

Let's Do It

By Russell Baker

WASHINGTON, June 1—As people who think there is too much ado about trivia at the Watergate say, "They all do it." Take George Washington. He did it.

That's why nobody ever dared to run against him. Several men thought of running and one, the venerable Increase Cyrus, boyhood companion of Benjamin Franklin, came very close to announcing his candidacy in 1796.

All of them changed their minds. They did not have the courage to run against George Washington because, as John Adams noted in his correspondence with James Madison, "We were all afraid that Washington would do it."

The venerable Increase Cyrus wrote Cotton Adams that on the evening before his intended announcement of candidacy he was visited by a man wearing an ill-fitting white wig and using a voice modification device. "You can run if you want to, Increase," the visitor said in his ill-fitting voice, "but if you do we're going to distribute a million copies of this forged letter we've written over your forged signature to show you were in cahoots with Benedict Arnold."

"George Washington would never allow you to perpetuate such a lie," the venerable Increase Cyrus declared.

"Why shouldn't he, Increase?" the caller asked. "They all do it."

Thomas Jefferson did it on the grand scale, but he was most famous for the many burglaries which were a special feature of his Administration.

According to Jefferson's famous correspondent, Henry Moose Lodge, "Tom had burglars rifling every blanket

OBSERVER

chest between Savannah and Boston looking for stolen Government papers that might reveal the secret U.S. plans for robbing the Indians blind. Once when I wrote to Tom and said, 'Tom, these burglaries are in bad taste,' he wrote me back, saying, 'Tush, Henry, they all do it.'"

Andrew Jackson brought something fresh to the scene. He did it with guns. This provoked self-righteous editorials.

"The habit of extorting large sums of raw cash from rich men who need a favor in Washington has always been unseemly in our Presidents," Horace Greeley editorialized. "But President Jackson lets matters go too far when his campaign committee sends soldiers into the streets to collect campaign contributions at gunpoint. It is not enough for President Jackson to say, as he has done, 'Hell, they all do it.'"

Ulysses Grant, Rutherford B. Hayes, Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison did it in the style made famous by Abraham Lincoln.

Lincoln's political foresight was so great that he realized early in his career that there would eventually be laws against candidates taking huge sums of money from rich people, and that when these laws were passed they would all have to find a new way to do it.

This, in fact, was the real reason for the Mexican-American War. Lincoln made President Polk see that all Presidents would soon need a compliant Mexico willing to launder their campaign checks without telling the F.B.I.

"Goodness, Abraham," President Polk said to the young Lincoln at this time, "do you mean to tell me that politics isn't going to be any more decent by the time you become President?"

And Lincoln replied, "You can hide all of the money some of the time, and you can hide some of the money all of the time, but you can't hide all of the money all of the time unless you've got a Mexican laundry."

Polk said, all right, he would make the war, but he didn't like it. "They all do it," Lincoln told him.

Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, of course, did it. "We didn't know we were doing it," they later told President Polk, who never succeeded in finding the universal doing of it anything but distasteful, although he did it himself, just like everybody.

"But we did it," Roosevelt and Wilson explained, "for national security."

President Polk leaped to his feet and saluted.