

Mr. Buchanan and the Watergate Grand Jury

Only a single member of that 23-member [Watergate] grand jury was a Republican. Seventeen of the 23 were black—members of a racial minority that voted, nationally, upwards of 10 to 1 against the President, a minority whose political leaders have repeatedly characterized Richard Nixon and his Administration as bigoted and racist.—From an article by White House Consultant Patrick J. Buchanan in The New York Times.

WELL, SO MUCH for the Watergate grand jury. The resourceful Mr. Buchanan has now explained to those who care to listen how that particular group of men and women happened, toward the end of their second year of deliberations, to name Mr. Nixon as an unindicted co-conspirator in the Watergate cover-up. They were unrepresentative, you see, both by virtue of their being black and of their not being Republicans. If Mr. Nixon is ever impeached, we have not the smallest doubt that Mr. Buchanan will offer up the explanation that the House of Representatives is not representative—they are, after all, *mostly not Republicans* and some of them are even, well, *black*, and never mind that somebody or other out there among the electorate voted to send them to Congress.

True, no one voted to send the Watergate grand jurors to the grand jury. That long-suffering and much put-upon group of citizens trying to do their duty was summoned to serve in the first instance—courtesy of a computer—by the U.S. District Court and then assigned its tasks by an official of the U.S. Justice Department. The Justice Department, you will remember, was then under the guidance of a white Republican who has since become the first Attorney General in our history to be convicted of a criminal charge. (It should be noted, nonetheless, that statistically both he and his predecessor, another

white Republican currently awaiting trial on criminal charges himself, would have much more nearly approximated Mr. Buchanan's apparent criteria for fair service on the Watergate grand jury.) The reason the grand jurors to whom Mr. Buchanan objects have been in business so long is that the subject before them was reopened when it was discovered that they had, the first time around, been systematically lied to under oath by the President's associates and otherwise been made the object of deceit in a conspiracy emanating from the White House. It is not recorded that when, having fallen for the lies, they originally indicted only a handful of lower-down aides in the fall of 1972, Mr. Buchanan saw fit to introduce questions about their color and their politics.

Mr. Buchanan, of course, is a white Republican. So is John Dean. So is Judge Sirica. So is H. R. Halde- man. And so is Lowell Weicker. The point is so elementary that one is astounded to have to make it: people are more than the sum of their statistics; they are individual and willful and different; and they tend to be motivated by a desire to act responsibly and to do right. As anyone who has contemplated the White House transcripts will know, it is this last little wrinkle that Mr. Nixon and some of his closest aides seem to have had the most trouble understanding. Those transcribed conversations show that they were at once baffled by and contemptuous of those of their associates and employees who decided to play straight with the investigators. Were they closet Democrats? Were they going for some hero's role? What could be motivating such people who were, after all, white Republicans?

The same thing, we would say in response, that is motivating the black grand jurors: a desire to fulfill their public responsibilities as honestly and as decently as they can.