



Carl T. Rowan: The hunger for power

Was nothing sacred?

But 6/29/79

Washington—When it all begins to sink in, you are left with the chilling realization that no novel about the Mafia could ever be as disquieting, as nauseating, as John Wesley Dean's narrative about crime and cover-up in the White House.

For Dean was talking about that real world which we live in, and not just some limited kingdom of a Don Corleone or some other godfather, real or fictional.

Lust for power

Dean was revealing how a whole society can be debased when the lust for power grabs ruthless men.

Dean was talking about a lone war protester with a ten-foot sign in Lafayette Park whose very presence so irked President Nixon that then-White House aide Dwight Chapin set out to get a squad of goons to remove the protester.

The White House dealing in goon squads? So that is the point to which

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they dragged the right of dissent in America?

Dean was talking about White House employes in a Georgetown alley, nervously breaking into the home of columnist Joseph Kraft so they could tap his telephone—using technical information provided by a man who had just moved over from the telephone company to the White House.

So that is what this Administration thought of freedom of the press, or the rights of privacy, or the laws forbidding burglary?

A sinister Machiavelli?

Dean was talking about a cynically Machiavellian White House chief of staff, H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, conniving and contriving to make every protest against President Nixon and his policies look like a plot attributable to George McGovern and Teddy Kennedy. And he was talking about a President who seemed paranoid beyond all public supposition as he ranted and railed because responsible intelligence agencies would not give him data to support the canard that he was the victim of some Democratic plot, or some foreign plot, to hound and harass him.

So this was the regard for truth which survived in the White House!

Dean was talking about an elaborate-to-insane plan to shadow Senator Kennedy to gather data which might be politically embarrassing. And he was talking about similar efforts to get compromising information on Senator McGovern and Democratic Party chairman Larry O'Brien, and Sen. Edmund S. Muskie.

So this was how low they were willing to sink, how far they were willing to erode all rights of privacy, in their



AP Wirephoto

John W. Dean 3d.

... sad and frightening testimony.

fiendish hunger for power?

Nothing was sacred, nothing immoral, nothing beyond the pale when it came to reelecting the President.

If it meant trying to corrupt judges, they tried it—and even when they failed, they told stories and wrote memos pretending they had succeeded.

Unashamedly, they maneuvered and failed to get a Senate investigation headed by friendly Jim Eastland of Mississippi rather than that disgustingly independent Sam Ervin of North Carolina. Here, too, the White House faithful were glib in making claims as to which senator was “in the pocket” and certain to be kind to the “family.”

One need not believe every nuance of Dean's testimony to be appalled; he has produced documentation aplenty to wipe away the doubts of all but the foolish or the hopelessly partisan that the Watergate crimes and cover-up went right to the presidency of these United States.

Disheartening aspects

The disheartening truth is that we may not have enough courts to try all the former and present White House and Administration personnel who seem indictable on the basis of Dean's narrative.

In truth, the great curse of the whole business may be that it is too broad, too sinister, too mind-boggling for the mass of Americans to cope with it.

The likelihood is that a President who will tolerate goon squads, authorize burglaries of doctors' offices, demand phony “intelligence” data, claim White House innocence on the basis of an investigation that he knew never took place, is also probably too insensitive or arrogant to resign.

And so many Americans have come to think of Presidents as royalty that they will wring their hands and say there is nothing they can do about it. They will rationalize and theorize and apologize—and ask how in the world we can put in prison that veritable army of clean-cut young men who burglarized, stole, lied, spied, paid hush-money and otherwise obstructed justice and corrupted the American political process beyond anything ever tried in the nation's history.

Far more frightening than the ugly Gestapo incursions into American political life is the possibility that the people will just lie down and take it.