

Capitol Punishment

Watergate

Cover-Up

Trial

By Art Buchwald

It went over to the Watergate conspiracy trial the other day, and it was good to see all my old friends again—Bob Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, John Mitchell, Robert Mardian and Kenneth Parkinson. It was tape day, and the prosecution was playing White House tapes for the jury. Everyone in the courtroom was provided with a set of earphones, and all we had to do was sit back and relax and listen to how everyone was shafting each other.

It's a pity that all Americans can't hear the Nixon tapes. No matter what you read in the transcripts. Nothing compares to listening to the volgees themselves as they discuss ways and means of shutting off Watergate at the pass.

Having just seen "The Godfather" on television, I couldn't help comparing the Don Corleone family with the Don Watergate family. The first thing that occurred to me was that Marlon Brando, as the godfather, spoke so much better English than Richard Nixon—and this despite the fact that Brando had cotton in his cheeks and was supposed to have been born in Sicily. Second, I couldn't help thinking that there was so much more

honor in the Don Corleone family than there was in the Don Watergate family.

The Don Corleones lived by a code of sorts. While they did not hesitate to take care of people outside the family, they always protected each other. When you listen to the tapes, you have to conclude that in the Don Watergate family it was every man for himself. Although the Nixon lieutenants' primary concern was to protect their "godfather," the tapes show their primary interest was to save themselves.

So what you hear through your earphones is the making of a conspiracy not only against the government but against each other. Haldeman and Ehrlichman are out to get John Mitchell, Nixon's out to get Colson; Colson's out to get John Dean, and Haldeman's out to get Ehrlichman. If nothing else, the Watergate people have given "obstruction of justice" a bad name.

The clearest tapes are the telephone conversations between Nixon and his aides. The thing that struck me the most about these is that, when Nixon was speaking on the phone, he always breathed heavily as if he was making an obscene call—which it now turns out he was. Another observation you can make from the tapes is

that nobody ever let the President of the United States say anything. Every time he started to talk he was interrupted by one of his aides. All they permitted him to do was occasionally repeat something that they had just told him. Marlon Brando would have never stood for this.

I don't want to carry this comparison between the Don Corleone and Don Watergate families too far. For one thing, the Don Corleones were so much smarter than the Don Watergates. You can't conceive of Marlon Brando's people setting up a tape system in his house. And you know even if they did, the godfather of the film would have thrown out the machines after the Feds were on to him.

But we can't cry over Scotch tape. The tapes are there for the jury and a few privileged members of the press to hear. They make great listening, and my only regret is that so far the American public can't tune in on them. If they could, I assure you they would have a higher rating than "The Godfather." Hollywood writers just can't duplicate the duplicity of the Watergate gang. If they tried, nobody would believe it.