

# A Watergate Boom

## Sales of Anti-Nixon Novelties High Despite TV Recess

By Tom Huth

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"This is a very risky business," explained the distributor of Watergate novelty items. "Let's say the President should resign suddenly. You can kiss all your merchandise goodbye."

Fortunately for the novelty business, interest in Watergate continues. And scandal begets profits — in anti-Nixon posters, anti-Nixon bumper stickers, anti-Nixon T-shirts and whiskey bottle labels, bracelets, record albums and games.

Watergate has been a hot item for the novelties people for a couple of months now. Not as hot, certainly, as a Davy Crockett fad. But, as Larry Fishman, owner of FDC Graphics in Beltsville, put it, "When it's hot, you've got to grab it."

For many retailers, the issue apparently is too hot. Watergate merchandise tends to be clustered in a few small stores in the Washington area. The other shops, and especially the large chains, have resisted the urge to market such a momentous controversy.

"I mean, you wouldn't sell Nixon posters on the Mall, or at Sears," said Al Dargis, whose Dargis Associates in Beltsville distributes posters and bottle labels.

Fishman, whose company sells to several large drug and department store chains, said that when it comes to Watergate "they don't want to get involved . . . The big stores are shying away. They're really afraid."

One buyer told him, Fishman said, "You never know when you're going to get investigated." Fishman said buyers have admitted, "We know we can sell the hell out of it, but we're afraid." Their parameters are—nothing political, nothing gross, nothing sexual, nothing dope-oriented."

Personality Posters, a New York company that has not been so timid, received a letter last week from lawyers representing Maurice H. Stans, who was chairman of the Finance Committee to Re-elect the President.

The letter demanded that the firm cease and desist from printing one of the best-selling Watergate posters—a WANTED poster with mug shots of Stans and

other Watergate figures overlaid with the inscriptions "APPREHENDED."

The letter said that Stans "considers this poster highly defamatory because it subjects him to public humiliation, obloquy and ridicule."

A spokesman for Personality Posters—which was sued by the Girl Scouts of

See NOVELTIES, B7, Col. 1

### NOVELTIES, From B1

America a few years ago for a "Be Prepared" poster that pictured a pregnant Scout—said the letter had been turned over to the firm's lawyers. As to the merits of Stans' complaint, the spokesman said, "We simply describe what in fact was the case."

Stans has been indicted in New York on charges of obstructing justice and making false statements to a grand jury. He has repeatedly denied the allegations.

Retailers and wholesalers disagree about whether Watergate has reached the peak of its marketing value. That depends in part, they concurred, on how long the Senate Watergate hearings continue on television.

One poster distributor noted this difference between Watergate and past novelties fads:

"Most of the posters that are big sellers are connected with some youth-oriented experience—a pop hero, a film superstar, a rock hero or it could be an event, like Woodstock. So the only thing that distinguishes this one is that it's the first poster we've had that got a big response specifically from the over-40 market."

A shopping tour in the Washington area turned up these Watergate items, all exercising the constitutional right of free speech, including the right to revile or ridicule or laugh at a President:

- The Watergate Game. A poster, actually, which can be a little bugger. The object of the game is to stay out of jail as long as possible. . . Cheating is permitted if it is not seen by the com-

mander-in-chief, or if the commander-in-chief says he didn't see it."

- The Watergate Scandal—A Game of Cover-Up and Deception for the Whole Family. This is a simple card game about which it is explained: "Score is kept on scraps of paper which should be destroyed after each game. If, after the game, any of the winning losers become too obnoxious, they, too, should be destroyed."

- The Watergate Caper Game. This is a more complicated and expensive game, something like Monopoly, as suggested by an excerpt from the rules: "Upon gaining enough scandal points to indict an official, the official's name card is placed in the grand jury room. Once an official is indicted the Watergate investigator has the remainder of the game to gain enough scandal points to convict him."

- Bumper stickers. A large variety, including such disdainful ones as "Nixon Now, Worse Than Ever" and "Tricky Dick Proves Himself Again."

- Lapel pins. Two examples: "I Made Dean's List" and "The President Has a Staff Infection." The "Dean's List" is a reference to the so-called White House "enemies list" made public by John Dean.

- Bar glasses bearing pictures of a sour-faced Richard Nixon wearing headphones and the inscription, "The Big One."

- The Watergate Bug. Plastic caricatures of insects.

- T-shirts showing the President as a band leader, his arms extended in his characteristic victory pose but with antennae extending from his "for-victory fingers" and the label, "Don't Bug Me."

- Candles shaped like busts of a shifty-eyed, Pinocchio-nosed Nixon.

- Whiskey-bottle labels inscribed "The Proof Increases Every Day" and referring to the contents as "smooth and easy to swallow."

- "Confidential File" plastic briefcases. These are perforated with holes like Swiss cheese; "complete with holes for confidential leaks," the ads explain.

- The Puzzle of Watergate—A Jigsaw Puzzle That Will Bug You. The puzzle pictures the White House with hundreds of creepy-crawly insects streaming out the doors.

- Record albums. "The Watergate Comedy Hour" by the Watergate Seven, "Sing a Song of Watergate" by Mort Sahl and "Richard Nixon: A Fantasy" by David Frye.

- Bracelets. Patterned after the POW bracelets, these numbers are inscribed with names like Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Mitchell and their dates of indictment or resignation.

- Posters. These seem to be the most numerous and widespread. They fit all descriptions, but seem to be unanimously anti-Nixon.

One anti-Nixon poster has simply been updated to reflect Watergate. Nine drawings of the President depict a Jekyll-Hyde transformation from a stern and handsome crisis-solver to a vampirish, drooling, warty, wild-haired, pig-nosed, toothless ghoul. The old label was simply "Stoned Again" and the new one, "The Watergate Story."

Al Dargis, whose firm prints and distributes the posters, commented, "A public figure is bound to receive a certain amount of poking, fun, and that is part of the American way, really."

The latest big sellers are items glorifying Sen. Sam J.

Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.), the chairman of the Senate committee investigating Watergate. There already have been "Uncle Sam" Ervin T-shirts, and word is that Sam Ervin dolls and other goods are on the way.

Ken Hunter, a salesman at The Dungeon on Connecticut Avenue just below Dupont Circle, believes the anti-Nixon novelties are intended "not so much as an insult as to tease somebody else."

Some people, of course, do take offense. "We've got one woman," he said, "who stands outside and kicks the window. Never comes in."





By Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

A passerby seems interested in shop's Nixon posters, as well as Watergate posters.