

HERB CAEN



Tapped, Taped and Bugged

ASKED for a comment on Watergate, Senator Robert Dole, ex-chairman of the Republican Nat'l Committee, says "The credibility of the administration is zilch" — and there's That Word again! . . . A few columns ago, I expressed awe at the amazing longevity of that term, which, Trivia Champ Milt Staub tells me, was invented by Norman Anthony in 1930 when he launched the legendary Ballyhoo magazine. By '31, Milt recalls, "zilch" was as familiar to Americans as Ace Brigode and his 14 Virginians, "or at least as well known as Bing's immortal tag coda on the classic Gus Arnheim version of 'I'm Gonna Get You,'" at the very thought of which the entire Class of '32 may blush.

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A MEMORABLE Monday night, it was, and an Emmy-winning performance by Our Peerless Leader, who accepted "full responsibility" and then passed the flaming zilch to Elliot Richardson. Only three things were missing: singing violins, a stuffed Checkers on the table, and a Republican mink in a cloth coat. Also he forgot Tiny Tim in his "God bless you one and all" signoff. ITT's offer to sponsor the program was turned down . . . Anyway, now we know what's wrong with the Nixon team: no bench.

There were the inevitable strange coincidences. On Ch. 5, the President was followed by a Bill Cosby rerun, taped Feb. 19, during which Cosby asks Groucho Marx, "But seriously, how would you rate me as a comedian?" and Groucho replies, "Seriously, Bill, I'd say as a comedian you follow right behind Nixon" . . . Viewers who turned to Ch. 3 were astounded to find Judy Holliday and Bill Holden entering a hall to hear the "Watergate Symphony" during that fine '51 film, "Born Yesterday" . . . And in Sunday's "Prince Valiant" comic, drawn months ago, Frieda says "It is for the good for the kingdom that any source of scandal be suppressed immediately."

Michael Davie of the London Observer, reporting from Washington, produced one line, "Mr. Nixon has always liked fresh blood," that caught Gretchen Herbkersman's eye. "And all this time we thought it was ketchup," she sighs.

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