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# Another Thousand Days

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**BLIND AMBITION, The White House Years.**  
By John W. Dean 3d. 415 pages. Il-  
lustrated. Simon & Schuster. \$11.95.

No, John W. Dean 3d is not the most appealing person in the world, and yes, the subject of Watergate is getting a little tedious. So one feels not a little antsy as one begins reading "Blind Ambition: The White House Years" and watches Mr. Dean undertake the by-now-familiar confessional routine of explaining how he got his job in the Nixon White House—which was of course to be John D. Ehrlichman's successor as legal counsel to the President—and how he unsuccessfully resisted his first assignment—which was to "get" the owners of the erstwhile muckraking magazine Scanlan's Monthly for a derogatory article they ran in 1970 on Vice President Spiro T. Agnew. But one's restlessness does not last long. Before you know it, you are turning the pages of Mr. Dean's book as if you were reading about Watergate for the very first time. And by the time you have finished, you are convinced that no previous book about the scandal—not even those by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein—has begun to tell the inside story as this one does.

Why? I suppose one has to begin with the hard news revelations, since these are what all the advance publicity has been about. To be sure, they are by turns intriguing and outrageous. For instance, Mr. Dean, and Charles W. Colson too, believes that the Central Intelligence Agency and Howard R. Hughes are the keys to why the Democratic National Committee offices were broken into and bugged in the first place, which would confirm Norman Mailer's somewhat feverish speculations in a recent issue of New York magazine.

And for instance, when Mr. Dean last spoke to G. Gordon Liddy, on June 19, 1972, Mr. Liddy told Mr. Dean in all seriousness: "I'm prepared to accept responsibility for [the tracing of the break-in to the Committee to Re-elect the President]. And if somebody wants to shoot me . . . on a street corner, I'm prepared to have that done. You just let me know when and where, and I'll be there."

But this is hardly headline stuff, and the stuff that has made headlines so far—such as the news that Richard M. Nixon mentioned in Mr. Dean's presence that "the typewriters are always the key—we built one in the Hiss case" or that William E. Timmons, chief of White House liaison with Congress, told Mr. Dean that "uh, Jerry [Ford] himself might have some problem in this area [of campaign contributions]"—is hardly substantial enough for anyone to sink his teeth into.

No, the news of "Blind Ambition" is soft and relatively subtle. As Mr. Dean explains in an introductory note, he prepared for its writing "the same way I prepared to testify before the Ervin committee, before the special prosecutors, and in the coverup trial. But in the book I have included dialogue and enclosed it in quotation marks, whereas

in my testimony I deliberately re- strained from dramatizing the events I was relating." And: "I have included detail, texture, tone, to make this history more vivid—though, I trust, no prettier."

So what is fascinating about "Blind Ambition" are the details that can't be put into headlines. Background developments: Mr. Dean rose so quickly to a position where he was the "linchpin" of the cover-up conspiracy because he deliberately set out to make of his office a "law firm" servicing everyone in the Administration. Comic scenes: In March 1972, Mr. Nixon asked, in a meeting with Mr. Dean, H. R. Halde- man, Mr. Ehrlichman, and John D. Mitchell, why "we" were reconsidering "the idea of opening up Watergate, lancing the boil?" Because of "the lack of alternatives, or a body," Mr. Dean replied, "meaning that no one was will- ing to risk jail, alone or in company. The whole group broke up in laughter—this time not nervous, pressured laughter, but guffaws." And scene upon scene in which Mr. Dean comments on what was going on in his mind during the famous taped discussions with Mr. Nixon.

And one follows it all with mounting excitement not only because this is the first account of Watergate complete with "detail, texture," and "tone," but also because for the first time we have a single point of view—and that of a major figure in the scandal—with which we can identify.

How can one sympathize with John Dean, when, as he puts it somewhere in the book, "no one likes a squealer, a Judas, an informant, a tattletale, especially one who is also guilty"? More important, why should we believe him in the first place? It will take far more expert study than I can give it to say whether "Blind Ambition" is credible; I can only promise that it seems consistent with what most of us have heard about Watergate. But Mr. Dean handles the problems of his "tat- tling" and his guilt most effectively. He persuades us that he turned informer because not to have done so would have meant getting both himself and the Nixon Administration far more deeply entangled in the cover-up than they had already become.

As for his guilt: He neither denies it nor makes love to it in the manner of one master he studied when he took on vacation with him Albert Speer's "In- side the Third Reich." He simply offers it up for our perusal: "For a thousand days I would serve as counsel to the President. I soon learned that to make my way upward, into a position of con- fidence and influence, I had to travel downward through factional power plays, corruption and finally outright crimes. . . . Slowly, steadily, I would climb toward the moral abyss of the President's inner circle until I finally fell into it, thinking I had made it to the top just as I began to realize I had actually touched bottom."

One would like to conclude that Mr. Dean's basic crime was an unusual one. But it is not.