

One Who Didn't Know

Now then, students, do you all understand about Watergate?

The President admits he's responsible. But he says he isn't to blame.

No, no, that isn't the same as admitting he's a little bit pregnant. Whoever said that go wash out your mouth with soap.

When the President says he doesn't know what's going on, it's your patriotic duty to believe him.

He was the victim of a diabolical conspiracy, that's what.

Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell, Magruder, Gray and Dean — those are the casualties of Watergate so far.

And since Mr. Nixon brushed aside many better qualified aspirants in order to make those fellows his palace guard, some observers may conclude that they must be the President's kind of men.

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SOME MIGHT EVEN say the Watergate caper wasn't all that different from the California caper of '62. That was when Nixon and Haldeman, working in a Republican backroom, put out a postcard blitz in the guise of "concerned Democrats." They later confessed up in court about that one.

Some might say that whatever the White House aides did, they learned their tricks from the master himself, and now that the heat is on he is throwing them to the wolves.

Some might go so far as to mention that the only thing those men had in common was their loyalty to Richard Nixon, that he was the magnet who drew all those bad apples together.

But anyone who says such things just doesn't understand how conspiracies work the way Mr. Nixon does.

After all, he cracked the Alger Hiss case. When everyone else was fooled, he led the posse straight to the Pumpkin Papers.

No, those aren't the papers that were carried out of the White House by the boxfull in the dark of night after Watergate broke. And they aren't the papers that Pat Gray burned at the height of his career as FBI director. Please pay closer attention.

The point is that we should all feel sorry for the President at the way the conspirators betrayed him. They worked at his side day after day. Some, being masters of deep cover, had posed as his friend for 20 years.

And he never dreamed what they were really like.

Forgiving soul that he is, the President would like to believe that Watergate was just a one-time slip. He is so blinded by compassion for his fallen disciples that he fails to notice the rest of the iceberg — the theft of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatric records, the rigged polls, the phony ads and forged telegrams faking support for bombing Hanoi.

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FOR A LONG TIME the President just couldn't believe his buddies would break scout's honor — even when that plane crashed, and the wife of one of the Watergate burglars was killed, and the cops opened her baggage and found \$10,000 in untraceable cash.

Right then most of the nation smelled a payoff. But not Mr. Nixon. And that gets a bit hard to explain, considering how he cracked the Alger Hiss case.

Maybe the conspirators clipped the plane crash story out of the Washington Post before they put it on his breakfast tray.

Anyway, if the President says it took him nine months to realize that Watergate was more than a "third-rate burglary," I feel duty bound to believe he is that naïve.

But one thing bothers me. If his own aides could make such a fool of him, is he the right man to deal with old pros like Mao and Brezhnev?