

Richard Nixon's Road towards America's most Significant Crisis The Watergate Scandal

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Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive portrait of one of the most complex and controversial figures in modern American history. It begins with Richard Nixon's life and political career in California politics before delving into his controversial presidency along with the events leading up to the Watergate crisis. It traces the infamous break-in at the Democratic National Committee Headquarters and subsequent cover-up attempts. The article argues that Nixon's road to the Watergate crisis was paved by his belief in the presidency's inherent power and his willingness to use any means necessary to retain it. Ultimately, the Watergate scandal led to Nixon's resignation and marked a turning point in American political history. It examines Nixon's legacy and the ways in which his presidency continues to shape American politics and culture.

Keywords: Richard Nixon ; Watergate Scandal; Significance; impact; political system.

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Résumé

Cet article dresse un portrait complet de l'un des personnages les plus complexes et les plus controversés de l'histoire moderne des États-Unis. Il commence par la vie et la carrière politique de Richard Nixon en Californie avant d'aborder sa présidence controversée et les événements qui ont conduit à la crise du Watergate. Il retrace l'effraction tristement célèbre du siège du Comité national démocrate et les tentatives d'étouffement qui s'ensuivirent. L'article affirme que le chemin de Nixon vers la crise du Watergate a été pavé par sa croyance dans le pouvoir inhérent à la présidence et sa volonté d'utiliser tous les moyens nécessaires pour le conserver. En fin de compte, le scandale du Watergate a conduit à la démission de Nixon et a marqué un tournant dans l'histoire politique américaine. L'article examine l'héritage de Nixon et la manière dont sa présidence continue de façonner la politique et la culture américaines.

Mots clés: Richard Nixon; Le scandale du Watergate; importance; impact ; le système politique.

ملخص

تقدم هذه المقالة صورة شاملة لواحد من أكثر الشخصيات تعقيدًا وإثارة للجدل في التاريخ الأمريكي الحديث. يبدأ الأمر بحياة ريتشارد نيكسون ومسيرته السياسية في سياسة كاليفورنيا قبل الخوض في رئاسته المثيرة للجدل جنبًا إلى جنب مع الأحداث التي أدت إلى أزمة ووترغيت. إنه يتتبع الاقتحام سيئ السمعة في مقر اللجنة الوطنية للحزب الديمقراطي ومحاولات التستر اللاحقة. يجادل المقال بأن طريق نيكسون إلى أزمة ووترغيت كان ممهدًا بسبب إيمانه بالسلطة المتأصلة للرئاسة واستعداده لاستخدام أي وسيلة ضرورية للاحتفاظ بها. في النهاية، أدت فضيحة ووترغيت إلى استقالة نيكسون وشكلت نقطة تحول في التاريخ السياسي الأمريكي. إنه يفحص إرث نيكسون والطرق التي تستمر بها رئاسته في تشكيل السياسة والثقافة الأمريكية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ريتشارد نيكسون؛ فضيحة ووترغيت؛ أهمية؛ تأثير؛ النظام السياسي.

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Introduction

The Watergate scandal, which occurred during the presidency of Richard Nixon, remains one of the most infamous episodes in American political history. It involved the Nixon administration and its illegal activities to win the presidential election in 1972. It began with a break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate complex in Washington, D.C., and ultimately led to Nixon's resignation from the presidency.

This academic article seeks to analyze the political fallout of the Watergate scandal and the lessons learned from this tumultuous period in American history. Specifically, the article will examine the following questions: What were the key factors that led to the Watergate scandal, and how did Nixon's response to the scandal affect his presidency? What were the broader implications of the scandal for American politics and the public's trust in government? And what lessons can be drawn from the Watergate scandal for future generations of political leaders?

To answer these questions, the article will draw on a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including government documents, news reports, and scholarly analyses. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the article aims to provide a nuanced and comprehensive analysis of the Watergate scandal and its significance for American politics and society.

I. Richard Nixon's Early Years

Richard Nixon was a prominent American politician who served as the 37th President of the United States from 1969 to 1974. He was born on January 9, 1913, in Yorba Linda, California. He was the second of five children of Francis A. Nixon and Hannah Milhous Nixon. His father was a grocer and a Quaker, and his mother was a devout Quaker. Nixon's father struggled financially during the Great Depression and the family had to move several times in search of work. The strain of their life did not obstruct their happiness, declared Nixon. Their father would engage himself in any sort of work that might bring the necessary nourishments to feed the family. "Thanks to a vegetable garden and some of our own fruit trees, we had plenty to eat despite our low income. We also had a cow that provided milk from which my mother made our butter and cheese" (3-4).

Nixon infrequently dishonored his proletarian origins as he went further to accuse the psycho-historians who, while he became president, related his poverty to the poor quality of his own personal character. He clearly stated that the complexity of his character has nothing to do with his social class. He even, strongly, argued that the opinions of these psycho-historians are just mere reflections of their own lives and no one else: "It is obvious that in their books lower class equals a lack of class" (*In the Arena* 79). Jonathan Aitken, a journalist, argued that the social class Nixon came from has never been an obstacle for him: "[...] who fought through hardscrabble poverty to high peaks of achievements". Similarly put, poverty is not a reason for the hindrance of one's achievements or goals; it can be a very strong motive toward a successful career and that what Richard Nixon has shown through so many long years of hard work that were crowned with major achievements recorded in his presidential career in the American history.

If Richard Nixon would describe his early life, he would say the following: "Three words describe my life in Whittier: family, church, and school". Despite all challenges, Nixon was a successful student and was elected student body president of his high school. He went on to attend Whittier College, where he continued to excel academically and was again elected student body president. Because of their low-income and their economic situation, Nixon was forced to reject a tuition to Yale University. The ultimate choice for him, thus, was to graduate from Whittier College. During his last year in college, Nixon was able to win a scholarship to Duke University Law School in Durham, North Carolina. "My three years at Duke provided an excellent legal background," said Nixon. After applying for jobs for Donovan Leisure, Newton and Lombard, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) at Duke, Nixon finally decided to go back to Whittier to practice Law. His career in laws started with

acceptance in the oldest law firm Wingert and Bewley that shortly changed its name to Wingert, Bewley, and Nixon (RN13-21).

His childhood experiences helped shape his personality and worldview, and he often spoke about the importance of hard work, perseverance, and personal responsibility. His Quaker upbringing instilled in him a strong sense of morality and a belief in the value of public service. These values would guide him throughout his political career.

II. Richard Nixon's Character

It is always essential to study presidents' personalities; it is not an easy matter to do, though. In academia, to investigate any presidency, one should not separate the personal and the institutional behaviors of any particular president. The reason why is that a president's behavior is sprung from his own character and both of them cannot be set apart. A simple description, according to Michael Genovese, would never be applicable to the case of Richard Nixon. Many people who truly knew Nixon would definitely agree on the paradox of his personality. "Richard Milhous Nixon was a complex, multidimensional figure, a man of many contradictions" (57).

He is an absolutely sinister human being, but fascinating, I'd rather spend an evening with Richard Nixon than with almost anybody else because he is so bizarre. He has splashes of brilliance. He is obscene at times; his recall is almost total; his acquaintanceship with the world's figures is amazing. He is a fascinating human being (qtd. in Genovese 58).

Such a positive description of Nixon by Hugh Sidey, a columnist, and quoted by Genovese, would not repeatedly appear in different analyses of the psychological characterization of such an ambiguous former American president. David Abrahamsen argued that Nixon has a "psychopathic personality and character disorder". This is due to the fact of the depiction of Richard Nixon by many psycho-historians into different ways. One must never talk about Nixon without referring to the way Abrahamsen described him in his book *Nixon vs. Nixon: An Emotional Tragedy* "Nixon had a double personality, a person who simultaneously seems to display entirely different thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and character". These behavior traits were imprinted on Nixon during his early childhood and extended into his adulthood. It created, in Abrahamsen's terms, "an emotional conflict". There was "an abyss between his higher, noble intentions and his aggressive, lower inclinations" (250-7).

Theodore White, a political journalist and historian, talked about the paradoxical qualities when he summarized it as follow: "the essential duality of [Nixon's] nature, the evil and the good, the flights on the panic and the resolution of spirit, the good mind and the mean trickery" (57). William Safire, a former White House aide, illustrated the complexity of Nixon's character with a multi layered cake "conservative, stern, dignified, proper. But beneath the icing [his public face] one finds a variety of separate layers which reveal a complex, sometimes contradictory, paradoxical human being" (74).

Raymond Price, Nixon's former speech writer, observed that one part of Nixon was "exceptionally considerate, exceptionally caring, sentimental, generous of spirit, kind, while another was angry, vindictive, ill-tempered, mean-spirited" (qtd. in Genovese 58). Considering major facts, the depiction of some characteristics of Nixon's personality will never be uncomplicated. As it happens, the complexity of his character led to diligent and studious search for one common outcome but with no valuable one. He has always been a very difficult issue to be tackled. Consequently, this president's mind and life would never be easily understood and would always lead to further questions and queries. Bob Haldeman has already described Nixon as "the weirdest man ever to live in the White House" and John Ehrlichman also said that Nixon, his former boss, is a "mad monk" (qtd. in Genovese 58).

Stephen Skowronek in his book *The Politics Presidents Make* divided the presidents' characters into four distinct categories; Reconstruction, Disjunction, Articulation, and Preemption. A Reconstruction type is the one that wins elections at

the peak of the struggle between the political parties. This victory emerges from the strong opposition to the incumbent administration. The politics of Articulation is the one that considers the president as the source of "political orthodoxy" where no signs of opposition seem to hinder the advancement of the nation. The politics of Disjunction is the one that mingles with the old regime when common interest seems to be an obstacle for both political parties.

According to him, Nixon would perfectly fit in the Preemption category. To define this category, Skowronek explained that: "Preemption presidents stand out for the attention both for their aggressive employment of the powers of their office and for wrenching their political impacts" (41-44). These words can perfectly be put into effect when tracing back Nixon's political career. He was known by his aggressiveness and harsh behavior toward his opponents, furthermore, he had always considered them as his enemies. Last but not least, Michael Genovese gathered miscellaneous descriptions on the paranoid Nixon in the following table:

Richard Nixon's Psychological Characteristics

Author	Characteristics	Source
Abrahamsen	<i>Psychopathic Personality Type</i> Orally and anally fixated, obsessive-compulsive longings, passive-aggressive, secretive, egocentric, manipulative, paranoid personality, suffers from character disorders	Childhood
Barber	<i>Active Negative Type</i> Vague self-image, insecure, low self-esteem, lack of trust, need to manage aggressiveness, driven to compensatory behavior, feelings of inadequacy	Childhood
Brodie	<i>Man of Paradox</i> Self-loathing, paranoid? Sense of being unloved, impulse toward self-destruction, severely defective conscience, self-hatred	Childhood
Chesen	<i>Compulsive-obsessive Type</i> Feeling of uncertainty, need to prove manliness, need to control	Childhood
Mazlich	<i>Fear of Being Unloved, Self-Absorption</i> Capacity for denial, low self-esteem, compensatory behavior, feelings of inferiority; compulsiveness, need for control, projection, repressed hostility, lack of trust, death wish	Childhood

Source: Genovese, Michael A. *The Watergate Crisis* Westport: Greenwood, 1999. Print.

Finally, the psychoanalysis of Nixon's character has been explored in many books and by many historians that all ascertained that a common description is just impair. However, the real Nixon, contended Genovese, could be just wrapped around the fact that he was dominated by his own self-promotion; the one that was embodied in his paranoid style of undertaking multifold issues. Unfortunately for him, that paranoid style poisoned his administration and eventually, accelerated his self-destruction (115). On the same issue, Aitken opined: "Nixon was a character of Shakespearean complexity". This complexity, he explains, is due to the diverse achievements Nixon was able to earn, whether in terms of foreign policy or domestic one. Dismally, the American people were so quick forgetting all these accomplishments shortly after the occurrence of America's most infamous watersheds '*The Watergate Scandal*'.

III. Richard Nixon: The Politician

Being in school was the first stage where Nixon has constantly showed his interest in politics. He was ready to sacrifice all he had for the sake of engaging himself in the political life. He showed a hefty enthusiasm towards politics and he was apt for any political positions he might be offered. Starting with Voorhis¹, The Herter Committee², Alger Hiss³ to Gahagan⁴, Richard Nixon was able to prove to the nation

that politics was his greatest passion that made him win such compelling political encounters.

Michael Genovese genuinely described the political character of Nixon as "the most political man imaginable". Genovese argued that Nixon was a very conservative person and this fact was by instinct and characterized by being temperament, he said that Nixon had no ethics or a doctrine, he did not believe in anything or anyone. Such a fact, he clarifies permitted Nixon to balance and choose the best policies to be followed in every step he went through especially in matters related to the Soviet Union and communism. As a matter of fact, all these qualifications made Nixon such a master of what is known as "realpolitik"⁵. Genovese claimed that Nixon's political behavior is just a reflection of the quality of his personal character. He noted that Nixon could not make the difference "between disagreement and disloyalties". As a result of this, Nixon had always considered any of other political opponents as his enemies and that was crystal clear in his presidency as he considered politics a field of battle where you have to fight for your own survival (63-5).

IV. Richard Nixon: The Vice President

Nixon's political career began in the 1940s when he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. He later served as a senator from California and ran for president in 1960, but lost to John F. Kennedy in a close election. After his defeat, Nixon returned to California and ran for governor in 1962 but was again unsuccessful. "A man is not finished when he is defeated, he is finished when he quits," Nixon believed. In 1966, he decided to campaign once more for the 1968 presidential elections. For two years, he glanced all the moves of the Democrats and worked very hard to resurrect his own party. Huge funds were raised, many visits and other different activities were the target to ensure his outstanding comeback especially that he was depicted as a "perennial loser", explained Moore (491).

Presidential Candidate	Vice Presidential Candidate	Political Party	Popular Vote		Electoral Vote	
			Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Richard Nixon	Spiro Agnew	Republican	31,783,783	43.42%	301	55.9%
Hubert Humphrey	Edmund Muskie	Democratic	31,271,839	42.72%	191	35.5%
George Wallace	Curtis LeMay	American Ind.	9,901,118	13.53%	46	8.6%
Other (±)	-	-	243,259	0.33%	0	0.0%
Total			73,199,999		538	

Source : <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?year=1968>

In the end, Nixon won the election, receiving 43.4% of the popular vote and 301 electoral votes. Hubert Humphrey, Johnson's Vice President who ran as the Democratic nominee, received 42.7% of the popular vote and 191 electoral votes. George Wallace, the segregationist governor of Alabama, ran as an independent and received 13.5% of the popular vote and 46 electoral votes. The 1968 presidential election in the United States was one of the most significant elections in the country's history, as it was marked by major social and political upheaval. It was significant for its impact on American politics and society. It marked a turning point with the end of the post-World War II era of stability and the beginning of a period of political and social turmoil. The election also highlighted the deep divisions within the country over issues such as the Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movement.

V. The President's First Term

Nixon won the elections mainly because he was best known in the political arena and he also promised and stated that he had plans to end the Vietnam War; the one that irritated and debilitated not only the former presidents but the public as whole. In a plight of actions and words, the President must work hard to satisfy his people and to prove the strength of his political character. The threat of communism, the long-lasting Vietnam War, economic crises, the Civil Rights Movements among other

serious crises were all waiting for imminent solutions the sooner the possible. Nixon not only tried to work hard to solve the national crises, international ones also stood as a priority to be dealt with. New achievements, new advances, international peace were all issues underlined within Nixon's agenda.

V.1. Reconciliations to Open the Asian Doors

After more than 25 years of no diplomatic relations between the countries, Richard Nixon decided to forge political ties with China. In an article published by the *Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, Nixon's visit to China was depicted as an event that served for two main purposes. One, it was the event that made the American-Chinese ties stronger than ever before and it, also, paved the path for future possibilities to set the issues with the Soviet Union. Flexibility, mainly, was the primary purpose where America would break ice with the "Communist Bloc", China will no longer be considered as an enemy that opens the doors to the other communist superpower Soviet Union. Hence, the United States will be able to develop relationships with the Eastern part of Europe.

Nixon stated: "We have been here for a week. This was the week that changed the world" (*In the Arena* 15). At the end, Nixon proved that his capacities and his willingness to rapprochement with the communist sides were all going fine. The visit to China was very successful where Nixon proved again his efficiency as an international activist especially that this time, he is visiting this country as the president; the representative of a whole nation. This visit actually paved the way for another great old communist enemy called the U.S.S.R.

V.2. The Victorious and Virtuous America in Vietnam

The Vietnam War is a war that has survived consecutively through five different administrations right after WWII. Every president dealt with the issue differently. However, the American public started worrying about the consequences of their American interventions more during Lyndon B. Johnson's term especially when he started sending a bigger number of soldiers to South Vietnam in an attempt to defeat Northern Vietnam. President LBJ could not perfectly handle the situation in Vietnam because the reality was worse than what media was reporting back at that time. American soldiers found themselves in a no-way-out of the situation, consequently, LBJ announced his decision of not campaigning for re-elections. "Well if they say I inherited [the Vietnam War], I'd be lucky, but they'll say I created it. [...], a man can fight if he can see daylight down the road somewhere, but there ain't no daylight in Vietnam. There's not a bit" (qtd. in McLaughlin).

As a matter of fact, no previous presidents could stop a war that lasted for so many long years but Nixon at the end did. President Richard Nixon proved to, not only the American public but the world as a whole, that his doctrine and oath met the promises he has made. Through negotiations and military strength President Nixon was able to stop the spread of communism in Vietnam and his help and support were always vital in uniting both parts of Vietnam. It is true that the statistics revealed huge losses of American soldiers in a war they gained nothing from, but at the same time, they showed the whole world that the American political, economic and even military support is highly requested in different parts of the world.

V.3. The Reestablishment of the Soviet Cordial Relations

After his historic trip to China and the reestablishment of the good relationship of the two countries, President Richard Nixon decided to try the same experience with another great communist antagonist, U.S.S.R. Thus, Nixon became the first American president to visit the capital Moscow in a formal presidential visit. It was a significant moment in the Cold War and a pivotal moment in U.S.-Soviet relations. Such a visit is going to mount President Nixon's achievements of his first term and make him appear as the candidate whose actions speak louder than his words. It was another stride through the realization of the Nixon's doctrine, the one that would bring not only domestic but international peace as well. To understand the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States, the diplomatic ties of the two countries must be taken into a deep analysis.

The Russian-American relationship is always attributed and dated back to one of the history's most terrifying periods recognized as the Cold War. The administration of the former president J.F. Kennedy (the 1960s) was well-known for its dire eagerness to stop the spread of international communism alongside with Richard Nixon. Because of the American intervention in South Vietnam and because of the Russian continuous support to North Vietnam, tensions between U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. were strikingly escalating. Each side was trying to prove the strength and constant support to their Vietnamese allies. Thus, former president Kennedy had always been aware of the danger of the growth of a Russian intercontinental ballistic missile; he worked hard to revitalize the American nuclear powers.

The most significant characteristic of Nixon's visit to the U.S.S.R. was the agreement the two countries came to which was known as Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT). Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev⁵ decided to sign the document on May 26th, 1972. It was a great event that occurred during the period known as the Cold War which characterized the end of the international race to arming where both; the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., agreed on the limitation of their nuclear missiles in their arsenals. In an article published by the Department of States, such an agreement was described as the one that showed the best result of a détente strategy both Nixon and Kissinger opted for (Department of State "Strategic Arms").

V.4. The Moon Exploration

It has always been so important to shed light on one of Richard Nixon's most important achievements during the summer of 1969. It was the first time that an American human being could walk on the moon. Such an event, explained Nixon, brought joy and excitement to the American population in specific and the humanity in general. Nixon contended that by such an event, he proved to the Russians that America will always be number one especially that Russia had failed so many times in exploring other planets. The race between the two rivals has always been intense and many explorers tried to achieve this trip but only the American Apollo 11 succeeded in that. Once there, Nixon asked Neil Armstrong to plug the American flag on the moon along with the following message: "here men from the planet Earth first set foot upon the moon. July 1969, A.D. We came in peace for all mankind."

V.5. Nixon and the Civil Rights Movement

Another key important issue that was standing as an obstacle for Richard Nixon is the Civil Rights Movements. This was a movement started by the African-American people who were claiming for equality and integration in the American society. Once in office, explained Scott Carlson, Nixon had to seriously deal with the schools and buses desegregation. According to the principles Richard Nixon included in his doctrine, a strong nation is the one that is built upon peace and negotiations to ensure the development of this nation and the assurance of a better life to its citizens. It was high time civil liberties, mainly and worth mentioning, equality and integration in the American society were guaranteed for all American citizen regardless their origins or ethnicity.

Carlson Scott opined that the strategy Nixon followed for the sake of creating a desegregated society in the American South was very efficient as he succeeded in achieving his goal peacefully without any costly results. According to the statistics provided at that time, the percentage of the Southern black children attending the black schools was 68%. This percentage, however, has drastically fallen to 8% by the end of Richard Nixon's second term in 1974.

V.6. Taping the Offices



One can never talk about Richard Nixon without highlighting the taping system. Actually, Nixon is not the first president to bug the office with tapes but by accepting the issue, Nixon's career came to an end. If you want to understand why presidents need to record what happens in different places in the White House, The *Washington Post* published an article illustrating the reasons behind it. First of all, these tapes would be used as a means of protecting presidents in any conflicts eruption so that the president would be provided with arguments and proofs to defend himself. Secondly, such tapes can be used as a primary source for drafting presidential memoirs

and autobiographies once needed. And finally, these tapes are a facilitating means of running the White House, which is a huge and complex organization. For all the presidents who used the tapes in the White House, the issue was kept secret. As a president, Richard Nixon gave his orders to plug taping devices in the White House, Old Executive Office Building, and Camp David. This system of taping of all of these buildings was kept secret until 1973 when Special Assistant Alexander Butterfield gave his testimony before the Senate Watergate Committee during the Watergate investigations (Moss and Nichter).

As a matter of fact, this system of taping was a double-edged sword. On one hand, it was a means that helped the president to easily run the different offices all together. On the other hand, one can say that it was the first thing that led to the destruction of the Nixon's administration where all of the records were leaked and the public heard different conversations that were supposed to be kept secret. The legitimacy or the effectiveness the recording system of what was going on in the offices is not going to be questioned because it is traced back to the reasons presidents saw behind bugging the White House with the tapes. However, releasing such confidential materials is to be doubted especially in a crucial matter during times of any crises. A hypothetical thought crosses the mind while examining the impact of the tapes on the downfall of America's most respectful character for four years. If these tapes were never released to media, and if no one knew of their existence, would former president Richard Nixon be regarded in a shameful and disgracing way?

VI. Second Term Achievements

All of the previously mentioned achievements were the key motive behind another try when Nixon decided to run for the 1972 presidential elections. The advantages of running are sprung from his strong belief that the American people will not find a better candidate who would bring about more changes to the American people. While Nixon decided to run again, he fully assumed the huge burden on his shoulders. America under Nixon's administration was always proving to the whole world that such a country is the one that should prevail at all times; it is the one that should never be competing with even while going to space. Fortunately for Nixon, the running mate this time is the South Dakota Senator George McGovern⁶.

Party	Nominees		Electoral Vote	Popular Vote
	Presidential	Vice Presidential		
 <i>Republican</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Richard M. Nixon	Spiro Agnew	520	96.7% 47,169,911
 <i>Democratic</i>	George McGovern	Sargent Shriver	17	3.2% 29,170,383

Source: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1972>

It was such a victory for president Richard Nixon; the results revealed the landslide vote and the defeat of his running mate by a margin of 23.15%. In an article published by *World Atlas*, McGovern's failure was traced back to the stigma of his Vice-President that led to their loss though he had a very good anti-war strategy. However, Richard Nixon won these elections because of his sound policy toward internal and external politics. As a matter of fact, the 1972 presidential landslide victory made Richard Nixon rank in the fourth position among all the previous presidents and even the ones that came after him in terms of the ones who won elections in such historical landslides.

Unfortunately for Richard Nixon, time was not given to him to prove his efficiency as a great nation's president, investigations about the *Watergate Scandal* started at the end of his first term which caused him anxiety throughout his last days in office. One main thing that climaxed and complicated the issue was media revelations that were leaking constant news that show the relationship of President Nixon with some burglars that were behind breaking in the Washington hotel to spy on the Democratic counterpart. Such news, simply, say that Richard Nixon won the elections in an illegal way that was full of dirty tricks. Unfortunately, President Nixon was the

first American president to resign the office because as he was accused of abuses of powers that gave him the choice of either being impeached or resign the presidency.

VII. The Watergate Scandal

The Watergate Crisis was a defining moment in American political history struck at the peak of Nixon's success and triggered an outrage among politicians, media and citizens revealing the extent to which government officials were willing to gain power and suppress opposition. The scandal involved high-ranking members of the Nixon administration who were caught engaging in illegal activities, including wiretapping, burglary, and obstruction of justice. The Watergate Crisis had far-reaching consequences for American politics, leading to increased public distrust in government, heightened scrutiny of elected officials, and a renewed emphasis on transparency and accountability in government.

VII.1. The Break-In and Cover-Up

The Watergate Crisis was the culmination of a series of events that began in 1971, when Nixon authorized the creation of a special White House unit called the Plumbers. Among its prominent figures were G. Gordon Liddy, a former FBI agent, and E. Howard Hunt. A liaison to the CIA John Paisley was also appointed among the members. Other members would simply be a group of Cubans who collaborated with the Plumbers for the conception of distractions. The Plumbers were tasked with investigating leaks to the media, and they quickly became known for their aggressive tactics, which included wiretapping and burglary. In 1972, they were caught breaking into the Watergate complex, and their actions set off a chain of events that would lead to the downfall of the Nixon administration.

The Watergate Scandal dramatically changed the American society. Tom Van der Voort narrated that on June 17, 1972, five men were caught breaking into the Democratic National Committee headquarters located in the Watergate complex in Washington, D.C. The burglars were caught by security guard Frank Wills, who called the police. Kathryn Moore, in her book *The American President* stated that the American police apprehended five men wearing surgical gloves spying at the Democratic Party members. Except for one; who was a native American, the other four were originally Cuban whose goal could be possibly justified through their need for installing or upgrading the various spying devices that were already and previously plugged in the different offices over there (498).

Reading throughout different pages of his memoirs, Nixon succeeded in convincing his readers that the first time he heard of the break-in was when he scanned the morning newspaper while drinking his coffee. As he continued telling the story, Nixon argued that the news did not have that importance for him for they were speaking about an ordinary burglary that happened at the hotel (625-6). Alfred E. Lewis⁶ wrote: "There was no immediate explanation as to why the five suspects would want to bug the Democratic National Committee offices (DNC) or whether or not they were working for any other individuals or organizations".

Most of the historical resources would commonly agree upon the fact that the prime mover of the scandal was the press. Because of the unceasing efforts of two main journalists, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, who maintained an investigative policy, very highly ranked officials were grounded. The *Washington Post* was always tracking down the news in attempts to find any leaks about the ties and connections between the president and the burglars. *The New York Times* published an article the next day where the journalist Walter Rugaber reported that once brought to the court, both McCord and Gordon were instantly taken to the District of Columbia jail before the judge could think of the possibility of a decision on bonds for the two-pending sentencing. Rugaber commented on the reaction of Liddy Gordon who was behaving against all the expectations showing no uneasiness expressions and behaving in accordance with the very normal circumstances, as if he was not about being sentenced in the court. The court finally found out that Liddy Gordon was guilty on all of the counts registered against him and an estimated 35-year sentence was waiting for him. On the other hand, McCord was waiting for another 45-year sentence as he was found

guilty as well. The same situation for Howard Hunt and the other four defendants, they were all found guilty and sentenced to long years of jail.

Lawrence Meyer, form *Washington Post* too, reported what has come in the court's decision, but moreover shed light on the frequently repeated question by Judge John J. Sirica. Not only the judge, but every American citizen wanted the same question to be answered: is there anyone else, besides the persons indicted, involved in the conspiracy? Woodward and Bernstein in their eminent book *All the President's Men* acknowledged the Judge's words while he was insisting on uncovering the whole truth related to the Watergate break-in. "This jury is going to want to know: what did these men go into the Headquarters for? Was their sole purpose political espionage? Were they paid? Was there financial gain? Who hired them? Who started this?" (230). That went beyond the responsibilities of a judge where he himself seemed to open investigations with the defendants.

Gerald Alch, McCord's lawyer, was interrupted by the Judge while defending McCord and accused him of giving his personal opinion instead of his defending statement. Alch expressed his frustration: "[the Judge] did not limit himself to acting as a judge- he has become in addition, a prosecutor and an investigator...Not only does he indicate that the defendants are guilty, but a lot of people are guilty. The whole courtroom is permeated with a prejudicial atmosphere" (qtd. in Meyer).

Thereupon, the situation was not overwhelming. From one side, seven men are arrested, most of them have connections with the White House. This issue indicates that other people were involved as well and it was very necessary to expose a whole list of those involved. This, however, does not mean that the judge turns into a prosecutor and starts investigating the defendants. It probably could be the eagerness to solve the mysteries surrounding the case that led Judge Sirica to behave in such a way that made him face the harsh criticism of Alch. Again, it was that excitement that led the young journalists crave for any piece of information that would at the end import any sort of fame for them. All things considered, the incident made everyone so anxious, worried and questioning what could happen next? Will this long story ever come to an end?

The direction of the case was pushing forward to pull in any minor or major participant in the Watergate affair. As a result, accordingly, a 77-to-0 vote came from the U.S. Senate in favor of the creation of what was known as The Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities on February 7th, 1973. It was also known as Ervin Committee, a name attributed to its Chairman Senator Sam Ervin. In his article, Ronald Garay explained that the purpose behind the establishment of this committee was to deeply inspect and investigate the Watergate case. In a *Washington Post* article, Ervin was depicted as a conservative democrat who prioritized the constitutional law. The committee was composed of seven members whose aim was to allow the American public to hear the testimonies of every individual involved in the case. Eventually, public hearings started to be televised on 17 May, 1973.

Whether it was common sense, logic or experience, John Dean, a former White House counsel, has already anticipated the outcome of the crisis the presidency was going through. On March 21, 1973 he had a meeting with Nixon in which he discussed the plan Liddy came with in order to spy on the Democrats. Dean explained for the president that he did not accept the deal because it did not suit the principles of the White House staffers. The most significant part of the meeting history recorded for Dean is the moment he talked about the current situation amidst the crisis: "I think there is no doubt about the seriousness of the problem we've got. We have a *cancer*, within, close to the presidency that's growing. It's growing daily. It's compounding, it grows geometrically now, because it compounds itself" (309).

Seemingly, all the mysteries that have covered the break-in started to be divulged. McCord's letter⁶ and then the harsh sentences that came from the Judge are all indications of a black storm striking its way to the White House. Polls have been conducted to measure the extent to which Nixon was trusted even after hearing the news. Doubts started to englobe the White House that is now poked with the fingers of accusations.

On April 30th, 1973, President Richard Nixon gave his first speech related to the Watergate affair. He started his speech by expressing his shock and surprise after

reading the news about members of his CREEP who were involved in the burglary of the DNC. Nixon added "I immediately ordered an investigation by appropriate government authorities". He explained that the news he received about the affair from his staff all said that the situation was under control and the President should not worry about the issue as no member of the administration was involved in the break-in. Because he had faith in the fairness and the reliability of the reports he was receiving, Nixon publicly said that he did not, personally, intervene in the problem and left the issue in his staff's hands. However, he sustained referring to his meeting with John Dean, March was a time he learnt that some of the charges that media was reporting against members of his administration tended to be true and he even spoke about some people trying to hide evidence that would uncover the puzzle of the Watergate. In this speech also, Nixon declared the resignation of some his White House staffers and close friends of him.

John Dean was a key figure in the Watergate Crisis and served as White House Counsel to President Richard Nixon from 1970 to 1973. Dean's testimony before the Senate Watergate Committee in June 1973 was a turning point in the investigation, as he revealed that the Nixon administration had engaged in a cover-up of its involvement in the Watergate break-in. In his book, *The Last of the Presidents Men*, Woodward said that John Dean was able to captivate the whole country, and other parts of the world, while giving his testimony for four successive days. John Dean just described all the meetings he had with the President to illustrate the extent to which Nixon was involved and his miscellaneous efforts to obstruct justice. However, Woodward accentuated the trust and confidence people put in their president through the different polls that were in favor of the innocence of Richard Nixon. On the other side, Dean was pictured as "a young, ambitious lawyer out of his depth, desperate to keep himself out of jail" (148).

In an interview with Bill Boggs, Dean answered the host's question that asked about the reaction of the people, who now see him as the one who was unfaithful, after his famous historical testimony. Dean said: "I'm sure there are people who feel that way the snitch [...] but, yet, there's a strange situation in our society because people want one people to tell the truth but yet when someone does, he's likely to become a pariah for having done it and maybe the perjurer becomes more respected". Dean was seen as the one who betrayed his President and let him down for some unexplained reasons; some would say fame and others would just say it was the truth announced. He, himself described the moments he was about giving his testimony and told Boggs that had nothing but two choices, lie or say the truth. So, for him, the option was betraying the President, the office and say the truth that was dependent on some notes he put on paper knowing that he had neither heard nor learned about the existence of tapes inside the Oval Office.

To speak about the role President Richard Nixon played, John Dean noted in his book the following:

Watergate, as the overwhelming evidence revealed, was merely one particularly egregious expression of Nixon's often ruthless abuses of power. Had Richard Nixon not encouraged his aides to collect political intelligence by any means fair or foul, or insisted from the moment of the arrest that there must be no cover-up, neither would have taken place. Nixon was not only responsible for all that went amiss during his presidency, he was in almost every instance the catalyst, when not the instigator (619).

In his second speech in August, 1973, Nixon this time surrendered to the fact that his administration was involved in the burglary and as a courageous leader he said that he "accept[s] full responsibility for them". He expressed his sorrow as these events happened during his term of presidency. But, notwithstanding this, President Nixon emphasized his intentions of protecting his office from any untrue charges telling the people that they should think of what is coming instead.

On August 21, 1973, Louis Harris released a poll in which the following question was asked to the American people: "Has Nixon failed to answer serious

doubts about his involvement in Watergate?" The results shown in the poll were as follow:

	<u>Total Public</u> %
Agree, not answered doubts	66
Disagree, answered doubts	25
Not Sure	9

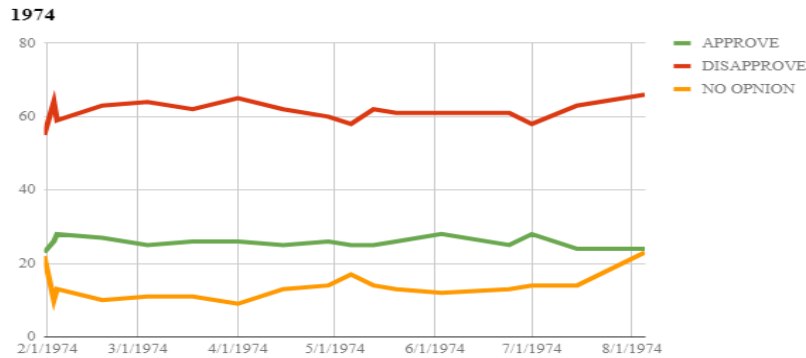
This poll was one of many polls conducted during the Watergate Crisis, but it was particularly significant because it reflected a shift in public opinion that had been building for months. The poll helped to galvanize the public's outrage and led to increased pressure on Congress to take action against the president. 66% of the people said that they do not believe in what came in Nixon's speech and this should primarily be blamed on John Dean's testimony. The poll results had a profound impact on the political landscape, as they gave momentum to the impeachment proceedings that were already underway in Congress. The poll also helped to erode Nixon's support within his own party, as more Republicans began to distance themselves from the president and call for his resignation.

VII.2. Nixon's 1973 Summer

To impeach an incumbent official, the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate are the only ones who can initiate rules governing the process of impeachment as they are the only ones who could change these rules. So, the whole process starts in the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives; it starts with hearings, collects evidence and then hears testimonies of the witnesses, the exact process of President Nixon's case. Next step, the Committee defines which articles of impeachment should be applied and then reports the vote to the House of Representatives. Once the Articles of Impeachment are approved, the case will be immediately sent to the Senate for trial ("Impeachment"). Accordingly, three impeachment articles were to be applied in the case of President Nixon.

The first article spoke about President Nixon's inability to protect and respect the American law; thus, it focused on Nixon's obviously obstructing law and justice. The second article, however, spoke about Nixon's involvement in "violating the constitutional rights of citizens, impairing the due and proper administration of justice and the conduct of lawful inquiries, or contravening the laws governing agencies of the executive branch". Finally, the third article summarized the fact that President Nixon, for a very long time during the year 1974, refused to comply with the committee's orders of submitting the subpoenaed papers and tapes to compile the necessary evidence that would help solve the mystery of the Watergate ("Impeachment").

There was no choice left for President Nixon after all these developments in the case. The Committee was insisting on knocking him down by trying to gather all the necessary information to prove the President's involvement in the scandal. Richard Nixon, by submitting the tapes, gave all the evidence that would show the extent of his involvement. People and the press were constantly waiting for the moment the whole truth would be revealed. In another poll, The American people were asked about their opinions concerning their president's image in office especially that his end was so soon. The following chart indicates the percentage of president Nixon disapproval among his citizens that in turn shows the highest average Nixon has reached since 1969.



Source : <https://historyinpieces.com/research/nixon-approval-ratings>

The president who has been on the top of the ratings for so many long years is now ranking on the top again but for being disapproved by his people. More than 65% of the American people showed their disgrace for their President. The presidency was famous for its success, achievements and struggle. Now, the President and his staff are living their final days; the end declared itself for them in the middle of the second term that was won in a landslide victory that has prevailed for a very long time.

VIII. Resignation

At the beginning of the crisis, President Nixon has confirmed that he had no intentions of resigning his office; he claimed that as long as he is physically apt, he would never save a drop of his energy to fulfil the duty he was elected for. He said that his people had already trusted him twice, and because of this trust, he would do his best to solve internal and external matters that tend to shake the stability and the security of his nation (RN 947). After all what President Nixon has reached related to the Watergate Scandal, he just spoke about the final decisions he could come up with. He clearly stated that he was left with no choices but only two. The first one is to accept the charges against him and be the very first President in the history of the United States to be impeached. The second one was to be the first American President to resign the office. For him, the second option was way better than the first one because it would not be easy for him to be seen tried for so many long months in the Senate (RN 1051).

Just few days after the release of the smoking gun tape, Nixon was shocked about the reaction of the public, something he expected before but not to this extent; he decided to deliver the last speech in his life as a president. "I have never been a quitter. To leave office before my term is completed is abhorrent to every instinct in my body. But as a President, I must put the interests of America first". In his speech on August, 8th1974, President Nixon announced that his service as a president came to an end for his influence and role in the American Congress is over and what really matters more now is the interest of the nation that should come before the president's considerations ("Resignation Speech").

The press, as usual, did not miss to track the incident. Different headlines spoke about the defeat of Nixon, his surrender and his departure. John Herbers, for the *New York Times*, highlighted the President's tone and content that he described as soft compared to the 'combative' ones of Nixon's previous speeches. He said that the image Nixon looked in does not suit the image of someone who is believed to be "the most powerful presidency in the history of [their] nation". Another article published by Carrol Kilpatrick for *Washington Post* spoke about Nixon not making any statements confirming his accusations of high crimes and misdemeanor, nor did the president speak about the Committee's charges related to the cover-up. The journalist explained that Nixon appeared in a very calm manner void of any emotions. Michael Genovese, in his book *The Watergate Crisis*, described Nixon's speech as "a controlled, carefully crafted speech" (52).

Everyone had spoken about the resignation of the president which meant the end of America's nightmare, as stated by Gerald Ford. It seemed like what irritated the

American nation for more than two years has finally come to an end. To this point, the truth is undeniable because it was a third-rate burglary where the White House was involved which means that the people's trust is shaken. Yet, the evaluation of this presidency would reveal deeper truth about such a critical period of the American presidency. President Nixon had shown great skills in managing domestic policy and greater ones in controlling foreign policy. He has never known limits nor did he step back in times of crisis. He has been deeply criticized and carefully tracked down, he went forward and achieved more, though. The way he left his presidency is the most shameful one for any president, he was the first president in the history of the nation to quit office and to give a resignation letter. He wrote history, though it was written from both sides; positive and negative.

Once appointed as the new president of the United States, President Gerald Ford publicly spoke about the suffering and agony of not only Richard Nixon but everyone related to him. He declared that no one in the American nation could change the situation nor can he stop rumors and allegations against Nixon. The only person in the American country who could do so, he stated, was him. A month after former president Nixon's resignation, President Gerald Ford, in a national televised speech, declared: "I [...] have granted and by these presents do grant a full, free, and absolute pardon unto Richard Nixon for all offenses against the United States which he, Richard Nixon, has committed or may have committed or taken part in" (Ford). A presidential pardon came to say that Nixon is not accused of any charges and accusations he has faced previously.

Such a pardon had a huge impact on the American society; it was the salt added to each American wound back then. The reactions of the people differed from an approval to a disapproval, from a defender to an attacker and from pros to cons just because Nixon is to be forgiven for all the wrongdoings he has committed in office. *The New York Times*, as usual tracking down the events, published an article written by the journalist Harold M. Schmack JR. In this article, Schmack gathered a variety of people's opinions concerning the presidential pardon. He said that the reaction was actually sharply divided. To speak about the political parties Nixon's pardon was relatively accepted by the Republicans who had simply approved President Ford's decision. However, the Democrats just "expressed various shades of disapproval and dismay". It was just an expected reaction from both parties.

Other reactions, explained Schmack, were claiming that Nixon had had enough punishment through the high price he paid at the end of his presidency; he left in such a shameful way that was able to lessen the damage. People who refused such a pardon were numerous and for a variety of reasons. Among these were the ones who said that the pardon was simply "a presumption of guilt," such a belief was adopted by many who opposed President Ford's decision. Another reason was just that the pardon was so premature, in a way enough time should have been given to prove the charge against Nixon. Stronger opposers were saying that the pardon did not represent a country where justice and leadership were not respected. Above all, the hardest comment came from the fired Cox who said that President Ford's pardon was a proof that the American law did not function properly and excluded the punishment of highly ranked officials.

It was a very brave decision taken by a president appointed just one month ago; to pardon Richard Nixon was almost a crime in itself. Nixon's reputation was marred by the Watergate Crisis. The role Nixon played in this scandal is a crucial one, everybody agrees that he did not order the burglary but his contribution in the cover-up of the scandal was the one that brought him down. As stated by Genovese, "it was the criminal cover-up that eventually led to Nixon's forced resignation". (5) Richard Nixon himself spoke about the role of his administration in covering-up the scandal which justifies the deeds as a legitimate right all the previous presidencies have done before as a means of protection. "In retrospect, I would say that Watergate was one-part wrongdoing, one-part blundering, and one-part political vendetta" (*In the Arena* 40-1).

On one hand, Nixon wanted to protect his administration from the consequences of the break-in, though the means used were unlawful and even

unethical. On the other hand, Nixon should not have lied to his public as evidence was there waiting for the right moment to show up. He was trying to oppose the court's decisions, fired officials, and lied about the fact of him knowing details of the scandal. The resignation was, more or less, the merciful way through which Nixon could have ended up the stains of the shame and disgrace he was fighting for years. About the resignation, Graham said: "Nixon left a shattered and confused nation, a host of spurned aides, and an accidental president. The fallout from Watergate stripped the nation of its political innocence, revolutionized executive power, and bequeathed a range of new reforms. It sent a huge crop of politicians to Washington".

One last important issue that should be tackled concerning the Watergate Scandal in Deep Throat; the mysteriously hidden person under such name with huge leaks of information about the Watergate investigations. In *All the President's Men*, Bob Woodward defined Deep Throat as a person who provided the two journalists with information from CREEP and the White House. The identity of Deep Throat was critically kept secret for so many long years and meeting with him were cautiously organized because the person provided trusted news and information from the White House, Justice, the FBI and CRP, very important organizations in the country (71-131).

The existence of such a source of leaking was so critical that opened criticism and doubt in each American mind especially that the information has never proved to be falsified. Clapman Lea published an article in which he dealt with the importance of Deep Throat back then which represented as well a rich source of information for newspapers and other kinds of media in America, it was even, according to him, a way that led Congress's investigations about the White House. A paranoid mind would just view Deep Throat as a criminal who was betraying his president and was the reason behind his breakdown. The real personality of Deep Throat was kept secret until the year 2005 when Mark Felt, an FBI special agent, publicly declared that he was Deep Throat.

A considerable number of the American people was skeptical about Deep Throat, some of them were digging into the fact that this person has preferred to deal with one journalist at the expense of more important parts related to the issue. Others were just claiming that Mark Felt was trying to preserve the dignity of the agency he belonged to. Another view states that Felt was honoring not only people who were working under his supervision but the American people as a whole, added Clapman. Whatever the motives of such a character were, the conspiracy of different sides led at the destruction of one of America's strongest presidencies ever. The nightmare has been over but the struggle between the President and other branches is still prevailing. The Watergate was a key lesson in Nixon's career and a stigma that survived through so many long years in the American soul.

IX. The Legacies of the Scandal

The Watergate scandal had significant legacies that continue to impact American politics and society today. Some of the key legacies of Watergate include the power of the media. The scandal was largely uncovered by journalists, who tirelessly investigated the story and brought it to light. This helped establish the media as an important watchdog of government and a check on political power through the new role it gained in the aftermath of the scandal. The erosion of public trust in government is another key issue. The Watergate eroded public trust in government institutions and officials. It revealed the extent to which politicians could abuse their power and highlighted the need for transparency and accountability in government. People grew more skeptical after the scandal and lost faith in their government. As a result of this, The Watergate scandal led to increased congressional oversight of the executive branch, including the establishment of permanent investigative committees. It even led to the appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate government corruption. This became a common practice in subsequent investigations of government officials and institutions. Finally, the Watergate ultimately led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon, marking the first and only time in American history that a president has resigned from office. This event had profound implications for American politics and

society, including a heightened sense of skepticism and cynicism among the public. (Robenalt and Dean)

Conclusion

Richard Nixon was a complex and controversial figure in American history, serving as both Vice President and President during a tumultuous era marked by social and political upheaval. His legacy is a mixed one, with accomplishments such as the opening of diplomatic relations with China, overshadowed by the Watergate scandal and his eventual resignation from office. Despite his achievements, Nixon's presidency is often defined by the dark stain of Watergate, a political scandal that involved the Nixon administration's attempts to cover up illegal activities, including the burglary of the Democratic National Committee headquarters. Nixon's involvement in the cover-up led to his impeachment, but he resigned before he could be removed from office.

In conclusion, the Watergate scandal stands as one of the most significant events in American political history. The events surrounding the scandal exposed a level of corruption and abuse of power that had never before been seen in the highest levels of the U.S. government. The actions of President Nixon and his administration represented a fundamental violation of the public trust, and the subsequent fallout from the scandal had a profound impact on American politics and society. The Watergate scandal had far-reaching consequences for the United States, both in the short-term and in the long-term. In the immediate aftermath of the scandal, public trust in the government plummeted, and the political system was thrown into turmoil. Nixon's resignation from office marked the first time in American history that a sitting President had been forced to step down.

However, the impact of Watergate was not limited to the political sphere. The scandal had a profound impact on the American public, contributing to a growing sense of disillusionment and cynicism towards government institutions. The revelations of corruption and abuse of power eroded the public's faith in the ability of government to act in their best interests. The legacy of Watergate continues to shape public attitudes towards government to this day.

Despite the profound impact of Watergate, it is important to remember that the scandal did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, it was the result of a complex web of political, social, and economic factors that had been building for years. The events surrounding the scandal were indicative of deeper issues within American society and politics, including a growing sense of distrust towards government and a willingness to prioritize political power and expediency over ethical considerations. Ultimately, the Watergate scandal serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of unchecked political power and the importance of transparency and accountability in government. The lessons learned from Watergate have led to important reforms aimed at preventing future abuses of power, and the scandal remains a potent reminder of the need to uphold the principles of democracy and the rule of law in all aspects of political life.

Appendices

¹**Jerry Voorhis** was an American politician and educator who served as a member of the United States House of Representatives from California's 12th congressional district from 1937 to 1947

²**The Herter Committee** officially known as the "Special Committee on the Foreign Aid Program" was a committee appointed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1958 to review the United States' foreign aid program.

³**Alger Hiss** was an American government official and lawyer who was accused of being a Soviet spy in the late 1940s.

⁴**Helen Gahagan Douglas** was an American actress and politician who represented California's 14th congressional district from 1945 to 1951.

⁵**Realpolitik** is a political system that is not based on beliefs, doctrines, ethics, or morals, but rather on realistic, practical ideas. Richard Nixon's diplomacy with China in the 1970's was an example of realpolitik.

⁶**George McGovern** was an American historian, author, U.S. Representative, U.S. Senator, and the Democratic Party presidential nominee in the 1972 presidential election

⁷**Alfred E. Lewis** is a reporter of the Washington Post for 50 years who helped break one of the biggest stories in June 1972. D.C.

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