

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Collage by Ken Burgess—The Washington Post

Post 4/3/76 'The Final Days'

This certainly is Woodward and Bernstein's week! The world premier of the Woodward-Bernstein-Redford-Hoffman movie plus a front page book review of their new release, "The Final Days." The timing couldn't have been better. And such a book review! The Post may think that it has insured that the book will soar to the number one position of the New York Times Book Review, but I wouldn't spend my money for it, since The Post, Newsweek and the news media have already told us all the "juicy" parts.

I thought that cashing in on Watergate would come to an end with this movie, but Woodward and Bernstein are obviously not through. They have spent "over a year and interviewed 394 people—one 17 times" to extract the last drop of blood from the turnip.

Although Haynes Johnson tells us in his March 27 book review that there is "no sense of keyhole gossip" in the book, he also tells us of 1) how Alexander Haig joked that Nixon and Rebozo had a homosexual relationship 2) that Kissinger called Nixon a "meatball" President 3) how Mrs. Nixon and Mr. Nixon were drinking so heavily 4) that David Eisenhower has been waiting for Nixon to go bananas

5) and that Eddie Cox relates how Nixon was walking the halls talking to pictures of former presidents. No sense of keyhole gossip.

With millions of words written about Mr. Nixon—"our most tortured President"—things were being repeated and repeated and the public was becoming immune to any new book on the subject of Watergate. Now, Mr. Johnson tells us, that "reporters will be laboring to produce 'hard news' leads out of the welter of new information." Perhaps I am wrong, but I thought that Woodward and Bernstein were reporters. They very obviously have saved up all this new information—to enclose it in a neat package—a book. And books make money and therefore so do Woodward and Bernstein. Does this reflect on their credibility?

KAREN B. AYLOR

Bowie.

The gross and tasteless portrayal of

Nixon's last evening in the White House by Messrs. Woodward and Bernstein displays not only their lack of common human compassion, but makes suspect their motives in originally reporting the Watergate case. Does not even this man, whatever his faults, deserve at least these last moments free from a prying, insensitive and irresponsible press?

Most people of mature years who have lived as recluses have seen the most stable of their acquaintances behave in extraordinary ways when, under very great stress, they have drunk too much.

One wonders with what equanimity these young men would endure international disgrace and obloquy in the twilight of their careers. And let them not answer that Nixon himself was seldom compassionate or sensitive, for the impartial critic may not condemn another for lacking those virtues he abjures in his criticism.

JOHN LAPPIN

Washington.

The headline regarding the new book by Woodward and Bernstein on the front page of the March 27 issue of The Post represents the pinnacle of absurdity.

What the hell did they think former President Nixon should have done—dance a jig, laugh and sing?

EDGAR C. ROPER JR.

Arlington.

Surely The Post must be embarrassed over the publication of that juvenile piece of writing by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein on March 27 dealing with President Nixon's "night of decision." Where is the sense of balance, of reasonableness, that is supposed to characterize the press?

The air of authority Woodward and Bernstein have taken on as a mantle these days is absolutely laughable. One would think President Nixon had personally invited them over to record this marvelous event.

If that piece of claptrap is any indication of the calibre of their book, perhaps I should contradict myself and thank you for the warning. Cornball historians I can live without. (I dare say that if they ever grow tired of working over Mr. Nixon, they can apply their melodramatic talents to the daytime soaps on TV.)

If you're listening, fellas, how about this: Oliver Wendell Holmes was asked by a reporter for the secret of his success. He replied: "Young man, the secret of my success is that at a very early age I discovered that I'm not God."

JAMES R. MESSENGER

Rockville.

The political motivation for the simultaneous world premiere of the Watergate movie and the publication, plus extensive excerpting by the Post and Newsweek, of the second Woodward and Bernstein book is comprehensible . . . the Nixon pardon must be kept firmly around President Ford's neck until Nov. 2.

But the fact that The Post helped to give the widest possible circulation to dirty, back stairs scrapings, about Pat Nixon is not. This casual destruction of the pride and privacy of a good and lovely lady, who never made a misstep in all her years as the loyal wife of a public man, is sickening, shameful, and inexcusable.

KATHERINE M. WILSON
Washington.

Pogo said it all when he said, "I have seen the enemy and it is us." He, at least, would understand the warnings of Solzhenitsyn.

Katharine Graham and her cohorts seem to have succumbed to the same hubris that caused the downfall of Richard Nixon. Have they no sense of the meaning of common decency?

As one who consistently opposed Mr. Nixon and deplored the appointment of Mr. Kissinger as Secretary of State, I ask, is it unreasonable to hope that these may be "the final days" of yellow journalism in Washington?

ELIZABETH C. FENN
Arlington.

I, like millions of other Americans, applauded the journalistic and investigative efforts of Messrs. Woodward and Bernstein which led to the Watergate disclosures and the subsequent termination of the corrupt regime of Richard Nixon. Your front page display of 27 March however, signals a new stage of Watergate disclosures.

The revelation of Mr. Nixon's private breakdown and deep personal agony discloses much about Messrs. Woodward and Bernstein as well as The Post. Your pursuit of sensationalism and money has driven all of you beyond the point of "investigative reporting" into the realm of distasteful tattling. And it is much too soon to claim that such bald exploitation is of "historical" interest.

You could not even resist ending the featured excerpt of Woodward and Bernstein's book with Richard Nixon's plea for the privacy to maintain his self respect.

Gentlemen, you have now gone too far and should be ashamed.

N. C. NICHOLAS
Silver Spring.

Haven't we had enough of Watergate? The subject has taken on the character of the perennial lawn

weed. We can go for months without front page news of our four-year old ballyhoo and then, up it crops.

My concern isn't in closeting this blight in American democracy. The accurate facts and consequences of Watergate are essential to America's history and the understanding of it. But I strongly object and resent your front page coverage of the Woodward/Bernstein soap opera rendition of one of the most tragic nights in history. Can't a man who is struggling to stay afloat in a sea of quicksand be allowed privacy in his last moment of political life?

Who are Woodward/Bernstein, but two psycho-journalists capitalizing on America's misfortune. Unfortunately for the American public, they seemed to have milked dry that newsworthy event. Yet, they persist in milking the public dry with another book. The excerpt from their new book appears to have the flavor of Gary Trudeau's "Doonesbury". The sadly comic portrayal of two of America's top government officials would be humorous in "Doonesbury", but is pathetic on the front page of a national newspaper. Do not mistake me for a Nixon devotee, but it seems in extremely poor taste to plaster a plastered President fumbling and tripping over himself and his words on your front page.

For the sake of the vulnerable public, we would do better with a stricter more accurate account of Watergate and not one based on histrionics.

ALICIA C. SHEPARD
Washington.

Woodward and Bernstein, by writing the account of the Nixon-Kissinger encounter and The Post by publishing it, have violated the most elementary standards of compassion and good taste. Except to pander to prurient interests, what possible reason is there to publicize the last writhings of Richard Nixon?

PAUL CHODOFF
SELMA CHODOFF

Washington.

We would not have been surprised to read the excerpt of Woodward and Bernstein's book "The Final Days" on the front page of The Enquirer or the National Tattler, but to find it on the front page of The Post was rather appalling.

There is no denying that Woodward and Bernstein's discovery and uncovering of the Watergate scandal was in the public interest, but your publicizing of their ugly and distasteful book serves no constructive public purpose and jeopardizes the reputation of your paper. Furthermore, the presentation of the intimacies of the former President's realization of his own demise makes one wonder whether the standards of integrity of

the authors are any higher than those of Mr. Nixon himself.

Good business is NOT always good journalism!

DENNIS D. PITTS

WILLEM H. VAN DER LEEUW

Washington.

Have The Washington Post's news gathering abilities fallen on such hard times that The Post must stoop to advertising a new book release on its front page?

As a regular of The Post I was dismayed by the utter lack of thought shown in the assembly of the Saturday, March 27th issue of The Post. The Woodward and Bernstein book, "The Final Days," is fine subject matter for Book World or the Style section, but its does not belong on the front page.

It seems to me that something more newsworthy must have been available for print and it certainly should have taken precedence over the proseletizing of The Post's two, star reporters and their semi-factual, semi-fictional account of the last days of Nixon administration.

By allowing nepotism to guide the creation of the aforementioned issue, The Post became a forum for the airing of personal vendettas and in doing so strayed from responsible journalistic endeavors.

Watergate is a symbol of and hopefully a guidepost for a decadent society and for those reasons it should not be forgotten. But The Post's irresponsible actions served only to betray its readership and cloud the Watergate issue by the use of mere Hollywood tinsel-type tactics, and in the process forgetting that a newspaper they owe the

public "all the news that's fit to print."

PATRICIA A. SAHM

Washington.

Richard Nixon never got any sympathy from me until now. I feel that he got everything that he deserved for letting the American people down the way he did. But this book by your reporters Woodward and Bernstein ("The Final Days") is an evil thing. Richard Nixon has been totally destroyed. All they are doing is torturing a helpless and degraded cripple. To no avail. For no purpose other than perhaps to make money. Truly they are infinitely worse than he was. They are bad men. Bad. Evil. Vile.

VINCENT J. HERZ

Chula Vista, Calif.

Haven't The Washington Post and its reporters, Woodward and Bernstein, gotten enough mileage out of Watergate without continuing to beat a dead horse?

Everyone I've talked with has expressed revulsion at your cruel, tasteless disclosures in the excerpt from "The Final Days."

SARA C. MOORMAN

Arlington.

I feel that the exposure of the Watergate affair and the resignation of President Nixon were necessary for the good of the country. I find the new Woodward-Bernstein book and the attendant Post/Newsweek publicity unnecessary and despicable.

ROGER W. RUBIN

Alexandria.