

In Defense of Nixon's Ignorance



Arthur Hoppe

Washington

NOW THAT everybody else has explained why they knew nothing about the Watergate affair, it's high time somebody explained why Mr. Nixon knew nothing about the Watergate affair. I'd be glad to.

The first time Mr. Nixon heard the word was when his friend, John Mitchell, called him at 3 a.m. one night last June.

"I just thought you'd like to know, sir," said Mr. Mitchell, "that some Cuban patriots were caught breaking into the wrong apartment at Watergate which happened to be the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee and I know absolutely nothing about it because I never talked to anybody beforehand except to tell them don't blame me if you get caught."

"John," said Mr. Nixon, "I'm glad you called because I've always been deeply interested in Latin American affairs. And let me say that I'm delighted you don't know anything about nothing because that's the kind of men I want around me. Could I say hello to Martha?"

"I'm afraid she's tied up right now, sir."

"Well, give her my regards and . . . Excuse me, John. There goes Maurice. Pardon me, Maurice, what have you got in that huge laundry bag over your shoulder?"

★ ★ ★
"OH, IT'S nothing sir. Just 10 or 15 million in \$100 bills sent in by grateful Americans who wish to remain anonymous. I'm delivering it to a little Mexican laundry because I realize how you want us to use only clean money in your campaign, which I don't know anything about."

"Maurice, I can't tell you how glad I am that you're handling the finances,

which you don't know anything about, for my campaign, which you don't know anything about. That's the kind of men I want around me."

"Thank you, sir. You can always count on my ignorance."

Well, months passed. And while the newspapers were filled with little else but Watergate, Mr. Nixon, as is well known, never reads the newspapers. Actually, it was Mrs. Nixon who brought the matter to her husband's attention.

"Dear," she said one morning at breakfast. "Bob Haldeman told me yesterday what time it was."

"Good heavens!" cried Mr. Nixon. "If my staff knows what time it is, there's no telling where this might end."

So he called in John Dean III. "John," he said, "I want you to conduct a thorough, impartial investigation of yourself to see if you know anything about anything." And Mr. Nixon was elated, of course, to receive a 32-page report from Mr. Dean proving conclusively he knew nothing about nothing.

★ ★ ★
ALL MIGHT HAVE gone well, had not Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman hired one lawyer between them (there being a critical shortage of lawyers in Washington these days).

"If they know enough to hire a lawyer," said Mr. Nixon angrily, "they must know something about something, whatever it may be."

And that's when Mr. Nixon decided to fire his entire White House staff and replace them with 168 Australian aborigines, all of them deaf mutes.

"This should restore the confidence of the American people in my leadership," said Mr. Nixon triumphantly. "For if I have made one thing perfectly clear, it's that I and the men around me know absolutely nothing about anything."