

# Letters to the Editor

## 'Azaleas or Somesuch,' Not Watergate in Ervin Country

To the Editor:

For the last twenty years I have lived in New York Times country (specific locales being too varied to list) but I am a product of Senator Sam Ervin's North Carolina. And while, given that opportunity, I would certainly vote, contrarily to most votes cast by that singular gentleman, I take enormous pride these days in sharing a state with him.

Yesterday I heard a lady from Raleigh say that people down there ("and not maids or street sweepers, mind you, but intelligent people") wonder why Big Sam is "makin' an ass of himself in this Watergate thing." And I marvel that we, those intelligent people and myself, can see the same thing with so differing opinions of it. There is a Rashomon here for sure.

On a recent visit to my home state I tried to engage friends in talk of the investigation and those peculiarities which spawned it. As these friends are vastly charming folk, the topic was changed—without my quite noticing it at first—to azaleas or somesuch. But these, too, were not "maids or street sweepers, mind you" and so I became increasingly piqued by their unwillingness to speak at all on the subject which I'd introduced. With one exception, I was cast lovingly among the azaleas—and thus forced to make deductions.

It appears to me that these people are embarrassed by the Nixon Presidency, which they voted into their lives. They seem unable to become angry at the man who has abused their trust: They retreat into that vacant-smile tolerance accorded the drunk who has just vomited all over granny's damask tablecloth. (You will also end up examining the azaleas if you mention the Civil War to this group. A crazy kind of geographic inferiority complex abounds, denying them the satisfaction of saying, "It looked like a great idea until it looked like a rotten idea.")

I do not believe there is one decent person in this country who sanctions what the men in Nixon's White House have been doing. And although a very young Southern gentleman said to me that "this kind of thing has gone on in all the other Administrations," I do not believe that even he is so young as not to recognize this insult to our society as totally unique in kind.

They and all the rest who may denounce Senator Ervin or the committee or any of its members as asses know—they must know—that never before in the history of this Republic have the President and or his power-flecked minions worked determinedly to subvert the Constitution of the United States.

There have indeed been pocket-lining and other tawdry goings-on,

nefarious wafflings in Government and felonious machinations galore, but there has not been the effort to deprive the entire citizenry of its civil rights before. And on a less indictable but still important count, there has not been a Presidency so disdainful of its constituency.

This shouldn't embarrass the people who voted Richard Nixon into office. It should outrage them. Instead of slipping deftly behind the azaleas, they ought to raise their voices in high indignation, for they have been cheated of far more than the man who did not vote for Mr. Nixon.

Instead of refusing to talk about the unpleasant subject, they—like Senator Weicker — should roar like wounded bulls at their betrayal. Instead of voiding their right to have a voice, they—like Senator Baker—should seek fairly and fervently to call all the guilty to account.

It makes me very sad when I, a Southerner, see Southerners shrinking behind shames with which they ought not burden themselves.

J. HOWARD HOLDERNESS HAMMERSTEIN  
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