

# commentary

from other pens...

## White House named by Teddy Roosevelt

By Lawrence L. Knutson

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The capital’s planner called the great stone house “The Palace.” For 50 years the government called it “The President’s House.” And for the next half century it was “The Executive Mansion.” But in the fall of 1901 Theodore Roosevelt officially gave the old house the name Americans had called it almost since the first coat of whitewash was slapped on its sandstone walls in 1798.

He called it “The White House.” Historian William Seale says that for Roosevelt, taking office after the assassination of William McKinley, the Executive Mansion title seemed to symbolize a stodgy, inefficient presidential office “ridden with layers of tradition stacked atop temporary procedures.” “One of his earliest orders, given before McKinley’s funeral flowers had wilted, was to change the name ...” Seale writes. “Things were to be different now.”

On Oct. 17, 1901, the administration notified Cabinet members and agency heads that the president wished “to change the headings or date-lines of all official papers and documents requiring his signature, from “Executive Mansion” to “White House.”

The Washington Evening Star reported one reaction: “It is said that many of the older clerks of the government, accustomed for so many years to writing ‘Executive Mansion,’ failed at first to fall into the new style and forgot the desire of the president.”

First he scrapped plans drafted in earlier administrations to move the house elsewhere or to expand it beyond recognition.

“You tell the newspaper men Mrs. Roosevelt and I are firmly of the opinion that the president should live no where else than in the historic White House,” Roosevelt directed.

Roosevelt and his wife, Edith, threw out the dark and bulky trappings that had accumulated. In league with Charles McKim, one of America’s most prominent architects, they made the White House interior light, airy, and elegant, in keeping with the intentions of its 18th century builders. “Theodore Roosevelt changed the house and made an indelible mark,” said William Bushong, staff historian for the White House Historical Association. “The image and functional use of the White House as we know it today was created by his architects in 1902.”

Those functions and elegance essentially survived the Truman reconstruction of the interior in the 1950s, he said.

The White House had many names, some of them official, some not. When Pierre L’Enfant drew the plans for the city of Washington he sketched in space for “the palace.” The structure would have been palatial had not George Washington ordered the plans scaled back.

First occupied by President John Adams in 1800, the house was called “The President’s House” until 1850. when the name Executive Mansion started appearing on documents.

The house became white as early as 1798 when a coat of whitewash was brushed on to protect the sandstone against winter freezes.

There is a Washington myth that people didn’t start calling the house the White House until it was painted white to conceal the scorch marks left when the British burned it to its walls in 1814.

Not so, says the office of White House curator Betty Monkman. She and her staff have uncovered many references to “the White House” well before the British marched in.

For example, a Massachusetts congressman wrote his wife: “There is much trouble at the White House, as we call it, I mean the President’s.”

Truman once called the place “the big white jail.” Thomas Jefferson called it “big enough for two emperors, one pope and the grand lama into the bargain.”

But ever since Theodore Roosevelt blew the dust away in 1901, it has been simply — and officially — “The White House.”

**EDITOR’S NOTE** — *Lawrence L. Knutson has covered the White House, Congress and Washington’s history for 34 years.*



“THE MIDNIGHT RIDE OF JOHN ASHCROFT”

## Garbage collecting is bipartisan

WASHINGTON — The great mayor Fiorello LaGuardia once said, “There is no Republican way to collect garbage.”

The grandchildren of those New Yorkers who time and again elected the “Little Flower” have not forgotten his admonition. A city flooded by Democrats has once again chosen a Republican, Michael Bloomberg, to be its life raft.

The reasons have everything to do with what happened to this city two months ago. It switched the job description of New York mayor from “only Democrats need apply” to “opening for strong executive with business savvy, proven track record.”

The next mayor has, as everyone in this country knows, a job to do. He needs to shake off the horror of Sept. 11 and get this city moving again. To get that job done, voters have picked a can-do American success story, Michael Bloomberg.

The fact that Bloomberg happens to be a Republican tells you something good about the overwhelmingly Democratic people of New York. They want a grown-up to run their city, and they don’t care what partisan button he sported to get on the ballot — or how much of his own money he spent to get his message across.

They simply wanted someone who could get things done. They knew that Mike Bloomberg had built an empire in business communication from scratch. That history made him a good bet to rebuild the world’s greatest city from the rubble.



### chris matthews

• commentary

The fact that Bloomberg is Jewish, supportive of abortion rights and gay rights, and a New Yorker tells you something about the post-Sept. 11 Republican Party.

Recall the pre-Sept. 11 standards. To be a prominent leader of the GOP you had be from the Bible Belt and sing from the southern Republican songbook of Dick Armey and Tom DeLay. Check out the leaders today: Rudolph Giuliani, New York Gov. George Pataki, former Pennsylvania governor and Homeland Security boss Tom Ridge, and, last but hardly least, Mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg of New York City.

A president who made just one trip to New York prior to the World Trade Center disaster and passed over Tom Ridge for vice president because of his abortion position is now surrounded by northern pro-choicers.

A guy who has never shown much interest in snagging tickets to “The Producers” is now Mr. Broadway. He’s a man who wants to do all he can to help the same city-in-need that a former Republican president once told to “drop dead,” accord-

ing to the New York Daily News.

I write this column as an out-of-towner still enamored of this wondrous American metropolis. I recall all the thrill of my first visit for the Columbia University high-school newspaper editors convention. I remember catching “Hair” on my last day in the country before heading to Africa with the Peace Corps. And now I treasure every day I get to work there, especially this time of year.

While New York lost the World Series in seven, I am thrilled that they came back to win every game at Yankee Stadium.

New York cheered those three victories with greater love than I have ever seen in a professional sport. The fans knew they were cheering themselves.

Winning at home is, after all, a huge part of this war.

And while we go about winning the early, vital battles here at home, we need to carry on the fight in Afghanistan. We need to bring New York justice to Osama bin Laden and his whole wretched gang. That, too, is a nonpartisan job, come to think of it.

Just remember what La Guardia said: “There’s no Republican way to collect garbage.”

*Chris Matthews, author of “Now, Let Me Tell You What I Really Think” (Free Press, 2001) and “Hardball” (Touchstone Books, 1999), is a nationally syndicated columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle and the host of “Hardball” on CNBC and MSNBC cable channels.*

## America’s swimming lesson with the royals

America is wading in water up to its neck, while a supposed ally has taken the form of rocks tied to our feet. We have spoiled Saudi Arabia’s Royal Family, and now we have a dilemma. How do we help the Saudi’s make a transition to a more democratic regime sans being a fatcat fundraiser for al Queda? Do we cut the rocks loose, to sink on their own or do we help them to the surface, all the while struggling for our own survival. Are these “friends” worth saving?

The Saudi Royal Family has failed its people. It hasn’t dealt with its country’s severe unemployment and inadequate schools. It has become increasingly estranged from its own people, and has become so unnerved by the growing strength of the Islamic fundamentalist movement in its county that being in the bin Laden booster club became a must, not an option. In the mid 1980s, in an effort to appease some of their radical opponents, the Royal’s relinquished some of its authority on day to day life in the Kingdom to the “mutawwafin”, religious police rivaled only by the Taliban. These religious radicals were allowed to take control of the press and most of the schools. Today nearly 70 percent of all Saudi Ph.D.s are in Islamic Studies. This has produced increasingly harsh, and even violent, rhetoric directed toward America. Because of our private interests with the Saudi’s our government made the mistake of ignoring these events which continue to occur with great frequency.

According to a senior American diplomat who served for many years in the Kingdom there is little the U.S. can do now. We have indulged their every whim for decades. They have always had things their way. They so believe in their “majestic instance” that we are looked at as their captives, just as the Ottoman Turks had their “janissaries.” We have allowed them to work us like pack mules because of their money. The Royal’s have been major financial backers of everything from the



### mitch hixson

• soundgarden

Reagan administrations anticommunist campaigns against the Soviet Union in Latin America and Afghanistan, to assisting the Clinton administration by buying Boeing aircraft. They have contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to charities and educational programs here. They do billions, yes with a billion, of dollars worth of business with American construction and oil companies. With all this giving they do in America, they expect a paycheck. That paycheck is for us to stuff our heads in the sand about their anti-American rhetoric and un-American form of governance. Haven’t we bowed before them enough already?

During the Clinton era, the C.I.A. was “discouraged” from conducting any risky intelligence operations inside the country, and was restricted from recruiting among the Saudi population. In 1994, 14,000 documents, that’s with three zeros, were brought from the Kingdom by a Saudi United Nations secretary. The documents depicted the Royal’s corruption, human rights abuses, financial support for terror groups, and the regression of their popular support. But the F.B.I. refused to accept them. I guess the person was a kook and not credible. But then why was the person granted asylum and put into witness relocation?

The Saudi’s have also been shielded from the typical Washington bureaucracy. Only a handful of people inside our government are familiar with U.S.-Saudi relations. This is not by accident. The Bush administration has so far chosen not to confront the Royal’s over its support for terror groups,

its refusal to help with the investigation of the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, and its uncooperative stance on the U.S. military using Saudi air bases.

The problem for the United States is that we have become hostage to the Saudi royal family. Their system of governance is of no concern to us as long as we get the black gold from their oil fields. If we balk at how they run their show, OPEC raises oil prices, and the Saudi’s cancel billions of dollars worth of contracts with American companies and charities, or at least that’s the threat. But if the Royal’s are on unstable ground, what do we do? Do we applaud their removal or ball our fists to protect them?

If a more radical, and potentially more unfriendly, regime is going to take control in the Kingdom, its better America face that fact sooner rather than later. At least if a new regime is overtly anti-American it would at least give us a clear picture of what really is going on. That would be better than the blurry vision we have when we look at the Royal’s today. Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia has admitted that the U.S.-Saudi relationship is “at a crossroads.” So are the Royals.

Whatever happened to that Shah guy in Iran??

## berry’s world



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