How Watergate Changed America

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

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The Watergate burglary in 1972 was only a small event in what became almost a way of life for the American people. The entire Watergate affair, from the burglary through the trials and finally to President Richard Nixon's resignation, made one of the most powerful political impacts in our country's history. Under the guidance of Dr. Dwight Hoover of the History Department, I have written this thesis to show how the Watergate affair affected the mass media, government, presidency, and the American people during the early 1970s, or the Watergate era.
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INTRODUCTION

On June 17, 1972 five men broke into the Democratic National Committee’s headquarters on the sixth floor of the plush Watergate Hotel in Washington D.C. Wearing surgical gloves and armed with walkie-talkies, cameras, and electronic bugging devices, the men searched through documents, stuffing some in boxes, and dumping others on the floor. Meanwhile, a lock that the men had taped open on a basement door in the complex had been discovered by a watchman. The watchman promptly called the police and within minutes three members of the Capitol’s plain-clothes "mod" squad burst in on the burglars with guns drawn. Then, as Newsweek put it, "Washington had one of the juiciest political scandals in memory."¹

The burglary of the Democratic National Committee’s headquarters was only the beginning of a long chain of events included in the Watergate affair that culminated with President Richard Nixon's resignation in August of 1974. In the two years between the burglary and the resignation, America lived through the endless Watergate controversies.

The Watergate affair began with the burglary and arrest of the five men found in the Watergate Hotel room. Two other men were connected with the operation and were later arrested. All seven were involved with the Republican party or the White House, but were denounced by the White House. President Nixon’s first comment after the burglary was, "The White House has had no involvement whatsoever
in this particular incident."² His press secretary, Ronald Zeigler, referred to it as a "third-rate burglary attempt."³ But Democratic National Committee Chairman Lawrence O'Brien said, "There is developing a clear line to the White House."⁴

On September 15, 1972 the "Watergate Seven" were charged with having conspired "to use illegal means to obtain information from the Democratic headquarters" and entering the headquarters "with intent to steal property" and "intent to illegally intercept telephone and oral conversations."⁵

The trial began on January 10, 1973. Chief Judge John J. Sirica of the U.S. District Court in Washington felt that a number of questions needed to be answered. He asked, "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?"⁶ When the trial ended January 30 Sirica said that the key questions had not been answered.

A few months later a special investigating committee headed by Senator Sam J. Ervin, Jr. (Dem.) of North Carolina began a full-scale inquiry of the break-in and its ramifications. Congress wanted the fullest possible disclosure of the facts. However, President Nixon refused to allow present or former staff members to testify under oath about their activities in the White House. But Congress did not agree with Nixon's idea of executive privilege. Sen. Ervin asserted that the President's claim that his aides were immune from such appearances was "not executive privilege" but "executive poppycock."⁷ The staff members finally did testify for the committee.
Names such as Dean, Mitchell, and Erlichman started appearing in the news. Nixon's aides were giving testimonies that showed more and more that the White House was definitely involved in the Watergate break-in.

In the summer of 1973 Congress learned of the President's taped conversations. Nixon had a special system set up to tape conversations in the White House, but he had kept the tapes confidential. When the Congress asked that he release the tapes, Nixon again declared executive privilege.

After months of legal struggles between the President and Congress, Nixon released his tapes in May of 1974. This was the start of attitude changes from even Nixon's strongest supporters. The tapes revealed a side of Nixon that few people had ever imagined.

Although journalists and politicians were calling for Nixon's resignation as far back as the fall of 1973, the tapes caused people to urge for the President's removal more than ever. Nixon released the tapes to show that he was not involved with the planning of the Watergate break-in. But the tapes only revealed an indecisive, defensive, and insecure President.

From the time Americans read the transcripts in May until Nixon's resignation in August, it was unsure whether the President would resign of his own free will or if he would face impeachment. Then, it was not until weeks later when President Gerald Ford pardoned Nixon, that the public knew he would not be prosecuted for his involvement in Watergate.

The Watergate affair covered more than two years in our nation's...
history. But it left changes and effects that will last much longer. Throughout this paper the Watergate affair will include the events occurring from May of 1972 until August of 1974. Watergate had a great impact on America through the mass media, the government, the presidency, and the American people. In this paper I will show the influence of journalism on Watergate and the effects and changes Watergate made in America.
THE MASS MEDIA

The Watergate affair would probably not have swollen to such huge size without the continual attention that the mass media gave it. Never before had the mass media taken such an active part in a political scandal. Newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and every other type of print and broadcast medium focused their attention on Washington D.C. All aspects of the Watergate incident were thoroughly examined. No small detail was overlooked and no one person exempt.

The Watergate incident was not only one specific news story, but it represented the culmination of journalistic investigation into governmental operations. Journalists researched, investigated, interviewed, and went undercover to find any material they could that was pertinent to the Watergate case. It soon became an obsession to report as much as possible about Watergate.

After the basic facts were known about the Watergate burglary, journalists began making their own detailed searches to discover more information about anyone or anything associated with the scandal. Motives and the reasons for the break-in were considered. Then, as the case progressed, the facts and issues involved were discussed. Every person connected to the crime was brought into the public eye. People with little involvement, such as the watchman who discovered the taped lock on the night of the burglary, became well-known through print medium, radio, and television exposure almost over night.
Although the Watergate burglary was a serious event, most Americans were not aware of it until about the end of the Watergate Seven trial. When the burglary occurred in June of 1972, the press covered it like any other news event. Some newspapers, like the Washington Post, gave it more attention than other news stories. But between the indictments and the trial the media coverage faded away. It began to pick up again when the special investigating committee started their proceedings and when the Watergate Seven were sentenced. Then for about a year, from the time the tapes were discovered until Nixon's resignation, Watergate was the main focus of news coverage.

Besides the regular news stories and features, editorials also concentrated on the Watergate controversies. It seemed as if nothing could be criticized more than Watergate. Newspapers often would neglect to report on local issues, preferring instead to fill up the news with reports on Watergate. And even if the main editorial or feature were not on a Watergate topic, there were usually at least one or two small mentions of Watergate.

Americans were becoming tired of hearing and reading about Watergate. In May of 1973 a 34-year-old Ohio mechanic commented, "I'm so sick of hearing about it that I could care less. I just jump over it in the paper and read something else." A Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania woman said, "The stories are so confusing that I can't follow them, and anyway, nothing has been proved." The people were becoming disgruntled with Watergate and the press was not helping matters any.
Public distrust of the press almost reached an all time high during the Watergate reporting. Many people were even reluctant to consider the impeachment of President Richard Nixon because they did not trust the accuracy of press reports. In the spring of 1973 an advertising man in Birmingham proclaimed, "A few Democrats and the liberal press—especially the Washington Post—are persecuting the President and tearing up the country." The press was accused of having condemned Richard Nixon in print. Nixon claimed that wild and unfounded accusations had been given banner headlines. But as it turned out, most of the wild and unfounded accusations about Watergate turned out to be true.

A California poll conducted in June of 1974 showed that half the public thought the print and television journalists were paying too much attention to Watergate. Also, a growing minority of Americans considered the coverage to be biased.

While the media were being highly criticized, the journalists, on the other hand, were also complaining. In January of 1973 ABC's Howard K. Smith, whose moderation had made him one of the President's favorites, commented that government pressure on journalism was beginning to "look like a general assault on reporters." Dan Rather, a CBS White House correspondent who was one of the Administration's least favorite commentators, said, "I'm certainly not saying that they all sit around a table and plan some grand strategy to hit the media on all fronts. But I am convinced that in a broad, general way, the people around Nixon have come to know it's OK to attack the media." NBC's John Chancellor summed it up when he said, "Other
Administrations have had a love-hate relationship with the press. The Nixon Administration has a hate-hate relationship.\textsuperscript{16}

Many of the journalists' complaints were valid. Vice President Spiro Agnew was one of the most persistent attackers of the media commentators. He criticized their facial expressions and their frequent analyses of the news. President Nixon angered the Washington Post by blackballing them from many of the White House social functions. He also gave many exclusive stories to the Post's rival, the Washington Star-News.

Other reasons that the media were annoyed at the Administration were because of their use of the media and their distrustful attitude towards the press. Many journalists remembered Nixon's "last press conference" in 1962 after he had lost the California gubernatorial race. At that time Nixon declared, "You won't have Dick Nixon to kick around any more."\textsuperscript{17}

As President, Nixon chose to go directly to the people through television so that the print media could not rephrase anything that he had said. The print media was also angered at the increase in postal rates which threatened the existence of many magazines.

Because many people felt the press was responsible for the confusion concerning Watergate, they believed the press had an obligation to help clarify the Watergate disaster. They thought it would be ironic if the press, which had brought Watergate to public attention, would let the meaning of the crime be lost in a wave of headlines.\textsuperscript{18} They felt that the press should rebuild an American consensus or a new agreement as to the country's meanings and goals.
Many of the complaints about the press were understandable. Editorial cartoons offended many people. Some portrayed Nixon with bugs hovering over him to depict his involvement in the Watergate bugging. Others hinted at the President's guilt and ridiculed his character. A number of news stories made tremendous accusations but did not give any reliable sources to back them up. Also, much of the other significant news was being ignored to give more room to Watergate.

After more press accusations became facts, people were taking more of an interest in what was happening with Watergate. One man who had been very critical of the press at the beginning of the Watergate reporting became absorbed in politics after Agnew's resignation convinced him that something was wrong in Washington. Also, many people were starting to believe that without publicity the outcome of the Watergate proceedings would have been different and the facts would never have been disclosed.

Even though most of the reporting was based on fact, many times Watergate reporters had to rely on questionable sources in order to write their stories. Most of the time these speculations did turn out to be true. It was even sometimes argued that a leak from a committee or an investigation was not too harmful since it was usually anticipated by the press and already published anyway. What the representatives of the media could not find out for certain, they took a pretty good guess about.

Although the media could justify their stories and sources
through the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of the press, they were often attacked for not revealing their confidential sources. Disputes between journalists and government officials arose with the journalists losing most of the battles. The basic right of freedom of the press had become an occupational hazard.

One problem journalists faced was the influence that newspaper owners wielded. Many publishers made editors "kill" stories that they did not want printed. The courts could do nothing to change this. Journalists could also not turn to the court when they lost a news source or obtained incorrect information. The reporter was basically on his own. And even if the reporter did ask for legal help, he usually could not win his case.

The struggles between the reporters and the government were complicated. Both sides argued for their rights. The press felt it had the right to inform the public, while the government insisted that it had the right to know how and from whom the press gained its information. The journalists themselves insisted that they had the right to total confidentiality of sources, while at the same time demanding that Nixon reveal all of his secret conversations. This apparent double standard caused endless conflicts between the media and the government throughout the Watergate proceedings. The use of unattributed stories made the media vulnerable, while at the same time they had the First Amendment to protect them. On the other hand, the courts could hold reporters in contempt if they refused to tell what the court declared necessary to the Watergate case.
The mass media was definitely affected by the Watergate affair. Changes were made in reporting styles, sources of information and how they were obtained, relations with the government, and the way Americans viewed journalism. Watergate gave the journalists something to investigate and report like they had never had before. Through the Watergate affair journalists came to realize just how much journalism can affect the country.
THE GOVERNMENT

Watergate caused changes in the government that were novel. The results of the Watergate proceedings and the legislation inspired by the break-in were significant alterations in the areas of freedom of the press, executive privilege, and separation of powers, as well as legislative innovation.

The meaning of the First Amendment's phrase "freedom of the press" became essentially a political issue between the media and the government. The media would refuse to tell the government what it wished to know by claiming that the First Amendment protected their sources. Often this refusal would lead to legal action and resolution.

Litigation between the Democratic National Committee and the Committee for the Re-election of the President ensued over the Watergate bugging incident. In the course of the lawsuit with the Democrats, the Republicans subpoenaed the reporters and executives of the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Washington Star-News, and Time. All of these publications resisted surrendering information. The subpoenas were eventually squashed on the grounds that they violated the newsman's right under the First Amendment. The press was relieved, but the Republicans were very dissatisfied.

Subpoenas from the court and as part of his own defense were the main reasons Nixon put out his original transcripts. The press
agreed with the court that Nixon should release the tapes and showed their "power of the press" to influence Nixon's decision. The press felt that it was Nixon's obligation to let them explore the transcripts and the truth of his appeals; thus, after months of retaining the tapes, Nixon finally released the transcripts. 22

Executive privilege was one of the most questioned of the president's rights during the Watergate ordeal. The executive privilege argument illustrated a conflict between two basic principles: 1) the independence of the executive branch and 2) the power of Congress to obtain information which it believes necessary to legislate effectively. In addition to the basic conflict, there was confusion over the interpretation and use of the privilege.

Although the Constitution makes no mention of special presidential immunities, the executive privilege through customary usage has allowed the president to: 1) withhold documents requested by Congress and to 2) forbid employees of the executive branch of Government to testify before congressional committees. 23

George Washington was the first to set the precedent of executive privilege. In their first full-fledged investigation, the House of Representatives demanded the records of military planning for an expedition against Indian tribes in Ohio. Washington released them but warned that he would never again turn over papers that might reveal military secrets or be "injurious" to the public. 24

President Andrew Jackson turned down a Senate request to see
a paper he had read in a Cabinet meeting defending his removal of federal deposits from the Bank of the United States. Teddy Roosevelt also ignored the Senate when they ordered him to hand over documents involved in an antitrust suit against the U.S. Steel Corporation. More recently in history Congress hounded the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations for F.B.I. files on federal employees whose politics were in question. Both presidents claimed executive privilege. 25

President Nixon preferred to call executive privilege "the principle of confidentiality" and, for him, it was a principle so dear he was prepared to defy the Congress and the courts, plunge the nation into a grave constitutional crisis, alarm and alienate the substantial majority of the electorate that had given him a massive vote of confidence, and walk to the very brink of political ruin. 26 Not only did Nixon want to protect himself by not revealing information, but he also wanted to protect the institution of the presidency by not giving over the power of withholding information. He risked practically everything to fight for the executive privilege principle in which he believed.

Nixon's tapes were the most controversial pieces of information involving executive privilege. Nixon finally did release the taped White House conversations, but only after serious deliberations. He knew that if he did not release the tapes, many people would conclude that the evidence on the tapes incriminated him. But then when he did release them in order to support his denials
of Watergate guilt, the principle of executive privilege would be virtually abandoned.

Congress was especially affected by the use of the executive privilege. When a President used it, Congressional checks on executive power were weakened. This trend towards concentration of power in the executive weakened the power of Congress and negated the supposed system of checks and balances operative in the U.S. Government. The checks and balances principle states that the Congress--the Senate and the House--the Supreme Court, and the Executive Branch each limits the other and prevents a grab for power by one or other of the segments of government.

Although never specifically written into the Constitution, the operation of the system provides for separation of powers. The Court can declare a law unconstitutional, thereby checking both the Congress and the President. The checks and balances principle was assumed in the Constitution to make certain that no one branch of government became more powerful than another.

Although checks and balances appear to be a good idea, the practice of the theory showed a flaw. The system did not operate to prevent the abuse of power before it happened; the checking took place after the damage had already been done.

When the Congress finally realized that the checks and balances were not operating well and separation of powers was not balancing the three branches of government, reforms were started. Lawmakers proposed to create a committee in both the House and the Senate to watch over the White House to prevent the White House from
controlling the government singlehandedly.

Another way of controlling the power of the White House that was considered by Congress was to reduce the size of the White House staff. The Cabinet in recent years had rarely been consulted and sometimes had just been given instructions. Congress thought of limiting its size or even eliminating it all together.\textsuperscript{27} On the other hand, Congress suggested reducing the number of aides and special assistants and departments. This would hopefully strengthen the Cabinet members and allow them to serve as advisers as well as advocates.\textsuperscript{28}

Even before the Watergate case, the Executive Branch exercised more power than the other branches; the rest of the government actually realized this fact when the Watergate case came to public attention. Once the other branches of government were aware of this, they took action to regain the equal separation of powers.

In February of 1973 Congress assembled to debate the question of equal power with the Executive Branch at the Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery. Hedley Donovan, Editor-in-Chief of Time Inc., who hosted the event, stated, "We need a presidency capable of deriving strength from a strong Congress."\textsuperscript{29}

Because of all the revelations in the Watergate affair, legislation was proposed in Congress to correct the lack of balance. Some of the most significant of these laws pertained to campaigns, the F.B.I., and the presidency.

One of the strongly advocated pieces of legislation concerned
corrupt election practices. Most of the legislation was aimed at ending corrupt practices such as illegal campaign contributions and gifts of corporate stock which resulted in a loss of capital gains taxes to the government. Using federal financing or cutting down campaign costs was one suggested reform, but it drew criticism because additional taxing would be necessary if federal financing was used. Congress was sensitive to additional expenses because in recent years inflation made it practically impossible to cut costs anywhere.

Another proposed reform was to outlaw large gifts of money for campaign use from individuals. During President Nixon's campaign for re-election it was estimated that his personal friend, Bebe Rebozo, donated gifts of up to $500,000 dollars. The proposed legislations set limits of only $100 dollars.30

Limiting the duration of campaigns and allowing one free mailing per voter for each candidate were other suggested ideas for presidential campaign reforms, but they also ran into problems. It proved difficult to set a time limit on campaigning because so many politicians "campaigned" before ever declaring their candidacy. The free mailing idea was worthwhile, but with increasing postage costs, it was almost impossible to get it passed.31

The only reforms that were amended and passed were those concerning large campaign contributions. Most of the reforms were considered but never passed in full.

Due to the misuse of the F.B.I. by the Executive Branch, a bill was submitted to make changes in the operations of the bureau.
The bill suggested that the bureau become an independent agency no longer under the authority of the Attorney General. Also, the law limited the F.B.I. director's term to seven years. With this bill Congress hoped to make the F.B.I. more self-sufficient and less controlled by the White House.32

Insofar as discussion concerning the status of the presidency, Watergate resulted in an investigation into impeachment and resignation procedures. The House Judiciary Committee had to consider whether sufficient grounds existed for the House of Representatives to exercise its constitutional power to impeach Richard Nixon.33

Although in Congress a consensus was gathering that the Nixon situation was intolerable, the proper policies and procedures had to be followed. Since the impeachment process had not been investigated since President Andrew Johnson's administration in the 1860's, the Congress had to be certain that the circumstances warranted impeachment proceedings.

Also, when Nixon resigned, the transition to Ford as President had to be carefully handled. The Congress and the courts investigated existing rules to check that the proper legal procedures were followed for the succession. And the legislative and judicial branches had to learn how to work with a completely different President.

Watergate caused the government to look at the areas of freedom of the press, executive privilege, separation of powers, and changes in legislation. Also, since Watergate was caused by
government officials, it had to be solved by government officials. Most importantly, Watergate demonstrated that ours is a government under the law, and that the law applies to all, governors and governed alike.\textsuperscript{34}
THE PRESIDENCY

The man who holds the office of President of the United States has the sworn duty to "preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution." Up until the Watergate affair, Richard Nixon was believed to have done this. But when President Nixon's involvement in Watergate was discovered, his actions as Chief Executive were questionable.

First of all, President Nixon was accused of taking too much power into his own hands. Not only did he accumulate power, he seized it. One example of Nixon taking power into his own hands occurred in December of 1972. The President ordered bombing in Cambodia quite illegally and without the knowledge of Congress. Nixon also ordered wire tapping, messed with campaign contributions, and misused the F.B.I. and C.I.A.

Another way Nixon flaunted his authority was through his power of veto. In June of 1973 Nixon vetoed the first antiwar amendment to pass both houses of Congress. Although Congress was shocked by his veto, the House failed to override it. However, in October of 1972, after Nixon had vetoed a water-pollution bill, the House overrode the veto 366-11 and the Senate overrode it 74-0. But Nixon again wielded his power by ignoring the override and impounding the funds "citing the "staggering cost" of the $24.6 billion measure over the next three years as justification."  

Although Nixon often acted on his own without consulting aides
or other branches of the government, he alone was not to blame. Whenever a political problem arose, the easiest solution had always been to allow an increase in the President's powers. It never occurred to anyone that the presidency itself could become a threat to the government.37

Nixon's personal tapes yielded an extraordinary contrast between the public Nixon and the private Nixon.38

Behind the closed door of his office, he seemed both more human and far less commanding—a muddled thinker, a rambling talker, a waffling executive, a President who instead of presiding at these critical discussions deferred continuously to his subordinates. The earnest, intense Nixon of his public speeches and press conferences turned distracted. The tightly buttoned-up Nixon of his prayer breakfasts turned salty and profane.39

This was written by a Newsweek reporter. The political persuasion Nixon once exercised was lost when the transcripts were released. People who shouted, "Nixon's the One," in 1968 were changing their minds after Watergate.

The "Nixon Papers," as the transcripts were often called, were almost equally damaging to the President's reputation as a leader—and as a man.40 Nixon's frequent use of profanity and his outcry "Nobody is a friend of ours!" surprised many Americans whether they were pro-Nixon or not.41

Some of Nixon's political comrades even became doubtful of his worth as President. Congressmen cited the transcripts as indicative of a "deplorable, disgusting, shabby, and immoral" performance on the part of the president.42 Republican Senators called
for Nixon to resign and complaints about the President for various reasons could be heard from all sides.

Many Republican politicians disliked the isolation of the presidential office. During Nixon's second campaign for the White House, he was noticeably absent from his own campaign. Concentrating on foreign affairs occupied much of his time and it seemed as if the presidency faced toward everything but the American population.

Other politicians worried about the great amount of power given to the President without control. In response to this worry, Senator Walter Mondale, D-Minn., introduced legislation to reduce the power of the President. He suggested: 1) requiring every important officer in the Executive branch to be confirmed by the Senate, and 2) requiring high administration officials to answer questions before Congressional committees.43 This was one politician's idea for resolving the Watergate revelations of the president's power.

Senator James Buckley, a conservative Republican, also had an idea of what Nixon should do when he said, "In order to preserve the Presidency, Richard Nixon must resign as President. If he resigned, Congress would be automatically discharged of the Watergate affair and could devote itself to its legislative business." Watergate problems would still remain but could be cleared up by a working Congress.

Another option that politicians considered was to push for the quick passage of the 25th Amendment which "permits the President to let the Vice President take over temporarily if the President
is 'unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office.'

Claiming the Watergate case was taking up a great deal of his time, Nixon opposed the rapid enactment of the 25th Amendment.

But it was obvious after hearing the transcripts that Nixon spent much more time on Watergate than even he admitted. In an April 1974 pep talk with his two defense attorneys Nixon said:

Well, we'll survive this. You know--people say this destroys the Administration and the rest--but what was this? What was Watergate? A little bugging! I mean a terrible thing--it shouldn't have been done---shouldn't have been covered up. And people shouldn't have and the rest, but we've got to beat it. Right!

Nixon concentrated on just that--beating the Watergate case. Because of this, his own responsibility of governing the nation suffered.

The transcripts revealed Nixon would come back again and again to the subject of Watergate even when discussing something completely different. He also wasted time on Watergate when he prepared the tapes and decided which sections were "unrelated to Presidential action." Another time he planned a speaking tour for the sole purpose of getting the public to forget about Watergate.

Even though Nixon lost part of his ability to govern, many Americans were desperately eager to have him continue in office. A few legislators even accepted such Nixon faults as his disregard for the separation of powers, his contempt for the probity of the American system of justice, and his unconstitutional war.

The President had been above reproach for so long that it was
difficult for people to find fault with him.

For many people one way of dealing with the presidency was to ignore Nixon and to reform the institution. For these persons, protecting the institution had permitted Nixon to exploit it, therefore, they felt the institution needed to be put right. Nixon, too, often treated the presidency as an institution far removed from himself. He worried immensely about Watergate's effect on the presidency and professed that he did not want the presidency to be blemished in any way. But Nixon's greatest error was that he did not let the presidency be treated with respect. He performed as Richard Nixon—the man, instead of Richard Nixon—the President.

Another effect of Watergate on the presidency was the changing of the White House's attitude. One lobbyist remarked, "For the first time in five years, top people in the Administration are willing to sit down and talk, rather than saying 'Here's our plan—take it or leave it.'" How to terminate Nixon's presidency was another big question facing politicians. Whichever course Nixon chose to follow, impeachment or resignation, he could no longer resist the public opinion consensus that he should get out of office before any more harm was done.

One magazine writer's opinion was, "If the revolting picture of conniving and deception revealed by the White House tapes is just politics as practiced in the Oval Office of the President of the United States, it is time for the present occupant to vacate
A *Time* editorial stated, "It now seems likely that the President will have to give up his office: he has irredeemably lost his moral authority, the confidence of most the country, and therefore his ability to govern effectively." The editorial continued, "But the wise and patriotic choice is for Richard Nixon to resign, sparing the country and himself the agony."  

And yet even another editorial said, "His integrity and trustworthiness are perhaps the most important facts about him to his country and to the world. And these Nixon has destroyed." Calling for Nixon's resignation, the editorial concluded with, "The nightmare of uncertainty must be ended. A fresh start must be made."  

Watergate elicited ideas about the presidency that made many people consider the future of the Executive Office. The general attitude was that action had to be taken now against Nixon to serve as an example for the future. A journalist showed Nixon as an example when he wrote, "Our message to future Presidents will be: watch out or we will evict you. Otherwise, future Presidents will read in our failure the opposite message: Go ahead. You are safe from punishment. You are above the law. Do with your subjects as you will." Nixon would serve as the ultimate example of what would happen if a president abused his power.

In "Demystifying the Presidency," Charles Hardin wrote, "Watergate, as a learning experience, has demythologized the presidency--so that a healthy skepticism, even some serious disrespect, can be shown the office." Watergate showed the Presidency in a different
light. Americans were forced to look at the institution realistically. The glamour and gala were gone. The ugly as well as the attractive side of the Executive Office was shown. Many people did not like what they saw, but they lived with it nevertheless.

Nixon's presidency during the time of Watergate made a great impact on history. The presidency was scrutinized in every aspect. The President's power, ability to govern, relationships with other government officials, and personal handling of the office were all affected by the Watergate affair.

The Watergate affair hampered Nixon's actions as the nation's leader. As President, Nixon seemed to grasp for enough power to keep him above the Watergate scandal. He was more concerned with keeping himself and his aides away from political destruction than with effectively governing the country. Then, Nixon became defensive of other government officials and politicians when he realized how they felt about the Watergate affair.

Watergate—the burglary, cover-up, trials, investigating committee, and the transcripts of Nixon's tapes, showed how Nixon as a man failed the nation in his responsibilities as the country's leader.
Because of all of the publicity given to Watergate, it did not take long for Watergate to become "America's business." The American people survived Watergate, but their attitudes and opinions of the United States government changed as a result of it.

Although President Richard Nixon was elected in 1972 by one of the greatest margins in election history, by May of 1974 only 38 percent of the American people favored retaining him in office. Fifty-three percent of the people were in favor of immediate impeachment or resignation. The growing evidence about Nixon's involvement in Watergate had caused the public to change their opinions about the desirability of Nixon continuing his term of office.

One man who had been disinterested by Watergate because of the excessive press coverage, became convinced something was wrong in Washington after Agnew's resignation. "All of a sudden, I started reading about politics again; I got wrapped up in it," he said. Many Americans got "wrapped up" in the Watergate case and their opinions were as varied as some of the stories heard about the cover-up.

Some people did not realize the full extent of the Watergate cover-up. "I don't think it's a big deal. They just got caught," commented a federal court clerk in Columbia, S.C. His view was similar to that of many other Nixon sympathizers. Another man said,
in Nixon's defense, "The President has no doubt been the victim of his unfortunate remoteness from the press and public and the misguided loyalty of his staff."\(^{60}\)

Even though some Americans still viewed Nixon as innocent, they could also see the seriousness of Watergate. A Lexington, Va., farmer said, "This type of Watergate thing goes on all the time. These boys were just unfortunate to get caught. But Watergate has caused us to lose whatever confidence we had left in our Government, in the System."\(^{61}\)

The faith that Americans once had on the government was definitely diminishing. An Atlanta man commented, "These days a politician is about three cuts below a used-car salesman."\(^{62}\) Watergate seemed to create "a growing suspicion of politicians and cynicism about government."\(^{63}\) The public was disillusioned. Their views were divided and there seemed to be no clear remedies in sight. But one government employee who did not believe Watergate was anywhere near a crisis state, did believe it would have its beneficial effects. "In the long run, it may stir people up a bit. Politicians may think hard before they start that sort of trouble again," he remarked.\(^{64}\)

Although many people were bored by the whole Watergate affair, for most of the well-educated and politically aware Americans Watergate was a searing, personally-felt issue.\(^{65}\) In May of 1973 a 46 year-old woman who voted for Nixon said, "People don't know what to believe. They feel lost. I have a strong feeling that I've been betrayed somehow, because this is my Government and I
expected it to be noble and above all, honest." This woman's hurt changed to bitterness when in November of the same year she stated, "I have to believe he's guilty of using the Government and people and his position to his own advantage." The public started resenting Nixon and especially his involvement in the Watergate affair.

In August of 1973 a Harris poll showed that personal confidence in Nixon had fallen to 21 percent. An irate Milwaukee nursing assistant reflected the feeling of many Americans when she declared, "My woman's intuition says Nixon's a liar. He's gone beyond politics as usual; he's taken advantage of being President. Impeach him."67

A November of 1973 poll showed that 49 percent of the American public wanted Nixon to continue in office. This was down from 60 percent in August. "We thought we were electing the lesser of two evils last year, and look what we got," said a Milwaukee machinist. "I'm thinking about not voting next time."68 Not only did Watergate cause people to become apathetic about the Nixon Administration, but they also were apathetic about politics in general.

A study at Western Illinois University was made in the fall of 1973 to determine the effect of Watergate on the students' views. Of the 58 students who said they had voted for Nixon in the 1972 election, more than half said they would not have voted for him if the election were held again.69 Moreover, many of the students were harsh in their judgement of Nixon and Watergate.

Even though there were those whose minds were obviously changed because of Watergate, many people were concerned with those who
were not aware of the real seriousness of Watergate. This fear was shown in a *Christian Century* feature where it was asked, "What if the public, while approving of the removal of those involved, nevertheless dismisses the whole thing as 'just politics'?"  

The Watergate affair caused a public uproar at times. And even though the views were always varied, one thing was certain concerning Watergate—-it touched the lives of every person in some way or another. Whether actively involved in politics or apathetic towards the political system, Americans could not help but react outwardly to the sting of Watergate.
Nixon's resignation in August of 1974 was meant to be one of the first steps in marking the end of the Watergate affair. In the almost five years since that time it is obvious that Watergate did not end there. Although President Nixon's resignation did mark the end of an era, the controversies concerning Watergate remained and the effects were limitless.

Watergate was almost like a toy for the mass media. It was something they played with for more than two years and refused to outgrow. To the government, Watergate proved to be a time for reevaluating the way our nation is run. As for the Presidency, the Watergate affair caused the nation to realize that the country can be harmed by just one person and that one person can be in the highest elected office in the United States. Lastly, the American people--they will be the ones to write history. Whether they tell the entire story or not, one thing is certain; Watergate was the most significant political happening of the Nixon Administration and its effects will be remembered throughout always.
NOTES

1 "Operation Watergate," Newsweek, 3 July 1972, p. 18.
16 "Nixon and the Media," p. 42.
21 "Subpoenas (Contd.)," p. 65.
22 Henry Grunewald, p. 73.
24 "Privilege and the President," p. 28.
25 "Privilege and the President," p. 28.
34 "Reflections on the Assassination," p. 967.
37 "This Is Your President, Warts and All," *Newsweek*, 13 May 1974, p. 19.
38 "This Is Your President, Warts and All," p. 18.
39 "This Is Your President, Warts and All," p. 18.
43 "Who Runs the Republic--The Congress or the President?"
Senior Scholastic, 1 Nov. 1973, p. 9.
45 "Richard Nixon's Collapsing Presidency," p. 16.
54 Robbins Burling, p. 619.


63 "Autumn in the Shade of Watergate," p. 23.

64 "America's Mood 'We Can Survive This Mess,'" p. 20.


66 "Main Street Revisited: Changing Views on Watergate," p. 29.

67 "Main Street Revisited: Changing Views on Watergate," p. 29.

68 "Main Street Revisited: Changing Views on Watergate," p. 28.


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"The Media to the Bar Again." Newsweek, 12 March 1973, p. 64.


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*Senior Scholastic*, 1 Nov. 1973, pp. 6-9.