

Watergate1 essay



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The “ Watergate Scandal” and constitutional crisis that began on June 17, 1972 with the arrest of five burglars who broke into the Democratic National Committee (DMC) headquarters at the Watergate office building in Washington D. C. It ended with the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon on August 9, 1974. (Watergate)

At approximately 2: 30 in the morning of June 17, 1972 five men were arrested at the Watergate Complex. The police seized a walkie talkie, 40 rolls of unexposed film, two 35 millimeter cameras, lock picks, pensized teargas guns, and bugging devices. (Gold, 75)

These five men and two co-plotters were indicted in September 1972 on charges of burglary, conspiracy and wire tapping. Four months later they were convicted and sentenced to prison terms by District Court Judge John J. Sercia was convinced that relevant details had not been unveiled during the trial and offered leniency in exchanged for further information. As it became increasingly evident that the Watergate burglars were tied closely to the Central Intelligence Agency and the Committee to re-elect the president. (Watergate)

Four of these men, that were arrested on the morning of June 17, 1972, came from Miami, Florida. They were Bernard L. Barker, Frank A.

Sturgis, Virgillio R. Gonzalez, and Eugenio R. Martinez. The other man was from Rockville, Maryland named James W. McCord, Jr. The two co-plotters were G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt. (Watergate)

The senate established an investigative committee headed by Senate Sam Ervin, Jr., to look into the growing scandal. As they were investigating, they related that the famous break-in was far more involved than what everyone had expected. (Watergate) The White House involvement of that morning first became evident when James McCord wrote a letter to Judge Sirca. In this letter McCord explained that he wanted to disclose the details of Watergate. He made it apparent that he would not speak to a Justice department official or an FBI agent. Although his letter did unveil details, it made several charges. McCord justified that " Political pressure" (Westerfield 36) had generated many defendants to plead guilty and remain silent. He also claimed that there had been whitewash at the trial who had

committed perjury in order to protect the people who headed the
break-in. McCord declared that he, his family, and his friend may be
in danger if he spoke out. (Westerfield 36-37)

The Senate Watergate Committee saw their chance to unravel the
mystery of this scandal. They offered James McCord a chance to speak
publicly. In his first meeting with representatives of this committee
he named two more people that he claimed were involved in the burglary
and cover-up. These two men were John Dean and Jeb Magruder.

Magruder was the second-in-charge of the CRP and Dean was a White
House aide. After hearing these substantial accusations the Senate
Watergate Committee promptly subpoenaed John Dean and Jeb Magruder.

After the next session with James McCord he took the witness
stand and explained how Liddy had promised him an executive pardon if
he would plead guilty. This began to question the White House
involvement since only the president could present such a pardon.

(Westerfield, 40) Jeb Magruder was the next witness to testify. He
admitted his own perjury to the Grand Jury and verified what McCord

had said. While on the stand he also revealed another name to add to the list of those involved, John Mitchell. (Gold, 246-247)

The next witness scheduled to appear was John Dean. In Dean's testimony he exposed that the Watergate burglary had been only a part of a greater abuse of power. He said that for four years the White House had used the powers of the presidency to attack political enemies. They spied on and harassed anyone who did not agree with Nixon's policies. If a reporter wrote stories criticizing the White House they would be singled out for tax investigations. The White House also kept an "Enemies List" (Westerfeld 43) of people that the president's men wanted revenge on. After being fired, Dean kept official documents that supported his statements. (Westerfeld 43-44; John Dean said, in his opening statements, that he had discussed the cover-up with president Nixon in several meetings. At the first meeting, in September 1972, he told the president how he and other members of the White House had handled the cover-up so far. Dean claimed that in another important meeting with Nixon, on March 21,

1973, the president agreed \$1 million should be raised to silence the burglars. However Dean said that he dealt with the president mostly through H. R. Haldman and John Ehrlichman. (Gold 266-308; Westerfeld Dean faced the committee for four days of Questioning, after his opening statement. During these four days the republicans focused on what happened in these meetings between Dean and the president, which was the only evidence the president. The question that Senator Baker asked and was being wondered throughout the nation was, what did the president know and when did he know it? (Westerfeld, 43) The Nixon administration tackled Dean's reports of the two meetings. They claimed that the March 21, 1973 meeting was the first Nixon had heard of the cover-ups. The White House's version was they the president had rejected the burglars' blackmail. (Hearings 02)

For the first time in this intriguing scandal the president himself had been accused. This was the greatest blow the Nixon White House had sustained. " polls showed that 70 percent of TV viewers believed Deans version of the event" (Westerfeld, 43). But who was to

be believed? It was John Deans Word against Richard Nixon's. (Gold 669-670; Westerfield, 43) The committee then made a shocking discovery, only a few weeks after Deans testimony. As the committee was managing a routine aid, they asked him how the White House administration came up with their version of what happened in the meetings of Deana and Nixon. His response was that the meetings had probably been recorded Alexander Butterfield explained that the White House had been equipped with a recording system. They were installed in his two offices, the Oval Room " The taping device was spring load to a voice actuation situation." (Gold 436) In Alexander Butterfields testimony he said that the recording system was installed to help preserve all documents. The only people who knew of these recording devices were the president, Haledman, Kigbe, Butterfield, and the secret service Now the committee had stumbled across exactly what they were looking for, a way to prove the presidents innocence of guilt. The tapes of the meetings between Dean and Nixon were lying some where in the White House. These tapes would show which of these men were lying

and if the president of the United States had been involved in a criminal conspiracy. Although when the Senate asked him for the tapes

On July 17, 1973 the Senate Committee went directly to the president about their request. Congress wanted the tapes of all the important meetings. President Nixon refused. The Committee decided to subpoena the tapes that afternoon. (Westerfeld 45) On the same day, July 17, 1973, special Prosecutor Archibald Cox had also subpoenaed the tapes. He declared that they were significant for the grand jury's criminal investigation. This was the first time anyone had ever subpoenaed the president of the United States, and Nixon has two subpoenas in one day. Although the White House claimed that neither Congress nor the special prosecutor had the right to demand evidence from the executive branch and refused to obey. (Westerfeld 45)

This started a powerful struggle. The Senate Committee wondered if they could find the president in contempt of Congress which would be a serious legal charge. But they didn't know who would be a serious legal charge. But they didn't know who would arrest him since

the president controlled the Department of Justice, the FBI, and the Armed Forces. The committee had to think quick and come up with another way to get the tapes. Cox and the grand jury was going to sue for the tapes in federal court. The committee decided to follow the special prosecutor's lead. (Westerfled 43) Both lawsuits went to Judge John Sirca, the same judge who presided the trials of the Watergate burglars. Judge Sirca charged the president to turn over the tapes to the special prosecutor. When the White House Appealed the decision the case went to the Federal Court of appeals. (Westerfled 43)

Another scandal in the White House shocked the nation. The Department of Justice announced that they had been investigating Vice President Spiro T. Anew for taking large bribes in return for government contracts. He then resigned from office October 10, 1973. (Westerfled

On October 15, 1973 the court of appeals sustained Judge Sirca's ruling and demanded that the president give the subpoenaed tapes to the Special Prosecutor, Archibald Cox. Nixon ordered Cox not to subpoena any more tapes, although Cox said he would do so. Cox also

told him that if he refused he would find him in contempt of the court. (Westerfled 45) Nixon was beyond furious. Cox was a employee of the executive branch and questioning the authority of the president. Nixon ordered Richardson's deputy attorney general William D. Ruckelshavs to fire Cox. He also refused and was fired. The third-ranking Justice Department official, Solicitor General Robert H. Bork, was now acting as Attorney General. He agreed to fire Cox. This event was called the " Saturday Massacre." (Westerfled 48)

The nation raged in anger. So Nixon agreed to hand the tapes over to Sirca's court and appoint a new Special Prosecutor. The new prosecutor was Leon Jaworski. Jaworski was a very well known lawyer and accepted the offer on the one condition that Nixon could not fire him. (Westerfled 48-49) As the presidents lawyers were going over the tapes preparing them for the special prosecutor they made an alarming discovery. During a conversation between Nixon and Haldman there was an 18-minute gap. This made the nation lose even more faith in their

On April 11, 1974 Special Prosecutor Jaworski demanded the White

House turn over 69 more tapes. Once again the Supreme Court ruled that Nixon had to supply the subpoenaed tapes. (Watergate 51-54)

“ On July 27-30, the House Judiciary Committee, whose public hearings had disclosed evidence of illegal White house activities, recommended that Nixon be impeached on three charges: obstruction of Justice, abuse of presidential power, and trying to impede the impeachment process by defying committee subpoenas.” (Watergate) Millions of people watched the committee vote on television. There were twenty-seven votes for the impeachment and only eleven against it. He was accused of misuse of his authority and also violating the constitutional rights of citizens by ordering the FBI and Secret Services to spy on American citizens. The last thing he was charged with was refusing to obey congress’s subpoenas. Nixon had broken his oath to uphold the law. (Watergate)

With the impeachment vote against him, Nixon would have to stand trial before the U. S. senate. Two-thirds of the senate would have to vote for impeaching the president. Nixon would be removed from

office. (Westerfled 46) On August 5, 1974 the White House released an overdue transcript of the tapes. The recording was from June 23, 1972, only a week after the break-in. This tape told how Nixon ordered Haldeman to tell the CIA to cease the FBI's investigation of Watergate. These tapes made it clear that Nixon was involved in the cover-up from the beginning. (Westerfled 56)

At nine o'clock August 8, 1974 Nixon made his last speech as president Richard M. Nixon. He only admitted losing the support he had from Congress. He said " I have never been a quitter, to leave office before my term is complete is abhorrent to ever instinct in my body. But, as president, I must put the interest of America first. America needs a full-time president and a full-time Congress.

Therefore, I shall resign the presidency effective at noon tomorrow."

The next morning Nixon addressed a tearful White House staff.

He then boarded a helicopter and began his journey home to San Clemente, California. (Westerfled 57) At noon the Vice President, Gerald R. Ford, was inaugurated. He became the thirty-seventh

president of the United States. He told the American people in his first speech “ Our long national nightmare is over.” (Westerfled 57)

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