

MUT

6/29/73

Confessions of A White House Enemy

By James Reston

WASHINGTON

QUESTION: Mr. Reston, do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

ANSWER: I do.

Q. You are charged in the Senate Watergate hearings with being "an enemy of the White House." Do you have anything to say about this?

A. It's an offensive charge, but it could be worse. Considering what's been going on there, I could have been accused of being a friend.

Q. Have you ever been accused of being a friend of the White House?

A. Never. It's our job to watch them, not to be friends with them.

Q. How do you plead to the charge of being an enemy of the White House?

A. Innocent.

Q. Do you deny that you have written articles critical of President Nixon?

A. No sir.

Q. Do you not agree that your criticisms of the President have sometimes been extreme?

A. On reflection, my moderation astonishes me.

Q. Do you deny that your articles have sometimes embarrassed the President and even given comfort to his enemies?

A. No, sir.

Q. Does it not follow then that you have been an "enemy of the White House"?

A. No, sir. Good houses often have bad tenants.

Q. What did you think of the White House list of its "enemies"?

A. Very unfair.

Q. To the people on the blacklist?

A. No, to the people who were left off. It's really outrageous that people like Father Hesburgh of Notre Dame, Eric Sevareid and many others who have tried for years to tell the truth about these political twisters shouldn't be properly recognized.

Q. I must warn you that anything you say under oath here may be used against you.

A. That's an improvement. For years they've been using things I didn't say against me.

Q. Have you ever been harassed by this Administration?

A. No sir, it's really been very pleasant. Scarcely seen a soul in the White House since this bunch came to town.

Q. When did you talk to the President last?

A. During the Oregon primary election of 1968.

Q. What did you discuss?

A. Mr. Nixon told me he was going to win the primary and the election.

Q. Anything else?

A. He asked me what kind of Secretary of State McGeorge Bundy would make and he told me there were some fine young Californians he wanted to bring on the White House staff.

Q. You've been on the list a long time then?

A. Yes sir, charter member. I got on it twenty years ago for suggesting we should negotiate with the Russians and the Chinese.

Q. Why does the President have so many enemies?

A. All Presidents acquire enemies in the heat of politics, but Mr. Nixon has a special gift for making enemies. He works harder at it than anybody else, I guess.

Q. What do you have to do to get on his list?

A. In general, all you have to do is tell the truth and you're on, but you can qualify if you are against the bombing of Cambodia or keep talking about the Watergate. And, of course, if you say anything nasty about Chuck Colson.

Q. What's the point of a list like this?

A. It gets around the Government and everybody knows that talking to anybody on the list would not be very helpful to a man's career.

Q. What's likely to happen to the Top Twenty enemies of the White House?

A. I understand they're going to organize a society of benevolent criminals and have a big blowout once a year at the Watergate.