

Charles McCabe Himself

SF Chronicle

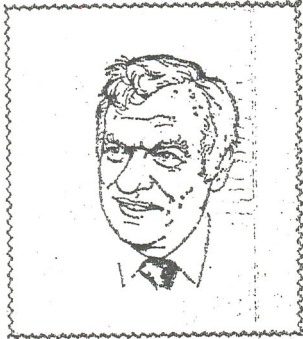
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'Can't Cheat an Honest Country'

THE EXPRESSION "You can't cheat an honest man" is from the vocabulary of the underworld. The con man steers clear of the honest man, as a waste of his time and energies. The mark for any successful con game must have a little larceny in his heart.

The mark must be essentially crooked to want quick and easy profits from ANY sort of scheme. Usually the mark is taken by a scheme which would look *prima facie* crooked nonsense to the honest man.

I have a gambling friend named Tom, who has more than once operated his own con. When you ask Tom about Watergate, which is a rip-off of no small proportions, he smiles his crooked gambler's smile and says, "You can't cheat an honest country."



What Tom means, of course, in his cynical way, is that we were twice conned into electing Richard M. Nixon, and that therefore we as a nation had larceny in our hearts, and were not unprepared to get something for nothing. (As, though Tom did not say it, "law and order" in exchange for some of our dearest-held civil liberties.)

It's easy enough to see us as a nation be-comed, and to suggest that we should just take the consequences and button our lips. We are said to get the government we deserve, and we have gotten foolish government because we made a foolish choice of leaders, men who offered us simple answers to simple questions, of which there is no such thing in public life.

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YET THERE is a strong unwillingness on my part to accept this view. I think this is at heart an honest country — or at least most of me thinks so — and that for this reason in the end Mr. Nixon will be gotten rid of by impeachment and then Senate conviction, unless he has the taste to resign before that.

My reasons for so thinking are, at the moment two. The first is, curiously, a matter with no legal status at all, and with only peripheral connection with Watergate and the other scandals.

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THIS IS THE matter of Mr. Nixon's profanity. It is my belief that the presidential release of the tapes was the major political mistake of Mr. Nixon's life. When it became known that he swore, not only continually but really to no purpose, his chief constituency, which is that area roughly called the Bible Belt, was shocked to the point where any form of forgiveness is out of the question.

Not only did Mr. Nixon swear, beyond any question of doubt. He was hypocritical about it. And while the Bible Belt has its share of hypocrites, there is nobody more openly condemnatory of a revealed hypocrite than one who still retains his closet status.

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PEOPLE have not forgotten Mr. Nixon's righteousness on the subject of profanity in one of his debates with Senator John F. Kennedy in 1960. Or, if they have forgotten it, there are plenty of his enemies around to remind them of the hurting words.

"It makes you realize," Mr. Nixon said, "that whoever is President is going to be a man that all the children of America will either look up to or will look down to, and I can only say that I am very proud that President Eisenhower restored dignity and decency and, frankly, good language to the conduct of the presidency of the United States, and I only hope that should I win this election that I could approach President Eisenhower in maintaining the dignity of the office, in seeing to it that whenever any mother or father talks to his child he can look at the man in the White House and whatever he may think of his policies, he will say:

"... Well, there is a man who maintains the kind of standards personally that I would want my child to follow..."

More tomorrow.