

To the Editor:

As I sift through the great scandals of the past decade I am more and more struck by the number of wanton lies lurking at the muddy bottom. I do not mean the kind of lie that one expects of a trapped criminal; I mean the kind of lie that actually creates the scandal, or creates at least the scandal's magnitude.

For who would not forgive the busy director of a great art museum the sale of a few paintings at something under the highest price that he might, with a bit more diligence, have secured? Who would not forgive a tired British cabinet officer one call girl? And might one not even forgive an American President a temporary surrender to the instinct to "cover up" when suddenly confronted with the fact that his entire administrative staff was involved in political sabotage?

But what one cannot forgive—and what the press and public rightfully should not forgive—is the endless flow of falsification, big lies and little, whoppers and white lies, misrepresentations, distortions, fibs, equivocations, tergiversations, which with a dreary consistency have met the earliest and even mildest inquiries into all these scandals. Is it any wonder that in the end an insulted and exasperated press has finally been goaded into an all-out campaign of exposure, which the liars call a persecution?

Of course, one must concede that modern life subjects responsible citizens to greater and greater harassment by public exposure: in their tax returns, in the registration of their securities, in constant, nagging interrogations by government committees. It is only to be expected that, coached in the art of public relations, the weary investigatees should learn new skills in concealment, as nature produces new degenerative diseases to take the place of old ones abolished by human science.

But even admitting these irritations, the lying that is now taken for granted by so many American business and cultural institutions when faced with the smallest probe seems out of proportion.

I suggest that we do too much breast-beating today about the decline of morals. Let us accept the fact and put the question on plain grounds of expediency. It is not practical to lie; it is not profitable to lie. All our trade schools should teach the lesson that you cannot afford to have as the president of a small corporation—or of the United States—a man who cannot tell the truth or, if that be asking too much, a man who cannot hold his tongue.

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New York, April 11, 1974