupting votes, politicians, and policies at the highest levels of government. His goal was to help citizens take back their government from special interests, whether farmers or industrialists, by imposing restraints, such as limits on some contributions to political campaigns, so that politicians could represent the interests of citizens and stop kowtowing to donors.

“There is a strong current of impatience running in this country with institutions that aren’t doing their job,” he told *The New Yorker* then. “What has been borne in on me during my years in Washington is that we aren’t going to solve any of our problems with the existing machinery. It isn’t that the cities can’t serve the blacks; they can’t serve the whites, either.” These were the views of a good-government Republican who sought government untainted by patronage or corruption. Arthur Flemming, the Republican chairman of the White House Fellows commission under Nixon, shared this view. He had roles in the federal government from the Democratic Franklin Roosevelt until the Republican Reagan administrations. President William J. Clinton, a Democrat, gave him the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

In 1970, Gardner founded Common Cause, the nonpartisan citizens’ lobby. It attracted more than 100,000 members in its first year of operation and today has 1,120,000 members. (Gardner put Bobbie Kilberg on the organization’s first national governing board.) At 58 that year, he was a tall, soft-spoken, and visionary member of the American establishment, who avoided the limelight yet was prominent enough that, in 1967, he had been the subject of a cover story

of *Time* magazine. In 1968, when Senator Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated, Nelson A. Rockefeller, the liberal Republican governor of New York, had offered the seat to Gardner, also a liberal Republican. He declined. He said that he was too old to learn the moves necessary to succeed as a politician.

More to the point, he wanted to reform the political arena, not be shackled by it. Comparing the United States to France at the start of World War II, which he said was “so weakened by political and social decay that what fell was not a great nation but a house of cards,” he told *The New Yorker*, “We Americans have woven a tight web of institutions that imprison us, limit our decision and scope. To imagine that enlightened conversation will change things is just wrong. You must administer a jolt.”

In 1961, Gardner had become a celebrity in the opinion class when he published a book framing a central American dilemma since the nation’s founding, one that had sharpened since World War II. Called *Excellence: Can We Be Equal and Excellent, Too?*, it was a measured polemic from an insider addressed to the “middle 80 percent” of Americans who regarded themselves as neither liberals nor conservatives, wanted “the system” to work, and increasingly felt it wasn’t achieving anything for them. He wrote, “This book is concerned with the difficult, puzzling, delicate and important business of toning up a whole society, of bringing a whole people to that fine edge of morale and conviction and zest that makes for greatness.” The book helps explain the purpose of the fellowship.

To Gardner, resolving the dilemma required recognizing the different kinds of excellence in every quarter that the nation depended on as a complex technological society (“We must have respect for both our plumbers and our philosophers or neither



The Fellows in Israel. *Photo courtesy of Landis Jones*

our pipes nor our theories will hold water”). It also depended on shared purposes: peace, justice, freedom, individual worth, and equality before the law. He was concerned that America’s growing polarization along lines of class, race, ethnicity, and place—tribes—and that democracy’s leveling effects were yielding the opposite of excellence. The antidote was lifelong learning and opportunity for revitalization for everyone, with every institution contributing to the fulfillment of individuals in it and to its own realization. Leaders—society’s most talented people—had a special obligation to look beyond their own and their institution’s narrow interests, with a sense of civic responsibility.

Gardner became an outsider and a reformer in founding and promoting Common Cause. As *The New York Times* observed in 2002 when he died, he was, “to many Americans, a personification of political reform and volunteerism in democratic

society.” Still, that was just a part of his story. In the four decades before then, he had been a swimming champion at Stanford University, dropped out of college for more than a year to write fiction before realizing that he was not a novelist, and earned his doctorate in psychology at the University of California at Berkeley. He had been a college teacher at Connecticut College for Women and Mt. Holyoke College, served as a military intelligence officer during World War II, and been president of the Carnegie Corporation from 1955 to ’65. In that role, he was a reshaper of American education, for which he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

He had served as secretary of health, education, and welfare in the Democratic Johnson administration for two and a half years, as the only Republican in the cabinet. His work in the government, Gardner said wryly, involved “a series of great opportunities disguised as insoluble problems.” In early 1968,

he quietly resigned his cabinet post because of the Vietnam War and the priority that Johnson was giving it in the federal budget, at the expense of what Gardner saw as overwhelming domestic needs.

A primary Gardner theme was the need for renewal—of individuals, institutions, and society. Another was the need for leaders capable of achieving excellence in their own fields and of spurring others to achieve excellence in other spheres. In 1957, while leading the Carnegie Corporation, in New York City, and, at the same time, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, he wrote a paper about the need for what he called “the Presidential Corps,” a hundred young men and women in each cohort, ranging in age from 21 to 31, bringing “a steady flow of exceptionally gifted and highly motivated young Americans into brief periods of national service.” He titled his idea “A National Service Plan.” His objective was to renew the supply of people, like himself, who were “not getting any younger.” They had gone into government from colleges and universities, law firms, banks, and other institutions during “the world-shaking events of the 1930s & 1940s” to help resolve the fundamental crises of the Great Depression and World War II.

He wrote, “In this country today we turn out skilled professionals by the carload; but neither in the private nor public sectors of our society have we learned to turn out many great leaders and statesmen”—people of “superlative talent, breadth, and statesmanship,” of the caliber of “Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Monroe, Madison, Hamilton, Franklin, and others” who were renowned as polymaths and vigilant about government. He believed that many “qualities crucial to a society’s continued vitality are qualities of youth: flexibility, enthusiasm, readiness to learn.” The criteria for selection would be “intelligence, character, special talents and general promise, and the standards would be so high that this would be as impressive an honor as a young person could win.” Being in this program would be “an important civic and patriotic duty.”

In September of 1964, Eric F. Goldman, a Princeton historian who was a special advisor to Johnson from 1963 to ’66, wrote a memo to the president in which he presented the memo of Gardner. Regarding Gardner’s idea as “excellent,” Goldman nevertheless proposed a few changes: the program should be limited to “a maximum of 15 or 20” people; they should be called “White House Fellows or National Fellows”; and the program should be launched on a trial basis for three years. On the strength of the memos—Goldman’s and Gardner’s—Johnson asked Gardner to make a concrete plan for the White House Fellowships. The program got underway in 1965, with Gardner on a selection commission chaired by David Rockefeller, the chairman and chief executive of Chase Manhattan Bank and, really, the chairman of the American establishment.

Gardner had well-defined ideas about the features of the program. Its “whole success” would depend on “the educational value” of a Fellow’s assignment: “meaningless routine” would make the experience “fruitless.” It was important for each assignment “to make effective the interesting use of exceptional young people.” In addition, Gardner wanted the program to give each Fellow “a strong sense of membership in the group,” in part by introducing them to people “who combined theoretical understanding with first-hand experience in government.” These should be “outstanding leaders in our national life,” guiding Fellows to “discuss the role of leadership in both governmental and non-governmental spheres, the challenges facing this nation in the decades ahead, and the ways in which the nation must move to meet those challenges.” The government should also pay the Fellows a reasonable wage.

Yet neither Gardner nor Goldman included criteria for evaluating the results of the program—what Fellows accomplished after their fellowship. Gardner recognized, approvingly, that some would “choose to remain in government” and said that the civil service should count their time as Fellows toward seniority. His main objective was lofty—to

create “an invaluable natural resource” of leaders in the form of former Fellows. He didn’t specify the kinds of leaders he had in mind, but everything in his description of the program indicated that he envisioned leaders of the nation. He imagined major contributors to national affairs. Goldman proposed as a possible title “National Fellows.”

In his 1990 book *On Leadership*, Gardner ventured a possible reason why he had not been precise in setting benchmarks about what fellows should achieve in their careers to repay the government’s investment and help fulfill the nation’s needs: “There is a romantic notion that the best leaders do not thrust themselves forward but are sought out. In reality, almost all young leaders nominate themselves—over and over, if necessary. They win recognition through a series of acts of presumption.” Stamina, confidence, and judgment-in-action give people advantages as leaders. A combination of courage, nerve, and chutzpah is essential.

From Gardner’s perspective, clearly, the careers of Fellows should be evaluated based on standards of excellence: the key criteria were what they accomplished as national leaders with a devotion to civic responsibility and how they accomplished it. But since would-be leaders nominate themselves, the paths and roles they choose for themselves must determine the fields of engagement and the types of leadership on which they are evaluated.

In some cases, the field and even the type of leadership would be new and hard to assess, like what

Common Cause and Gardner offered in 1970, or what he offered a decade later, when he helped found Independent Sector, a membership organization of the charitable community, to advance the common cause of foundations, philanthropists, not-for-profit organizations, and society. Each was a response to what he called the “beloved and exasperating clutter” of American life.

To Gardner, motivation was the engine driving all other attributes of Fellows—and of society, as well. History teaches us that “a good many” societies

“have gone to sleep because they failed to understand the challenge that was undeniably there.” He warned, “Nothing—neither wealth nor technology, neither talent nor wisdom—will save a society in which motivation continues to deteriorate.”

A primary Gardner theme was the need for renewal—of individuals, institutions, and society.

Bestselling books of his—*Excellence* (1961), *Self-*

Renewal (1964), and *Morale* (1978)—carried his message to a nationwide audience about the responsibility of American citizens for the state of their society and about their diverse abilities to help meet its considerable needs. His success as a leader of the establishment, followed by his surprising switch into an impatient instigator of challenges to it, eclipsed the trait of his that resolved this seeming contradiction. He was a motivator, a lifelong student of individual, institutional, and social psychology. As a leader in thought and action with a stirring record of spurring Americans to do their part in renewing the nation, he considered this his chief mission. The White House Fellowships were the epitome of what he helped create to fulfill it.

THE YEAR

The '69-70 class included five Fellows known as “the kids”: Bobbie Greene, 24; William J. Kilberg, 23; Michael A. Levett, 25; Geoffrey C. Shepard, 24; and Victor H. Sparrow, III, 24. Each had received a JD in 1969—Greene from Yale, Levett from UCLA, and the other three from Harvard. (Woodrow Sneed was the fourth in the class with a Harvard JD.) During the weekend of final interviews at Annapolis, Shepard made a pitch in some of his interviews that benefited all of the kids: the way law firms and other legal institutions trained lawyers in those days, through what amounted to a long apprenticeship best unbroken once begun, meant that the best time for a young lawyer to be a Fellow was right after getting a law degree, before that apprenticeship began in earnest.

One theory about the cluster of unusually young Fellows with newly minted JDs is that the commission that chose them, which Arthur Flemming, then president of Macalester College, chaired, saw them as a solution to the problem of open fellowships that would normally be filled by people in the military. Whatever the reason they were chosen, their class was unusual in having two tiers. The five kids averaged 24 years old. The 13 others averaged 31. The members of the class were cordial to each other and lifelong friendships developed among some of them. But the class did not gel as a group. While they shared many experiences as Fellows, the impact of the year was largely on each of them as individuals.



Photo courtesy of Landis Jones

The year 1968 was one of exceptional turbulence and disorder in America, with the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April and Robert Kennedy in June, violence in more than a hundred American cities and on many campuses, and divisions along lines of race, class, and generation sparking the combustion. Nixon appealed to racial grievances of whites, in particular white southerners, with an overt emphasis on law-and-order and a covert message that black progress needed to slow down. Among the kids, two had especially strong and polarized views about Nixon and what he stood for.

Shepard, a white conservative Republican from California, applied to be a Fellow because he wanted to work for Nixon. Three years earlier, in the spring of Shepard's junior year at California's Whittier College, it awarded him the \$250 Nixon scholarship funded by the Republican Women of Whittier in honor of Nixon as the college's best-known alumnus—equivalent to about \$2,000 today. Shepard had to go to a luncheon to receive it. To his surprise, he ended up sitting next to Nixon on the dais. The former vice president had arranged for the comedian Bob Hope to speak that week at the college's graduation, so Nixon had flown out from New York City where he was living and practicing law to attend both the commencement and the scholarship lunch.

Nixon had done his homework on Shepard, all without consulting him. He charmed the gathering by comparing his own successful race to be president of the student body 32 years earlier with Shepard's recent successful effort—the reason the young man had won the scholarship. Nixon's point was that both had worked with the Whittier administration instead of against it, to solve a campus problem. Two weeks later, Shepard received another \$250 for the scholarship (another \$2,000 in today's dollars). Nixon was apparently so taken with Shepard that he had sent a personal check to the college, doubling Shepard's award. When Nixon won the presidency, Shepard was eager to work for the new administration.

Sparrow, an African-American, was a liberal Democrat from Philadelphia, who had gone to Kenyon College, in Ohio, because his family was poor and the annual difference of \$500 a year in cost made Kenyon more affordable than more prestigious colleges back east where he had also been accepted. He helped form Inner-City Systems, to train minorities in computer operation and coding. He won backing from Ross Perot, the founder of Electronic Data Systems, which went public in 1968 and instantly enhanced Perot's wealth by \$350 million (about \$2.6 billion in 2019).

In the matching process after he was picked as a Fellow, Sparrow had the opportunity to work for the Justice Department. In an interview with Attorney General John N. Mitchell, who had chaired Nixon's '68 campaign, Sparrow recounted recently, the new Fellow said that he would not work for the attorney general because the administration's law-and-order policy was so harsh on African-Americans. He ended up working for Donald H. Rumsfeld, the 37-year-old former congressman from Illinois who was director of the Office of Economic Opportunity and, later, chief of staff for President Gerald R. Ford and secretary of defense for Presidents Ford and George W. Bush.

Sparrow was not the only Fellow in the class who felt compelled to draw a line. Landis Jones, a liberal Democrat who had grown up in Baltimore and had earned a PhD from Emory University, in Atlanta, was an associate professor and chairman of the Political Science Department at the University of Louisville. He was assigned to the office of Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, who had been governor of Maryland; helped Nixon carry crucial border and southern states; and touted law-and-order on behalf of the people he called the "vast faceless majority of the American public in quiet fury" about the country's mess.

When Nixon set up a task force to turn the Republican Party's southern strategy into government policy, Jones thought that he was likely to be assigned to it

because he was a political scientist from a southern university. Regarding the strategy as a surrender to political barbarism and the ruin of the party of Lincoln, he could not stomach the possibility of working on it. He talked over the prospect with his wife. They agreed that, if he got that assignment, he should resign as a Fellow. He went to see C.D. Ward, his mentor in Agnew's office, who was a former aide to Nelson Rockefeller and had been chief lobbyist for the National Association of Counties. Ward absorbed his message and Jones was not named the vice president's representative on the task force.

For Jones, that brush with cutthroat partisanship was an unnerving exception to the agreeable nature of his fellowship experience. Agnew's team knew that he had been a Democratic precinct captain in Louisville, but he got assignments that, in his view, demonstrated their trust in him, including the one he considered his oddest and hardest. Nixon and Agnew had enjoyed the backing of many professional athletes ("Performing under pressure," went a poster bearing their names, "the mark of a professional"). Jones was detailed to the handful of people tasked with rewarding them.

A plum often accorded such personalities was a briefing about policy from an administration big shot—the bigger the celebrity, apparently, the better the backgrounder. A certain professional athlete got his foreign-policy briefing from Henry Kissinger, Nixon's national security advisor, and his domestic-policy briefing from "Professor Dr. Jones." The star, known for his foot speed, turned out to be a slow learner of facts. Jones kept going back through history to bring the athlete forward in his grasp of the material. He ended up as far back as he could go, talking about America's founders. The athlete seemed to know nothing about them.

Jones's view of the kids was that the world was their oyster, serving up pearls of opportunity. Among them, he found himself agreeing regularly with the common sense and genial moderation of Bill Kilberg. On the verge of graduating from Harvard Law, Kilberg

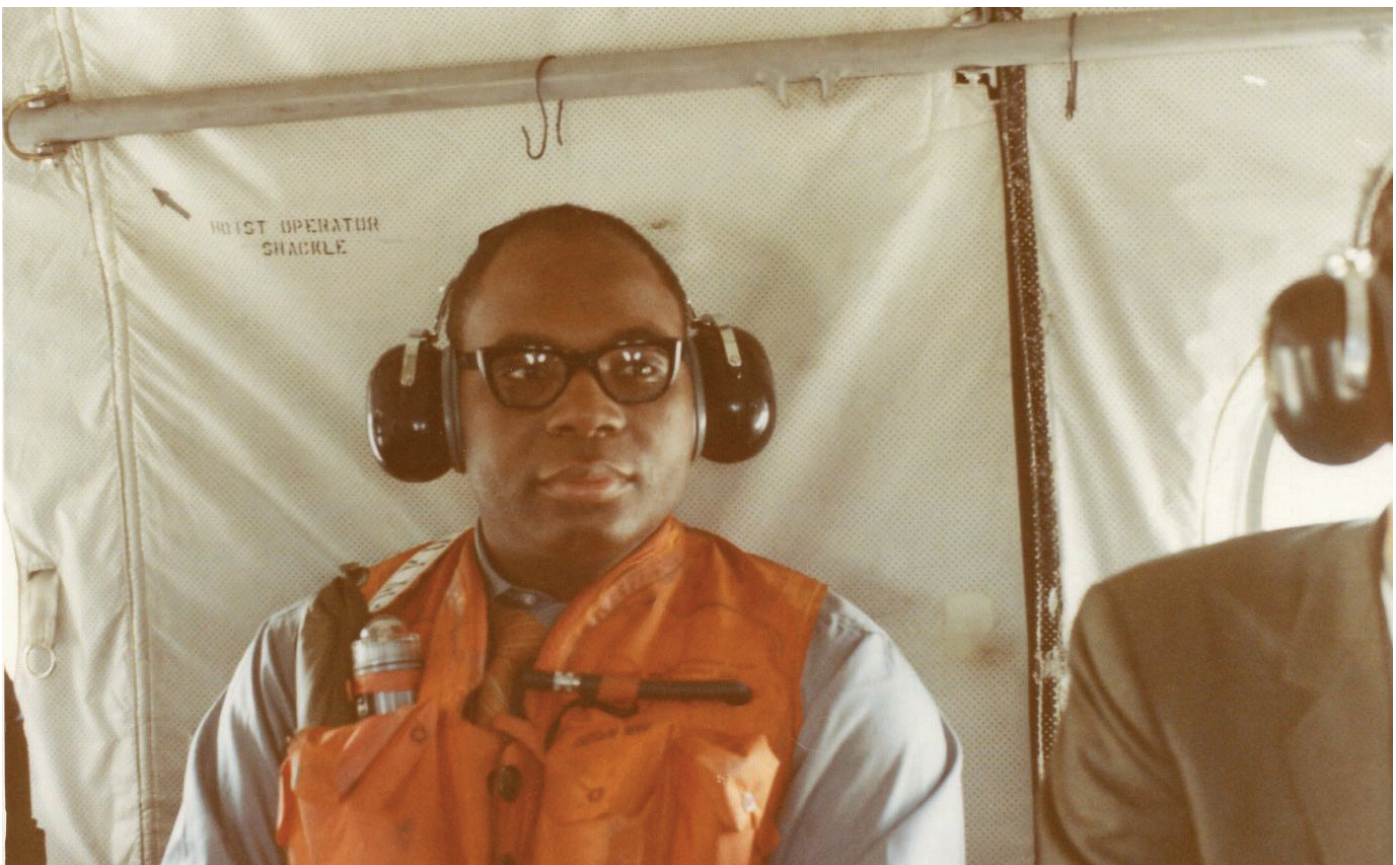
had seen a notice about the fellowship on a school bulletin board. The opportunity intrigued him. He was a member of the Ripon Society, created in 1962 by a small group of Republicans who admired Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt and the inclusiveness and reform they stood for (the society was named for Ripon, Wisconsin, where the Republican party was founded in 1854). Kilberg viewed the organization as a way for Republicans, some liberal, some conservative, to support civil rights.

During the 1968 presidential campaign, because of his Ripon involvement, Kilberg wrote position papers for Nixon and three other Republican candidates whose centrism he admired. In the spring of '68, the Nixon campaign invited Kilberg to meet with Nixon and others. They asked him to work for the campaign. Unrelated to his campaign work, he had an offer to work that summer for Nixon's law firm. He had a clear path in mind for his career, to become a labor lawyer in a major firm in New York City; his major paper in law school had addressed ways to reduce strikes in public employment. He told the next president of the United States that he wanted to stay on track, so he couldn't work full-time for the campaign. Unable to pass up the invitation entirely, however, he worked for the campaign at night.

When he was picked as a Fellow, he got a choice between working for the Commerce and Labor departments. Not surprisingly, he chose Labor. He admired its secretary George P. Shultz: At 48, he was an economist with a specialty in industrial relations and a PhD from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who had been dean of the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business from 1962 until joining the new administration. In 1970, he became the first director of the newly named Office of Management and Budget and, not long after, secretary of the Treasury. When he left government in 1974, he became president of the Bechtel Group, an engineering behemoth. He returned to government in the Reagan administration, as secretary of state.

The message Kilberg got from Shultz and his department team was that working in government was a privilege as public service and that their work needed to be about facts and arguments, not politics. Shultz was a friend of Willard Wirtz, his predecessor as secretary in the Johnson administration. Some of Shultz's team in sensitive positions were holdovers from Wirtz's era. Kilberg found the Shultz team nonideological and nonpartisan, though big labor, then at its zenith, was often at odds with the department since Shultz and James Hodgson, his under-secretary, who spent most of his career at the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation negotiating contracts with labor unions, were thought to favor management. As Kilberg wrote in a reminiscence about that year, "Certainly, there were some significant changes in policy direction." But, he also wrote, "There was no 'we/they' division between the political appointees and career staff and no 'palace guard.'"

Shultz wrote in his memoirs that, when he introduced his team to the press, a reporter asked Hodgson whether he was a Democrat or a Republican. Shultz wrote: "Naïve me. It had never occurred to me to ask him. Hodgson said, 'I'm a Democrat.'" So were others in his high command. Shultz recounted, "When we took office, my team members proved to be very competent. Even some of the skeptics called me to say, 'We like your guys.'" He concluded, "So I realized that competence matters. Party affiliation is not the only thing that counts, though it could be wise to ask about it." A senior aide told Kilberg, in so many words, "You're going to get phone calls because people have a problem and the switchboard connects them to you because you're listed as a special assistant. They'll need information or advice about how to navigate the bureaucracy. Take those phone calls and listen to the people. Help them solve their problems. Don't foist them off on someone else."



Judge Dickson on the helicopter before landing aboard the USS Independence. *Photo courtesy of Landis Jones*

Responding to those queries gave Kilberg a chance to learn how the department worked, from top to bottom. At the outset, the weightiest queries and lessons came from Shultz. Kilberg wrote speeches for him and represented him on task forces, like one about equal opportunity in employment. When the Kilbergs got engaged in the West Wing of the White House in June of 1970, they recalled that Shultz quipped, “This is carrying fellowship a bit too far.”

Toward the end of Bill’s fellowship, he was asked to become the general counsel of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, an independent agency founded in 1947 to provide mediation services to industry, government, and community agen-

cies around the world, with the resolution of labor disputes its main task. Kilberg was the service’s entire legal department. In 1971, he was asked to join the separate general counsel’s office for the department, the Office of the Solicitor, and was put in charge of civil rights. He represented the Office of Federal Contract Compliance, which was carrying out a program of affirmative action designed by the Johnson administration and expanded by the Nixon administration. (Nixon’s affirmative-action policy largely made possible the engineering programs for minorities that Percy Pierre developed.) In 1973, when Kilberg was 26, he became the department’s solicitor, or chief legal officer, and served in that post under Nixon and under Gerald Ford after



Bill Kilberg introducing Secretary of Labor George Shultz. *Photo courtesy of Landis Jones*

Nixon resigned, until the end of Ford's administration in 1977. In his reminiscence, he wrote, "I have the honor still to be the youngest person ever to be confirmed by the Senate to a sub-Cabinet position."

In the summer of 1968, Michael Levett was living in Venice, California, confident about his next move. He was planning to graduate from law school the following spring and go back to work for Alaska's Democratic senator Ernest Gruening in Washington, D.C. Gruening had become Alaska's first territorial governor in 1939. After successfully politicking in 1958 for it to become the 49th state, he was elected to the Senate: Alaska was admitted to the union the same day he was sworn in, in January of 1959. In August of '68, however, because Gruening was 81 and vulnerable as one of only two senators who had opposed the Vietnam War in a Senate vote, he lost a primary election for the Democratic nomination to a 38-year-old real estate developer. Levett called Gruening and said, "So now what do I do?" The senator told him about the fellowship and introduced him to a former Fellow from Alaska as a source of background about the program. The combination of the strong impression Levett got from the former fellow that he was not fellowship material and Gruening's enthusiastic support moved Levett to apply.

As a law student, he was the editor-in-chief of the *UCLA Bruin*, a vociferous critic in print of California's conservative Republican governor Ronald Reagan, and a member of the new far-left Peace and Freedom Party, which had originated in California. He had created and edited a newspaper in Chicago during the 1968 Democratic National Convention put out by a bunch of editors from other major college papers; that week, tens of thousands of young people protested in the streets, against America's ossified and, to them, morally bankrupt politics and, in particular, against the war.

He presented himself as what he was: a representative of student activists who was a skillful communicator about his beliefs and had a knack for mediating

between warring groups. That's how Charles E. Young, the chancellor of UCLA, saw him, too. In a letter of recommendation, he wrote of Levett, "His is a voice of sanity in what many people think is a completely insane world." He also had a mordant sense of humor. In one interview for the fellowship, Levett was asked who he wanted to work for if he was picked. He replied: Spiro Agnew. "No one wants to work for Agnew," the questioner said. "Why do you?" "Because he is a powerful man and I think I can take over his mind." He broke up the room, was picked as a Fellow, and, in the event, did not try to work for Agnew.

Levett called Gruening to ask who he should work for. Gruening said, Walter J. Hickel. He was another Alaskan, called Wally in the state, a former Golden Gloves boxing champion and self-made multi-millionaire who, as the state's governor, had put Nixon's name into nomination at the '68 Republican Convention and had been nominated to be secretary of the interior. He faced outraged opposition for the post, in part on the supposed grounds that he was an anti-environmentalist. Though he was confirmed, the fallout from the hostility briefly led Levett to doubt Gruening's counsel. "Trust me," Levett recently recalled Gruening saying. "He is going to surprise everyone because he sees himself as the secretary of the interior of all the people." Hickel quickly showed himself to be an ardent, though idiosyncratic, environmentalist.

Several other Fellows that year were treated, wherever they worked, as Fellows rather than Nixon loyalists—in but not of the inner circle. From the first day, Hickel made clear that Levett had to choose between being one of his assistants or being a Fellow. He chose the former. Far from a Nixon loyalist, he had been raised to disdain the man. As a 16-year-old in 1960, he had supported John F. Kennedy in his race against Nixon in large part because he wanted Nixon to lose. But he represented Hickel on the President's Advisory Council on Executive Organization, and Nixon was now the president. It was called the Ash

Commission, after its chair, Roy Ash, co-founder and president of a conglomerate called Litton Industries. While it recommended that the Bureau of the Budget should be strengthened as the Office of Management and Budget, its best-remembered recommendation was the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, founded in 1970, the year Earth Day was started, as well.

With the birth of the modern environmental movement, the question for the Ash Commission was whether the government should create a new environmental agency to combat pollution or unify in a new super-agency all programs dealing with the environment and natural resources, including much of the Department of the Interior, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency at the Department of Commerce, and so forth. Levett favored a super-agency, because it would be stronger and more effective. Initially, so did Ash. Eventually, Ash changed his mind and approved the creation of the EPA to “repair the damage already done, and to establish new criteria to guide us in the future” for dealing with the environmental crisis (“Even the fact that Americans annually junk 7 million cars, 100 million tires, 20 million tons of paper, 28 billion bottles, and 48 billion cans, does not reveal the dimensions of the problem”). The outcome was a good example of how the pragmatic Nixon administration balanced interests in a liberal era of law- and policy-making.

One of Levett’s tasks was to work on educational initiatives for youth involving the environment. The most prominent was Earth Day, on April 22, 1970, which the White House wanted the Interior Department not to take part in officially. Hickel ignored that position, and about a thousand department staffers took part in campus gatherings around the country. A couple of weeks later, Hickel held a regularly scheduled senior staff meeting. The day before, in response to a protest at Kent State University, in Ohio, against America’s recent invasion of Cambodia, members of the Ohio National Guard shot and killed four students and wounded nine

others. At the meeting, Hickel mentioned the four dead students and asked Levett, as one of his youth experts, to explain what was going on in the country.

Afterward, Hickel asked Levett and another assistant to compose a memo on the subject, which sparked the secretary, the next day, to send an open letter to the president. It began like this: “I believe this Administration finds itself, today, embracing a philosophy which appears to lack appropriate concern for the attitude of a great mass of Americans—our young people. Addressed either politically or philosophically, I believe we are in error if we set out consciously to alienate those who could be our friends.”

The New York Times followed up with an account that started: “‘Why Wally Hickel?’ That was the question asked all over this city today.” It went on: “[H]ow was it that this man, regarded by some as so square, should be the one member of the Cabinet to write a letter to President Nixon saying bluntly that his Administration was consciously alienating the young people of America by failing to communicate with them?”

The heart of the answer was divulged as follows: “Mr. Hickel has undoubtedly been considerably influenced by three young assistants—Malcolm Roberts; Michael Levett, a graduate of the University of California law school at Los Angeles and a White House Fellow on assignment to the Interior Department; and Pat Ryan, formerly Mr. Hickel’s special assistant when he was Governor of Alaska. All of these assistants, it was said, have grave doubts about Vietnam policy and all have a sympathetic understanding of the problems of the young.”

The Nixon White House hated the attention Hickel got, as John Ehrlichman’s memoirs later spelled out. Within two weeks, Ehrlichman wrote, “it was definite”—Nixon would fire Hickel. Nixon’s inner circle didn’t agree with the *Times* account of who was responsible for the letter. Ehrlichman: “Bob Halde- man’s staff had reported that Hickel’s letter had actu-

ally been drafted by a young White House Fellow, Mike Levitt (sic). ... Levitt went on Haldeman's list of things to take care of." When Hickel asked the White House to approve his decision to keep Levett on as an assistant, the paperwork came back instead saying that Levett had "retired."

Levett summarized his year working for Hickel like this: "Lost the fight over EPA. Helped with the Earth Day battle. Contributed to the expansion of 'environment' beyond 'conservation' within the department and perhaps beyond. Succeeded at supporting the Secretary—he won more than he lost until he lost big."

The non-kids were much farther along in their careers than the kids.

Nelson Dorny was assigned to work for Clifford Hardin, the secretary of agriculture, who had previously been chancellor of the University of Nebraska. It took him a while to find a suitable task in part because Hardin's executive secretary, as Dorny wrote recently, "tried to prevent me from wasting the Secretary's valuable time," which "made it difficult for me to discuss with him how I could make a meaningful contribution."

After a couple of months, Dorny realized that the department had about 130,000 employees spread across 25 agencies, and that there was no digest to keep Hardin up to date on their top issues. Dorny arranged for each agency to send him a weekly report. He culled from them a one-page summary of the issues ("a' items and 'b' items") that the secretary needed to know about. "You saved my hide a number of times," Hardin later told him, and treated him like a special assistant.

An entry in Dorny's diary for a day in February of 1970 included: "The weekly reports are getting to be a drag. I came to work this morning with the same feeling. My contact with the Secretary was poor and artificial. By the end of the day I was elated. I spent

the day managing the schedule for the Secretary, was with him in meetings, rushed him between meetings, squeezed in his mail and extra appointments, and participated in a press interview. My involvement with him had a purpose."

Richard Ramsden, in response to a 2008 survey of former Fellows, wrote, "After the selection in June, 1969, I was requested to come to Washington to meet H.R. (Bob) Haldeman, chief of staff to the President, who had decided he would like to have a Fellow and wished to meet me. Why me? I don't know—he was probably more comfortable with my background than some of the others. Also, he knew well Peter Flanigan, a Dillon Read partner with whom I had worked closely, and who had joined the administration as an Assistant to the President. While it was not my choice—I had put down what is now known as OMB, as well as Treasury and HEW—being brought up properly I said I would be pleased to work for him."

His first two months in the White House, he never saw Haldeman. He got a couple of silly assignments—like, "are Nixon photographs up in all the US embassies and consulates around the world and are Johnson's down?" One day, he met Donald Rumsfeld, who was director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, but also an assistant to the president. He would attend senior staff meetings in the morning, work at his other job all day, and come back to his White House office late in the afternoon. He said Ramsden could use his office and then asked him what the White House had him doing. Ramsden: "I said not much, I made more decisions by 9 every morning as a partner on Wall Street than I do here in a week." Rumsfeld asked Ramsden to work for him at the Office of Economic Opportunity. Ramsden said, "OK, but you have to get me out of here." Rumsfeld did.

According to Ramsden, the Office of Economic Opportunity "was a wacky place with poverty groups storming the building once every few days

shouting where were their grants and calling us a few names not given to us by our mothers.”

For the whole class of Fellows, the year unfolded as a blur of invitations to occasions festive, ceremonial, and educational: from the ambassador of Japan to Washington and his wife for cocktails at the embassy; from the Business-Government Relations Council, which represented big businesses like U.S. Steel, to a reception and dinner; from the National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, to four seminars on American art; from James Rouse, whose company was a pioneer in the new-towns concept and had built the community of Columbia, Maryland, outside Washington, D.C.; and many more.

By that year, 103 people had been Fellows—95 men and eight women. With few women and with many of the men married, it was not surprising that there

was a wives’ educational program to complement the regular one. “Welcome to your year in Washington, D.C.,” announced a pamphlet by the wives of ’68-69 for those of ’69-70: “It will be one of the most memorable and exciting years of your life.” Sharon Talley, married then to Wilson Talley, commented recently, “It was a different time, and wives were clearly important to their husbands’ climb up the ladder of success, so I suspect the theory was that we should have a similar understanding of the workings of government.”

She kept a diary about the year, with the encouragement of wives of the Fellows of the previous year. “Salary virtually confirmed,” she wrote in September: “almost \$26k”—on the order of \$181,500 today. (Current Fellows are paid around \$140,000.) “To Folger Shakespeare Library,” she recorded one day in impeccable diarese: “turns out to be considerably



Photo from original White House Fellows booklet, 1969-70.

more than just a library—has a collection of all sorts of things related to Shakespeare.” And: “To Supreme Court. Sat in the front row.”

The wives’ group, Sharon Talley remembered, once convened at the apartment of Landis Jones and his wife Arnita to meet Jeane Dixon, a psychic, famous nationwide for having predicted, four years before it happened, that John F. Kennedy would be elected president and that he would die in office. Talley had a memory of Bonnie Armacost, Michael Armacost’s wife, asking Dixon what her husband’s future held. Dixon declared that Michael would “eventually” return to teaching. That is exactly what happened—a generation later, when he retired to Stanford University. The Fellows’ wives also received a tour of the Central Intelligence Agency in Langley, Virginia. Spouses of CIA personnel were irritated that they had never been accorded the same perquisite, *The Washington Post* reported, in a story titled “CIA Wives Angry Over Tour Given to White House Wives.”

In November of 1969, half of the Fellows went on a tour of Iran, Kuwait, Egypt, Greece, and Israel, the first foreign excursion for any class. Of Teheran, Dorny wrote in his journal, “The view from the hotel is much like that of Salt Lake City, including the mountains.” Of Athens: “I find it hard to believe that I am standing next to the remains of the Parthenon, in view of Mars Hill spoken of by the Apostle Paul ...” The word among the Fellows was that the women and the Jews, confined to the other half of the group and due to make a trip to Europe a few months later, would not have been welcome in Saudi Arabia. The country was then dropped from the itinerary.

At the time, the U.S. had no diplomatic relations with Egypt, so the group traveled around Cairo in cars used by the Spanish embassy, which handled matters in the country for its North American ally. At one point, Judge Dickson, who had been the starting fullback on University of Minnesota national champion and Rose Bowl-winning football teams, was mobbed by Egyptian kids. They chanted,

“Muhammad Ali! Muhammad Ali!,” mistaking Dickson for the great heavyweight boxing champion. The second half of the group went on a trip to Europe (and not the Middle East).

The fellowship office said that everyone was required to have a credit card to pay for expenses, which the government would reimburse. Charles McArthur understood that some other Fellows (particularly academics and the kids) couldn’t qualify in time for the trip (if at all), so he obtained cards on behalf of each class member, by personally guaranteeing their lines of credit.

In February of 1970, the Fellows and their families were invited to attend a Sunday religious service at the White House. Shortly before the event, the president arrived by helicopter from Camp David and made some opening remarks. This time, Dickson, seated with his wife in the front row, in front of cabinet members and congressmen, was mistaken for an African ambassador.

In April, on the way to a launch at Cape Kennedy, in Florida, traveling in a twin-engine government plane of the Federal Aviation Authority, they stopped where McArthur lived, in Okeechobee, Florida. A red carpet unfurled to greet the plane and a high-school band serenaded McArthur’s guests. He did not own the town, but he certainly seemed to: to the Fellows, with his thousands of acres and cows, it looked like a company town.

In July of 1969, before the Fellows had begun their year, the astronaut Neil Armstrong “planted the first human footprint on the lunar crust,” as *The New York Times* put it, and took what he called “one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” The achievement was spectacular proof of what America and its government were capable of. The majesty of that moment made the specialness of the year for the ’69-70 class of White House Fellows seem beyond compare.



Vice President Spiro Agnew and Wernher Von Braun at the launch of Apollo 13. *Photo courtesy of Landis Jones*



The launch of Apollo 13. *Photo courtesy of Landis Jones*

The Fellows went to Cape Kennedy to witness the launch of Apollo 13, which was scheduled to make the third moon landing (the second had happened the week before Thanksgiving in November of '69). The mission aborted after an oxygen tank exploded and crippled the spacecraft. If anything, seeing the launch impressed class members even more than

the T.V. coverage they had watched of the landmark landing the previous July: the scale of the rocket and the power of its lift-off were breathtaking, as was the daring of the science and technology. But the failure seemed to shock no one in the class: government was powerful and sometimes great; it was also sometimes markedly imperfect.

AFTER THE FELLOWSHIP

Each of the class members I spoke with described with pride much of what he or she did after the fellowship.

At the University of Pennsylvania, Nelson Dorny taught undergraduates and graduate students, supervised PhD dissertations, and ran a research center and maintained its funding. He chaired the Systems Engineering Department and served as the undergraduate dean of the engineering school. He invented courses and developed labs to test ideas about systems and wrote books to capture the concepts. With a colleague, he did research in high-resolution microwave imaging and started a company, called Interspec, which made the first high-tech, low-cost ultrasound equipment for use in doctors' offices. They took the company public, grew it to 750 employees, and merged it with another company that was sold to Philips, the multinational conglomerate.

Dorny had a parallel life as a leader in the Mormon church in increasingly senior positions, supporting the spiritual life of people who shared his faith. At 29, he had been recognized as a spiritual leader—in church terms, he was ordained a high priest. At 46, he was ordained a bishop—equivalent to a minister or priest in another Christian church. He led a congregation in Philadelphia, directing a staff of 200 volunteers. He presided over baptisms and ordinations of priests, managed youth programs, performed

marriages, and counseled church members about job loss, addiction, and other burdens. He became a leader of all congregations in the Delaware Valley, training other leaders and speaking to congregations of 300 to 3,000 members each week.

William Kilberg rose to the top of his law firm, Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher, which began in Los Angeles in 1890, added offices in London and Paris in the 1970s, and is now, with more than 1,300 lawyers, among the leading global law firms. He was the partner in charge of the Washington, D.C. office, a member of the firm's executive committee, and, for seven years, a member of its five-person management committee. He was also the senior partner in the group that practices labor and employment law. He completed his service as solicitor of the Labor Department in 1977: while he has not served again full-time in government, he has been president of the College of Labor and Employment Lawyers and received professional and community accolades.

Michael Levett had two careers, which came on the heels of a series of immersions in political campaigning, documentary filmmaking, and newspaper reporting in southern California—all of which came before he was 35. The first career, which lasted a dozen years, was as a businessman in the movie business (for Lucasfilm, Ltd. and the Dino De Laurentiis Corporation), helping the *Star Wars* series and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* become global block-

busters, and then developing entertainment, cultural, commercial, and trade ventures in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet states.

The second career, beginning in 1994 and continuing until recently, was in international economic development at the intersection of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. In 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, President George H.W. Bush started the Citizens Democracy Corps to aid countries of the former Soviet Union develop market economies. In '94, after serving as founding president of a new organization called Business for Social Responsibility, Levett became chief executive officer of Citizens Democracy Corps, concentrating on efforts in former Soviet Republics and in Central and Eastern Europe before expanding into Africa. A lot of the work focused on the critical role of supply chains in building local economies in developing countries—for farming in Jamaica and the oil-and-gas industry in Azerbaijan and Angola, or the interrelated sectors (hotels, restaurants, transportation, construction, and more) that are essential for the tourism industry in Nigeria's Cross River state. In 2002, the organization changed its name to Citizens Development Corps and expanded worldwide. Levett made five work trips in Iraq between '03 and '07.

After 16 years as chief executive, Levett became a senior director there and has done related projects for the Center on Strategic and International Studies, in Washington, D.C. where he lives. Citizens Development Corps was called CDC Development Solutions after 2010 and then was renamed PYXERA Global. For the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Levett went on fact-finding missions in the U.S. and in several other countries to contribute to a 2018 report on the crisis of people around the globe who are forced from their homes and often countries by armed conflict, persecution, political oppression, famine or insecure supplies of food, climate change, and other severe problems. The number of people in almost every region of the world who have been forced to become migrants

by conflict alone is almost 66 million. That number is projected to multiply by a factor of three or even five by 2030.

Victor Sparrow spent much of the last decade working abroad, as well, including as the academic guidance counselor at Hangzhou No. 14 High School, in China. As he put it in a reminiscence about the fellowship, though, "I must be the only former White House Fellow who was trained and received a commercial driver's license courtesy of the Federal Prison System—it was necessary to enable me to drive shipments of food over three (3) days (furniture, dairy and meat products) from Lompoc [a low-security prison in California], to Florence, Arizona, to Pleasanton, California and back to Lompoc." He served a two-year sentence there after being convicted in federal court, in 1982, on four federal criminal charges for conspiring with others to direct and manage a sham-marriage ring so that people who weren't Americans could illegally obtain permanent status in the United States. In his reminiscence, Sparrow said that naiveté led to his criminal troubles and his very different path. He also said, "Perhaps, I was too young and unsophisticated to participate" in the fellowship.

Judge Dickson also worked overseas. When he finished the fellowship and his job at the Defense Department, he went to work for International Business Machines Corporation, or IBM. He started out in Manhattan, working for the company's world-trade corporation, which was created to make IBM's foreign subsidiaries work cohesively, and then moved to Paris. After five years there, he came back to the U.S. and began to work for the company on the American side of the business. That included a stint as the administrative assistant to Nicholas Katzenbach, the company's general counsel, who had been deputy attorney general in the Kennedy administration and attorney general and under secretary of state in the Johnson administration. He spent about 30 years with IBM until he retired.

Dickson considered the fellowship “one of the best opportunities a person in my position at my age and at that time in history could have had.” He interpreted the program’s purpose as developing leaders throughout American society with an understanding of how government works: “Let’s bring young potential leaders into the program, let them learn about the government at the level of a cabinet secretary and let them have daily contact with their peers who are in every other branch of the government, working for the head of that branch or department, like the State Department or at the White House. Let them have exposure to their leaders coming up. Let them understand about the government at that high level. Then let’s have those people go back to wherever they came from, be it business or be it with a health organization that’s at a local level. Let them go back to where they came from and then they will have a better understanding of how the government can work with them, on whatever they want to do.”

Geoffrey Shepard was an intense consumer of the educational program, concentrating on who the key players in the Nixon administration were and what they were trying to accomplish. He felt that he was the only Fellow strongly pulling for the president’s success. At the start of the fellowship, John Ehrlichman was a speaker at the Fellows’ orientation seminar at Airlie House, in Virginia. Ehrlichman was a native of the Pacific Northwest, where Shepard had planned to go to work before he was picked to be a Fellow. The day of the orientation, they sat together at lunch and talked about Seattle law firms. Ehrlichman met again with the class toward the end of the fellowship year. He and Shepard fell into step as they walked to lunch and Ehrlichman asked about Shepard’s plans: Was he going back to Seattle to practice law? Shepard recently recalled his response: “What I’d really like to do is to work on the White House staff, but I don’t even know how to apply.” “That’s easy,” Ehrlichman said. “You come and see me.”



Photo courtesy of Landis Jones

Shepard spent five years on the Domestic Council staff, becoming one of four associate directors after Nixon's 1972 re-election. His policy focus was law-and-order. For the last ten months of the Nixon administration, he functioned as principal deputy to J. Fred Buzhardt, Nixon's Watergate defense counsel. He transcribed White House tapes and, in April of 1974, was responsible for the final transcriptions of 50 or so conversations sent to the House Judiciary Committee investigating the Watergate break-ins and cover-up and related crimes. On July 24 that year, the day the Supreme Court ruled in *U.S. v. Nixon* that Nixon had to turn over additional tapes, Shepard was the third person (after Nixon and Buzhardt) to listen to the tape of June 23, 1972 known as "the smoking-gun tape" because it revealed Nixon's knowledge of and involvement in the break-ins and cover-up.

After a long and successful career as a lawyer and an executive in the insurance industry, Shepard returned to being a defender of Nixon and his administration. For the past 40 years, he has hosted annual reunions of the policy planning staffs in the Nixon White House. He has also produced documentaries on Nixon's public-policy initiatives, co-sponsored by the Richard Nixon Foundation and the National Archives and broadcasted on C-SPAN, and has written two books about Watergate and the prosecution of Nixon. His overarching project is to help the president and his administration get the credit they are due for their accomplishments in domestic and foreign affairs, and to move out of the enduring shadow of Watergate.

In *The Real Watergate Scandal*, published in 2015, Shepard wrote, "I believe that Nixon was unfairly hounded from office and that the public has been misled about the Watergate scandal." He holds that the conventional and widely documented wisdom that the American justice system prevailed in holding Nixon and others to account for the Watergate break-ins and related law-breaking is wrong. He alleged that Judge John Sirica, whose order that

White House tapes about the Watergate scandal be released to prosecutors led to Nixon's resignation from the presidency in August of 1974, violated ethical and legal standards, as did the Watergate special prosecutors Archibald Cox and Leon Jaworski. The book carries the following dedication: "To the outstanding group of men and women who served honorably and with distinction in the Nixon administration."

In the 50 years since the end of the fellowship for the '69-70 class, Shepard has not missed an annual leadership conference of the White House Fellows Association. For 2018-19, he is president of the White House Fellows Foundation and Association.

Landis Jones returned from the fellowship to the University of Louisville with a new scholarly focus on executive leadership and the U.S. presidency, comparing presidents with prime ministers, governors, and mayors. He created courses on the presidency at the university and taught a seminar on the subject at the U.S. Military Academy as a visiting professor. In the 1980s and '90s, Jones was also a commissioner and vice mayor of a small suburb of Louisville and was chairman of Common Cause in Kentucky. In 1994, in the Kentucky district encompassing Louisville, he ran unsuccessfully for Congress.

In retirement, he was a board member and later director of the National Peace Foundation. Now defunct, it grew out of a utopian effort by World War II combat veterans and grassroots activists to create a Department of Peace in the U.S. government and a U.S. Peace Academy to complement the service academies. That led to the creation of the U.S. Institute of Peace in 1984, whose budget in 2018 was \$37.8 million, with projects in 51 countries to help turn bloody conflict into peace.

In 1977, when Jones was 40, President Carter chose him to direct the President's Commission on White House Fellowships, with John Gardner

the chairman of the commission. Jones hired Olga Pierre, Percy's wife, to be his deputy in running the program. Jones had admired Gardner since before his fellowship, when his father worked for Gardner at the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare as an employee of the Social Security Administration. Gardner and Jones met about every two weeks or so to talk about the fellowship. As fellow social scientists and, in Jones's words, government addicts, they regularly evaluated it: What could they do to make cabinet members stakeholders in the quality of a fellow's experience, when, by the mid-1970s, virtually every cabinet member had a cluster of loyal special assistants, many with credentials and accomplishments as impressive as those of the fellows?

What could the president do to get cabinet members more invested in the program?

Gardner made plain his view that the program should continue only if it developed leaders. His favorites among the alumni, Jones recalled, were "the aggressive take-charge types and smart women." Jones had wider benchmarks but shared Gardner's belief in the program's mission. Of the 20 former fellows (out of the program's 814 alumni, 761 were living as of September 2019) who have so far received the annual Legacy of Leadership Award in honor of Gardner from the alumni organization of the White House Fellows, four have come from the four classes Jones oversaw.

LEADERS

Today, the statement of purpose of the White House Fellows program remains general and much as it was when Gardner designed and implemented it: the program is "intended to give gifted and highly motivated Americans early in their careers a chance to work at the highest levels of the federal government." The measures of success for former fellows remain undefined, as they were.

One striking omission from the White House memo proposing the Fellows program in 1964, quoting Gardner and including additional thoughts by Eric Goldman, is the word "community." In a six-and-a-third page memo, it is never used. From its inception, the program asked applicants about their community involvement as a measure of their interest in service and as a means of assessing their leadership potential ("Most Significant Achievement – Community Service"). But everything in Gardner's description of the program indicated that he envisioned leaders of the nation. He imagined development of major contributors to national affairs.

Because the program today does not address this issue directly, it's debatable what the measures of success are now for former Fellows. But the statement of purpose includes a clue that they are broader than when Gardner proposed and implemented the program: "Alumni often go on to 'pay it forward' by providing leadership in their fields of endeavor and their communities—however they define them (business, law, politics, medicine, military, academia, non-profits, etc.)."

Sometime between the start of the program 55 years ago and today, the program's articulation of its mission changed from what Gardner originally wrote—whether it broadened or crystallized. Yet it reflects his focus on community in the last decade of his life, when, from 1994 to '96, he chaired the National Civic League, a hundred years after a pantheon of outstanding Americans, including Theodore Roosevelt, founded it as the National Municipal League to deal with corruption and incompetence in city government.

Gardner had long used the concept of community as a talisman in his writing, in an abstract way as an organizing principle of human affairs and as an insignia of shared identity. But having had his hopes possibly dashed about renewing national government as a renewer of the American spirit from the top down, he had shifted his focus to other organizations, including major foundations, large and small nonprofit organizations, and local communities. He sounded more like a champion of widely dispersed than concentrated national power: “A movement to wake up America would have to be like the nation itself—not monolithic, not hierarchical, not dependent on a powerful, charismatic leader rousing the masses, but upon leaders dispersed through all segments of society and down through all levels of society, as well as an even greater number of vital and responsible citizens who share leadership tasks. It cannot be centrally directed or tidy. Local effort is essential. Local responsibility is crucial.” This time, Gardner used the word community dozens of times: “We must regenerate the sense of community from the ground up.”

Gardner was 82 when he offered this challenge, close to the current average age of the older cohort in the 1969-70 Fellows class. A quarter of a century after they were Fellows, he had shifted his attention to America’s grassroots. It is likely that, as his emphasis shifted, he either influenced or reinforced the widening of the fellowship’s lens to encompass leadership “in fields of endeavor and communities” as well as leadership of the nation, in an example of the kind of renewal of understanding and purpose that he had long encouraged institutions and individuals to seek.

By that standard, a strong majority of the fellows in the ’69-70 class fulfilled their promise as fellows and amply returned the government’s investment in them. For Nelson Dorny, for example, only two major things happened in his life as a result of his fellowship: as an incentive to return to Penn, he got tenure five years after becoming an assis-

tant professor, rather than the usual seven; and the following year, he served as a member of the Philadelphia regional panel that interviewed and selected candidates for that year’s final interviews for a White House Fellowship.

Dorny never worked again in the federal government, never worked in state or local government, and never got involved in politics. When he returned to the university, some of his colleagues assumed that he had spent his time as a Fellow learning how to get money out of Washington. The thought never entered his mind. He went there to learn about governing, so he could take that knowledge back to the university and help others—administrators, academic colleagues, and students—better understand what it takes to govern and what government can and cannot do well.

Yet for Dorny, the eye-opening experience matured him. The statement of purpose about the fellowship included: “It is essential to the healthy functioning of our system that we have in the nongovernmental sector [emphasis added] a generous supply of leaders who have an understanding—gained at firsthand—of the problems of national government.” Dorny sought and took that from his year in Washington.

Still, while there is now a broader conception of the kinds of leaders for the fellowship to help develop than Gardner initially articulated, the program has never stopped aiming as high as he envisioned to develop national leaders like ones long celebrated by the program: Doris Kearns Goodwin, the bestselling author and former Harvard professor of government; Judge M. Margaret McKeown of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit and a leader in judicial ethics, in judicial efforts to address workplace harassment, and in judicial reform around the world; Colin L. Powell, the retired four-star Army general who is a former chairman of the joint chiefs of staff and a former secretary of state; and others of similarly exceptional public accomplishment.

Michael Armacost, Bobbie Kilberg, and Percy Pierre are in that tier of leaders and Pierre especially exemplifies both the sense of responsibility for bringing national greatness to reality and the commitment to community that forms a bridge between Gardner’s initial vision and the current aspiration of the fellowship.

In a chapter of the 2015 book *Changing the Face of Engineering: The African American Experience*, Percy Pierre wrote as “one of the principal architects of what became known as the ‘national minority engineering effort.’” He led a 1973 National Academy of Engineering Symposium that launched the effort and, in less than a decade, saw remarkable results. As he reported, “from 1974 to 2011, the percentage increases of African American engineering graduates at the bachelor’s level, the master’s level, and the doctoral level were 365% (743 to 3,457), 714% (153 to 1,246), and 1308% (12 to 169), respectively, while the percentage increases for all races/ethnicities at these degree levels were 104% (41,407 to 84,599), 187% (15,885 to 45,589), and 200% (3,362 to 10,086), respectively.”

In other words, for African Americans the increases were much greater than the increases for all races and ethnicities—by 3.5 times at the bachelor’s level, 3.8 times at the master’s level, and 6.5 times at the doctoral level. He was not content with these increases, writing, “African Americans remain considerably underrepresented in engineering

compared to their representation in both the general population and the college-age population.” But he recognized the achievement that the increases represented. Many of the African Americans and members of other minority groups in these cohorts were students and even protégés of his, and most were beneficiaries of his vision, persistent effort, and remarkable accomplishment over 50 years.

At a dinner honoring Pierre, Antoine M. Garibaldi, a protégé and the president of the University of Detroit-Mercy, explained, “I have modeled much of my own mentoring of students and colleagues in the same way that Percy has assisted me—being available at all times and giving advice in a calm, measured and declarative manner. I learned the importance of developing a list of pros and cons when making important decisions and determining which side had the most positive outcomes; and letting others know that you really want something because opportunities are not going to occur unless someone knows that you are interested.”

Leaders are exceptional people who choose to be leaders. They extend their reach by investing in others. They motivate others to join their quest and, if they are of a high caliber, to help fulfill some great purpose. In doing that with measurable and wide benefits, Pierre has pursued the kind of excellence that Gardner exhorted America to seek and realized his vision for a White House Fellow.



