

What's in a Good Name?

A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

"Give me back my good name!" Maurice (The Collector) Stans demanded of the Watergate Committee as he ended his testimony. The Collector, Richard Nixon's No. 1 money juicer, was looking in the wrong direction.

If he's misplaced his good name, he has a better chance of finding it in Bob Vesco's attaché case with the 200-grand secret campaign contribution. Or maybe he left it in Herbert Kalmbach's White House safe when he gave Richard Nixon's lawyer the 75 Gs to help buy the burglar's silence. Or it could be that his good name went down the mouth of the shredder in those panicky days after the Watergate arrests when The Collector was ordering the young CREEP-sters in the Finance Committee for the Re-election of the President to destroy the records.

The Collector was on the witness stand for two days. But after he gave his name to the clerk, only the tourists who're still lining up to get into the marble room could believe the rest of what he said. Even the most credulous members of this committee, which in the last few weeks has extended senatorial courtesy to some of the most disingenuous perjury ever uttered under the Capitol dome, had trouble keeping down what The Collector was feeding 'em.

It's possible that The Collector's cufflinks, bearing the presidential seal on them, hypnotized Inouye of Hawaii and Montoya of New Mexico. The two Democrats displayed a sympathy for the indicted and disgraced former Secretary of Commerce which was so touching they couldn't bring themselves to ask this most unfortunate of men a single vexatious question.

But if Montoya, who has shown that luck will get you into the Senate as fast as brains, spent his television time telling The Collector that his life story is a model for American youth, the two old-time Southern Democrats on the committee, Talmadge of Georgia and Senator Sam, the white-haired rooster from North Carolina, weren't having any.

It surpassed Talmadge's understanding how The Collector could know how much CREEP was spending for bumper stickers in Idaho and have no idea who he and his assistants parceled out nearly \$2 million in cash to. All that cash in those safes fascinated Senator Sam also. He wanted to know why, "instead of putting it in the bank there was a total of \$1,777,000 approximately in cash in that office . . . The office was in a bank building, was it not?"

"Yes, it was," The Collector answered.

"And all you would have had to have done to make it safe," Senator Sam inquired, "would have been for somebody to go on the elevator, to go down to the bank and deposit it in the bank, would he not?"

The Collector agreed: "That would be a simple way to do it." But Senator Sam couldn't keep on pushing the witness by asking questions like a big old white rooster who pecks at a piece of corn.

Gurney, the Florida Republican who last distinguished himself by going down fighting for G. Harrold Carswell's nomination to the Supreme Court, said Senator Sam was harassing the witness. Outside of asking Stans about the weather there was no way you could avoid harassing him, but nobody came to Senator Sam's aid. So Stans took over and delivered a lecture on the purity of his and his associates' motives: "The idea is being purveyed that no one gives a substantial amount of money to a campaign without buying something in return, without the expectation of a favor . . . that is vicious, that is a lie, and it is belittling to our self-respect as a people."

Fine, except The Wall Street Journal (June 1) quotes one of Stans' own contributors as saying of any campaign investor like W. Clement Stone (two million bills). "When someone gives that kind of money they have a purpose and it isn't altruistic." The same article reports that George Champion Jr., finance chairman of Florida CREEP, declared that if he'd known about Watergate he might have doubled the \$25,000 he put in the pot to reelect the leader.

But the Committee let Stans say without rebuttal that, "A lot of innocent people (unnamed) have been drawn through the mire of unrelenting publicity insinuations, accusations, charges . . . I put myself in that category. I volunteered or was drafted, whatever the case may be, because I believed in My President . . . but I know you cannot feel the abuse to which I have been subjected because of the association I fell into."

Somebody might have said to Stans that next time Richard Nixon drafts him to be the paymaster for a burglary ring, he could protest and say, "Oh, My President, do not throw me into association with perjurers and thieves, because, My President, I will be subject to abuse, get indicted and lose my good name."

Instead, Senator Baker thanked him for coming, which is a strange thing to do with a man who appears under subpoena, but he couldn't give The Collector back his good name. That little item is in G. Gordon Liddy's jail cell, where Maurice Stans may yet go to reclaim it.