



The Nixon-Presley Papers

BY BOB GREENE

FIRST OF ALL, I am not making this up.

I realize that is a strange phrase with which to begin a column. But once you read on, you will understand its necessity.

By now, many people are aware of the fact that in December 1970, Elvis Presley visited President Richard Nixon in the Oval Office. A White House photographer was present and snapped twenty-eight shots during that meeting. When a syndicated newspaper columnist, who shall remain nameless, reported last spring that the government was offering the Nixon-Presley pictures for sale to the public, they immediately became the most requested photographs in the history of the National Archives, far outdistancing a rare portrait of Abraham Lincoln.

The details of how that meeting came about, though, are less well known. The National Archives and Records Administration in Washington has more than forty million pages of documents from the Nixon administration in storage—including all the paper work related to the Nixon-Presley visit.

I requested a set of that paper work. I present the documents here with a minimum of editorial comment.

Again—this is not satire. This is real; these are the real documents on file with the government.

IT STARTED WITH A LETTER written by Presley to Nixon. The letter covered five pages of American Airlines stationery. Presley's handwriting resembled that of a second- or third-grade student.

"Dear Mr. President:

"First I would like to introduce myself. I am Elvis Presley and admire you and Have Great Respect for your office. I talked to Vice President Agnew in Palm Springs 3 weeks ago and expressed my concern for our country. The Drug Cul-



**From the files of
the National Archives: Elvis
visits the White House**

ture, the Hippie Elements, the SDS, Black Panthers, etc, do *not* consider me as their enemy or as they call it the Establishment. I call it America and I Love it. Sir I can and Will be of any Service that I can to help the country out. I have no concern or motives other than helping the country out. So I wish not to be given a title or an appointed position. I can and will do more good if I were made a Federal Agent at Large, and I will help best by doing it my way through my communications with people of all ages. First and Foremost I am an entertainer but all I need is the Federal Credentials. I am on the Plane with Sen. George Murphy and We have been discussing the problems that our Coun-

try is faced with. So I am Staying at the Washington hotel Room 505-506-507—I have 2 men who work with me by the name of Jerry Schilling and Sonny West. I am registered under the name of Jon Burrows. I will be here for as long as it takes to get the credentials of a Federal Agent. I have done an in depth study of Drug Abuse and Communist Brainwashing Techniques and I am right in the middle of the whole thing, where I can and will do the most good. I am Glad to help just so long as it is kept very Private. You can have your staff or whom-ever call me anytime today tonight or Tomorrow. I was nominated the coming year one of America's Ten most outstanding young men. That will be in January 18 in My Home Town of Memphis Tenn. I am sending you the short

autobiography about myself so you can better understand This approach. I would Love to meet you just to say hello if you're not to Busy.

"Respectfully,

"Elvis Presley

"P.S. I believe that you Sir were one of the Top Ten Outstanding Men of America also.

"I have a personal gift for you also which I would like to present to you and you can accept it or I will keep it for you until you can take it."

ON DECEMBER 21, 1970, Nixon assistant Dwight L. Chapin sent a memo, on White House stationery, to Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman. In his memo,

Bob Greene is a contributing editor of *Esquire* magazine.



Chapin explained the proposed visit.

"MEMORANDUM FOR: MR. H. R. HALDEMAN
"FROM: DWIGHT L. CHAPIN
"SUBJECT: Elvis Presley

"Attached you will find a letter to the President from Elvis Presley. As you are aware, Presley showed up here this morning and has requested an appointment with the President. He states that he knows the President is very busy, but he would just like to say hello and present the President with a gift.

"As you are well aware, Presley was voted one of the ten outstanding young men for next year and this was based upon his work in the field of drugs. The thrust of Presley's letter is that he wants to become a 'Federal agent at large' to work against the drug problem by communicating with people of all ages. He says that he is not a member of the establishment and that drug culture types, the hippie elements, the SDS, and the Black Panthers are people with whom he can communicate since he is not part of the establishment.

"I suggest that we do the following: This morning Bud Krogh will have Mr. Presley in and talk to him about drugs and about what Presley can do. Bud will also check to see if there is some kind of an honorary agent at large or credential of some sort that we can provide for Presley. After Bud has met with Presley, it is recommended that we have Bud bring Presley in during the Open Hour to meet briefly with the President. You know that several people have mentioned over the past few months that Presley is very pro the President. He wants to keep everything private and I think we should honor his request.

"I have talked to Bud Krogh about this whole matter, and we both think that it would be wrong to push Presley off on the Vice President since it will take very little of the President's time and it can be extremely beneficial for the President to build some rapport with Presley.

"In addition, if the President wants to meet with some bright young people outside of the Government, Presley might be a perfect one to start with."

In the margin next to the advice Chapin offered in that last paragraph, Haldeman scrawled: "You must be kidding."

But he initialed his approval for the visit.

A SECOND MEMORANDUM was prepared for Nixon, to get him ready for his meeting

with Presley. Included in this memo were some "talking points"—suggestions for what Nixon might say to Presley.

"MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT
"SUBJECT: Meeting with Elvis Presley, December 21, 1970, 12:30 P.M.

"I. PURPOSE

"To thank Elvis Presley for his offer to help in trying to stop the drug epidemic in the country, and to ask him to work with us in bringing a more positive attitude to young people throughout the country.

"In his letter to you, Elvis Presley offered to help as much as possible with the growing drug problem. He requested the meet-

ing with you this morning when he presented himself to the guard at the Northwest Gate bearing a letter.

"II. PARTICIPANTS

"Elvis Presley; Bud Krogh (staff)

"III. TALKING POINTS

"A. We have asked the entertainment industry—both television and radio—to assist us in our drug fight.

"B. You are aware that the average American family has 4 radio sets; 98% of the young people between 12 and 17 listen to radio. Between the time a child is born and he leaves high school, it is estimated he watches between 15,000 and 20,000 hours of television. That is more time than he spends in the classroom.

"C. The problem is critical: As of December 4, 1970, 1,022 people died this year in New York alone from just narcotic related deaths. 208 of these were teenagers.

"D. Two of youth's folk heroes, Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin, recently died within a period of two weeks reportedly from drug-related causes. Their deaths are a sharp reminder of how the rock music culture has been linked to the drug sub-culture. If our youth are going to emulate the

rock music stars, from now on let those stars affirm their conviction that true and lasting talent is the result of self motivation and discipline and not artificial chemical euphoria.

"E. Suggestions for Presley activities:

"1. Work with White House Staff.

"2. Cooperate with and encourage the creation of an hour Television Special in which Presley narrates as stars such as himself sing popular songs and interpret them for parents in order to show drug and other anti-establishment themes in rock music.

"3. Encourage fellow artists to develop a new rock musical theme, 'Get High on Life.'

"4. Record an album with the theme 'Get High on Life' at the federal narcotic rehabilitation and research facility at Lexington, Kentucky.

"5. Be a consultant to the Advertising Council on how to communicate anti-drug messages to youth."



THE MEETING TOOK PLACE. Nixon assistant Egil "Bud" Krogh was in the Oval Office, taking notes. When the meeting had ended he compiled them into yet another memo.

"MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT'S FILE

"SUBJECT: Meeting with Elvis Presley, Monday, December 21, 1970, 12:30 p.m.

"The meeting opened with pictures taken of the President and Elvis Presley.

"Presley immediately began showing the President his law enforcement paraphernalia including badges from police departments in California, Colorado, and Tennessee. Presley indicated that he had been playing Las Vegas and the President indicated that he was aware of how difficult it is to perform in Las Vegas.

"The President mentioned that he thought Presley could reach young people, and that it was important for Presley to retain his credibility. Presley responded that he did his thing by 'just singing.' He said that he could not get to the kids if he made a speech on the stage, that he had to reach them in his own way. The President nodded in agreement.

"Presley indicated that he thought the Beatles had been a real force for anti-American spirit. He said that the Beatles came to this country, made their money, and then returned to England where they promoted an anti-American theme. The President nodded in agreement and expressed some surprise. The President then indicated that those who use drugs are also those in the

vanguard of anti-American protest. Violence, drug usage, dissent, protest all seem to merge in generally the same group of young people.

"Presley indicated to the President in a very emotional manner that he was 'on your side.' Presley kept repeating that he wanted to be helpful, that he wanted to restore some respect for the flag which was being lost. He mentioned that he was just a poor boy from Tennessee who had gotten a lot from his country, which in some way he wanted to repay. He also mentioned that he is studying Communist brainwashing and the drug culture for over ten years. He mentioned that he knew a lot about this and was accepted by the hippies. He said he could go right into a group of young people or hippies and be accepted which he felt could be helpful to him in his drug drive. The President indicated again his concern that Presley retain his credibility.

"At the conclusion of the meeting, Presley again told the President how much he supported him, and then, in a surprising, spontaneous gesture, put his left arm around the President and hugged him.

"In going out, Presley asked the President if he would see his two associates. The President agreed and they came over and shook hands with the President briefly. At this meeting, the President thanked them for their efforts and again mentioned his concern for Presley's credibility."

AT SOME POINT after the meeting, one female White House staff member wrote a brief note to a female colleague.

"Lucy:

"Elvis Presley (believe it or not) was granted an appointment with the President on Monday, Dec. 21. He left these autographed photos with the President. I don't think any acknowledgement would be necessary. For your good disposition!

"Bev."

ON DECEMBER 31, 1970, President Nixon mailed the following letter to Elvis Presley:

"Dear Mr. Presley:

"It was a pleasure to meet with you in my office recently, and I want you to know once again how much I appreciate your thoughtfulness in giving me the commemorative World War II Colt .45 pistol, encased in the handsome wooden chest. You were particularly kind to remember me with this impressive gift, as well as your family photographs, and I am delighted to have them for my collection of special mementos.

"With my best wishes to you, Mrs. Presley, and to your daughter, Lisa, for a happy and peaceful 1971,

"Sincerely,

"Richard Nixon." ■