

Capitol Punishment

Piecemeal Now

By Art Buchwald

The solution to the two missing presidential tapes is simple. The President should do them over again with the same cast. It would be no problem for the White House to rent a recording studio and hire a producer to make tapes as good as the original.

This is how it would go.

Producer: Okay, Mr. President, do you have your script? Now on this tape you're getting a call from John Mitchell. It's right after Watergate and Mr. Mitchell is giving you a fill-in. Mr. Mitchell, you hold the phone over there at that mike. Are we ready? Roll 'em. This is the Nixon-Mitchell telephone conversation Tape One. Go.

Mitchell: Hi, Mr. President. John Mitchell here.

Nixon: Hello, John, how's Martha since you tied her up in Newport Beach?

Producer: Cut, Mr. President, you sound too relaxed. Now you have to remember, this is right after Watergate and it looks like the Committee for the Re-election of the President has been involved. Could you get some anxiety in your voice?"

Nixon: I never show any anxiety.

Producer: Well, pretend you were just awakened or something. We want to make this thing sound real. Okay, roll it again, Tape Two.

Mitchell: Do you want to start from the top or where I tell the President I can't tell him anything about Watergate because it will only upset him?

Producer: All right, start from there.

Mitchell: Mr. President, I know something you don't know.

President: What is it?

Mitchell: I'm not going to tell you because you'll go through the roof.

President: But as President shouldn't I know everything you know? It isn't nice to keep secrets from me, John.

Mitchell: Someday you'll thank me for not telling you about it.

President: Why on earth did you bring it up if you can't tell me?

Mitchell: In the future I may have to testify that I didn't tell you about it and I want it on the record.

President: Well, what did you call for then?

Mitchell: Just to tell you I couldn't tell you anything about the Watergate break-in or who was involved.

President: I appreciate that. And, John, have a nice day.

Producer: Beautiful. You guys were perfect. All right, let's do the second tape. Where's John Dean?

Assistant: He's sitting over there being guarded by two Secret Servicemen. He says he doesn't want to do it.

Producer: Why doesn't he want to do it?

Assistant: He says he has a contract with Columbia Records and he can't make tapes for anyone else.

Producer: Get him over here to this mike.

Dean: I can't read my script with these handcuffs on.

Producer: Take off the handcuffs. Now, John, the presidency of the entire United States is at stake. How you read these lines could affect the history of the country. Do you understand?

Dean: I guess so. But this script doesn't sound like me.

Producer: Who's going to know, John? You're in show biz.

Dean: The President didn't say these things to me.

Producer: Look, John. Don't worry about what the President said to you. Let him worry about his own lines. Okay, let's roll. Everyone in the studio, quiet. Tape One Nixon/Dean in Oval Office Alone.

President: I'm glad to see you, John. Do you have anything of importance to tell me?

Dean: We need a million dollars to cover up the Watergate scandal.

President: But that would be dishonest.

Producer: Cut . . . Mr. President, would you show more surprise in your voice when Dean brings up the million dollars.