

A Collection of Twerps, Pipsqueaks



Nicholas von Hoffman

THE Roman Republic was almost overthrown by Catiline (Lucius Sergius Catilina), 108-62 B.C. a conspirator of sufficient stature that Cicero could immortalize him while driving him from the Senate and stopping his plot. The American Republic was almost reduced to a Presidential autarchy by a collection of twerps and pipsqueaks.

Senator Sam Ervin deserved better than a bunch of conspirators who sniffle they just "drifted" into it. Senator Howard Baker merits more than saving the Republic from men who had no grander scheme in mind than skimming \$4850 (why the extra \$50?) for their honeymoons. When Cicero finished off Catiline in that oration which school boys still study, was Mrs. Catiline sitting behind him, looking like a Castro Convertible sofa?

Here a buck, there a buck. John Dean was making petty trades in suburban real estate to furnish his house, and his master is chiseling the public treasury for money to buy himself a rug, a lounge chair and an ottoman. My God, did they do it all so they could live like the people in the television commercials? Talk about the banality of evil, what we have here is the evil of banality.

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SUCH degraded people. Charles Colson hires E. Howard Hunt, his old friend, who performs his despicable tricks, but they're friends, their families are friends, and then Mrs. Hunt dies in the Chicago airplane crash scattering Mexican black-mail money over three acres, and Colson can't decide whether or not to go to the funeral.

Of course, this is Dean's version of the events. We haven't heard from Colson yet, and Dean hates Colson; and John Ehrlichman and Richard Kleindienst hate each other, and Jeb Magruder and Gordon Liddy and John Mitchell, so you can't be sure

who's telling the truth. A safe rule, however, is to believe the worst and the tackiest.

We have Magruder coming to the White House and asking, according to Dean, if they'll give him a better job than Assistant Third Out at the Commerce Department provided he can successfully perjure his way through the Senate Water-gate hearings.

We have Magruder rushing off to see his lawyers when he suspects "It's scape-goat time," and Dean's testimony laced with apprehension that they're setting him up.

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A FINE BUNCH. Taping each other's phone conversations. Can you imagine what those White House staff meetings must have been like?

If Dean's right, even President Nixon may have been doing it. He says of his April 15 meeting with Mr. President that "the interesting thing that happened during the conversation was very near the end, he got up out of his chair... and in a nearly inaudible tone said to me he was probably foolish to have discussed Hunt's clemency with Colson." What was he doing, trying to get out of microphone range? Lovely picture that. The President talking to his chief lawyer, both of them backing away from each other's tape recorders.

Catiline was a classic conspirator brought down in the Golden Age of an aristocratic republic by its foremost man of law and letters. Senator Sam is a classic American Whig, one of a long line of Southern, countrified, Protestant constitutionalists, an exemplar of a type that we egalitarian Americans cherish even when we disagree. He is confronted with the Great Trading Stamp Conspiracy, the executive trainee, corporate boardroom, shopping-center franchise plot. The match-up offends poetry and demeans the dignity of history.

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