

Angels Among The Devils

A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

Given that Dick Cavett's preparation for interviewing political figures was an apprenticeship as a gag writer for TV comedians, he did as well as you have a right to expect while devoting his program to Jeb Stuart Magruder. Occasionally, Mr. Cavett would take his thumb out of his mouth to ask Mr. Nixon's handsome fallen angel, now doing time in the slammer, whether Magruder resented Cavett resenting Magruder for having been such a stinker during the 1972 campaign.

In response Magruder would lay off playing middle class boy goes to lower class penitentiary and switch over to repeating his act of contrition. Forgive me, dear public, for I have sinned grievously against thy electoral process. In the business of public confessions Magruder, a fifth echelon pipsqueak with little to purge himself of, is outclassed by Jesus' new and effusive friend, Chuck, child of the Lord, Colson. You can hardly turn on a television set without seeing this erstwhile runner-over of grandmothers discussing the state of his soul in terms so tasteless that Jesus Himself must get goose pimples. The genuineness of these professions that he's accepted an innocent Jesus as his personal savior are attested to by Harold Hughes of Iowa, who is acting less and less like a United States senator and more and more like a theatrical anabaptist.

Colson and Magruder are no more tolerable on their knees than they were on their feet, but in either position the sincerity of their confessions should be a matter between them and their God, assuming He cares. This twaddle about the honesty of their confessions provides us with so much entertainment that we are distracted from the main business, part of which is that the big guys are getting away.

Former Attorney General Richard Kleindienst has been allowed to lie to the Senate under oath and plead guilty, not to perjury, but to a lesser charge. Three lawyers on Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski's staff are supposed to have quit over this sweetheart deal. They are supposed to have quit, because here in Washington the nearly invariable custom is to resign over a question of principle and then not tell anybody about it.

Jaworski himself has offered no explanation for giving Kleindienst a pass, but then there is a lot Jaworski has to explain. Why is a Magruder doing 10 months to four years while Harry Heltzer and Russel deYoung, chairmen of 3M and Goodyear respectively, get off one with a \$500 and \$1,000 fines?

When a scalawag like Harding L. Lawrence, chairman of the board of Braniff Airways, is allowed to plead guilty to but one violation of the Federal Code, it's not only that his lawyers have plea bargained him

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into a measly \$1,000 fine and kept him out of the jail, it is also that we don't get a trial. Without a trial we don't know what really transpired with Lawrence, Braniff and the CREEP representatives he dealt with. He pleaded guilty to \$40,000 in illegal campaign contributions, but the real amount may be 20 times higher.

By negotiating with Lawrence, Jaworski protected this man. He had help from the judge, the same George L. Hart Jr. who let Kleindienst off without a fine or a day in jail and then presented this self-confessed liar with a good citizenship award. At Lawrence's sentencing this same judge was told that the businessman was "under some pressure to make this contribution" but Hart didn't ask for the names of the men putting pressure on the Braniff chairman.

Hart's conduct is explicable. A former dispenser of Republican patronage, he had a record long before Watergate of being a biased, pro-Nixon judge. Jaworski, we don't know about. The talk is that these businessmen he ought to be prosecuting are the same sort that his own private firm represents.

There is no one to call a man like Jaworski to account. Secrecy protects almost everything that the judges and lawyers connected with Watergate do. Secrecy is the law profession's equivalent to executive privilege, but what is plainly out in the open is that by putting the Magruders in jail and giving a pass to the Lawrences, Jaworski and Hart are doing their best to see that Watergate gets repeated. Jail does deter white collar crooks.

The money and the ambiance for lawlessness come from the businessmen who put up the illegal millions in that campaign. Without them there could be no Watergates. Magruders are available by the peck. It's the real white collar criminals, the Lawrence types, who put up the dough to make the buy.

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