

Background

Republican Richard Nixon was elected to the Presidency of the United States in 1968, defeating the Democratic candidate, Hubert Humphrey. With the re-election campaign approaching in 1972, Nixon and a number of his aides began a secret campaign of slander and deceit against the Democratic Party. This campaign was a result of paranoia on the part of the Nixon administration with regard to losing the 1972 campaign. The election was taking place during a period of political and social upheaval, largely centered on the Viet Nam War. In June 1972, a team of burglars was caught attempting to plant surveillance devices in the offices of the Democratic National Committee, located in the Watergate building in Washington D. C. The burglars and all federal officials, including President Nixon, denied, and attempted to cover up, any involvement. In the months that followed, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, two reporters from the Washington Post, alleged that the President had approved the burglary and the cover-up that followed. The reporters had the support of the Washington Post's Editor in Chief, Ben Bradlee and the Post's publisher/owner, Katharine Graham. They relied heavily on anonymous sources, especially one who was known only to Woodward and Bernstein, and identified as "Deep Throat". The investigation begun by Woodward and Bernstein was completed by the U.S. Congress. The federal court system and the Supreme Court also were involved to rule on the issues of executive privilege and the definition of national security. Thirty of Nixon's closed advisors, including two former attorney generals, were convicted of crimes stemming from Watergate and other illegal activities. Of the individuals convicted nearly half served jail sentences. Richard Nixon resigned following the drawing up by the House of Representatives of three articles of impeachment. Gerald Ford, Nixon's Vice President, became president. He used his power as President to pardon Nixon of all wrongdoing. In addition to attempts at political campaign finance reform, a lasting impact of Watergate is that now most political scandals are termed "---gate". It was also the beginning of wide-spread political investigative journalism.

Cartoon History of the Watergate Scandal

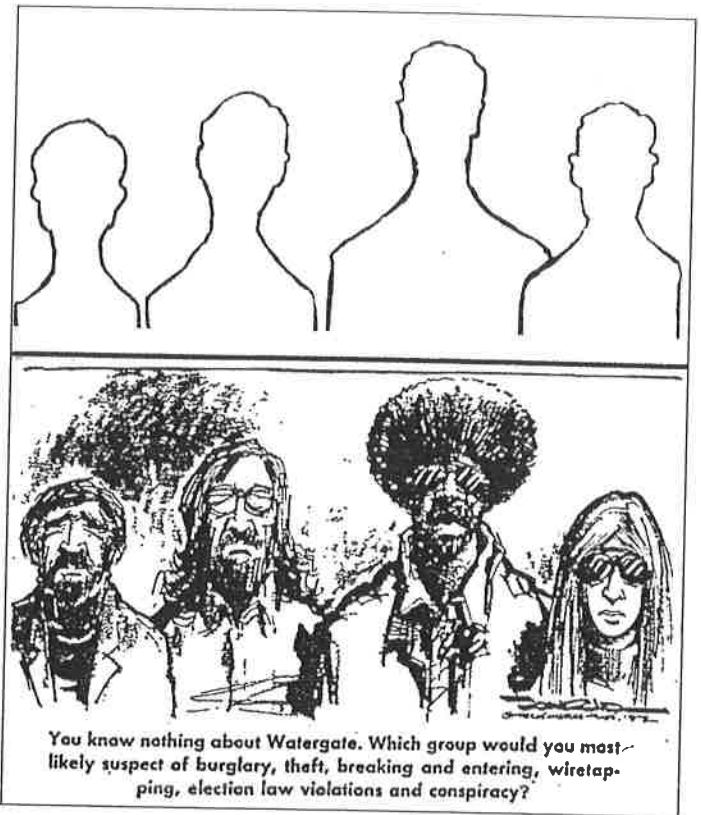
Stage 1: The Watergate Break-In

In the early morning hours of Saturday, June 17, 1972, Frank Wills discovered a piece of tape over a basement door lock in the Watergate apartment and office building in Washington, D.C. Wills, who was a night watchman at the complex, removed the tape and went on his way. When he returned less than an hour later, he found that the same lock had been taped again. Wills then called the local police.

Plainclothes officers responded to the call. On the sixth floor of the building, they confronted five burglars in the offices of the Democratic National Committee. The burglars wore business suits and thin rubber gloves. They carried cameras and film, a walkie-talkie, lock picks, electronic surveillance equipment, and stacks of hundred-dollar bills. At first, the men offered false identifications. However, the police soon discovered that the burglars were connected to the Committee to Re-Elect the President, popularly known as CREEP. They had entered the Watergate complex to install electronic bugging equipment in telephones to transmit information about the Democratic campaign back to CREEP.

Most newspapers downplayed or ignored the initial story of the break-in. However, the *Washington Post* ran an article on the front page of its Sunday edition. *Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein soon began an in-depth investigation of the curious circumstances surrounding the Watergate complex burglary.

In response to the story, President Nixon's campaign manager, John Mitchell, denied that the burglary was part of a spying operation run by the president's men. Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler stated that he would not even comment on what he called "a third-rate burglary attempt." And within days of the break-in, President Nixon himself denied that the White House had been involved in any way.



Critical Thinking Question A The top half of the cartoon is missing. With your group, discuss and be prepared to defend answers to these questions:

- What four figures might be pictured in the top half of this cartoon?
- What might they look like?
- How might they be dressed?
- What message do you think the cartoonist intended to convey?

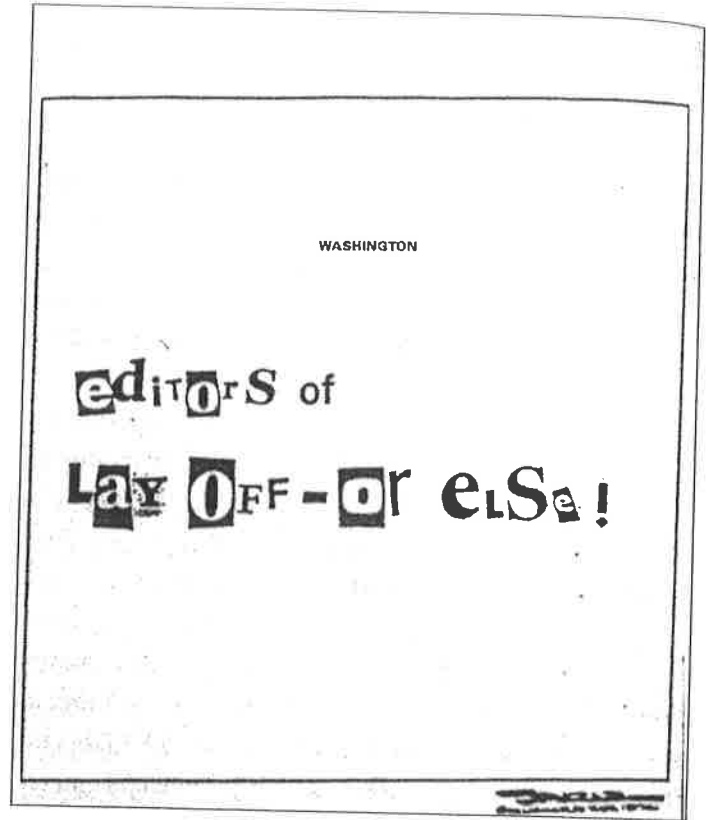
Stage 2: Investigations Begin

In the early days after the break-in at Watergate, few Americans suspected that there was a direct connection between the burglary and the White House. But details of the brewing scandal began to emerge in the pages of the *Washington Post* shortly before the 1972 election. The story continued to unfold long after it.

As the young *Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein pursued the story, they logged thousands of investigative hours. The two followed up on hundreds of leads, including ones from anonymous sources. They slowly began to link Nixon's advisors, and eventually Nixon himself, to a cover-up of the administration's involvement in the burglary.

Other groups also pursued information about Watergate. A number of newspapers and magazines aggressively covered the story. As well, a grand jury convened to investigate the consequences of the break-in. It conducted its initial investigations in September 1972. The grand jury then indicted, or charged with a crime, White House aides Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt. It also indicted the five burglars—James McCord, CREEP's director of security, and four other men who had been recruited for the job. Hunt and the burglars other than McCord later pleaded guilty to having taken part in the burglary.

The investigations into the Watergate scandal ultimately revealed that more than just a burglary had occurred. Woodward, Bernstein, and others obtained evidence that White House officials had made numerous efforts to ensure that Nixon was reelected. They planned to discredit and sabotage several Democratic presidential contenders. They pledged to do whatever was necessary to stop government leaks to the press. And they extorted—that is, illegally used their official positions to obtain—millions of dollars in campaign contributions from corporations seeking government favors. They even tried to convince the Internal Revenue Service to pressure Nixon's "enemies."



As the news stories increasingly connected top government officials to such sordid activities, the White House issued stronger denials. It also put pressure on the *Washington Post* and others to back off.

Critical Thinking Question B The cartoon is missing the letterhead imprint (which tells who wrote the letter), three words after “editors of,” and the caption. With your group, discuss and be prepared to defend answers to these questions:

- On whose stationery do you think this letter was written?
- What three words do you think follow the words “editors of”?
- What might be the caption of this cartoon?

Stage 3: Congressional Hearings

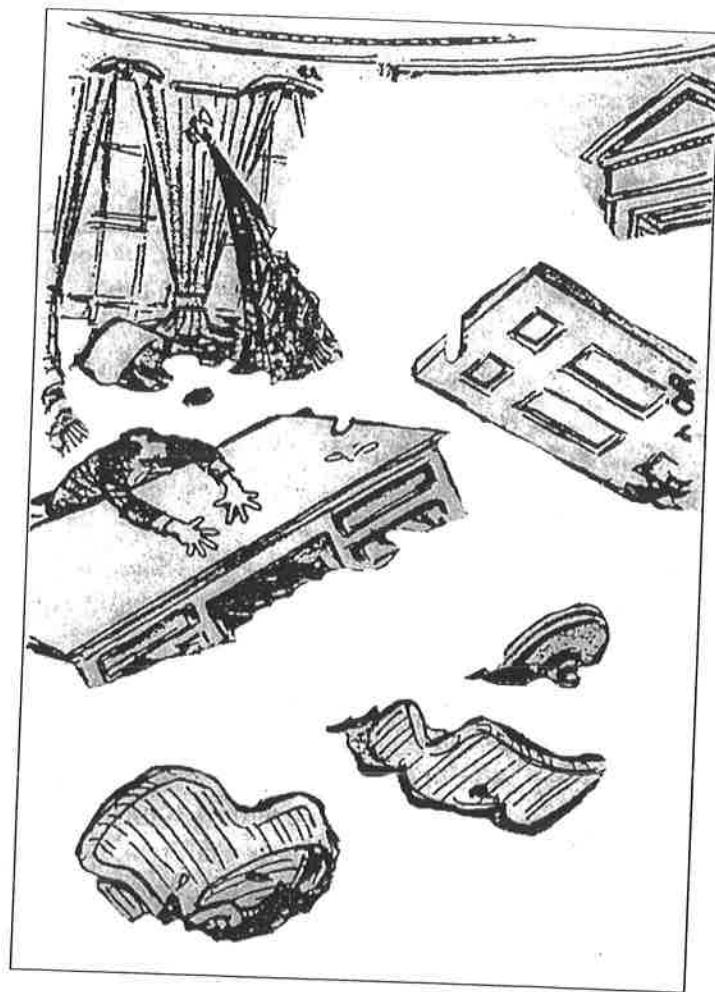
In March 1973, Judge Sirica sentenced Liddy, Hunt, and four of the burglars to 20, 35, and 40 years in prison, respectively. McCord admitted just before the sentencing that there was more information to be shared. Thus Sirica delayed sentencing him. Soon thereafter, L. Patrick Gray, the acting director of the FBI, admitted to having destroyed Watergate evidence. He then resigned. In May, North Carolina Senator Sam Ervin, the chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Activities, convened televised hearings on Watergate. Many Americans watched the hearings with great fascination.

In June, John Dean, whom Nixon had fired as White House counsel in April, testified before the Senate Select Committee. He revealed that the former attorney general, John Mitchell—who had become Nixon's 1972 presidential campaign manager—had ordered the Watergate break-in. Dean explained that the White House was covering up its involvement. He also testified that the president had authorized payments of hush money to the burglars to keep them quiet. Nixon's aides vehemently denied this charge.

On July 16, White House aide Alexander Butterfield testified. He revealed startling information—that Nixon had had a taping system installed in the White House to automatically record all conversations there. Only a handful of people had known about the system. Now, the hearing's key questions—what did the president know, and when did he know it—could be answered by listening to the tapes.

Special prosecutor Archibald Cox, appointed by Nixon to investigate the break-in, immediately subpoenaed—or summoned to court—nine tapes that could confirm Dean's testimony. Nixon refused to give up the tapes, claiming they were vital to national security. But he offered to provide a summary of them.

In October 1973, Cox stood firm that he needed the actual tapes. Nixon responded by ordering first Attorney General Elliot Richardson and then Deputy Attorney General William French Smith to fire Cox. Both men resigned in protest, but Nixon still had Cox fired. Nixon's actions aroused an outpouring of objection, which



included 350,000 angry telegrams sent to Congress and the White House. The president responded by appointing another special Watergate prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, and then turning over the subpoenaed tapes. By this time, many of Nixon's top aides had been indicted for crimes related to Watergate.

Critical Thinking Question C The cartoon of President Nixon in the Oval Office is missing one key element. With your group, discuss and be ready to defend answers to these questions:

- What is Nixon holding on to?
- What key element—that is disrupting the door and furniture—might be missing in the cartoon?
- What message do you think the cartoonist intended to convey?

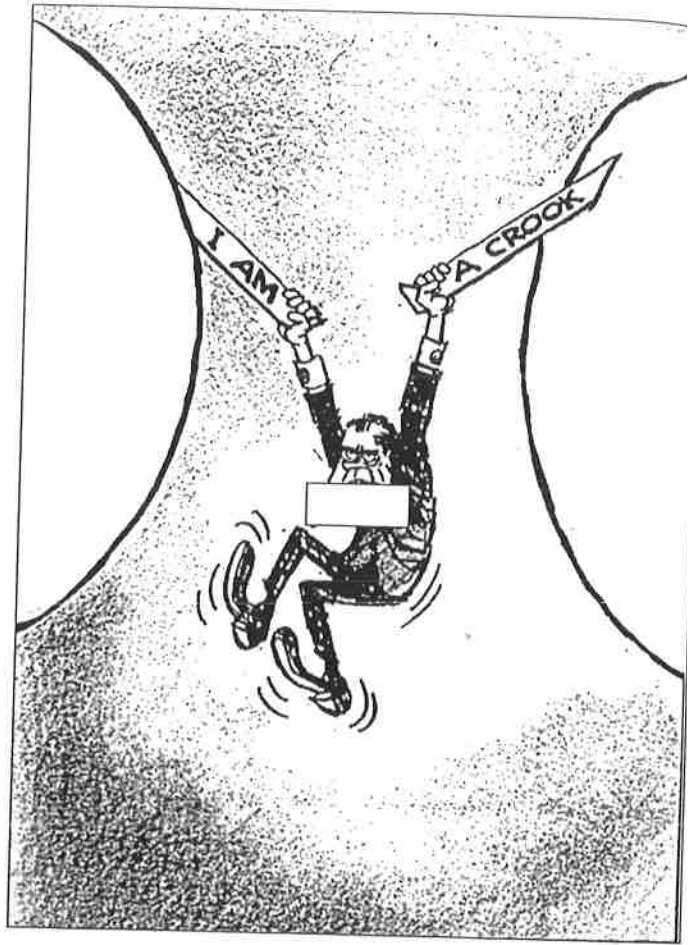
Stage 4: The Secret Tapes

When President Nixon finally turned over the tapes to Judge Sirica, two tapes and some of the conversations the special prosecutor had requested were missing. One tape included a mysterious gap of 18.5 minutes. Experts said it resulted from five separate erasures. Nixon's aides maintained that no intentional erasures had occurred and blamed the gap on an unintentional erasure by Nixon's secretary, Rose Mary Woods. Woods told Judge Sirica that she had accidentally erased the tape while transcribing it. However, her description seemed implausible. And it accounted for only 5 minutes of erasure. This left 13.5 minutes of missing tape unexplained. Americans increasingly came to believe that the missing conversations were part of a larger White House effort to hide damning evidence.

In March 1974, a grand jury indicted seven top White House officials—including Mitchell and Colson—for their roles in the Watergate cover-up. It did not indict Nixon. However, special prosecutor Leon Jaworski released to Sirica a secret report and two bulging briefcases full of evidence against the president. Jaworski asked Sirica to send the material to the House Judiciary Committee, which was considering impeachment charges against the president.

The House Judiciary Committee followed up by requesting from Nixon tapes of 42 more conversations. Instead of releasing the tapes themselves, at the end of April Nixon released transcripts of the tapes. White House aides had prepared the transcripts, editing out all irrelevant material. The release of the transcripts caused a sensation. The Government Printing Office sold close to 800 copies in less than four hours, and various presses printed 3 million paperback book versions within a few days. The transcripts had been somewhat sanitized for public consumption. Wherever vulgarities existed on the tape, the aides had replaced them with "expletive deleted" on the transcripts.

The transcripts revealed an overwhelming desire among Nixon and his aides to punish political opponents and thwart the Watergate investigation. Now, even Nixon's



most steadfast supporters began to suggest that he step down. Two months later, Jaworski requested 64 more tapes as evidence in the cases against the indicted White House officials. Nixon refused to comply. However, the Supreme Court voted 8-0 in July 1974 that he must turn over the tapes.

Critical Thinking Question D The cartoon shows President Nixon holding the ends of something. With your group, discuss and be prepared to defend answers to these questions:

- What is Nixon holding on to?
- What do you think Nixon is doing?
- What is he holding in his mouth?
- What might be written on it?

Stage 5: Nixon Resigns

After the Supreme Court ruled in late July of 1974 that the president must turn over the remaining tapes, the House Judiciary Committee adopted three articles of impeachment against him. They charged Nixon with misusing presidential power to violate the constitutional rights of U.S. citizens, obstructing justice, and defying Judiciary Committee subpoenas.

In early August, Nixon provided transcripts of the subpoenaed tapes. The tapes contained the “smoking gun”—the irrefutable evidence that Nixon had knowingly violated the law and that he had known about and participated in the cover-up of the Watergate break-in from almost the beginning. He had steadfastly denied the latter up until that time.

Before the tapes were forced out, the idea of such dealings and conversations in the White House seemed beyond belief. One tape revealed Chief of Staff Bob Haldeman telling the president, “The great thing about this is it is so totally [messed] up and so badly done that nobody believes” they could have done it. The tapes also revealed that the president and his advisors were petty and mean, constantly using vulgar and offensive language in their conversations. Republican Senate leader Hugh Scott described the tapes as “a shabby, disgusting, immoral performance.”

The backlash to the last set of tapes was overwhelming. Congressional Republicans—members of Nixon’s own party—concluded that Nixon was guilty, making him a liability they could no longer afford. Explaining that his impeachment by the House of Representatives and his removal from office by the Senate were both foregone conclusions, they urged the president to resign.

Rather than face the near certainty of being forced from office, Nixon announced his resignation on August 8, 1974. In his farewell address, he admitted making some “judgments” that “were wrong.” But he insisted



that he had always acted “in what I believed at the time to be the best interests of the nation.” The next day, he climbed the stairs of the presidential helicopter, turned and gave one last victory salute to his staff, and flew off to political exile in California.

Critical Thinking Question E The cartoon is missing its caption. With your group, discuss and be prepared to defend answers to this question:

- What caption might accompany this cartoon?