

Job Magruder, Superstar

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By Victor Gold

Magruder was confiding in me, in his most earnest and warming manner. Watergate? "This operation was pedants," he said, "they were using junk stuff." He sneered at the equipment used—if the Committee had really been involved, it would have been done competently, he implied. It was inconceivable, as he told his story so straightforwardly, that this boyish man could be lying.—"The Making of the President, 1972" by THEODORE H. WHITE

WASHINGTON—"Dillinger" is very big at neighborhood movies these steaming summer days, despite the usual outcry raised about the motion picture industry's crass romanticizing of criminal types. But considering the public's bland-to-eager acceptance of the commercial exploitation of contemporary iniquity, a movie extolling the career of a Midwest bank robber who went to his reward forty years ago isn't really worth working up a moral sweat.

We're informed in the nation's Capital, for example, that Jeb Magruder, recent star of the Ervin committee hearings, is going to be very big on the college circuit this fall, pulling down four-figure honorariums per lecture on, of all subjects, "the evils of

Watergate." Mr. Magruder's tour, presumably, will continue all the way up to the day he goes to the Federal penitentiary for having perjured himself and suborning others to lie before the grand jury in the court that convicted the original Watergate Seven.

Oh, well, forgive and forget. To err is human, to forgive is divine. Anybody can make a mistake, you know. Pick your own bromide to rationalize what's taking place here, but there are those, perhaps in a dwindling minority, who recall the day when there was a price to be paid for committing a crime in this country rather than the reverse.

Conceded, justice should be tempered with mercy in cases where the miscreant, like Mr. Magruder, professes a newborn sense of morality from having realized the magnitude of his misdeeds.

But the operative word here—if one can still use the word "operative" with a straight face in connection with Watergate—is "newborn." To date, there is nothing to establish the sincerity of Mr. Magruder's contrition except his own word, the unreliability of which, lest those who pay out those college lecture fees forget, is what got him into trouble in the first place.

Nor did this autumn's star of the lecture circuit come to grips with the turpitude out of any self-generated

moral volition. He decided to come clean only after the cover-up plot was cracking at the seams under the pressure of Federal Judge John Sirica.

In other words, had it not been for Judge Sirica's persistence in keeping the case open even after the conviction of the seven, the Watergate cover-up would have succeeded admirably for the purposes of Mr. Magruder and those higher-ups he protected by lying and arranging for others to lie before the courts.

In short, Mr. Magruder's repentance, by all available evidence, has come about not because he was struck with a sense of his wrongdoing along the road to Damascus, or as it were, Georgetown. Having been cornered, he simply turned state's evidence to save his skin from even greater penalties sure to come.

There is no quarrel with the rectitude, relatively speaking, of his having done so. Whatever his motives, Mr. Magruder is a better man for having spoken up, even if it required investigative heat to spur his conscience. But what is objectionable about this case is that the new penitent, being possessed of a video-genic face and appealing manner—the same, to be sure, that conned the original Watergate grand jury—came away from his Ervin committee appearance having pulled

off something of a public relations coup.

Ironically—outrageously is the better word—the suborner ended his testimony with the encomiums of commitee members ringing in his ears, praising him for his redemption, hal-lelujah O Lord; while the young man he suborned, Herbert Porter, every bit as contrite but left divest of ingratiating star quality was castigated before the cameras by the same questioners, notably Senator Howard Baker. At last report, there are no requests for Mr. Porter's services on the college lecture circuit either.

Ah well, that's show biz. Meanwhile, Arthur Bremer is locked in a law suit over the royalties to his diary, rehaforcing the suspicion that a crime of celebrity, while inconvenient at times can be made to pay despite anything you might have heard, kids.

Pity Dillinger, born forty years too soon. Had Johnny been around today, he wouldn't have ended up in an alley down the street from the Biograph. Far from it. Given the right agent—lecture, not F.B.I., of course—he would have been worth at least 2,000 an appearance speaking to college students across the country on the subject, "I robbed banks and found God."

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