

# WILEY



---

Nixon, Watergate, and the Study of the Presidency

Author(s): Ruth P. Morgan

Source: *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Winter, 1996, Vol. 26, No. 1, The Nixon Presidency (Winter, 1996), pp. 217-238

Published by: Wiley on behalf of the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27551561>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Wiley and Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Presidential Studies Quarterly*

# Nixon, Watergate, and the Study of the Presidency

RUTH P. MORGAN

*Provost emerita*

*Southern Methodist University*

Whether Watergate is an exhausted or unduly neglected subject, no volume on Richard M. Nixon can ignore it. Events subsumed under the term “Watergate” not only permeated the Nixon presidency, but have no clear prologue or epilogue in the seamless web of the American political experience. Watergate literature provides a hung jury as to causality, responsibility, and significance, and this alone guarantees an ongoing stream of publications. Contradictory evidence, conflicting accounts, controversial interpretations, and unanswered questions are magnets for further investigation, especially as new primary sources become available and as subsequent historical events stimulate new views through different lenses.

The Watergate story is too long and too complex for retelling here, even if it could be done with fresh information. Rather, emotion and outrage generated by Watergate, divided opinions about Nixon, and the sheer variety and volume of accounts of Watergate prompt the question: What does the Watergate literature tell us about presidential studies?

A WorldCat database search in February 1995 of over 28 million records owned by 17,000 libraries worldwide located 1,981 records on Richard Nixon alone and a total of 2,897 records on Nixon or the “Watergate Affair, 1972–1974.”<sup>1</sup> By comparison, the literature on Teapot Dome, which is often used as the reference point for twentieth century scandal, is scarce. This may be due to the fact that historians found Progressivism in the decade preceding the scandal, as well as the New Deal in the following decade, to be of greater interest and import. Perhaps to future scholars Watergate will also seem less important in comparison with preceding and subsequent eras.

A case can already be made for diminishing importance. Even though Watergate is often characterized as the “scandal of the century” and recent biographers tend to refer to “The Age of Nixon,” the Nixon/Watergate story fails to dominate the literature on recent presidents or on post-World War II events. The WorldCat search located 3,165 records on John F. Kennedy and 14,429 on “Vietnamese Conflict, 1961–1975.” In similar proportion, the 1994 edition of *Books in Print* lists thirty-two books on the “Watergate Affair, 1972–1974,” eighty-eight on the Kennedy assassination, and 222 on the “Vietnamese Conflict, 1961–1975.” The same volume indexes fifty-one books on Nixon and sixty-seven on John F. Kennedy. Without going into all of the caveats on databases and indexes, suffice to say that while these numbers do not represent the entire publications iceberg, they are useful in indicating relative interest.

Before “Watergate” had even entered the political lexicon, however, studies published during Nixon’s first term anticipated some of the main themes of the subsequent Watergate literature. For example, the authors of three psychobiographies published in 1972 concluded that Nixon had dangerous personality characteristics.<sup>2</sup> George Reedy’s *The Twilight of the*

*Presidency* (1970) and Arthur Schlesinger's *The Imperial Presidency* (1973) were forerunners of the theory that the cause of Watergate was the accretion of power to the presidency. The earliest participant-observer account detailed another theme of the Watergate literature, President Nixon's press relationships. James Keogh, who had covered politics and government as a reporter, writer, and editor for thirty years before he joined the 1968 Nixon presidential campaign and then served two years on the president's staff, cautioned about some of the practices of American journalism in *President Nixon and the Press* (1972). Lying by government officials, a dominant reason for loss of confidence in Nixon by public and press alike, was the subject of David Wise's *The Politics of Lying: Government Deception, Secrecy, and Power* (1973).

The Watergate story that eventually swept the president of the United States into its vortex first surfaces as newspaper accounts of the arrest on charges of second-degree burglary of five men in the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate complex in Washington, D.C., on June 17, 1972. In the days following the arrests the break-in was billed almost universally as a "campaign caper." Neither Richard Nixon nor his opponent, George McGovern, gave the story priority in their attention.<sup>3</sup> McGovern did, however, try to make corruption in government a campaign issue, but the public viewed Vietnam and the economy as more important. In a September 1972 Gallup poll, 52 percent had heard of Watergate, and by June of 1973, a phenomenal 98 percent were familiar with the break-in. Nevertheless, throughout 1973 the economy dominated the polls, and in 1974 the energy crisis topped the list of important problems. In fact, even after the public became aware of Watergate and confidence in the president had eroded during the Senate televised hearings in the summer of 1973, 43 percent of the poll respondents in June 1974 considered Watergate to be "just politics," compared with 48 percent who considered it to be a serious matter.<sup>4</sup>

If Watergate had low public saliency, why did the story not die? Walter Lippman once observed that the level of corruption in history remains relatively constant, but that the exposure of corruption varies, since "a community governs itself by fits and starts of unsuspecting complacency and violent suspicion."<sup>5</sup> Fuel was added to this theory by Victor Lasky, who recounted precedents in *It Didn't Start With Watergate* (1977) for the apologists who argued that Nixon did not do anything that had not been done previously; his mistake was in getting caught. Ironically, he was snagged by a break-in that no one considered particularly important, that was not investigated thoroughly at the time, and that has never been linked directly to Nixon. But the arrests of the "Watergate Seven" fueled "violent suspicion" and began the unraveling of the Nixon presidency.

The efforts of the press or Congress are historically the two most effective ways for exposing corruption in the United States. In the case of the former, the muckraking of Lincoln Steffens and some of his contemporaries helped to establish a pattern in this century for press condemnation of official misconduct. The literature of exposure attained a central position in the discussion of public affairs during the years of the Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft administrations. The crusading journalists of those years were "professional writers who portrayed themselves as objective observers of society, reporting conditions as they found them."<sup>6</sup> In the case of Watergate, Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, two aggressive young reporters for *The Washington Post*, were widely credited with the exposure, for which they won the Pulitzer Prize and described their role in *All the President's Men* (1974), a bestseller and a subsequent movie box-office hit. Others suggest that more of the credit is due the editors, Benjamin Bradlee, Howard Simons, Harry M. Rosenfeld, and Barry Sussman, as well as the publisher, Katharine Graham. Of these, Sussman also wrote a best-seller, *The Great Cover-Up: Nixon and the Scandal of Watergate* (1974; 3d edition, 1994).

On the other hand, those who believe that the press has been given too much credit point to the fact that government investigations produced the information that was used by the press, whether obtained legitimately or through leaks, and that conditions were right for investigative fervor. In spite of a landslide election in 1972, Republican President Nixon was confronted with an unpopular war he inherited, a Democrat-controlled Congress, and an entrenched bureaucracy over which he would have to assert his prerogatives if he were to accomplish his policy goals. This was not unlike the conditions that prompted previous periods of intensive congressional investigations following the Civil War and World Wars I and II. In fact, James Hume, a Philadelphia lawyer and later a White House aide, recounted that when Robert Smith, the chief counsel of the Senate Committee on Government Operations, reviewed the list of votes cast to impeach Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas, he predicted that with an anti-Republican majority in both Senate and House, it was only a matter of time before the legislature would use its powers of subpoena and impeachment to break an unpopular president.<sup>7</sup>

What is clear is that the story was slow to unfold and press coverage did not sweep other news aside until the televised Senate hearings began. Even after *The Washington Post* linked John Mitchell to illegal campaign activities in October 1972, and after the break-in trial ended in January 1973, Watergate remained largely a *Post* story. Ben Bagdikian, a long-time respected press critic, estimated that of the sixteen bureaus with ten or more correspondents based in Washington, employing a total of 433 reporters, fewer than fifteen were assigned full time to Watergate before the Senate Select Committee began hearings in May 1973.<sup>8</sup>

While Congress and the press traditionally have been the leaders in exposing government corruption, the courts played a more significant role in Watergate than had been the case historically. The Watergate burglary defendants were tried and convicted in Judge John C. Sirica's court, which was also the locus for the battle over the acquisition of the presidential tape recordings and of the cover-up trial. Few people, even those who were delighted with his decisions, give Sirica high marks as a judge.<sup>9</sup> After the seven break-in defendants were convicted in January 1973, Judge Sirica meted out conditional sentences of twenty to forty years, the maximum allowed by law, in a blatant announced intended to make the defendants talk in exchange for lighter final sentences. James W. McCord, Jr. was the first to respond to what legal scholar Philip Kurland called a form of "judicial blackmail." Judge Sirica devoted a gleeful chapter to McCord's revelations and concluded that "the case would never have been broken if McCord had elected to stand pat and had not written the letter to me." "Once that letter was made public," he continued, "the parade of people trying to protect themselves began."<sup>10</sup>

Frank Mankiewicz, who was a McGovern adviser, believed that the story would have died had it not been for the confluence of a crime, a judge (Sirica), and a newspaper (the *Post*) in the same city. He also suggested that the Senate would not have been so quick to set up the Select Committee had its members not read about the burglary in their hometown newspaper.<sup>11</sup>

Literature on Watergate began with the journalists, first with their reporting in newspapers and periodicals, and subsequently with their books. Then came a deluge of memoirs by participant-observers, justifying their roles. Political biographies dominated the work by historians, while political scientists focused more on institutions and public policy.

### Journalists and Free-lance Writers

For some, Nixon's relations with the press were the key to Watergate and to the failure of his presidency. His overt dislike of the press was returned by numerous reporters.

Even when they recognized and wrote about his accomplishments, they faulted his manner, style, and person. Had the press liked Nixon, he might have been given the benefit of the doubt. Disliking him, they viewed his actions through an unforgiving lens. Consequently, when revelations began to wound the president, the piranhas moved in. Tom Wicker recounted that Bryce Harlow told him about a luncheon conversation he had had in 1968 with John Osborne, a journalist respected by other reporters and by politicians alike for his efforts to be fair and for his philosophical views:

Harlow threw at him the surprise question: "Why do you hate my guy [Nixon] so much?" Evasively, Osborne replied, "I don't know." Then he apparently realized that, not having denied the proposition he had inadvertently admitted it. "You've trapped me," he told Harlow. "I'm profoundly embarrassed." And under pressure he conceded: "The press corps calls [Nixon] the cardboard man because we can't see past the facade of the candidate. I've never met the real Richard Nixon." The avuncular Harlow, who got along well with the press, said he understood. "He's smarter than you bastards. He's like Old Betsy the cow, except he don't let his milk until he wants to. You fellows fester because he controls it and you don't."<sup>12</sup>

Harlow may have been right. John Ehrlichman discounted the opinions of former newspaper people like Raymond Price and Herb Klein "who argue that Nixon was the victim of a sort of transient, uncontrollable dementia where the press was concerned." In Ehrlichman's view, "most of Nixon's conduct of his press relations was calculated and deliberate."<sup>13</sup> Certainly, Marvin Kalb's *The Nixon Memo* (1994) attests to Nixon's brilliant strategizing in his quest for renewed respectability. Kalb recounted how Nixon staged his rehabilitation by organizing a Washington conference for government officials, scholars, and journalists, and then in order to capture attention for the conference and his return to Washington, he wrote a blistering memorandum critical of Bush's policy toward Russia and arranged for it to leak.<sup>14</sup>

While Nixon's overt hostility toward the press and efforts to "get" newsmen by excluding them from social events at the White House poisoned the atmosphere in the staff, again, there was substance to his complaints. A journalist not known for his friendship to Nixon called Henry Kissinger to say he was shocked by the "bloodlust" surfacing among many of his friends: "All they seemed to be able to think of was 'get him, get him, get him.' As if they were gladiators that wanted to kill."<sup>15</sup> William Safire told of an editor who "hated Richard Nixon with the same blind devotion as he had worshiped John Kennedy," and who proclaimed to him at a garden party at Easter-time in 1973 that "there's got to be a bloodletting."<sup>16</sup> Marvin Kalb has observed that "at one level, Watergate was a battle between a President and a newspaper."<sup>17</sup>

While many of the reporters "never really liked Nixon," they "knew a good story when they saw one, and throughout his career Nixon was always a good story."<sup>18</sup> British journalist Fred Emery, a foreign correspondent in Washington for seven years, mostly during the Nixon administration, said that Watergate "was the best story a reporter could have."<sup>19</sup> Not only did the print and television reporters consider it a plum to cover Nixon, but some quickly capitalized on their experiences with books and published collections of their work.<sup>20</sup> Even a few who did not set out to write books on Watergate got caught up in the story. After writing several commissioned articles for *The New York Times*, J. Anthony Lukas found that by the time of Nixon's resignation on August 9, 1974, "the story consumed me." The "desire to weave together the diverse strands and to make fresh connections" resulted in *Nightmare: The Underside of the Nixon Years* (1976), one of the best books on

the two-year time frame of Watergate. Jim Hougan also did not intend to write a book about the Watergate affair, but rather, a magazine profile of a private detective named Louis J. Russell. In researching Russell's life, he learned of his employment by McCord and his presence at the Watergate break-in on the night of the arrests. This started Hougan on his Sherlock Holmes adventure which ended as *Secret Agenda: Watergate, Deep Throat and the CIA* (1984), in which he focused for the first time on CIA involvement in the burglary.

After the president's resignation and the final firestorm of the pardon, journalists moved on to other stories. But as Nixon began to move in a calculated way back onto the national and international scene, the fickle press covered him, mostly favorably. Amazingly, only a decade after his forced resignation, he received a standing ovation on May 9, 1984, when he appeared before the American Society of Newspaper Editors, and publishers gave him a standing ovation in April 1986 at the annual convention of the American Newspaper Publishers Association. But the most astounding 180-degree turnaround was by his old nemesis, *The Washington Post*. Publisher Katharine Graham was so impressed by his address on the world situation at the Publishers Convention that she had the *Post*-owned *Newsweek* give him a cover story with the headline: "He's Back: The Rehabilitation of Richard Nixon."<sup>21</sup>

Foreign journalists were far less hostile to Nixon than the American journalists.<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Aitken, a Fleet Street journalist from 1966 to 1973, when he was elected to Parliament, wrote the first biography of Nixon by a non-American author. He asserted that "no foreigner has ever understood Watergate." Aitken's own view, and one that he believed to be the consensus view of international opinion at the time, was that the forcing of Nixon's resignation was "a political overreaction, a human injustice, and a strategic mistake."<sup>23</sup> Based on his experience as an American who had lived abroad for almost fifty years before writing *The World and Richard Nixon* (1987), C. L. Sulzberger was convinced that the allied nations in the West, as well as China and Japan, viewed Nixon as a shrewd statesman endowed with a diplomatic wisdom unusual in American presidents. Consequently, when he traveled to New York and to Washington in the mid-eighties, he was astonished by the emotional dislike for Richard Nixon among all kinds of people, despite the passage of time since the Watergate scandal. He found the hatred "astonishingly personal, and not in the least abstract."<sup>24</sup>

Some journalists and investigative reporters returned once again in later years to retell the story of the burglary with new data or to assess anew the Nixon era. In the former case, Len Colodny and Robert Gettlin document in *Silent Coup: The Removal of a President* (1991) the political and personal agendas of presidential aides that combined to destroy Richard Nixon. When Tom Wicker realized that few remembered much about Nixon's presidency *except* Watergate, he decided to write a book about Richard Nixon in the context of "American politics, American lives, American dreams, American reality."<sup>25</sup> The fall of another world leader, Margaret Thatcher, gave British journalist Fred Emery the idea for "retelling the Watergate story for a new generation."<sup>26</sup>

### **Participant-Observer Accounts: The Investigated**

Most of the books published by White House "insiders" were published within ten years of the president's resignation to tell the story from their vantage points. In their efforts to "correct" the record, most also attempt to come to terms with the causes and how they got caught up in the experience.

E. Howard Hunt and James W. McCord, both of whom were convicted in the Watergate burglary, rushed memoirs to press in 1974.<sup>27</sup> The third key player in the burglary, G. Gordon Liddy, did not break his code of silence until 1980, after the statute of limitations had run out.<sup>28</sup> Also in 1974, Jeb Magruder, who like McCord began cooperating with the

Watergate prosecutors in spring 1973, told his story.<sup>29</sup> Two years later, John W. Dean's *Blind Ambition* (1976) hit the bestseller lists. While Sam Ervin, chair of the Senate Select Committee that investigated the burglary and cover-up, found John Dean to be "the most impressive and convincing witness to appear before the Select Committee,"<sup>30</sup> Dean's book certainly belies that assessment. In fact, none of these memoirs add either documented or even much substantiated information to the burglary/cover-up story, but they do form an important self-revelatory and often unflattering record.

Biographer Stephen Ambrose has observed the following:

One of the challenges of reading the Watergate transcripts is trying to keep up with the daily reconstruction of history. These guys could move the pea under the walnut far faster than the human eye could follow. They invented motives for themselves, or presented the most self-serving rationalizations for what they had done and could not escape, or, when they would get away with it, simply lied.<sup>31</sup>

What Ambrose said regarding their testimony can also be said of their books and edited diaries. The sleight-of-truths in their accounts of Watergate, written for financial, exculpatory, or perhaps even cathartic reasons, force reader suspicion. Only G. Gordon Liddy, while not the ideal hero, was mature and experienced enough to know who he was, what he wanted to be, and what the consequences of his actions would be.

Nixon's two top aides have provided some useful insights and substantive material on the White House in the Nixon years. John Ehrlichman's *Witness to Power: The Nixon Years* (1982), and Bob Haldeman's *The Ends of Power* (1978) added new information and interpretations to the conventional litany of facts, as established in the seventies.<sup>32</sup> Published posthumously in 1994, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House*, and the more complete CD version issued by Sony in 1994, are extraordinary documents on activities in the Oval Office and a must-read for any serious student of the presidency.\*

President Nixon devoted about one-third of his best-selling memoirs, published in early 1978, to Watergate. Subsequent books, particularly *In the Arena: A Memoir of Victory, Defeat and Renewal* (1990), repeated his explanations of Watergate. Nixon's memoirs, Haldeman's *Diaries*, and the massive memoirs of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger have set an awesome standard for thoroughness and detail. Alexander Haig, Jr., on the other hand, whose role in the final days of the Nixon White House remained veiled, provided disappointingly few insights on his White House experience in *Inner Circles: How America Changed the World: A Memoir* (1992).

As might be expected, the "insider" journalists felt especially compelled to defend their roles. Raymond Price, Nixon's speech writer and long-time assistant in pre- and post-president years, published *With Nixon* in 1977; Herbert G. Klein, chief press aide to Nixon and a veteran newspaper editor, added *Making It Perfectly Clear: An Inside Account of Nixon's Love-hate Relationship with the Media* (1980); and Clark Mollenhoff, who served for eleven months as an ombudsman in the White House, recounted his frustrations in *Game Plan for Disaster: An Ombudsman's Report on the Nixon Years* (1976). Mollenhoff dedicated

\* **Editors' Note:** Since the CD and shorter published version of Haldeman's diaries were released, scholars have begun to note a disturbing number of self-serving and inaccurate observations that cannot always be reconciled with papers and tape transcripts in Nixon's Presidential Papers, especially Ehrlichman and Haldeman's own handwritten notes about what took place at meetings with Nixon. So these latest Haldeman documents should always be checked against those in the Nixon Presidential Materials at the National Archive II building in College Park, Maryland.

his volume to Judge John Sirica and thirty-six named investigative reporters, while Sirica credited Mollenhoff with giving him the idea to make sentencing conditional on cooperation.<sup>33</sup>

Regrettably, more was not heard from Fred Buzhardt, John Connally, and John Mitchell, all now deceased. With respect to Mitchell at least, it can be hoped that the forthcoming biography by James S. Rosen will provide new insights and information. George Shultz, Arthur Burns, and Leonard Garment could also make valuable contributions to our understanding of Watergate and the Nixon years.

### **Participant Observers: The Investigators**

The main official investigations began February 7, 1973, when the Senate established the Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities under Senator Sam Ervin, Jr. Established primarily to investigate the circumstances related to the break-in at the Watergate complex, the committee gradually expanded the net of individuals and issues that it pursued. To partially offset that effort, the president set up the Watergate Special Prosecution Force under Archibald Cox in May 1973. The House Judiciary Committee, chaired by Peter Rodino, began staffing in December 1973 for the impeachment hearings, which began on May 9, 1974. Dagmar S. Hamilton has argued that without the confluence of all three of these investigatory groups, "It is less likely that Article II [on the abuse of presidential powers] would ever have been drafted and unlikely that President Nixon would have resigned."<sup>34</sup>

The meticulous accounts by lawyers concentrated in general on the preparation, the trials and hearings, the findings, and of course, the importance of their roles. First came Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski's *The Right and the Power: The Prosecution of Watergate* (1976) and Samuel Dash's *Chief Counsel: Inside the Ervin Committee—The Untold Story of Watergate* (1976). Jaworski, a Houston lawyer, was named Special Prosecutor to replace the fired Archibald Cox. Samuel Dash, a professor of law at Georgetown University Law Center, was appointed by Ervin as chief counsel and staff director to the Senate Select Committee. Both viewed themselves as heroes.

In addition to Jaworski, Richard Ben-Veniste and George Frampton, Jr., assistant special prosecutors, also told the story of the role played by the Special Prosecution Force in *Stonewall: The Real Story of the Watergate Prosecution* (1977). This was followed by Judge John J. Sirica's *To Set the Record Straight: The Break-in, the Tapes, the Conspirator, the Pardon* (1979), and Sam J. Ervin's *The Whole Truth: The Watergate Conspiracy* (1980). Judge John J. Sirica, who assigned himself as the judge at the trial of the Watergate conspirators, was the U.S. District Court Judge for the District of Columbia. Sirica claimed to have written his book only because he was persuaded by friends in the legal profession to do so, and because "many of the previous accounts were self-serving." Senator Sam J. Ervin, Chair of the Senate Select Committee, claimed that he retired from the Senate with no intention of ever writing anything about Watergate additional to the observations appearing the committee's final report, but changed his mind after he read President Nixon's memoirs. The lawyers certainly exceed the curve in hubris in proclaiming to give "the real story," to "set the record straight," and to provide "the whole truth!"

Given the critical roles of the Special Prosecution Force and the Senate and House committees, one would hope that the public record, if not the accounts by the participants, would be accurate. Unfortunately, that was not the case. As television fed the insatiable appetite of Washington and the public with continuous coverage of the hearings and with the nightly recaps of the latest "revelation" in the Watergate saga, publishers rushed to press complete



texts of documents, hastily written background reports prepared for congressional committees and records of court testimony. These did not carry a needed consumer warning as to accuracy.<sup>35</sup>

### Academicians

Historians, in general, have written mostly political biographies. The first two major post-presidency volumes on Nixon were David Abrahamsen's *Nixon vs. Nixon: An Emotional Tragedy* (1977) and Fawn Brodie's *Richard Nixon: The Shaping of His Character* (1981), both critical psychoanalytical studies. The three major biographies published in this decade were Herbert S. Parmet's *Richard Nixon and His America* (1990), Roger Morris' *Richard Milhous Nixon: The Rise of an American Politician* (1990), and the concluding volume, *Nixon: Ruin and Recovery, 1973–1990* (1991), of Stephen E. Ambrose's ambitious three-volume political biography.<sup>36</sup> These are all more balanced than the earlier works, as is historian Joan Hoff's recent history of the Nixon presidency, *Nixon Reconsidered* (1994). She devoted two of ten chapters to reevaluating Watergate and concluded that Nixon was more than Watergate and that Watergate was more than Nixon. Unlike some of the earlier works on Nixon's policies that emphasized his foreign policy achievements, Hoff found his domestic policies to be underrated.

The first comprehensive history of Watergate by a professional historian was Stanley Kutler's *The Wars of Watergate* (1990). He argued that Watergate precipitated a severe constitutional crisis raising weighty issues of governance, especially concerning the role of the presidency and its relation to other institutions. Unlike all of the burglary narratives and participant accounts, he focused on what the investigations found rather than on the unfolding process of revelation. Kutler, who unduly elevated Watergate and Nixon's earlier excesses to the status of "war" was concerned that Watergate had diminished too much in importance in American public life. Political scientist Michael Scudson confirmed Kutler's concern in *Watergate in American Memory* (1992), in which he focused on the ways in which Watergate is remembered and why it is not more important in our memory.

Political scientists have been more interested in public policy and in institutional and constitutional questions than in the burglary or in biography. These interests were reflected in books such as A. James Reichley's *Conservatives in an Age of Change: Nixon and Ford Administrations*, published by the Brookings Institution in 1981. When Dale E. Casper reviewed the scholarly articles written about Richard Nixon between 1975 and 1986 in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, *American Political Science Review*, *Political Science Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Politics*, he found that less than 50 percent of these related to the Watergate scandal and Nixon's resignation of the presidency. "The other articles focus upon policies and actions taken by the Nixon administration in the area of domestic or foreign affairs."<sup>37</sup> For comparative purposes, I reviewed the scholarly articles published between 1987 and 1994 in the same four journals, but found so few about Richard Nixon as to make the exercise meaningless. The lack of scholarly attention to Nixon was the more significant finding.

Similarly, there are few books by political scientists. However, Michael A. Genovese has produced a study of Richard Nixon as a political leader, focusing on his style of decision making and management in *The Nixon Presidency: Power and Politics in Turbulent Times* (1990). He contended that while "Watergate shows us Nixon writ large," it does not show us all of Nixon. Consequently, Genovese devoted considerable attention to foreign and domestic politics. One legal scholar, Philip B. Kurland, has also written an important book, *Watergate and the Constitution* (1978), in which he dwelt not on the events of Watergate, but rather, on the constitutional questions that were implicitly or explicitly raised by those events.

### Watergate: Causes

In general, the theories on the causes of Watergate can be categorized as personality, institutional, and societal. The most frequently mentioned cause of Watergate in the accounts by journalists and participant-observers is Nixon himself. While some go so far as to say that Nixon's personality made Watergate inevitable, others suggest that he made Watergate possible or probable because of the tone he set for his administration.<sup>38</sup>

Most of the biographers and White House staffers point repetitively to "the dark side" of Nixon's personality. Lying is the personality flaw most frequently cited, and the one that became the symbolic moral issue that caused Nixon's downfall. Biographer Aitken wrote that the "collapse of political support was brought about by an instant revulsion over the President's lies, not by a measured judgment of his deeds."<sup>39</sup> Fawn Brodie noted that one of the surprises of her research was "the extraordinary number of *unnecessary* lies Nixon told in his life." She added that "their sheer quantity would suggest a pathological origin."<sup>40</sup> Certainly, Nixon's authority eroded quickly when he was perceived to be lying (the cover-up, the missing tapes, the eighteen and one-half minute gap). This helps also to account for the firestorm Ford caused by pardoning Nixon before he had "come clean." On the other hand, Tom Wicker chided those who are not always free from "devious tactics in business, the professions, in personal relations," and yet are outraged at politicians for lying and deception.<sup>41</sup>

The Nixon-centered, but more depersonalized, views of Nixon as the perpetrator of Watergate, focus on his past experiences, operating style, and world view. These contributed to his setting a tone that immunized those around him to the abuses known as generic Watergate. For example, Herbert S. Parmet pointed to the importance of Nixon's loss in the 1960 election to his subsequent personnel selections and behavior in the White House.<sup>42</sup> While perhaps overstating the case, Sam J. Ervin made the important related point:

If President Nixon had entrusted his campaign for reelection to the Republican National Committee, there would have been no Watergate. Its members would have known that the activities of Watergate were outside the political pale. He gave control of his campaign, however, to close associates who were virtually without experience in politics or government apart from their association with him.<sup>43</sup>

The errors in campaign staffing were compounded when Nixon took his inexperienced campaign support team into the White House in important staff positions. Scholars and participants have pointed to the weaknesses in staffing the White House and to the problems caused by the president's isolation from alternative channels of communication. Nixon cut out the Cabinet officers and gradually eased out "old hands," such as Arthur Burns and Bryce Harlow, who might have tempered the inexperienced aides. Henry Kissinger reported that when he gave Harlow a brief account of what he knew about Watergate and asked what he thought had happened, Harlow drawled, "Some damn fool walked into the Oval Office and took literally what he heard there."<sup>44</sup> The juxtaposition of statements by a new kid on the block, John Dean, and a seasoned veteran, Vernon Walters, makes the point.

Settled back with my drink, [at the hotel after meeting the President], I entertained a reverie about what a big shot I would be as counsel to the President. Would I drive my Porsche to the office or ride in a White House limousine? . . . I thought about what I would tell my friends when they asked how I had pulled off this job at the age of thirty-one, after practicing law for a total of six months.<sup>45</sup>

I did not know of any way in which we could be of help to him [Dean] with his problem [having the CIA help on the Watergate matter]. If I were asked to do this,

I would resign. I told him that on the day I went to work at the CIA I had hung on the wall of my office a color photograph showing the view through the window of my home in Florida. It was a beautiful view showing the trees and the ocean at Palm Beach. When people asked me what it was, I told them that was what was waiting if anyone squeezed me too hard. Dean seemed to understand that I was not going to do what he wanted and I left his office.<sup>46</sup>

On the whole, Nixon's White House staff did not appreciate the responsibilities of governing and the restraints that must be exercised in a democracy, and they did not have a proper respect for the institutions of government. This point is recognized in the report to the Senate Select Committee by the Panel of the National Academy of Public Administration, chaired by Frederick Mosher: "Very few of the top witnesses indicated any sense of understanding or appreciation of democratic ideals or principles. Almost no one mentioned any special considerations of *public* service for the *public* interest apart from the President's interest."<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, and perhaps even more disturbing, are those who thought they knew the difference. Charles Colson, who was almost universally castigated by the participants for his activities in the Nixon inner circle, completed his law degree with a specialty in constitutional law and claimed that he believed "as much in the intent of the Framers . . . as anybody who graduated from that law school or took his oath as a lawyer or went into the White House and did so with a great sense of idealism."<sup>48</sup>

In addition to staffing weaknesses, Nixon's management style was also deficient. While there is almost always an assumption from the vantage point of hindsight that people involved in an event know more than they do, Nixon should have known more than he seemed to. Part of this was because the communication among the staff and between the staff and the president was poor. Staff information was filtered through Haldeman, and as Kissinger had noted, the relation of the various Nixon aides to one another "was like the prisoners in adjoining cells . . . proximity did not invite participation or intimate knowledge."<sup>49</sup>

Why didn't the president intervene sooner? Why didn't he "let it all hang out?" Why didn't he destroy the tapes? Why did he resign instead of taking his chances with impeachment and trial? As to the first two questions, Aitken theorized that part of the problem was that Nixon genuinely did not know what had happened in some of the pivotal episodes of Watergate.<sup>50</sup> I find this plausible and consistent with experiences in other crises. Even before Nixon's resignation, Mary McCarthy, writing picturesquely for *The New York Times Review of Books* in February 1974, expressed it this way:

Yet Watergate has a strange organic life of its own which, in my opinion, is more persistent than Nixon's desperate hold on power. Watergate has showed itself to be like an angleworm or a child's belief about an angleworm: if you chop it in pieces, each piece will wiggle off and make a brand new angleworm. Last September, everyone was sure it had died. Then came Agnew. After Agnew, another 'dead' period followed. Then came the Saturday Night Massacre. Another brief suspension of breath, then the missing tapes, then the tape erasures.<sup>51</sup>

Kissinger was convinced that Nixon genuinely believed his version of events, which was essentially that he had been let down by faithless retainers and that he was reluctant to transcend it by putting out the entire truth all at once—because he genuinely did not know it, had suppressed it in his mind, or knew that he was already technically guilty of obstruction of justice.<sup>52</sup> Intellectually, Nixon clearly knew the results of a cover-up. He told Ehrlichman on July 5 that "a cover-up is the worst thing; cover-up is how I nailed Truman. It can hurt deeply."<sup>53</sup>

Ehrlichman reported that shortly after the inauguration in 1973, Nixon decided to take personal control of Watergate and clean it up.<sup>54</sup> If this is what prompted him to ask Dean to prepare a full statement dealing with all of the issues, then Dean misunderstood, with the well-known damaging results. Stewing over his situation, Dean decided that the report was requested in order to frame him, and so he returned from Camp David intent on securing a lawyer and seeking immunity.

Perhaps the more puzzling Nixonian response to these questions is on the matter of the tapes. There is little disagreement that it would have been easy to destroy the tapes before that option was closed legally and politically. And Nixon in fact received plenty of advice to destroy the tapes from Nelson Rockefeller, John Connally, Henry Kissinger, and others. Brodie noted that her work provided “abundant evidence of Nixon the survivor, but very little of what became apparent in Watergate, an impulse toward self-destruction.” Destroying the tapes, in her view, would have been characteristic of Nixon the survivor.<sup>55</sup> I find it inconceivable that anyone could believe that the unedited tapes of conversations that go on in private in almost any executive office could withstand public scrutiny. Surely he would have purged them after writing his memoirs and did not destroy them because he believed they were protected by executive privilege. However, Nixon himself, as well as Haig and others, indicated that he believed the tapes would exonerate him and counter attempts by his “enemies” to rewrite history.

Finally, why did Nixon resign? Both Fawn Brodie’s characterization of Nixon’s habit of massive denial and James David Barber’s characterization of Nixon as an active-negative personality would have caused one to “predict” that he would ride out impeachment and conviction either to victory or martyrdom. The main elements of the active-negative rigidification process, according to Barber, are the sense that one must resist the temptation to give in, the feeling that salvation lies in effort, the perception of oneself as engaged in a lone struggle, the appeal to faith, and the sense of oneself as surrounded by lurking enemies. Rather, Nixon, the “I am not a quitter” politician, quit. Just as Nixon had not contested the electoral returns in 1960, nor stepped beyond any bounds of propriety as vice president during Eisenhower’s illnesses, he did not defy a court decision, did relinquish the tapes, and he did not stick with a failing course of action. In other words, this was not, as Barber contended, “the story of our nearest brush yet with an American tyranny.”<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, writers have often assumed that Nixon resigned because of the certainty of impeachment and likelihood of conviction. While that may have been Nixon’s reasoning at the time, Senator Howard Baker later said that in the final analysis the Senate would not have convicted Nixon. “I thought the historic dimensions of impeachment would have mitigated the partisan fervor and that my fellow Senators would have seen the evidence sufficiently ambiguous either to acquit or at least not remove him from office,” Baker said.<sup>57</sup>

### **Systemic Theories**

The systematic theories of the causes of Watergate, in the sense of the forces and trends that created an environment hospitable to Watergate offenses, include the consequences of a too powerful presidential institution, the growth and intransigence of bureaucratic power, the conflict between the legislative and executive branches, the excesses of the government in an era of the “security state,” the aftermath of societal changes such as the decline of respect for law and order in the 1960s, and the culmination of the Vietnam conflict. Other more specific suggestions as to causality have included the policy and party conflicts with the Democrats, and anti-Nixon “liberal establishment press,” the policy conflict

between the two wings of the Republican party, and conflicts within the U.S. intelligence community, including CIA entrapment of Nixon.

The overarching dominant theory is that the taproot of Watergate lies in the Cold War/Vietnam environment. As early as 1973 the chair of the international relations faculty of the Claremont Graduate School argued that in one sense there was a direct line from the Truman Doctrine to Watergate. He concluded that “the American system had progressively been bent out of shape by the corrupting influence of executive power set up to direct our Cold War foreign policy . . . which required secrecy, a vast ‘security’ apparatus, and greatly expanded executive power.”<sup>58</sup> John Shattuck, an American Civil Liberties Union lawyer, concurred with this analysis in his remarks at the Hofstra University conference on Nixon in November 1987.<sup>59</sup> Shattuck contended that the underlying crisis in the Nixon presidency was a crisis of national security that began when the security policies and intelligence community that grew out of World War II became a permanent feature of the postwar era.<sup>60</sup>

Political scientist Michael Genovese has provided an essential context with reminders of the emotion, fear, and alienation in the country in the late 1960s and of the fears occasioned by the demonstrations against the war that were growing increasingly menacing when Nixon became president. Nixon, according to Genovese, in his determination not to let the demonstrators drag him down as had happened to his predecessor, committed acts that were “to plant seeds of illegal and immoral activities that would eventually lead to the President’s downfall.” Genovese suggested that rather than viewing the Nixon presidency through the prism of Watergate, “one must always see Nixon through the prism of Vietnam.”<sup>61</sup>

Alexander M. Bickel added that an understanding of the era was crucial in that “much of what happened to the legal and social order in the fifteen years or so before Watergate was prologue.” In those years, he noted, the nation had an extraordinarily sustained experience when the limits to civil disobedience and conscientious objection were transgressed by at least three distinct, sizable groups in society—white southerners in the mid-fifties, the civil rights movement, and the white middle-class anti-war movement. Bickel suggested that in some measure Watergate was a replica of the transgression of those limits.<sup>62</sup>

More immediately within the context of protest over Vietnam, those directly involved as participants and those indirectly involved as journalists pointed to the Pentagon Papers as the pivotal point for Watergate. Journalist Jonathan Schell believed that the Pentagon Papers case, arising out of the war in Vietnam, was the watershed when lawbreaking within the executive branch became indictable.<sup>63</sup> The case also illustrated a double standard in that Daniel Ellsberg, who stole government documents marked “Top Secret” and gave them to the press because of his disagreement with policy, became a hero, while those who tried to ferret out national security leaks in government became villains. The views of the participants seconded those of the journalists. For example, Charles Colson also saw the release of the Pentagon Papers as the “pivotal point” after which the ground rules began to change and they “crossed the line.”<sup>64</sup> Roger Morris reported that “it was Kissinger who inflamed an initially complacent Nixon to take action” when the Pentagon Papers appeared. “Nixon himself saw the documents chiefly (and rightly) as a rebuke to the previous Democratic administrations.”<sup>65</sup> John Ehrlichman concurred with this assessment.<sup>66</sup>

### **The Legacy of Watergate**

The immediate impact of Watergate was on people and included the resignation of a president and the sentencing of more than seventy individuals in the Nixon administration, including a cabinet officer, two top aides, and the president’s counsel, appointments secretary, and personal attorney. The record conveys only the tip of the iceberg on the personal price

paid by the individual and their families. Some were guilty. Some were innocent and caught in the web of Watergate simply by being associated with the Nixon administration. Some got off too lightly through plea bargains. Some received sentences too harsh for the offense from “Maximum John” Sirica. Some made the best of it (Ehrlichman, Colson, Magruder, Liddy), some were bitter (McCord) and some remained angry (Stans).<sup>67</sup> These are the personal stories, the human dimensions of public service that are too often forgotten in analyzing American events and institutions. On the other hand, some individuals have never been able to move beyond that defining moment in their career, just as some of Kennedy’s associates have remained frozen in Camelot. This is true, for example, of William Safire.

The immediate legacy of Watergate nationally was the effect on U.S. policy from the temporary erosion of presidential authority, both before and after the resignation. Part of this legacy, in other words, is what did not happen. For a period of several months, Watergate circumscribed the president’s freedom of action and occupied his attention. Kissinger, for example, noted that “we were losing the ability to make credible commitments, for we could no longer guarantee Congressional approval.” Perhaps most symbolic of the state of affairs was the fact that Kissinger was asked at a press conference whether the alert at the end of the war in the Middle East in October 1973, was a Watergate maneuver.<sup>68</sup> Watergate had become the only lens.

Not only were the president’s actions circumscribed, but his foreign and domestic policies were obviously not realized after his resignation. Ambrose has provided an excellent outline of these policies. He also noted that with Nixon’s resignation, the Republican party moved to the right, bringing a majority of the voters in the country along with it and “what the country got was not the Nixon Revolution but the Reagan Revolution.” It got unbelievable deficits, Iran-contra, savings and loans scandals, millions of homeless, and gross favoritism for the rich according to Ambrose, who concluded that when Nixon resigned, “we lost more than we gained.” Or as Joan Hoff has said: “Watergate . . . perverted what should have been a fairly progressive period of conservatism following the end of the war in Vietnam into a regressive one under Reagan and Bush.”<sup>69</sup>

Another immediate impact was the rush to judgments by the other institutions of government. Howard Ball has effectively argued that the Supreme Court, in choosing to fulfill their “duty” to end the Watergate crisis, rushed to judgment too quickly and should have spent a great deal more reflection and analysis on ruling a constitutional privilege of executive privilege before creating it by precedent. Ball quoted Alan Westin to the effect that “*U.S. v. Nixon* was one of the most predictable rulings in the history of American constitutional law . . . the political situation was not only hospitable to a ruling against the President but almost irresistibly pressing for it.”<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, Congress, responding to outrage, especially over the pardon, rushed to judgment with a series of legislative measures, most of which have been either detrimental or ineffective. But the post-Watergate legislative agenda demonstrated that the scandal did give Congress the opportunity to reassert its power. The Watergate-related legislation has not improved confidence in government nor has it averted corruption. This should not be surprising, since historically reform movements that have been reactions to specific events and failings have been short-lived. If corruption and abuse of power did not start with Watergate, neither did it end with Watergate.

In her acclaimed book, *Scandal: The Crisis of Mistrust in American Politics*, Suzanne Garment recounted that after Watergate and despite the growth in anticorruption efforts, the number of our political scandals has actually continued to increase. She attributed this not to an increase in corruption at the federal level so much as “our growing capacity and

taste for political scandal production.” Today’s anticorruption efforts, according to Garment, “owe less to Watergate than to the attitudes toward American government and society that emerged among the political elite during the early 1960s and appeared on the national scene in opposition to Lyndon Johnson’s presidency and America’s participation in the Vietnam war.”<sup>71</sup> Nathan Miller indirectly confirmed this thesis in his study of corruption, primarily at the national level before 1900, by finding that while many officials were driven from office, none were indicted.<sup>72</sup>

One would assume that after a period of outrage, penalty, and corrective action, the lessons to potential perpetrators in the near future would be clear. However, this legacy of Watergate was short-lived. It did not prevent Iran-Contra, the savings and loan scandals and RTC, the Abscam Scandal in 1980 that resulted in the conviction of seven members of Congress, or Whitewater. While not instructing the future, the experience tarnished the past. One of the effects of the investigations was to further disillusion the public about their government by retroactively uncovering abuses, especially those in the Johnson and Kennedy administrations.<sup>73</sup>

Other assessments of the impact of Watergate include the impact on the electorate and on political parties, the vast expansion of the concept of national security to rationalize classification of official documents in a democracy, and arguments over whether or not the “system” worked. On the latter point, Richard Ben-Veniste and George Frampton, both assistant special prosecutors under Archibald Cox and then under Leon Jaworski, argued that the lesson of Watergate is not that the system worked but that the system nearly did not work and does not work by itself. This is the same conclusion reached by Hoff in *Nixon Reconsidered*.<sup>74</sup> Most of the attention, however, has been focused on the impact the Watergate experience had on the press.

The heroized investigative reporters, Bernstein and Woodward, established a new low watermark for using unnamed sources. When *The Washington Post* began to dig into the Watergate story, almost all of the sources quoted were on a nonattributable, off-the-record basis. The most famous unnamed source was Deep Throat. Various participants named their candidates for Deep Throat: Ehrlichman’s was Henry Peterson, head of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division; Haldeman’s was Fred Fielding, John Dean’s assistant; John Dean’s nominee was Alexander Haig; Herb Klein believed it was a fictitious character developed by Woodward and Bernstein representing a combination of two or three of their sources of information; Aitken proclaimed Deep Throat and Deliberate Eraser (of the eighteen and one-half-minute gap) to be the same person—either Alexander Haig, Fred Buzhardt, Steve Bull, or Haig’s deputy, Major General John C. Bennett; and James Mann, a colleague of Woodward’s at the *Post* at the time, wrote that based on his conversations with Bob Woodward, it was a specific individual from the FBI.<sup>75</sup> Although nominated by others than Dean, Haig spent one chapter in his memoir denying Dean’s accusation<sup>76</sup> and Woodward has promised to explain Deep Throat someday.<sup>77</sup> In all likelihood Deep Throat represented a literary conceit based on a compilation of anonymous sources, this is one of the mysteries stimulating continued interest, especially by journalists, in Watergate.

Another result of Watergate journalism was to make unlicensed detectives of a generation of reporters who came to concentrate on personalities and personal lives of politicians using “leaked” information rather than on legitimate research into substantive concerns of policy. How else could the press have missed the savings and loan scandal and parlayed the private peccadilloes of John F. Kennedy, Gary Hart, and Bill Clinton into headline news? One of the most disturbing and enduring effects of Watergate was to legitimize printing rumor and hearsay. Suzanne Garment observed that “one sign of the changed spirit is the

recent growth in the number of press people who think of themselves as investigative journalists.” “The term refers less to specific techniques or modes of research,” according to Garment, “than it does to an attitude: the determination to fight the established powers for the information whose exposure will bring about some malefactor’s downfall.” “The central purpose of the journalistic craft,” her argument continued, “is to bring to citizens’ attention the flaws in their institutions and leaders.”<sup>78</sup> This view was seconded by *Washington Post* editor Benjamin Bradlee, who told Aitken in an interview in July 1991: “As far as the Presidency was concerned there was an awe for the office under Wiggins, my predecessor. I guess I changed all that. By the time Nixon got in we were already anti-White House, and we sure stayed that way.”<sup>79</sup>

In spite of the torrent of criticism of Woodward and Bernstein’s second book on Watergate, *The Final Days* (1976), and the criticism that has continued on Woodward’s methods in his subsequent books in using unnamed sources and unattributed quotations, this has not stopped him and his books sell well. In his latest, *The Agenda: Inside the Clinton White House* (1994), Woodward noted in the introduction that he had conducted more than 250 interviews and “nearly all the interviews were conducted on ‘deep background,’ which means that I agreed not to identify these sources.” Historian Joan Hoff, on the other hand, refused all privileged access and did not accept any restrictions on the interviews she conducted and yet she was able to produce an impressive study, *Nixon Reconsidered* (1994).

### Problems in Studying the Presidency

A review of the literature on Nixon and Watergate written by journalists, participants, and academics point to a number of problems confronted by those engaged in research on presidents and the presidency. Some of these problems confront scholars studying other governmental institutions, while others are unique to the presidency. A few are specific to Watergate, but most are instructive to those who will write in the midst of future Watergates.

#### *Flawed Data*

The first problem highlighted by the literature on the Nixon/Watergate story is the sheer volume of undocumented information, much of which came to be accepted as fact through repetition.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, opinions and allegations came to be accepted as fact. For example, nineteen percent of the Watergate events listed in the front cover to *Watergate and the White House* were asterisked, with a footnote explaining that the events were “alleged in testimony and may or may not be true.”<sup>81</sup> Many reports did not include such a caveat. Sam Ervin pointed out that “it is impossible to enforce intelligent and logical rules of evidence in congressional hearings, and consequently, witnesses are permitted to express in such hearings their opinions concerning something of which they are necessarily ignorant, *i.e.*, the contents of other men’s minds.”<sup>82</sup>

From the journalists who were not held accountable for accuracy or attribution in their reporting, to the allegations and speculations that permeated the testimony in the hearings, to the unusually large number of memoirs by participants whose memories may have been fuzzy even when not consciously or subconsciously self-serving, one is confronted with a public record that is soft and unreliable. On the whole, the information upon which officials made judgments and upon which the public formed opinions was appallingly deficient. Subsequently, in each overlapping phase of Watergate accounts, writers built upon the misinformation of previous writers, layer upon layer, until the exponential effect produced nonsense.



Another serious data problem for the researcher on the presidency is that of gaining access to the White House. Consequently, the intuitive feel for “the way it really works” is necessarily left to insiders whose accounts are understandably, even when unintentionally, self-serving. This problem was exacerbated in the case of the Nixon White House, when so many insiders were either imprisoned, or were tainted by scandal even if they were not among those who were sentenced to prison. Nevertheless, books under even these circumstances can be useful. *The Haldeman Diaries*, for example, is an extraordinarily detailed and important documentation of activities in the Oval Office by a proximate player.

All qualifications regarding the extant Watergate literature place even more demands on the documentary record, which at best is but the visible portion of any administration. In the case of Nixon and Watergate the frustrations are magnified by the court battles and the slow progress in opening the Nixon archival materials. Clement Vost, James Hastings, and Joan Hoff have all previously given accounts of these problems.<sup>83</sup> Suffice it to say here that Karl Weissenbach, Supervisory Archivist, Nixon Presidential Materials Staff, told me that as of January 1995, only about 5.5 million pages in the National Archives of approximately 40 million and only sixty-three hours of 4,000 hours of White House Tape have been opened to research. Furthermore, while availability lists for the processed records are obtainable, researchers have to know what to inquire about in the case of records that have not been processed.

The Watergate experience may also be a harbinger of a documentary record in the future as potentially self-serving as memoirs and edited diaries. Suzanne Garment reported that a political appointee explained to her how top managers in her federal agency make their official decisions: “Any comments we want to make to one another are made on yellow stick-on paper that later gets thrown away.” The source continued, “We have oral government: I’ve had to learn to absorb things by ear and rely on people who are good at giving oral briefings.”<sup>84</sup>

Another problem is what might be called “censorship by omission.” Raymond Price observed that if every word of John Dean’s book were true, “in its totality it would be a gross distortion—not because of what he says but because of what he leaves unsaid.”<sup>85</sup> Of course, most participants have been unwilling to grant Dean’s best-seller even that much.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Ehrlichman recently wrote that while Haldeman tells in more than six hundred pages in great detail about things that occurred in the Nixon White House between 1969 and 1973, *The Haldeman Diaries* is more remarkable for what it omits.<sup>87</sup>

#### *Over-personalizing the Presidency*

The Watergate story provides a clear example of personalizing in the president the accumulated abuses of decades and of many individuals and of collapsing distinction between the president and the presidency. In sum, a personality theory of Watergate does not account for the large number of individuals, government agencies, and corporations indicted or tainted or fined for unethical or illegal actions. Furthermore, to attribute Watergate solely to the president ignores what has happened to the presidency in recent years with incumbents from different parties and with popular as well as unpopular personalities holding the office. The disequilibrium in the presidency during the Vietnam era is sobering to note: Kennedy was assassinated after serving only three years in office; Johnson was trumped by Vietnam and did not seek re-election; Nixon was forced to resign; the political firestorm over the Nixon pardon skewered Ford; the reaction to Watergate “morality” that placed Carter in the White House was short-lived; Reagan’s two-term “teflon” interlude

gave the public a breather; Bush followed as a one-term coat-tailer; and now once again, a president is faced by a hostile and aggressive opposition Congress.

What may be new and must be accommodated in studying the presidency is that today the media and the public are consumed by a focus on personality. Is it a coincidence that *People* magazine began publication in 1974? Its circulation by 1994 had reached over 3.5 million, compared with just over 4 million for *Time* magazine, which has the largest circulation of any general interest periodical. American citizens have become conditioned to a fascination with probing people's lives from the presidents' to O. J. Simpson's and Nicole Brown's and to their own through the often inane talk shows, and self-help books that make the best-seller lists.

Must a crisis be personalized before interest in public policy or in institutions can be generated? There was little interest in the problems that underlay the savings and loan crisis until Charles Keating personalized it, or in stock scandals before Michael Millikan. What happened to interest in the systemic issues that caused the Iran-Contra scandal and that have not been addressed? How can citizens forget the millions of dollars spent trying to put Oliver North in jail when they voted for him for the Senate, the institution to which he had lied?

On the other hand, over-depersonalization also carries risks. The character of the president does matter. Even if Nixon was a victim and not the perpetrator of Watergate, he must be held accountable for setting the tone for the administration, the standards for the personnel appointed in the administration, and the expectations for performance and communications. The issue is not whether we have a government of laws or a government of men and women, as was so frequently mentioned during Watergate, but whether we have a government of public servants under the law who respect the law. Perhaps future research can identify ways to discern a presidential candidate's ability to exercise self-restraint, consonant with democratic values, in the exercise of power.

#### *Overcoming "Passions of the Moment"*

If emotion rather than logic unduly affects the course of current events in periods of crisis, can academicians play more of an analytical role in public discourse than was evident during Watergate? Should they? Scholars did rise to the occasion in universities throughout the country by presenting seminars for students and for their local communities, but these activities had a minimal "trickle out" effect to a wider audience of national opinion leaders and hence had little or no impact on outcomes.<sup>88</sup>

Do national convulsions and periods of high emotion create more volatility in interpretations of presidents and of the presidency beyond what one might call "normal revisionism?" Few presidents' historical images have changed more frequently than Andrew Johnson's, for example. He was impeached, but subsequently was rehabilitated by the citizens and elected to the U.S. Senate in 1874. Even though he was elected in a landslide, Nixon's highest Gallup Poll approval rating was between eleven and nineteen points below that of his five predecessors in office. His slippage of forty-four points from a high of 68 percent approval to a low of 24 percent in July and August 1974 was less than Truman's (sixty-four points). Yet Truman, also the subject of an impeachment resolution, is currently riding the crest of a new wave of popularity.<sup>89</sup>

Journalists and participants and scholars have already revised their views of Nixon in the sober light of further study and reflection. Tom Wicker has written with considerable honesty that as a columnist he wrote many critical articles about Nixon, "some of them, in retrospect, overstated and rather righteous." "The fact that I found him no more appealing

as a personality than did most reporters may have affected my view subconsciously,” Wicker conceded.<sup>90</sup> Scholar Stephen Ambrose acknowledged that beginning as a Nixon critic, he developed a “grudging admiration for the man” in volume one of his three-volume biography, “came to have a quite genuine and deep admiration for many of his policies” in volume two and “in volume three, to my astonishment, that I had developed a liking for him.”<sup>91</sup> Jonathan Aitken wrote that “at the end of my long biographer’s journey into the career and character of Richard Nixon, I found much more to like in the man and to admire in the statesman, than I had anticipated.”<sup>92</sup> Might one hypothesize that distance from the Oval Office makes one hyper-critical of an incumbent president, while distance in time from a former president mellows criticism?

### *The Bias of Inevitability*

Too much of the literature on Watergate, including the work of scholars, assumed an inevitability of outcome. Retrospectively authors tend to impose more order and continuity on history than is the case in reality and to assume an inevitability that does not exist. Knowing the ending to a story causes this seduction. This should serve as a caution not to diminish the importance of individuals and of serendipity in history.

One need not recount all of the “if onlys” in Watergate that could have changed the course of history. Indeed, one is struck by the mistakes and accidental factors without which there might not have been a scandal: if Frank Walls had not noticed the tape; if the plumbers had not bungled the job; if Alexander Butterfield had not been queried; or if Martha Mitchell had not “distracted John.”<sup>93</sup> What if Nixon had died in office as Harding did before the scandals of his administration were revealed? Or what if Nixon had died during the life-threatening surgery immediately upon his return to San Clemente and had not had twenty years for rehabilitation? One can endlessly speculate to no useful purpose, except to serve as a caution against succumbing to the myth of inevitability in assessing institutions and processes for dealing with crises.

### *The Kaleidoscope Effect*

How does one capture the dynamic process of decision making, changing every day in direction and character and personalities? Nixon described the problem in this way:

I had tried to grapple with the facts [of Watergate] only to find that they were not like the pieces of a puzzle that could be assembled into one true picture. They were more like the parts of a kaleidoscope: at one moment, arranged one way, they seemed to form a perfect design, complete in every detail. But the simple shift of one conjecture could unlock them all and they would move into a completely different pattern.<sup>94</sup>

The same can be said of the Nixon presidency, or of any other presidency. Verbal methodologies have not kept pace with numerical ones. With computer technology has come the ability to model  $n$  variables and to display in four dimensions. But the verbal story line remains undimensional. Some day a verbal methodology may be developed that will enable the scholar to present an account of a presidency as a symphony, with all of the parts “performed” simultaneously, so that the reader can see the interrelationships and interactions of multiple events and decisions more realistically. Such a capacity would also enable new kinds of investigation into the qualities required for effective presidencies. This methodological problem is highlighted by the Watergate story line, which in most books proceeds as though nothing else was happening in government simultaneously with the unfolding events of

Watergate, and as though nothing else was happening in American society except a preoccupation with Watergate.

Jonathan Aitken did give occasional glimpses into context. For example, he noted that the “smoking gun” (*i.e.*, the direct evidence on tape of criminal guilt) conversation took less than five minutes of Nixon’s and Haldeman’s attention in a ninety-minute agenda on the affairs of the presidency.<sup>95</sup> John Ehrlichman observed that perhaps “someday someone will notice that all the aspects of Watergate required only the tiniest percentage of the time and attention of the President and his staff . . . [and] then he may wonder what else was going on in 1972, 1973 and the years that went before.”<sup>96</sup> Bob Haldeman’s *Diaries* does the best job in conveying the range of demands on attention, from the significant to the mundane.

### Conclusion

As future generations scroll through the verbal terrain of the American experience, how will Watergate literature fare? In Watergateography, as in photography, the image of reality that writers captured and froze in time depended upon the lens used, the distance of the viewer from the subject, and the “eye” as to angle and framing. All lenses distort, but different ones are more suitable than others under certain conditions. The Watergate literature I have reviewed for this essay points to serious distortion problems that have resulted from the unusually heavy reliance by reporters on “source stories”—that is, stories learned second- and third-hand from sources who refused to be named. In some cases the sources may have lied, or the person the source quoted may have lied. Distortion was then compounded when authors subsequently used press accounts as their sources.

At least the plethora of memoirs prompted by Watergate have the advantage of being first-hand, even though they carry the obvious disadvantages already illustrated. The scholarly literature on Watergate and Nixon remains scant, but will likely surge when and if, more of the documentary record becomes available. As the following article by Joan Hoff indicates, those with a research interest in the Nixon presidency have been handicapped by the slow progress in opening archival materials. All of this means that the verbal archaeologist studying Nixon not only has a great deal to dig through, but also to wait for.

### Notes

1. Database search as of February, 1995.
2. Charles P. Hendersen, Jr., *The Nixon Theology* (New York: Harper, 1972); Bruce Mazlish, *In Search of Nixon: A Psychohistorical Inquiry* (New York: Basic Books, 1972); and Arthur Woodstone, *Nixon’s Head* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1972). James David Barber, *The Presidential Character* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), classifies Nixon as a variant of the “active-negative” character.
3. Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978), pp. 645–6; George McGovern, interview with the author in 1991; and Jonathan Aitken, *Nixon: A Life* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1993), p. 447.
4. *The Gallup Opinion Index* (September 1974, Report No. 111), *passim*.
5. “A Theory About Corruption,” *Vanity Fair* 35 (November 1930): 61.
6. Herbert Shapiro, ed., *The Muckrakers and American Society* (Boston, MA: D. C. Heath, 1968), p. v.
7. James Hume, interview with the author in July 1991; Jonathan Aitken, *Nixon: A Life* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1993): 370.
8. “The Fruits of Agnewism,” *Columbia Journalism Review* (January/February 1973): 12.

9. Philip B. Kurland, *Watergate and the Constitution* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 73–4. See also J. Anthony Lukas, *Nightmare: The Underside of the Nixon Years* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), pp. 305–6.
10. John J. Sirica, *To Set The Record Straight: The Break-in, the Tapes, the Conspirators, the Pardon* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), p. 116.
11. Frank Mankiewicz, *U.S. v. Richard M. Nixon: The Final Crisis* (New York: Quadrangle, 1975), p. 86.
12. Tom Wicker, *One of Us: Richard Nixon and the American Dream* (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 366.
13. John Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power: The Nixon Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 263.
14. Marvin Kalb, *The Nixon Memo: Political Respectability, Russia, and the Press* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 5–7.
15. Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1982), p. 122.
16. William Safire, *Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), p. 364.
17. Kalb, *The Nixon Memo*, pp. 14–5.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
19. Fred Emery, *Watergate: The Corruption of American Politics and the Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York: Random House, 1994), p. vii.
20. For example, Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, *All the President's Men* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974) and *The Final Days* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976); Dan Rather and Gary P. Gates, *The Palace Guard* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); and Jimmy Breslin, *How the Good Guys Finally Won: Notes from an Impeachment Summer* (New York: The Viking Press, 1975). John Osborne, who wrote a weekly “Nixon Watch” column in *The New Republic*, published his work in this period as *The Fourth Year of the Nixon Watch* (New York: Liveright, 1973) and *The Fifth Year of the Nixon Watch* (New York: Liveright, 1974); and Herbert Block’s image-creating cartoons in *The Washington Post* were published in *Herblock: Special Report* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976). In one of the most interesting collections of material, most of which appeared originally in *The New Yorker*, Elizabeth Drew’s *Washington Journal: The Events 1973–1974* (New York: Random House, 1975) follows the events chronologically and conveys the emotion and uncertainty close observers experienced during “Watergate Summer.”
21. Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon: Ruin and Recovery* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), pp. 560–1; Jonathan Aitken, *Nixon: A Life* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1993), pp. 561–2.
22. See James Trezise, et al., *Watergate: A Crisis for the World; A Survey of British and French Press Reaction Toward an American Political Crisis* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980).
23. Aitken, *Nixon*, pp. 525–8.
24. C. L. Sulzberger, *The World and Richard Nixon* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1987), pp. xi, 5.
25. Wicker, *One of Us*, p. xiv.
26. Emery, *Watergate*, p. vii.
27. E. Howard Hunt, *Undercover: Memoirs of an American Secret Agent* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1974); and James W. McCord, *A Piece of Tape: the Watergate Story: Fact and Fiction* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Media Services, 1974).
28. G. Gordon Liddy, *Will: The Autobiography of G. Gordon Liddy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980).
29. Jeb Stuart Magruder, *An American Life: One Man’s Road to Watergate* (New York: Atheneum, 1974).
30. Sam J. Ervin, Jr., *The Whole Truth: The Watergate Conspiracy* (New York: Random House, 1980), p. 161.
31. Ambrose, *Ruin and Recovery*, pp. 102–3.
32. Other defendants in Watergate-related trials who wrote their versions of their roles included Charles Colson, former Special Counsel to the President, *Born Again* (Old Tappan, NJ: F. H.

- Revell, 1977); and Maurice Stans, chief GOP fundraiser and chairman of the Finance Committee to Re-elect the President, White House aide and later Transportation undersecretary, *The Terrors of Justice: The Untold Side of Watergate* (New York: Everest House Publishers, 1978).
33. Sirica, *To Set the Record Straight*, p. 89.
  34. Hamilton, "The Nixon Impeachment and Abuse of Presidential Power," in Leon Friedman and William F. Levantrosser, eds., *Watergate and Afterward: The Legacy of Richard M. Nixon* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), p. 199.
  35. These included *The White House Transcripts* (*New York Times*, 1973; and Bantam paperback, 1974) and *The Presidential Transcripts* (*Washington Post*, Delacorte Press, 1974); *The Watergate Hearings: Break-in and Cover-up* (*New York Times*, Bantam Books, 1973); *The White House Under Fire: Responses of the President to Charges of Misconduct* (1974), a report requested by counsel John Doerr for the impeachment inquiry staff; and *The Senate Watergate Report: A Vital Document in the Impeachment Drama* (1974), a three-volume report as released by the Senate Select Committee.
  36. The first two volumes were *Nixon: The Education of a Politician, 1913–1962* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987) and *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962–1972* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).
  37. Dale E. Casper, *Richard M. Nixon: A Bibliographic Exploration* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), pp. 5, 12.
  38. Eli Chesen, *President Nixon's Psychiatric Profile* (New York: Peter H. Wyden, 1973), p. 160; Jeb Magruder, *An American Life*, p. 348.
  39. Aitken, *Nixon*, p. 518.
  40. Fawn M. Brodie, *Richard Nixon: The Shaping of His Character* (New York: Norton, 1981), p. 27.
  41. Wicker, *One of Us*, p. 47.
  42. Herbert S. Parmet, *Richard Nixon and His America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), pp. 356–8.
  43. Ervin, *The Whole Truth*, p. vii.
  44. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp. 92–3.
  45. John Dean, *Blind Ambition: The White House Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), pp. 18, 24.
  46. Vernon Walters, *Silent Missions* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978), p. 593.
  47. Frederick C. Mosher, et al., *Watergate: Implications for Responsible Government* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), pp. 12–3.
  48. Charles W. Colson in Friedman and Levantrosser, *Watergate and Afterward*, pp. 86–7.
  49. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 77.
  50. Aitken, *Nixon*, p. 530.
  51. Mary McCarthy, *The Mask of State: Watergate Portraits* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 161.
  52. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp. 105–6.
  53. Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, p. 354.
  54. *Ibid.*, p. 368.
  55. Brodie, *Richard Nixon*, pp. 510–11.
  56. James David Barber, "The Nixon Brush with Tyranny," *Political Science Quarterly* (Winter 1977–78): 590.
  57. Howard Baker, interview with the author, September 1991; Aitken, *Nixon*, pp. 525–6.
  58. Fred Warner Neal, "The Cold War: Road to Watergate," *The Center Magazine* (September/October 1973): 23.
  59. The proceedings of the conference were published in 1992 as *Watergate and Afterward*, edited by Leon Friedman and William F. Levantrosser.
  60. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
  61. Michael Genovese, *The Nixon Presidency: Power and Politics in Turbulent Times* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), p. 136.
  62. Alexander M. Bickel, "Watergate and the Legal Order," *Commentary*, January 1974, pp. 20–2.

63. Jonathan Schell, *The Time of Illusion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 267.
64. Colson in Friedman and Levantrosse, *Watergate and Afterward*, p. 87.
65. Roger Morris, *Uncertain Greatness: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 249.
66. Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, pp. 300–2.
67. On the latter, see Maurice H. Stans, *The Terrors of Justice: The Untold Side of Watergate* (New York: Everest House Publishers, 1978).
68. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 124.
69. Ambrose, *Nixon: Ruin and Recovery*, p. 597; and Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), p. 335.
70. Howard Ball, “United States v. Nixon Reexamined,” in Friedman and Levantrosser, eds., *Watergate and Afterward*, p. 123.
71. Suzanne Garment, *Scandal: The Crisis of Mistrust in American Politics* (New York: Times Books, 1991), pp. 2, 5–6.
72. Nathan Miller, *The Founding Finaglers* (New York: David McKay, 1976).
73. C. Vann Woodward, *Responses of the Presidents to Charges of Misconduct: White House Under Fire* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1974).
74. Richard Ben-Veniste and George Frampton, Jr., *Stonewall: The Real Story of the Watergate Prosecution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), pp. 391–395; Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, pp. 330–337.
75. James Mann, “Deep Throat: An Institutional Analysis,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1992, p. 112.
76. Alexander M. Haig, Jr., with Charles McCarry, *Inner Circles: How America Changed the World: A Memoir* (New York: Warner Books, 1992), pp. 321–6.
77. Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, *All the President’s Men* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), p. 271.
78. Garment, *Scandal*, pp. 77, 81.
79. Aitken, *Nixon*, p. 369.
80. For an account of how a quotation was mis-reported and then became a false story that entered legend. See Colson in Friedman and Levantrosser, *Watergate and Afterward*, p. 86. Likewise the oft-quoted “madman” theory about Nixon’s conduct has no basis in fact. See Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, pp. 176–178, 233, 398n. 84.
81. Edward W. Knappman, ed., *Watergate and the White House, June 1972/July 1973*, vol. 1 (New York: Facts on File, 1973).
82. Ervin, *The Whole Truth*, p. 175.
83. Clement E. Vose, “Nixon’s Archival Legacy, PS (Fall 1977): 432–8; James Hastings, “The Status of the Nixon Presidential Materials,” in Friedman and Levantrosser, eds., *Watergate and Afterward*, pp. 253–262; Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, pp. 263–267, and Hoff’s article on the Nixon Presidential Papers in this issue.
84. Garment, *Scandal*, p. 1.
85. Raymond Price, *With Nixon* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977), p. 88.
86. For example, see Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, p. 137.
87. John Ehrlichman, “Where’s the Man I Knew?” *Parade Magazine*, February 5, 1995, p. 4.
88. See, for example, the collection of original essays presented at a conference at the University of Delaware in 1973–74 in Paul J. Halpern, ed., *Why Watergate?* (Pacific Palisades, Ca.: Palisades Publishers, 1975).
89. *The Gallup Opinion Index* (September, 1974), *passim*.
90. Wicker, *One of Us*, p. 444.
91. Ambrose, *Ruin and Recovery*, pp. 635–6.
92. Aitken, *Nixon*, p. 6.
93. Nixon, RN, p. 648.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 817.
95. Aitken, *Nixon*, p. 475.
96. Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, p. 243.