

**GUIDE TO THE
MICROFILM EDITION
OF THE**

**FBI FILE ON
WATERGATE INVESTIGATION**

A Microfilm Publication by

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Publisher's Note

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Several hundred FBI deleted page information sheets, stating that the documents were already processed earlier in release may be found in Sections 1-15, 17, 19-20, 23, 29-31, 41, 45, and 49 have been removed from Volumes 1-9 and 14.

Introduction

On the evening of June 16, 1972, a security guard at the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C., discovered a piece of tape on the lock of the door that led to the National Democratic Headquarters and set off a chain of events that would, ultimately, bring down the presidency of Richard Milhous Nixon. Afterwards, Americans would wonder why Nixon and the Republican Party risked so much on such a minor event when Nixon was leading in the election polls, and the Democratic Party was in disarray. Indeed, Nixon would go on to win the presidency by a landslide, with 520 electoral votes. Only 270 electoral votes are needed to win the presidency.

The break-in at the Watergate was only part of a larger campaign designed by Nixon supporters to rattle Democratic candidates and tarnish the reputation of the whole party. This campaign included harassment of Democratic candidates, negative campaign ads, two separate break-ins at the National Democratic Headquarters, and an additional break-in at Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office. Ellsberg was the individual who offered up the "Pentagon Papers" for public consumption, detailing the strategy--or lack of it--for the United States' position in Vietnam.

Theodore H. White, chronicler of presidents from Dwight Eisenhower to Ronald Reagan, points out in *Breach of Faith* that the Watergate break-in was riddled with mistakes. G. Gordon Liddy, advisor to Richard Nixon, had been given \$83,000 from Nixon's Committee to Re-Elect the President (CREEP) to provide the necessary equipment. When the tape was placed over the lock, it was placed horizontally rather than vertically, which made it more noticeable. The tape had been spotted earlier in the day and removed by a security guard. It was replaced in the same position. Since only outside personnel were used for the break-in, they were easy to spot as not belonging in the Watergate. The electronic surveillance equipment purchased by Liddy was inferior and had no cut-off between those conducting the actual break-in and those listening in another hotel across the street. When the break-in was discovered, the police were led to Howard Hunt and Liddy in a hotel across the street. Furthermore, all participants had retained their own identification papers.

Instead of being honest with the American public and taking his advisors to task, Richard Nixon immediately became embroiled in a cover-up that would slowly unravel over the next two years--leading to Nixon's resignation in August 1974. As the facts surrounding the break-in were made known, it was revealed that the Nixon presidency had been involved in serious manipulation and abuse of power for years. It seemed that millions of dollars coming from Nixon supporters had been used to pay hush money in an ill-advised attempt to hide the truth from Congress and the American people. Richard Nixon, it was discovered, truly lived up to his nickname of "Tricky Dick."

During the investigation, the names of Richard Nixon's advisors would become as well known to the American people as those of Hollywood celebrities or sports heroes. Chief among these new celebrities were close friends of the President: John Ehrlichman and

Bob Haldeman. Ehrlichman served as the President and Chief of the Domestic Council while Haldeman acted as Chief of Staff. Both would be fired in a desperate attempt to save the presidency. Another major player was John Dean, the young and ambitious Counsel to the President. John Mitchell, the Attorney General, and his wife Martha provided color for the developing story. Rosemary Woods, the president's personal secretary, stood loyally by as investigators kept demanding answers to two questions: "What did the president know?" and "When did he know it?" The answers to the two questions provided the crux of the investigation. If it had been proved that Nixon was the victim of over-enthusiastic supporters rather than a chief player in the entire scenario, his presidency would have survived. When Nixon learned of the break-in was integral to understanding his part, if any, in the subsequent cover-up.

An investigation revealed that Nixon knew about the break-in from the beginning and that he was involved in the cover-up as it progressed. When the Nixon presidency was over, James David Barber, political scientist and author of *The Presidential Character*, detailed its crimes: "Making secret war; Developing secret agreements to sell weapons to enemy nations; Supporting terroristic governments; Helping to overthrow progressive governments; Receiving bribes; Selling high political offices; Recruiting secret White House police force; Impounding sums of money appropriated by Congress; Subverting the electoral, judicial, legal, tax, and free speech systems; and Lying to just about everyone."

In the early days of the Watergate investigation, most forms of media reported the break-in as a minor story with little national significance. However, two aggressive young reporters who worked for *The Washington Post* began to dig deeper into the background surrounding the actual crime. Aided by an informant, who would be identified only as "Deep Throat," Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward uncovered one of the major stories of the twentieth century and became instrumental in forcing the first presidential resignation in American history.

As Congress began to hold congressional hearings, Alexander Butterfield, a Nixon presidential aide, revealed that a complex taping system had been installed to record conversations in the Oval Office, Camp David, the Cabinet rooms, and Nixon's hideaway office. Nixon's distrust of others would prove to be his own undoing. He fought to maintain control over the tapes and went so far as to fire a number of White House officials in what became known as the "Saturday Night Massacre." The Supreme Court did not accept Nixon's argument that the tapes contained only private conversations between the president and his advisors and, as such, were protected by executive privilege. From the time in 1974 that the Court in *U.S. v. Nixon* ordered the president to release the tapes, it was widely accepted that Nixon had lost the presidency.

The tapes released in the 1970s contained 18 minutes of silence that have never been explained. In 1996 the lawsuit of historian Stanley I. Kutler and the advocacy group Public Citizen resulted in the release of over 200 additional hours of tape. In *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes*, Kutler writes that the new information reveals that Nixon was intimately involved both before and after Watergate in abuses of power. A taped

conversation on June 23, 1972, proved that Nixon and Haldeman talked about using the CIA to thwart the FBI investigation into the cover-up. When the *New York Times* published the "Pentagon Papers," Nixon told his advisors: "We're up against an enemy conspiracy. They're using any means. We're going to use any means." This conversation goes a long way in illustrating Nixon's paranoia and his adversarial relationship with the American citizenry. It also points out his belief in his own invincibility.

In mid-1974, after Nixon had been named an unindicted co-conspirator in the Watergate affair, the House of Representatives approved the following articles of impeachment: Article I: Obstruction of justice; Article II: Abuse of power; and Article III: Defiance of committee subpoena. These charges arose from months of listening to those involved in the Nixon presidency and the Watergate cover-up explain the machinations of the Nixon administration. In order to save themselves from serving time in prison, most Nixon cohorts were willing to implicate higher-ups. Ultimately, Howard Hunt, G. Gordon Liddy, James McCord, and four Cuban flunkies were convicted and served time in jail.

Until the final days of his presidency, Richard Nixon insisted that he would survive. When he recognized that it was over and that he had lost, he went into seclusion. Reportedly, Alexander Haig, his Chief of Staff, oversaw the dismantling of the presidency. On August 8, 1974, wearing a blue suit with a blue tie and a flag pin in his lapel, Richard Nixon announced to the world that he no longer had a political base strong enough to support his remaining time in office and resigned the presidency. The following day, Vice President Gerald Ford was sworn in as President of the United States.

Although it was a bitter and disillusioning time for the American people, Watergate proved that democracy continues to work--and that not even the president is above the law and the United States Constitution.

Source: "Watergate." St. James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture. 5 vols. St. James Press, 2000. Reproduced in History Resource Center. Farmington Hills, Michigan: Gale Group, 2005.

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**FBI FILE ON
WATERGATE INVESTIGATION**



Reels 1-9

Reel Notes: FBI File on Watergate Investigation

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