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## Watergate and Vietnam: The Disparate Offenders

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To the Editor:

William Safire, who rarely utters the names of Kissinger, Haig and Mitchell without mention of the roles they played in tapping his phone, is hardly the apostle of mercy to whose master plan for wholesale pardoning the President can be expected to give serious thought ("Pardon Them All" column Jan. 3).

Cataloguing the similarities in the positions of those who did not fulfill their responsibility to serve in Vietnam and those who committed the crimes of Watergate, Safire's plan urges that if the national interest requires letting Vietnam offenders off the hook, the stars of Watergate, for the same reason, deserve the same reprieve.

Busy with similarities, Safire neglected essential differences. For the Watergate criminals (except for a few hired petty burglars), theirs was the treachery of concealment and deceit

and their bastion their own high offices of public trust reinforced by the office of the President of the United States. Until upended by the unlikelyst of accidents, they pursued their illicit activities in an atmosphere of immunity — contemplating neither wrong, guilt or apprehension. By contrast, Vietnam offenders had never a foretaste of the hope or expectation of swindling justice. Their open defiance marked them, from that moment on, the guilty and the hunted. They set out on their lonely exiles by deciding either to give themselves up or to forever run and hide, knowing that in either case—barring divine intervention—they had only themselves to call upon for help and protection.

A nation's concern over the plight of hundreds of thousands of its young men and Safire's over a handful of brigands are in no way equatable.

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