

Books

The hippie, the Brooks Brothers type, queen for a day, and the ex-con

By Geoffrey Wolff

Blind Ambition: The White House Years by John Dean. Simon and Schuster (415 pp., illustrated, \$11.95).

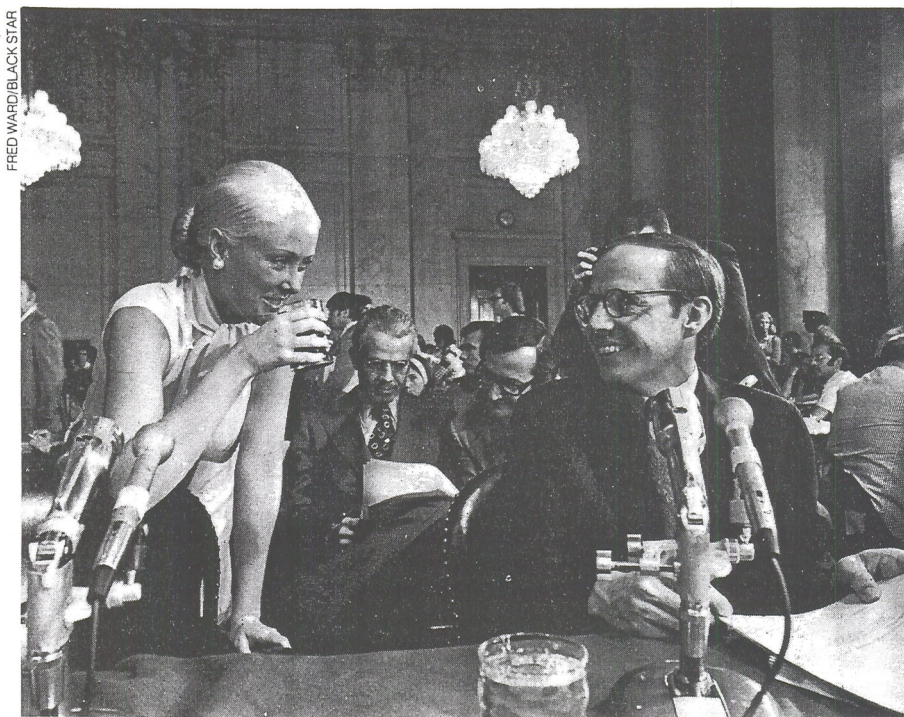
"Mo": A Woman's View of Watergate by Maureen Dean, with Hays Gorey. Simon and Schuster (286 pp., illustrated, \$8.95) and Bantam (270 pp., \$1.75).

Richard Nixon thought John Dean was a hippie, because his deferential Chief Counsel rode to work in a Porsche and failed to wear an American flag on his lapel. John Dean thought that *The Most Powerful Man On The Planet* was certainly awkward, and probably dumb. He also believed him to be "a devious bastard." James Neal, the Watergate prosecutor, thought Jeb Magruder was a "crybaby. All he does is bitch, bitch, bitch." Gordon Liddy thought Magruder was "an asshole." Now, Barry Goldwater thought that his party's best man was deceitful: "That goddam Nixon has been lying all of his life," while Dean's criminal lawyer believed that Nixon, for whom he voted in 1972, was "a goddam criminal, that's what I think." Dean thought of Liddy as a "beggar's crossroads," and he didn't care at all for John Ehrlichman. Neither did his wife Maureen, "Mo" as she is known to millions, who thought of him as "That arrogant, thoughtless creature." She noticed too that the bearded Bard of Santa Fe was fat. Now Rosemary Woods? Mo liked her: "I liked her instantly. Basically, I like everyone. . . ." Well, almost: "I don't know which bothers me more—the President's callousness, or his stupidity." She loved Walter Cronkite who "even invited us [John and me] to go sailing with him and his wife off Martha's Vineyard during the summer" of the Watergate hearings. (What would Spiggy Veep have thought?) Now Colson maligned Dean during the Senate

hearings, but in prison they were good buddies again. Ehrlichman simply *hated* Mitchell, who hated him right back. Haldeman was a meanie to almost everyone, but he was sometimes courteous to Dean. Hunt was a blackmailer, and Pat Gray told fibs. Mo thought that her husband's brother-in-law and civil lawyer was trying to screw John out of his royalties. Everyone felt sort of sorry for Segretti, but what could they do, he was a patsy? Mo thought it wasn't fair that John Dean had to spend his nights in a cell: "He's the one who spent years studying law and utilizing his knowledge of it. Now he will never

she'd agree. This is a woman raised in a poor pocket of a rich Los Angeles neighborhood for whom "a Beverly Hills address becomes a badge of distinction, something to strive for, something that announces—like a Mercedes Benz or a Rolls Royce in the driveway—that you have arrived, even if you haven't." She fell for the President's mouthpiece (as she would have it) because he was "a Brooks Brothers type . . . someone who knew so much about what was going on in the world." (Did he not *just*?)

She was not so witting, but "I smiled, batted my eyes a lot—and



Mo and John: although he didn't tell her anything about Watergate during the Nixon years, both are singing now.

be allowed to practice law again." Sam Dash didn't know what to make of Mo: "She showed no outward sign of concern or comprehension of her husband's—and consequently, her own—desperate plight. . . . Such a remarkable display of indifference, under the circumstances, reflected either insensitivity and shallowness or an extraordinary ability to submerge feelings of personal turmoil."

Well, I'm here to tell you that Mo Dean is not a woman of "extraordinary ability," and I have no doubt that

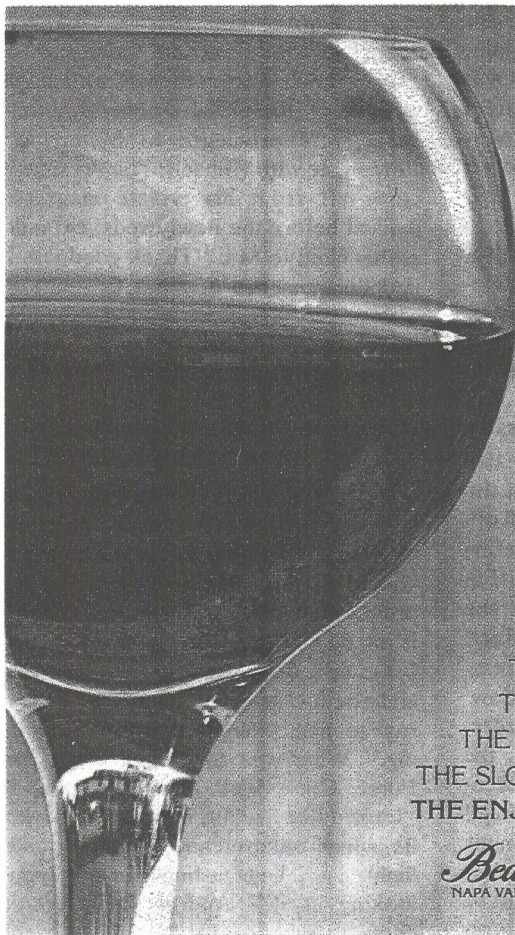
found that people really were very helpful." She and John lived together two years before they were married, and during that time her husband did not trouble to introduce her to his parents, who lived a few hours drive from Washington. John "occasionally seemed aloof and distant from me. . . ." For example, she thought after they were married that she was pregnant, and told her husband, thinking to cheer him up. "Oh?" he responded. "Well, I guess that's all right; I mean it's O.K." One thing, as she re-

marks casually, "We prayed together as we always do. . . ." They pledged to tell each other the truth always. John Dean reports that he is a very unskilled liar, and that when he took a lie detector test, and was instructed to prevaricate, he "almost broke the machine." But he neglected to fill Mo in on his professional activities: "Looking back," she writes, "I do not regard John's not telling me about Watergate as a failure to abide by this agreement. It was just one of the many elements of his work for the President, and neither of us wanted to talk all night about what he had been doing all day."

Who can blame them? He was a busy boy. At thirty-one, after having practiced law for six months, he found himself at the bottom of the greasy pole and eager for a climb. His principal talent was an ability and willingness to kiss ass, as he confesses with almost lubricious eagerness. He was a clothes-wearing man, and he managed to work peoples' first names into almost every sentence of his conversations with them, just to remind them that he remembered who they were. (He has not yet suppressed this tic.) A dilemma that put him on the rack was the matter of John Mitchell, his early patron. Could he call this mighty fellow "John?" Finally he did, just as he decided to throw him to the hounds of vengeance.

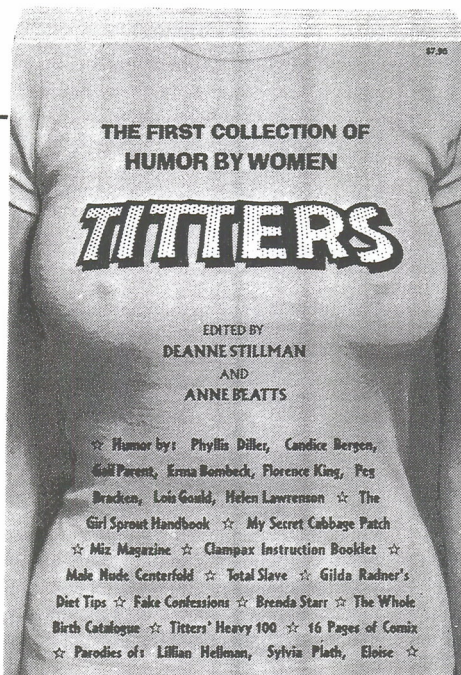
As soon as he was settled in the White House, Dean developed "a plan of advancement." Simply, he would insinuate himself into as many of the affairs of his superiors as he could, building a practice like any conventional eager-beaver novice lawyer, building a reputation as a can-do, want-to, kid. Got problems with conflict of interest? Here's Johnny. Your wife's a pain in the ass? Dean will find you a divorce lawyer. Problems with an illegal break in? Let's see what can be done. You want to bust Hunt's safe? Here we go. . . .

And nothing was neglected on the personal side. Dean learned the jargon of "game plans" and "stroking sessions." He agonized with his colleagues when someone turned scared or—God forbid!—honest, and wandered "off the reservation." He even practiced the device of stroking on his wife, giving her when she thought of leaving him before they were married an engagement ring, which would "keep me 'on the reservation' . . . and yet without a wedding ring or even a firm commitment of one. . . ." Here was a man eager to grease life's



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wheels. Sometimes this was unpleasant for John Dean. One day, for example, the President called him into the Oval Office and offered him a cup of coffee, "which I declined. When he offered it again, I accepted. I was too timid to tell the President that I hate coffee and never drink it, it does terrible things to my body." He was a quick study, however. Later, at a prayer breakfast (Jesus!), Mo suffered as "John handed me a cup of coffee, took one himself, and began to 'circulate.' I kept an eye out for the woman in the same dress, but she never appeared, thank goodness."

Mo is, as what viewer can forget, "The glass of fashion and the mould of form, /The observ'd of all observers." I quote Shakespeare in deference to her own affection for that Famous Man, whose own *Macbeth* she harks unto with such portentous effect: "The President was no more successful in saying, 'Out, damned shadow' than Lady Macbeth had been in ordering: 'Out, damned spot.' In fact, the shadow darkened. . . ." And suddenly it was time for the Senate hearings! "Being preoccupied with the statement he was going to make, and being a man, John of course had given no thought to the fact that a woman about to go on view before thirty million people must concern herself with what she is going to wear. At least this woman must. 'Just look like a wife,'" John said. Just like a man! Well, they quarreled so about Mo's turban that she almost stayed home. But the rest is, she'd surely say, history. Her mother brought her the news that she was "beautiful" on screen. Not weird, as some thought, but beautiful. Mo has a sense of proportion about these things: "Well, I may have looked beautiful to Mom, but to me I looked like a large size 12—double my normal 6. I went very easy on the pizza and cheeseburgers that night," the night of the day when John Dean's decision to tell the truth for a change "saved the nation from a President and an administration that could have wrecked it. Absolutely wrecked it." Mo admits that "there is a little of the historian in me," and she senses these things (woman's intuition!), so how could a couple of nice youngsters have got themselves caught up in such a mob of scoundrels?

There were helicopters and limousines. Special telephones that ring louder than regular telephones, and more often. The company of the great, awesome creatures like Maurice Stans, a member of the CPA Hall of Fame,

and Richard Nixon himself. One day John and Mo, King and Queen for a Day, wrenched from their Florida honeymoon by the press of cover-up business, were privileged to fly on Air Force One with Himself. The President came aft from his private quarters, paused before the newlyweds, extended his hand to Mo: "Thank goodness I had the presence of mind to shake it rather than kiss it. With my latent Catholicism stirring within, the thought of kissing his hand did cross my mind—fleeting. I would have died of embarrassment if I had." (Suppose the Commander in Chief had extended his ass to this latent Catholic's hubby! Who would have been embarrassed then?)

"To fly with the President of the United States and First Family in the presidential plane! It was a long way from Mar Vista for Sidney Charles Kane and Irene Kelly's little girl Mo, and she had to pinch herself a time or two to make sure she wasn't dreaming." What was so special about Air Force One? Well, for one thing it "looked like a giant, majestic bird with its wings outstretched, ready to take flight. . . . I get a tingle in my spine looking at it." And if that weren't enough, once aboard "We knew right where to sit. There were name cards for every passenger."

So deep did this experience of privileged flight cut, so high did it lift, that airborne metaphors continued to buzz in Mo's fancy long after the event. When the President ordered his counsel to Camp David to write a piece of fiction, a Watergate "report," Mo was asked along. "That put me on Cloud Nine. . . . I was terror-stricken. What, I asked myself, does a woman wear to Camp David?" She muddled through, and found special jackets hanging in their closet, bearing the Camp David seal. And she didn't even know she and John were supposed to take them with them when they left! They were a gift from the taxpayers to the taxpayers' guests.

We are generous people, you and I. We were eager to put Trick at his ease in San Clemente and at Key Biscayne. The Air Force One so moving to Mo was a junker as far as we and our President were concerned, and he replaced it with one that had shag carpeting of a deeper blue. He lost patience with the Presidential Yacht *Sequoia*, and one of John Dean's duties was to come up with a more suitably elegant replacement. Here was a President who knew his mind. Too awkward to

remove his fountain pen cap from its body without deep study, he nevertheless had a sense of history, as he liked to remind himself, ruminating about the Hiss case. In the Oval Office was a desk which once belonged to Woodrow Wilson. It was a lovely desk, according to Dean, who found the Presidential rug rather tacky. "The President liked to sit with his feet on it, and his heels had scarred the top. Once, when he was out of the country," Dean reports, "someone noticed the damaged mahogany surface and sent the desk out to be refinished. When he returned, Nixon noticed that his heel marks had been removed. 'Dammit, I didn't order that,' he snapped. 'I want to leave my mark on this place just like other Presidents.'"

Well why not? Ike put the signature of his golf cleats on the floor of the office. Snooty Ike didn't care to see too much of Vice President Nixon. Told Prime Minister Macmillan he couldn't stand to have him on the place at Camp David. Tables turned now, Ike dead, Pluck and Luck from Whittier up there whenever he pleases, and with his own pool recently built, more elegant than what he found. Camp David: "all the trappings of royalty were present," Mo observed. Such as? Her eye is shrewd: "The cabins at Camp David are not plush, but they are oh so comfortable. In the main large rooms there are double and twin beds," (in case there are ten in each room?) "a night stand, and lots and lots of telephones." There is even "a television set—color, of course." Even John, not much of a gusher, was impressed: "You couldn't pay for such services."

But John, as history will recollect, was busy at Camp David, trying to figure out how to save his nation's ass, and his own. He was working on the March 21 meeting with his Leader, a meeting that "will never be forgotten as long as there is a United States." Later Mo would give up on the Watergate trial because it bored her, and she found life with John in seclusion at Bethany Beach in Delaware while he prepared his testimony "a drag" without television or even radio. There is only so much history can do for a girl, and Mo had her limits, so Camp David let her down: "I played pool with myself. . . . I looked at the books. They were all old and dull." She was about to go crazy with boredom when suddenly she remembered that guests at Camp David can see any movie they care to see, and she watched five in

three days from a sofa "nine feet long! I measured it." Now there's an Imperial Presidency for you.

Why are we going through all this? *Blind Ambition* is the November full selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club (*Mo* was the responsibility of the Literary Guild), and the good judges have publicly searched their consciences: "There was a time of it deciding what to do about . . . *Blind Ambition*. There was a strong feeling that the scoundrels had made quite enough money out of their Watergate follies. . . ." But they got their consciences under control sufficiently to put more money in Dean's purse, and their own, because he "must be heard out." (The club might have offered the book, as it has offered others, *pro bono publico*, and free to its citizen readers. It might rain frogs and gold pieces before sunup tomorrow.)

There are bits and pieces of news here. An implication that Nixon admitted to Dean having counterfeited

a typewriter in the Hiss case. A report of Liddy's willingness to have himself shot by his superiors. Testimony that President Ford perjured himself at his confirmation hearings, that he was controlled by the White House when he sabotaged an early House investigation of Watergate. Confirmation that Nixon always knew as much, more than, Dean about the break-in and coverup. Mitchell's promise that "If anyone tries to charge me with anything, I'm just going to stonewall it." A report that Howard Baker was a devious rascal, conspiring with the White House in private during the Senate hearings while he played the part of Senator Sanctimony on camera. (This is told in great and chilling detail in Samuel Dash's current *Chief Counsel: Random House*, 275 pp., \$10.)

But mostly what is here is gossip, and a sense of what any sane person has always suspected of these thugs. Dean writes as coldly as he has lived, and sometimes far better than his

sophomoric report for *Rolling Stone* on the Republican Convention would have led me to expect. (He's still trying to please the boss, cutting himself with ludicrous ineptitude to fit Hunter Thompson's form.) He still manages to inflict damage on his colleagues, reporting that one—find his name on your own—was probably caught in a raid on a whorehouse, that another reads *Playboy* and looks at the centerfold. I won't say who this latter is, but I've changed my mind about the former. Ronnie Ziggy. It wouldn't be fair to him not to squeal on the other: Maurice Stans.

What's left to know? If people choose shitheels to lead them, they'll be led by shitheels. Thieves steal paper clips and rubber bands from the office.

There is one final question, I guess. Chuck Colson and John Dean, during an idle moment in the slammer, asked it of Jeb Magruder. Why did they bug Larry O'Brien? "Well, it just seemed like a good idea," Jeb said evasively."

Movies

Tycoons and tirades

By Richard Corliss

"I noticed the girl long before Stahr arrived at the dance. Not a pretty girl, for there are none of those in Los Angeles—one girl can be pretty, but a dozen are only a chorus. Nor yet a professional beauty—they do all the breathing for everyone, and finally even the men have to go outside for air. Just a girl, with the skin of one of Raphael's corner angels and a style that made you look back twice to see if it were something she had on."

This is Cecilia Brady, the young narrator of *The Last Tycoon*, speaking of the novel's heroine, Kathleen Moore. And this is Scott Fitzgerald, at the burnt-out end of his shooting-star life, writing what every English Comp. professor wants his students to emulate as classic American prose—that serene balance of the colloquial and the poetic, the discovery of images and incidents that seem both brand new and immediately recognizable from the collective American unconscious. With their searching, doomed heroes and their beautiful women who offer everything but themselves, Fitzgerald's nov-

els and short stories were pigeonholed as the apotheosis of Jazz Age romance; and the author himself, following the tritest scenario from resolute madcap to dissolute madman, seemed sent from heaven (or Central Casting) as the soul of an adolescent age. That's why he was considered washed up in 1937 when he went to write scripts in Hollywood "with the resignation of a ghost assigned to a haunted house." It's also

why the seventies has taken Fitzgerald to its nostalgic heart, and why in the last few years we've seen half-a-dozen movies and TV shows based on the author's life and works.

Fitzgerald would be the first to recognize the irony here. His last years in Hollywood were spent mostly in fruitless, pathetic arguments with the moguls, pleading that the scripts on which he'd lavished such care not be



Nicholson, DeNiro and Boulting: heightening senses instead of bludgeoning them.