

Capitol Punishment

Watergate As Pure Entertainment

By Art Buchwald

Everyone from Joseph Alsop to Vice President Gerald Ford is pleading that the country should forget about Watergate so the President can devote his time and efforts to such important matters as the energy crisis.

Dr. Sieg Fried Siegfried, a psychiatrist who is writing a book, "How Much Can Americans Take?," supports the opposite view. "I think it would be more advantageous if the country could forget about the energy crisis so the President could devote his full time to Watergate."

"Why do you say that, doctor?"

"The truth is that practically everyone in the country gets a fiendish delight reading about Watergate, while very few people get any fun reading about the energy crisis. My studies show that if you offer readers the choice of a Watergate article or one on the oil shortage, they will take the Watergate story 5 to 1. I'm afraid that if Watergate hadn't happened we would have had to invent it."

"But why?" I asked Dr. Siegfried.

"Watergate is pure entertainment. It has comedy, mystery and melodrama. I would prefer that it have a little sex as well but we can't have everything."

People identify with the Watergate characters. They are all clean cut, short-haired Americans caught up in a soap opera which each insists was not of his making. It also involves a new element which is the question of a presidential impeachment. The number two man has been booted out of office and the number one man's job is on the line.

"What more escape can you offer people who are beset with inflation, unemployment and transportation problems beyond their wildest dreams?"

"Without Watergate you would have a mass mental depression in this country. I maintain that Watergate is the glue that keeps the nation from falling apart."

"Take the controversy over the tapes. What a pleasure it is to see the battle being waged between the White House and the special prosecutor. What fiction writer would have had the nerve to have written the Rose Mary Woods role in the erasure of the key tape? Americans may not want to admit it, but they love every minute of Watergate. The worst mistake would be to deprive them of this marvelous farce provided them free through the courtesy of their friendly government."

"When you put it that way Watergate does have its role in American life," I admitted.

"Show me anyone who enjoys reading about the energy crisis. Produce one soul who gets pleasure out of seeing photographs of long lines of cars at gas stations. Find me a person who gets any pleasure out of watching administration officials give daily conflicting stories on the oil situation in the country."

"I don't know of anybody," I admitted.

"When John Chancellor leads his program with a story that the cost of living went up another 5 per cent the country goes into the dumps. But when he starts the show by revealing the President has refused to turn over tapes and papers to special prosecutor Jaworski, everybody cheers up and relaxes."

"I wonder why Alsop and Ford don't appreciate the psychological value of Watergate," I said.

"I can't analyze people I haven't examined personally," Dr. Siegfried replied. "But I do know that the biggest mistake this country could make would be to put Watergate behind them. As long as we can produce new evidence concerning the cover-up and high administration involvement, Americans will survive secure in the knowledge that the news can't be all bad."