



'Dirty-Tricks' on The Other Side

John D. Lofton Jr.

BOB WOODWARD is obviously no Chuck Colson. And Carl Bernstein is certainly no Donald Segretti. However, a reading of "All the President's Men," the new best-seller by the two Pulitzer Prize-winning Washington Post reporters, shows that in their zeal to get the Watergate story the duo were not above pulling a few "dirty tricks" of their own.

Bernstein admits using a phone company source to breach the confidentiality of one of the Watergate burglars' telephone records, something he says would be an "outrage" if done to him.

He also confesses to using a Pentagon source to provide another person — in exchange for Watergate dope — material from a third person's military medical records. The information requested was anything derogatory such as arrests, mental illness or history of homosexuality. As it turned out, the data was not needed.

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BUT CLEARLY the dirtiest of the "dirty tricks" pulled were the efforts of the two reporters to pump Watergate grand jurors for information. As they tell it, the effort began with an attempt on the part of Bernstein to first find out who the grand jurors were.

When Watergate chief prosecutor Earl Silbert flatly refused to provide a list of the 23 men and women, Woodward then went down to the clerk's office at the courthouse and began nosing around.

There he found the list of jurors. Told by a clerk that he would not be allowed to copy anything — "no names, no notes" — Woodward memorized the names and data about each.

Over that weekend in December of 1972, Woodward and Bernstein conducted what they call their "clumsy charade" of questioning jurors about Watergate, but not the grand jury proceedings unless the juror mentioned it.

On Monday morning, the editor called them into his office saying "The balloon is up." A juror had told the prosecutors of the questioning, the prosecutors had gone to U.S. District Court Judge Sirica and Post attorney Edward Bennett Williams.

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JUDGE SIRICA requested Woodward and Bernstein to be in court at 10 a.m. on December 19. With the grand jury present, he recounted the facts:

The jurors had been approached for information, but none was disclosed. However, even such an attempt was "at least potentially" a contemptuous offense, he said, reminding all present, that grand jury deliberations are "sacred and secret." The whole thing he characterized as "extremely serious."

Describing their approaches to the grand jury, the two reporters say they did not break the law, but had "sailed around it."

Joseph Alsop is on vacation.