

Go Ye and Sin Unto the Upper Brackets

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By Russell Baker

Has it been noted by students of American perversity that the Nixon scandals have produced one of the few financial bonanzas of the present bear market?

The wages of sin in this affair have already swollen so succulently that we may see a revival of youth's urge to grow up and be President, or even Vice President, or a President's flunkie, all of them jobs which a lad with an ineptitude for corruption may now dream of parlaying into riches ever after.

Mr. Nixon has a book contract for a sum said to be \$2 million. His first Vice President, Spiro Agnew, who was cashiered for chiseling on his income tax, will become a multimillionaire because of "contacts" he made while ~~as~~ the employ of the Republic, according to his Indiana real-estate partner.

Mr. Agnew's first financial coup, like his superior's, was scored in the vineyard of literature when he sold a project for a novel about a Vice President of the United States. Whether that will be completed now that international real-estate deals threaten him with surfeits of income is very doubtful. Writing is hard and lonely work compared to exploiting old "contacts." Would Shakespeare have bothered if Queen Elizabeth had granted him the rents on Westminster?

The ease with which a corrupt poli-

tical past lures publishers with fat checkbooks these days must make every poet in America wish he had gone in for a career of public malfeasance capped by national disgrace.

Job Magruder, the perjurer, had his book in the shops by the time he went into prison. John Dean, who has just come out, has a book contract in six figures, more money than Henry James earned from a lifetime of writing.

This is only the beginning. Can we doubt Messrs. Haldeman and Ehrlichman will resist the literary impulse created by publishers' advances which routinely begin at \$100,000? John Mitchell might. One senses in him the lawyer's contempt for practitioners of the literary arts. He might be more apt to take the athlete's route, granting endorsements of pipe tobacco, fine Scotch, carbonated beverages, snow tires and other such goods appealing to the sweaty male.

Ronald Ziegler is booked for the lecture circuit, where a person with good legs and powerful digestion can easily turn \$100,000 a year by talking forty minutes a day without saying anything. No one in the country approaches Mr. Ziegler's qualifications in this field.

It must be pointed out that Mr. Ziegler is not a court-certified sinner in the Nixon scandals. He is merely reaping the benefits of association with sin, having been the glibbie mouth-piece for the Watergate cover-up.

Profit by association, however, accounts for a large share of the total bonanza. Julie Nixon Eisenhower and her husband, David, who are associ-

ated with the scandals only by genealogy and marriage, are also heading out on the lecture circuit, following a season on the television talk shows.

Messrs. Woodward and Bernstein of The Washington Post, who were instrumental in exposing the scandals, have profited from their hostile association to the tune of a successful best-seller, "All the President's Men," and a movie-rights sale to Robert Redford, generator of the multimillion-dollar gross.

Nor should we overlook The Washington Post itself and The New York Times, for both corporations enjoyed immense sales of paperback editions of the official White House tape transcripts, now known to have been mendacious.

If Judge Sirica fails to write a highly enriching memoir, he will prove an even more extraordinary judge than he already appears to be. After all, the Senate Watergate committee gave us a phonograph record — by Senator Ervin — and promises us yet another novel — by Senator Baker. Is the bench to be kept from the bounty?

Possibly the biggest grossers of all, however, will be the dozens, the hundreds of lawyers who have argued the cases. At the typical bench conference in Judge Sirica's court, a million dollars worth of legal bills were assembled in the front of the courtroom, and these few were only the tip of the iceberg. The law is an awesome and mighty thing, and not least so for the amount of blood it can extract from a client in the course of clearing its throat.

The Nixon bonanza has close parallels to the financial consequences of President Kennedy's assassination. In both cases national disaster created flourishing new business, and the sadness of the even was dissipated as it was converted into a consumer product.

It may now be impossible for the United States to have a national tragedy unless we concede that national tragedy may be not only entertaining, but also good for business.