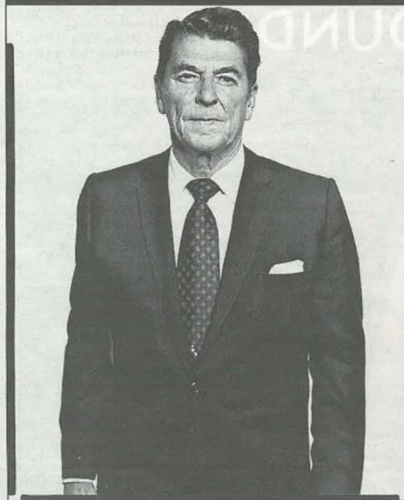


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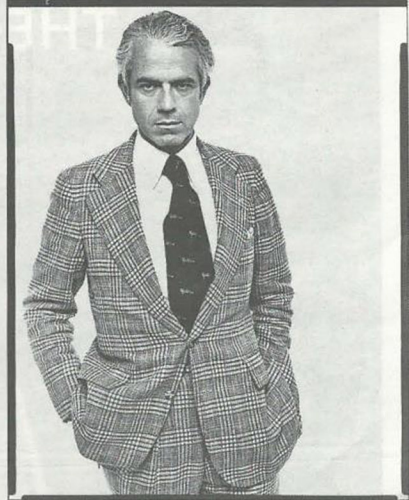
The Telegraph



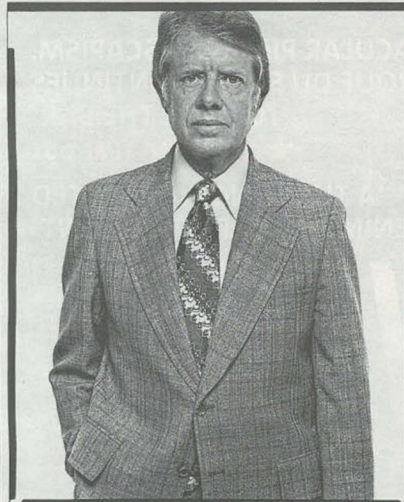
Ronald Reagan, then the former governor of California
Orlando, Florida, March 4 1976



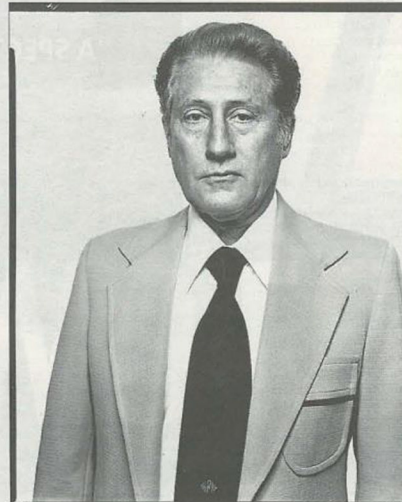
Rose Mary Woods, secretary to President Richard Nixon
Washington DC, August 10 1975



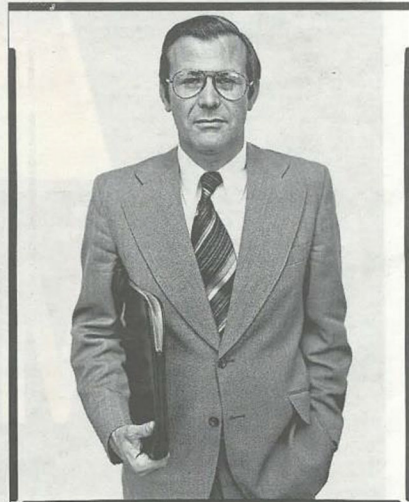
Charles Shaffer, attorney
New York, July 9 1976



Jimmy Carter, former governor of Georgia
Miami, Florida, March 5 1976



W. Mark Felt, former associate director, FBI
Fairfax, Virginia, July 8 1976



Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defence
Washington DC, May 7 1976

Is this what power looks like?

Forty years ago, Richard Avedon set out to photograph the most influential people in America. Look closely, says *Lucy Davies*, and you might see the secrets they were hiding

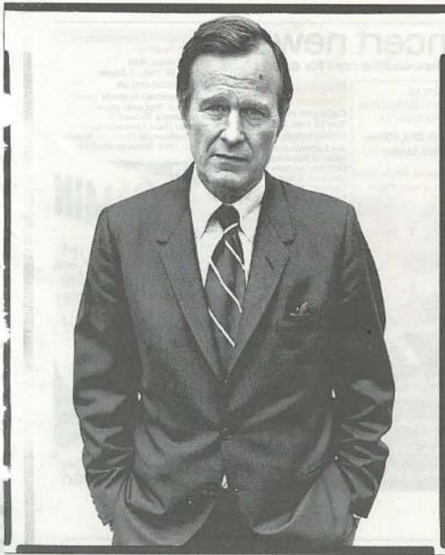
In 1976, the United States was exhausted by a decade of war and scandal. The Vietnam conflict, Watergate and the resignation of President Nixon had left public morale – and trust in government – at an all-time low.

With presidential elections on the horizon, *Rolling Stone* magazine asked photographer Richard Avedon if he would cover the lead candidates' campaigns. Editor Jann Wenner had in mind a sequential series, but Avedon countered with a better idea: why not dedicate an entire issue to those currently holding the reins of power? And not just political power: economic and cultural, too.

The fruit of that conversation was

The Family: 69 portraits in Avedon's no-nonsense style, filling every page of *Rolling Stone* #224. It came out on October 21, a fortnight before the election – and caused a sensation. "People loved it," says Wenner, speaking from New York. "No one had ever done anything like it before."

This month, the full series enjoys a rare airing at London's Gagosian Gallery. Though some of its subjects have been lost to time, it includes some very significant players: Ronald Reagan, who had just lost the Republican nomination for president to Gerald Ford; George Bush senior, then director of the CIA; and Katharine Graham, who as publisher of *The Washington Post* had faced the full wrath of the



George Bush, director CIA
Langley, Virginia, March 2 1976

the series, which also covered Vietnam, the civil rights movement and more. It seems incredible that these politicians, lawmakers and captains of industry would subject themselves to such scrutiny, especially considering the secrets many were hiding.

"You have to remember that Avedon was the most famous and well-regarded photographer in America," explains Wenner. "No one thought getting their picture taken was going to expose them too badly, and it was about power – of course they wanted to be in it."

Since he had founded *Rolling Stone* in 1967, aged 20, Wenner had gained a reputation for daring journalism. The tyro editor had an eye for talent, corralling writers such as Hunter S Thompson and Tom Wolfe, and a cub photojournalist by the name of Annie Leibovitz. By 1973, "the Stone" had equalled *Time's* news-stand sales.

Wenner was guided, he tells me, by the principle of "doing something original and something with meaning. I wanted to capture people's imaginations." In her 2008 memoir *At Work*, Leibovitz wrote that "*Rolling Stone* was the only place [Avedon] could have done that... *The Family* showed how the power of photography and the power of a magazine can be harnessed together."

Born in New York in 1923, Avedon had learnt to take pictures while serving in the US Marines, where he shot identification photographs for his fellow sailors. Within a year of the war ending, he was on the payroll at *Harper's Bazaar*; he stayed until he defected to *Vogue* in 1962.

By 1976, Avedon was considered the most innovative fashion photographer of his generation. Behind the scenes, however, he had quietly been earning his political stripes, taking portraits of civil rights leaders, American soldiers and Vietnamese napalm victims, among others.

"Politics interested Avedon increasingly throughout his lifetime," says Gagosian director Kara Vander Weg, who has curated this exhibition. "And America was almost bursting at the seams with it. He was a very intelligent man and he wanted to make a statement with his photography, not just about fashion and fame, but about something more important."

It took Avedon about six months to make the portraits for *The Family*, unrolling and rerolling his white backdrop in hotel rooms, homes and offices all over the United States. "I remember thinking that I should not do it because I didn't have the time," says Donald Rumsfeld, who was then the US secretary of defence. "But someone urged me to do it, and so I did..."

One of the most interesting things about the series is how opaque the photographs are. Each person is shot in almost the same stance, with no light variation, and at exactly the same size. It's as politically neutral as they come.

"He never wanted to inflict his view on the subject," says James Martin, executive director of the Avedon Foundation, who also worked as Avedon's darkroom technician. "He did have certain

political beliefs, but I know he felt it was very important to detach that from his work."

On the morning *Rolling Stone* hit the news-stands, Avedon gave an interview to America's early morning *Today* show. He explained that *The Family* was "in a sense a Rorschach test... they're seen in very different ways by different people, according to the way they feel about the subject".

What does hindsight bring to the series? "For me, it's the web of connections," says Martin. "Watergate, of course, but one sees that the networks of power in

Washington are never-ending. I also think it is about seeing the future in the past – look at that chiselled hard stare you get from Rumsfeld."

Wenner can't resist imagining how such a series might look today, if Avedon's project were repeated. "The 1976 group were a very distinguished lot – it was quite a different America. Today you would have a lot of hedge funders and bankers. Basically it would be all about greed," he says, laughing. "But it'd definitely be interesting to do it again. The time is ripe for it."

Avedon Warhol
at the Gagosian
Gallery, London,
to April 23; see
gagosian.com



Katharine Graham, chairman, *The Washington Post*
Washington DC, March 11 1976

Nixon administration when her reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein pieced together the story of the Watergate hotel burglary.

In fact Nixon, licking his wounds at his beachfront home in California, was the only person who refused to be photographed. In his place, Avedon put Rose Mary Woods, Nixon's private secretary, whose foot had famously "slipped" while she was transcribing a secretly taped phone conversation, deleting 18-and-a-half minutes of crucial evidence. Even the late Mark Felt, who was revealed in 2005 to be Woodward and Bernstein's source ("Deep Throat"), is present, as associate director of the FBI.

Watergate wasn't the only contentious issue to feature in

'No one thought their picture would expose them'

THE RICHARD AVEDON FOUNDATION