



Garry Wills ^{OCT 23 1972}
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**Chicken Little
Lives Again**

THERE IS a Sky Is Falling school of journalists at work on this administration's scandals. Writers are disturbed that Duckie-Luckie does not get disturbed enough when Doom impends over Watergate.

Their concern is understandable. It is not pleasant to think our rulers are crooks, or at least consort with crooks—when investigators trace rat droppings into and out of the White House itself. But this can hardly come as a surprise, so late in history.

McGovern says our moral insensitivity is of recent growth—is Richard Nixon's fault. But voters have been injured to scandal from our origins. The thievery of Grant's administration did not turn Republicans out of office; neither did Teapot Dome. In fact, I don't know of a single presidential election that was lost because of personal scandal connected with an incumbent.

THE PUBLIC attitude seems to be that every regime will have a certain amount of graft and hanky-panky. And politicians dutifully live down to these expectations. Truman had his Five-Percenters and fur coat; Eisenhower changed the

coat's material to vicuna, and added a rug; Johnson had his Bobby Baker and Walter Jenkins. Even a "reform" administration like Mayor Lindsay's in New York is scandal-ridden. And some of those doing Chicken Little's act over Watergate do not care at all about Chappaquiddick.

Is it cynical to say these things? Perhaps. Still, I do care that Americans do not care. This bothers me very much—but in areas that dwarf the Watergate puerilities. A nation that doesn't mind bombing defenseless civilians, killing them by thousands, is an obscenity. The man who strenuously tsk-tsks over partisan venalities, after that, has no sense of proportion. If even the worst charges prove true about Nixon's shady cadre of finaglers and forgers and evil clowns, all their efforts added up just amount to

petty crime when weighed against our war responsibilities.

OR TAKE the record of this Administration's attempts to "get" people it considered public nuisances. Framing a case to "cover" for J. Edgar Hoover, the Justice Department tried to deprive priests and nuns of their freedom, to put them in jail for life. After that, efforts to deprive McGovern of an election look small indeed. And I don't recall, for that matter, "St. George" saying anything in this campaign about the Berrigans.

No, McGovern has endorsed a man legally charged with involvement in the liquidation of troublesome Panthers by police "executioners." One side pays phone-tappers, while the other backs lynch law. Is it any wonder the public yawns at both sides, labors of outrage? The brother-in-law of Chappaquiddick's best-known motorist just cannot get over the effrontery of men breaking and entering out of obscure lust to read the collected missives of Larry O'Brien. Both sides boo-hoo over trivialities, while we bomb a whole country shapeless. Aren't politicians funny?