

Esquire Nov 73

Did There Come a Point in Time When There Were 43 Different Theories of How Watergate Happened?

Yes, to the best of our recollection

by Edward J. Epstein and John Berendt

While you were busy watching the testimony over television, others were formulating theories as to what Watergate was all about, from the tip of the iceberg right on down to the murky bottom. Here is how it looked from forty-three different perspectives. Choose one and run.

Who Masterminded Watergate?

THE DAREDEVIL THEORY

Proponent: The White House.

Thesis: Gordon Liddy either exceeded his orders or directly disobeyed John Mitchell by carrying out the Watergate break in on his own.

Selling Points: Liddy was known to be a daredevil adventurer—he had once threatened to kill Magruder. Furthermore, Liddy claimed he had permission for Watergate from higher-ups, but none of the other convicted conspirators ever saw proof of that firsthand.

Drawback: For three weeks Liddy had been feeding "Gemstone" phone-tap transcripts to his superiors.

THE JOHN DEAN PRODUCTION THEORY

Proponent: J. Fred Buzhardt Jr., Special Counsel to the President.

Thesis: Watergate was a John Dean production from start to finish. Dean originally suggested to Mitchell that the Committee to Reelect create a private detective agency, to be headed by his assistant John Caulfield, for security work and spying—budget \$450,000. After Mitchell rejected "Operation Sandwedge," Dean brought in G. Gordon Liddy and told him that there would be "a million or more" for spy work. Although Mitchell thrice rejected Liddy's plans, Liddy went ahead under the impression that Mitchell and Dean just wanted "deniability." After Liddy's team was caught in the Watergate, Dean supervised the cover-up, unknown to his superiors, to protect himself.

Selling Points: Dean admits sponsoring "Operation Sandwedge" and he attended two meetings where bugging plans were presented. Dean discussed executive clemency with Magruder, sent messages to McCord, and asked for, and received, the F.B.I. reports on the case.

Drawbacks: Mitchell okayed the plan, according to Magruder. Ehrlichman okayed cash payments to the burglars. And Hal-

deman ordered his files "cleaned" after June 17.

JOHN MITCHELL "SIGN OFF" THEORY

Proponents: Jeb Stuart Magruder, John Ehrlichman, Fred Buzhardt.

Thesis: John Mitchell approved the Watergate break-in without telling anyone in the White House.

Selling Points: As chairman of the Committee to Reelect the President, John Mitchell was in a position to approve or reject any intelligence plan. Jeb Magruder, his deputy, swore before the Ervin Committee that Mitchell had indeed "signed off" on the idea. He also testified that Mitchell later ordered the wiretap logs destroyed.

Mitchell left the campaign only fifteen days after the break-in, claiming domestic problems. At the same time, Martha Mitchell complained of "all the dirty things that go on" in politics.

Drawback: President Nixon has always said he runs his own campaigns.

Retort: Nixon claims he was too occupied with being President to run the campaign this time.

THE DIRTY TRICKSTER THEORY

Proponent: John Dean.

Thesis: Presidential Special Counsel Charles Colson secretly overrode John Mitchell's veto of the Watergate bugging plan and gave Hunt and Liddy the go-ahead.

Selling Points: If Colson would walk over his grandmother to reelect Nixon, would he not walk over John Mitchell? Colson was Hunt's immediate superior at the White House, and he had urged Dean to give Liddy's "intelligence" plans a fair hearing at CREEP after they had been rejected once. Widely thought of as Nixon's "dirty tricks" man, Colson has superintended an impressive assortment of shady deeds: overseeing a secret investigation into Edward Kennedy's private life, trying to force a tax audit on an anti-Nixon Teamster official, compiling a White House enemy list, "trashing" the Congress-

sional campaign of John Kerry, attempting to smear Connecticut Senator Lowell Weicker, etc. He even proposed fire-bombing the Brookings Institution, according to John Dean.

Drawback: Colson denies he had prior knowledge of Watergate and says he took and passed a lie-detector test in order to prove it.

Retort: Senator Sam Ervin on lie-detector tests: "Twentieth-century witchcraft."

NIXON'S THE ONE THEORY

Proponents: Martha Mitchell; eight percent of the American people.

Thesis: Richard Nixon approved Watergate and therefore had to cover it up.

Selling Point: This explains everything in one fell swoop—Ockham's Razor.

Drawback: Why would the President risk everything by involving himself?

HOWARD HUGHES THEORY

Proponent: Carl Oglesby in *The Boston Phoenix*.

Thesis: Hughes is ubiquitous. Oglesby notes, "Behind Nixon stands Howard Hughes; behind Hunt and Liddy and the Caribbean counterrevolution stands Hughes; behind Watergate stands Hughes." Presumably, Hunt and Liddy were working for Hughes.

Selling Point: This might explain why Liddy told McCord that Hughes would supply a private plane for a "getaway" from a contemplated Las Vegas burglary. Hunt claimed to be friends—and business partners—with Howard Hughes in Central America.

Drawback: No evidence.

HUNT VOICE-ALTERING THEORY

Proponent: Dr. Charles Lane, molecular biologist, Cambridge, England.

Thesis: E. Howard Hunt used a "voice-altering device" and various disguises to imitate White House officials, including Nixon, Ehrlichman, Haldeman, Colson, and Dean, while making calls on the White House scrambler phone. He was thus able to command unsuspecting un-

derlings to carry out Watergate and the cover-up.

Selling Points: This would explain many of the contradictions in testimony: e.g., Ehrlichman claiming he never telephoned General Cushman for C.I.A. assistance to Hunt, though Cushman says he heard Ehrlichman's voice; Krogh's orders from Nixon to break into Ellsberg's psychia-



trist's office; Dean's orders from Haldeman to maintain a cover-up. Finally, it explains how the Watergate might have been authorized in the first place: Hunt called Mitchell using Nixon's voice tone.
Drawback: None. It's the perfect crime.

ACT OF GOD THEORY

Proponent: Reverend Billy Graham.
Thesis: According to Graham, Watergate was an act of God and a judgment on America.

Selling Point: This theory ennoble the whole enterprise: the White House was covering up for God.

Drawback: God only knows.

MR. X THEORY

Proponent: John Mitchell.
Thesis: Someone gave orders to go ahead with Watergate after Mitchell refused. Magruder wouldn't have gone ahead on his own.

Selling Point: This clears Mitchell.

Drawback: Magruder named Mitchell as Mr. X.

THE HALDEMAN TAP THEORY

Proponent: Mary McGrory.
Thesis: The bugs in the Oval Office and on the Nixon telephones were placed by H. R. Haldeman without the President's knowledge. "Although nobody outside ever suspected that the President was receiving heads of anti-war groups through the side door or calling up Angela Davis on the sly," writes Miss McGrory, "the thought may have crossed Haldeman's suspicious mind." Also, "Maybe Haldeman worried that Ehrlichman, the only other person the President ever saw, would tell him something about Watergate that the President should not know." These taps, posits Miss McGrory, might have been revealed to Nixon by Haldeman just prior to the April 15 talk with Dean.

Selling Point: Alexander Butterfield told the Senate Watergate Committee that the President seemed "oblivious" of the taps. This theory points to Haldeman as architect of the cover-up.

Drawback: The tapes are stored in the White House. If it had been a Haldeman plot, he'd have stored them elsewhere.

THE JACK ANDERSON EXCLUSIVE THEORY

Proponent: Leo Zani, former press secretary to Senator Edward Gurney of Florida.

Thesis: Shortly after the Watergate break-in, Leo Zani put out the story that the Watergate burglars were registered Democrats and that one of them, Frank Sturgis, was a double agent in the employ of columnist Jack Anderson. According to Zani, Anderson got Sturgis and another of the burglars, Eugenio Martinez, to set up the others and embarrass the Republicans.

Selling Points: Not only are Anderson and Sturgis friends, but Anderson even went to court and asked to have Sturgis released in his custody.

Drawback: Zani's ex-boss, Senator Gurney, apparently thought so little of this theory that he never mentioned it during the Watergate hearings.

What Were They After?

SELF-DEFENSE THEORY

Proponent: James McCord.

Thesis: The Democratic National Committee was encouraging left-wing groups to plan violent demonstrations at the Republican Convention, so the Watergate break-in was necessary to uncover the plot.

Selling Points: McCord cited the riots at the 1968 Democratic Convention and recounted to the Ervin Committee a disturbing trend of violence toward the federal government (the Capitol and Pentagon bombings) and the Republican Party (bombings in Oakland, Manchester, Austin and threats against the lives of Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell). He said there was information that 250,000 demonstrators would be in Miami, many of them "out to commit violence."

Drawback: If the above were true, it was a matter for the F.B.I., not the plumbers.

Retort: J. Edgar Hoover, according to Ehrlichman, was not to be trusted.

ANTI-KENNEDY PLOT THEORY

Proponent: A Kennedy aide.

Thesis: Watergate was part of a plot to stop Ted Kennedy from being "drafted" for the nomination. A listening post was established in Larry O'Brien's office to keep tabs on the stop-McGovern plot in progress there. If it appeared that the pro-Kennedy forces were on the verge of success, a series of prepackaged Kennedy scandals could be revealed.

Selling Points: Kennedy was kept under surveillance by White House operatives. Hunt had forged cables implicating John F. Kennedy in Diem's assassination. (These presumably could be used to blackmail or discourage Ted.)

Drawback: Chappaquiddick.

THE ITT THEORY

Proponent: Jeb Stuart Magruder.

Thesis: Hunt and Liddy had traced leaks in the ITT case through Jack Anderson to Larry O'Brien. And they were hoping to be able to find some evidence to blackmail O'Brien.

Selling Points: At the time of the bugging, ITT was a great embarrassment to the White House. Hunt and Liddy were al-

ready on it. Liddy, according to *Newsweek*, had kidnapped ITT lobbyist Dita Beard out of New York.

Drawback: No hard evidence.

THE CUBAN GAME-PLAN THEORY

Proponents (Hidden): General Vernon Walters of C.I.A., John Dean. (Overt): James J. Kilpatrick, William F. Buckley.

Thesis: The key to Watergate is Havana. Castro desired normal relations with the U.S. and believed that only a Democratic Administration would bring this about. William Buckley suggests the following hypothesis: "Someone inside the Castro Government... tipped off a prominent Republican" about a deal between Castro and the Democratic Party to finance the Democratic campaign. "The recipient of this information requisitioned a suitcase full of money with which to pay professionals to bug the Democratic headquarters. But in turn, the Republicans were betrayed."

Selling Point: The Watergate operation can be justified as a "national-security operation," which Nixon admitted ordering concealed.

Drawback: Dean and Walters have asserted that the "Cuban Theory" was devised to mislead the press.

COUNTER-BUGGING THEORY

Proponent: James McCord.

Thesis: Watergate was justifiable on the grounds that the Democrats had already pulled a Watergate-style bugging operation on the Republicans.

"We had word from C.R.P. sources," McCord told the Ervin Committee, "alleging that the McGovern committees had 'a pipeline' directly into the offices of the Committee to Reelect the President in Washington; allegedly, they were feeding out, on a regular basis, policy position papers, i.e., plans and strategy..."

Selling Point: When Nixon was told by J. Edgar Hoover that the Democrats had bugged him in 1968, he vowed to do the same to them.

Drawback: Richard Nixon once said, "Two wrongs don't make a right."

McGOVERN ASSASSINATION THEORY

Proponent: Charlie McCollum, writer for *The Boston Phoenix*.

Thesis: The purpose of the Watergate break-in was to obtain the floor plan of George McGovern's suite in Miami in order to plan his assassination.

McCollum says he came upon this evidence from a friend of "a guy" who had stumbled across a plot to kill George McGovern while researching John Kennedy's assassination.

Selling Points: None.

Drawbacks: Nixon's men considered George McGovern the weakest possible Democratic opponent and went to considerable trouble to help him get the nomination. Killing him would have undone all of Donald Segretti's sabotage.

THIRD-RATE BURGLARY ATTEMPT THEORY

Proponent: Ronald Ziegler, for Richard Nixon.

Thesis: The Watergate break-in was just



one of 12,801 burglaries committed in Washington in 1972. A third-rate burglary at that.

Selling Point: There has been no evidence that the Watergate break-in was a first-rate or even a second-rate burglary attempt.

Drawback: The burglars had more money on them than was to be found on the premises they were burgling.

Disposition of Theory: Inoperative.

Nixon Was Framed

RIGHT-WING PLOT THEORY

Proponents: Leonid Brezhnev and Soviet journalists.

Thesis: Watergate is the work of a right-wing conspiracy aimed at destroying the American-Soviet détente. Objecting to the S.A.L.T. talks, the Vietnam peace and wheat deals, a small group of right-wing saboteurs and revanchists purposely botched the Watergate mission to devastate Nixon. One Soviet journalist, based in New York, was quoted as saying, "I'll always remember what Jim Garrison said. He said that they got Kennedy, and if another American President ever tries to turn the United States away from militarism, they'll get him too." Ergo, Nixon's plight.

Selling Points: All the Watergate conspirators, and especially Hunt and Liddy, were right-wingers. The Dean testimony was originally scheduled at the same time as the Brezhnev visit to Washington; presumably, Dean was in on the conspiracy. Nixon's power to deal with other nations has indeed been hamstrung by Watergate, according to American and European newspapers.

Finally, Vice-President Agnew, Nixon's putative replacement, would be less likely to continue the détente.

Drawbacks: Watergate could have blown up before the election, putting the pro-détente McGovern in the White House. (A variation on this theory, bandied about in Shanghai, holds that Chiang and the Formosa lobby engineered Watergate to torpedo the Sino-American entente.)

SEVEN DAYS IN MAY THEORY

Proponents: Lewis Chester, Cal McCrystal and Stephen Aris of the *Sunday Times* of London.

Thesis: The C.I.A. engineered Watergate and exposed the cover-up. "Many of the more sophisticated C.I.A. men," says the *Times*, "felt that the agency was in danger of being emasculated by the President." The C.I.A. had displeased Nixon: e.g., by not coming up with proof that "external culprits" could be blamed for campus unrest. For this and other failures, Nixon was setting up his own independent security agency that would come up with answers he liked. As McCord testified: "The White House had for some time been trying to get political control over the C.I.A. assessments and estimates in order to make them conform to White House policy." Suspecting a putsch against the C.I.A., the Agency staged its counter-coup with McCord, once described by Allen Dulles as "my top man," masterminding "Operation Watergate."

Selling Points: All the Watergate operatives had C.I.A. connections. Martinez even kept a diary for the C.I.A. Evidence of White House-C.I.A. conflict can be seen in the banishment of Richard Helms to Iran and the reorganization of the Agency, the investigation by Howard Hunt of the C.I.A.'s role in the murder of Diem (the interview with Colonel Conein) and the forging of the Diem cables. This theory would also explain why Dean felt he could ask the C.I.A. to come up with money for the defendants. It would also explain why the C.I.A. didn't help in the cover-up, but instead sent politically damaging photographs of Liddy outside the Ellsberg burglary to the Department of Justice.

Drawback: If the C.I.A. were attempting a coup against him, why would Nixon try to cover up for them?

DEMOCRATIC FRAME-UP THEORY

Proponents: Spiro Agnew, Clark MacGregor, Martha Mitchell, minority counsel Fred Thompson.

Thesis: Watergate was masterminded by Nixon's political opponents to weaken his chances for reelection. Agnew posited in September of 1972 that "Someone set up these people and encouraged them to undertake this caper to embarrass them and embarrass the Republican Party." The victim of the burglary, Larry O'Brien, was even suggested as the possible perpetrator



of it, Alfred Baldwin—who served as lookout across the street—was mentioned as the double agent. Martha Mitchell thought McCord was the one.

Selling Points: This would explain why they were so easily caught—the taping and

retaping of the door, the too-late warning that the police were coming. It gave the Democrats their only universally acceptable campaign issue. It allowed the hard-pressed Democrats to institute a multi-million-dollar law suit against the C.R.P.

Drawbacks: Such brilliant planning is hardly consistent with the rest of the Democratic campaign and anyhow, the Democrats failed to make much use of Watergate as an issue. The Republicans offered to settle the suit, indicating they didn't believe it was a Democratic plot. Nor does this theory explain why White House officials made payments to the conspirators, offered executive clemency and coordinated a cover-up.

Disposition of Theory: Inoperative.

THE BREMER CONNECTION THEORY

Proponent: Bernard Fensterwald.

Thesis: E. Howard Hunt knows something about the shooting of George Wallace that the Administration does not want revealed. Hunt has threatened to tell all he knows, and this is why he blackmailed the White House and obtained a promise of clemency.

Selling Points: This theory explains the cover-up. Fensterwald, who is James McCord's lawyer, is the head of the Committee to Investigate Assassinations (C.I.A.). He claims that investigators were tracing the 1972 movements of accused political saboteur Donald Segretti, and the trail had led them to Milwaukee, Bremer's hometown.

According to Hunt, Charles Colson called him and told him to go to Milwaukee and break into Bremer's apartment to look for left-wing literature or other materials that would point blame toward the Democrats.

Drawbacks: There was a primary going on in Wisconsin in 1972, which may be the sole reason that Donald Segretti was in Milwaukee. Further, it has been established that Bremer stalked candidates Humphrey and Nixon as well as Wallace.

How Could Such a Dumb Thing Happen?

ATMOSPHERE THEORY

Proponents: Jeb Stuart Magruder, John Dean, Walter Hickel, Richard Nixon.

Thesis: Watergate, the cover-up, and other illegal acts were natural products of a mood of lawbreaking within the White House. Says former Interior Secretary Hickel, the President "created the atmosphere and the attitude for it to happen."

Selling Points: Magruder testified that White House staff members became "inured" to breaking the law. John Dean described the staff's eagerness to smooth the way for Nixon even if it meant hiring "thugs" or doing other illegal things to get the job done. The cover-up, said Dean, became "a way of life."

The President himself gave this theory a boost when he wrote in his May 22 statement: "To the extent I may in any way have contributed to the climate in which [the break-in and cover-up] took place, I did not intend to."

Drawback: John Ehrlichman testified to the moral rectitude of the White House staff.

ZEAL THEORY

Proponent: Richard M. Nixon.

Thesis: Watergate and the cover-up were planned and carried out by wild-eyed Nixon aides "whose zeal exceeded their judgment... in a cause they deeply be-



lieved to be right," namely the reelection of Richard Nixon.

Selling Point: Charles Colson's declaration that he would walk over his grandmother to reelect Nixon does suggest excessive zeal.

Drawback: The zeal was short-lived, particularly when the facts started to come out and the zealots began accusing each other and making demands of up to a million dollars.

LONER THEORY

Proponent: Senator Barry Goldwater.

Thesis: The underlying reason that Watergate happened was that Richard Nixon has "never been able to be one of the boys." As Senator Barry Goldwater told Dan Rather of CBS, "His biggest weakness has been the fact that he's lived his life by himself. He's never let his hair down to friends. He's never asked enough friends what he's done wrong or what he's done right. So I'd have to say that's his problem."

Selling Point: Nixon rarely meets with his Cabinet or the press.

Drawback: H. R. Haldeman, the President's top aide, regularly saw Nixon for over an hour every day.

THE DISNEYLAND THEORY

Proponents: Eric Sevareid, Michael Davie, Rebecca West.

Thesis: The origins of Watergate can be explained by the peculiar nature of South-



ern California, out of which Nixon and his men emerged.

Selling Points: The following are from Southern California: Haldeman, Kalmbach, Porter, Ziegler (former Disneyland guide), Chapin, and Segretti. According to Dean, the cover-up was planned at La Costa, almost halfway between Disneyland and San Clemente.

Drawbacks: The following are not from Southern California: Dean, Mitchell, Magruder, Ehrlichman, Colson, Liddy, Hunt, LaRue, and Stans.

THE MEMOIR THEORY

Proponent: Victor Navasky.

Thesis: Watergate exploded into a scandal because the participants wanted to inflate the value of their memoirs.

Selling Points: McCord has already written a book on Watergate and Hunt (author of forty-six spy books) has received several offers. Martha Mitchell has told reporters, "My husband has told me I could get two million for anything I wrote." John Dean, a previously anonymous White House figure, has achieved national celebrity status by writing a 245-page memoir of Watergate. Frank Sturgis, one of the Caribbean mercenaries caught in the Watergate, has opened bidding on his book.

Drawback: It is illegal to write books for profit in prison.

THE NIXON LIBRARY THEORY

Proponent: Anonymous White House source.

Thesis: The taps on the Democratic National Party at Watergate, like those in the Oval Office of the President himself, were part of an "oral history" program destined for the Nixon library.

Selling Point: It explains the self-bugging of the White House.

Drawback: It doesn't explain why C.R.P. paid for the buggings.

JUDAS GOAT THEORY

Proponents: Spiro Agnew, Sherman Skolnick and Carl Oglesby.

Thesis: One member of the Watergate infiltrators was a double agent who led the others into a carefully prepared trap. Hunt's lawyer is quoted by Sherman Skolnick as saying, "Some of the defendants wanted to get caught... they suckered Nixon into a plan which they led him to believe was his plan."

Selling Point: It explains the incredible bungle at Watergate.

Drawback: If there was a double agent, why hasn't Nixon revealed it: entrapment is a valid defense.

Grand Schemes, Tips of Icebergs

YANKEES VS. COWBOYS THEORY

Proponents: Carl Oglesby (*The Boston Phoenix*), Kirk Sale (*The New York Review of Books*), Mae Brussell (*The Realist*).

Thesis: Watergate is merely one episode in a titanic subterranean war between two competing elites, known in the underground press as the "Yankees" and the

"Cowboys." The Yankees represent Eastern Establishment, old-line interests, starting the Kennedys, the Rockefellers, the liberal wing of the C.I.A., the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Bilderberg Group. The Cowboys represent the new-moneyed, self-made tycoons in oil, mutual funds and missiles, including Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, Howard Hughes, Aristotle Onassis and Frank Sinatra. Since World War II, both elites have been gripped in a death struggle for control of defense contracts, national resources and the government.

Up to 1963, the Yankees retained control through Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower (remember his warning about the military-industrial complex!) and John Kennedy. The Cowboys took over after the assassination and have held the initiative until Watergate.

According to Oglesby, who gives the most coherent version of the theory, when Bobby Kennedy was assassinated, the Yankee managers realized the Cowboys were playing tough, and adopted a new game plan—The Watergate Option. Yankee agents were thereupon infiltrated into the Cowboys' secret police to set a trap at Watergate which worked.

Oglesby theorizes that James McCord was a Yankee master spy, tapped for the big job by someone high in Yankee councils. McCord then taped and re-taped the



Watergate doors, setting up the bust in hopes of driving the Cowboys from power and "restoring the Yankee dynasty under young Prince Ted."

Selling Points: McCord did place the tapes, and Martinez says McCord was the one who insisted on going ahead with the bugging after they'd noticed the tapes had been removed.

This theory explains why the cover-up failed: the Yankees control important elements of the F.B.I., C.I.A., Justice Department, *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, etc. It also fits in with the radical critique of history, which assumes that momentous economic issues underlie the turning points in history.

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Drawbacks: If McCord's job was to make sure they were caught inside the Watergate, why didn't he do it during the first break-in, on May 30? Also, if Nixon resigns or is impeached, another Cowboy, Agnew, takes over. So what is gained?

THE EXECUTIVE THEORY

Proponent: Daniel Ellsberg.

Thesis: The burglary of the Beverly Hills psychiatrist and the other work of the Hunt-Liddy team, including presumably Watergate, are all part and parcel of an "executive coup" plotted in the White House to "change our form of government to one dominated by a Police State."

Selling Point: This would explain why the eighty-four White House aides were deployed to the key agencies of the government.

Drawbacks: It was the executive agencies of the federal government which, in fact, exposed Watergate: the Washington police made the arrests; Kleindienst refused to have the Department of Justice conceal the involvement of McCord and C.R.P. in the burglary; the F.B.I. traced the money used in Watergate to C.R.P.; the C.I.A. refused to intervene to cover up the investigation.

TIT FOR TAT THEORY

Proponents: H. R. Haldeman, Dick Tuck, Richard Nixon, Dwight Chapin.

Thesis: Watergate is the latest in a series of tricks the Republicans and Democrats have played on each other. As Richard Nixon said, "Both our great parties have been guilty of such tactics."

Selling Points: Dick Tuck, a Democratic idea man, long considered the champion campaign prankster, stepped forward to accept some of the responsibility for Watergate. It was Tuck who arranged for Barry Goldwater's train to roll out of the station while he was still speaking from it.

In the midst of Watergate hearings, H. R. Haldeman encountered Dick Tuck in a corridor on Capitol Hill and said, "You started all this, Tuck."

Drawback: As Richard A. Moore testified, Dwight Chapin thought up the Tuck angle as a phony cover-up story.

THE MIDWAY CRASH THEORY

Proponent: Sherman Skolnick.

Thesis: The crash of a United Airlines 737 at Chicago's Midway Airport last December was part of an increasingly desperate and complex effort to cover-up the Watergate.

Among the 45 people who died were the wife of E. Howard Hunt and CBS News correspondent Michele Clark.

Sherman Skolnick, an independent investigator in Chicago, claims that Mrs. Hunt was carrying more than two million dollars she'd "ripped off" from the C.R.P.—not merely the \$10,000 she was reported to have had—and that she had boarded the plane with Michele Clark to whom she was going to pour out the whole truth about Watergate.

Skolnick further claims that men also killed in the crash had been carrying papers highly incriminating to John Mitchell, involving conflict of interest in an anti-trust gas pipeline case. These papers were allegedly placed on the underworld mar-

ket (at a going price of \$5,000,000) two days after the crash, and were being offered by members of the "Sarelli mob" which had carried out the 737 hit in the first place.

Selling Points: Skolnick, who brought the original charges against Otto Kerner that resulted in the ex-Governor's bribery and extortion conviction, gives the following evidence: Mrs. Hunt had passed the word that her husband had enough evidence to "impeach the President," and that he could "blow the White House out of the water." Medical examiners found cyanide present in seven of the crash victims including Mrs. Hunt, Miss Clark, the two men carrying the Mitchell papers, and the pilot. Small pinpricks were found in the plane's altimeter, possibly explaining why the plane was 200 feet below course before the crash. One of the flight recorders, Skolnick reported, had unaccountably



malfunctioned just before the crash, and the other was lost until it mysteriously turned up some hours later.

Drawbacks: Plastic seat covers give off cyanide gas when they burn, which often accounts for the presence of cyanide in crash victims, according to the F.A.A.

The F.A.A. reported no pinpricks in the altimeter.

Neither flight recorder was lost, although one did malfunction.

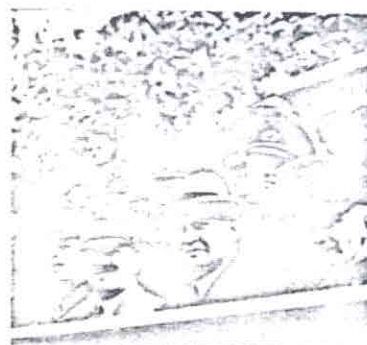
United Airlines says that Mrs. Hunt was in first class and Miss Clark was in coach, which would have made an interview difficult.

THE AMERICAN REICH THEORY

Proponents: James McCord, Arthur Schlesinger, Senators George McGovern, Edmund Muskie, J. William Fulbright, Sam Ervin, and Mae Brussell.

Thesis: Watergate was but one manifestation of an attempt to set up a dictatorship.

Selling Points: One can find similarities between Hitler's reich and tactics used by the Nixon Administration. Mass arrests in Washington in 1970 (Gestapo harassment); the plan to fire-bomb the Brookings Institution (Reichstag fire); antagonism toward left-wing elements at home but friendliness toward Soviet and Chinese Communists (Hitler-Stalin pact); attacks on press and prior restraint in Pentagon Papers case (abolition of all anti-Hitler



press); the use of federal intelligence machinery for political purposes (the S.S.—Geheime Staats-Polizei); the plumbers (S.S.). Enemy lists, sabotage, and the Watergate bugging are more consistent with totalitarian regimes than democratic ones.

Drawback: The men in jail—or under indictment—are former members of the Nixon organization.

MURDERVILLE THEORY

Proponents: Mae Brussell, Louis Tackwood.

Thesis: Watergate is just one visible sign of a gigantic plot by the C.I.A.-military-industrial complex to take over the country. Using information in Tackwood's book, *The Glass House Tapes*, Mrs. Brussell posits that the team caught at Watergate had been making arrangements to foment violence at the Republican Convention in 1972 so that Nixon could declare martial law and cancel the elections. The same C.I.A. people who directed and funded the Greek coup d'état are deeply involved in this one, she says.

The grand Murderville conspiracy theory is relentlessly all-inclusive: it takes in not only all the political assassinations but also the deaths of Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, the Manson slayings (all staged to discredit the youth movement), Chappaquiddick (Teddy wasn't even in the car; he was drugged), J. Edgar Hoover's death (murder), and so forth.

Mrs. Brussell is fast becoming America's leading conspiracy theorist, already championed by the underground. Each week, she broadcasts *Dialogue: Assassination* over KLRB in Carmel, California, and every two weeks she gets out her *Conspiracy Newsletter*. A prodigious researcher, she cross-referenced the twenty-six volumes of the Warren Report, and now she reads eight newspapers a day and keeps a growing file on Watergate (600 subject cards already). On July 11, 1972, only three weeks after Watergate, she completed a long article for *The Realist*, revealing the detailed and complex backgrounds of all those involved in Watergate. She was way ahead of her time.

Selling Points: None.

Drawback: For all of Mae Brussell's conspiracies to be true, more than half the country would have to be in on them, thus rendering them more or less democratic.

THE MACHIAVELLIAN POLITICS THEORY

Proponent: The New York Times.

Thesis: The bugging of Watergate was

part of a broader plot to defeat the stronger Democratic candidates—and notably Muskie—and trick the Democrats into nominating their weakest candidate, McGovern.

Selling Point: Donald Segretti, a saboteur paid by Herbert Kalmbach, the President's personal lawyer, has been indicted for attempting to blacken Muskie and Humphrey in the Florida primary.

With the hindsight of history, this theory would provide a rational motive for Watergate. It would tie together neatly all the other Republican clandestine activities that Porter testified about and would explain all the adverse happenings which confused and divided the Democrats (Muskie's tears in New Hampshire, Eagleton, etc.). (See Bremer Connection Theory.)

Drawback: Watergate was not bugged until late May, after all the primaries except California. Muskie had withdrawn from the race in April, and McGovern was already considered by the press to be the nominee.

THE HIDDEN GOVERNMENT THEORY

Proponent: Jim Garrison.

Thesis: A second government, "essentially Fascist in character," seized control of America by killing President Kennedy in 1963 and has since "succeeded in effectively influencing the course of the traditional government through its chosen representatives and business agents: Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon—whose previous loyalty to the warfare sector of the traditional government had been well demonstrated before the eliminations were initiated which made them Chief Executives." Watergate revealed the tenacles of the hidden government.

Selling Point: The White House was bugged because the hidden government didn't trust Nixon.

Drawback: No evidence.

But It Didn't Really Happen

ACCIDENTAL COVER-UP THEORY

Proponent: Richard M. Nixon.

Thesis: Richard Nixon had no prior knowledge of the Watergate break-in, but he may have unintentionally set off the cover-up when he told the Justice Department, the F.B.I., the C.I.A., and his own staff to limit their investigations so as not to reveal any covert national-security operations unrelated to Watergate.

Shortly after the break-in, Nixon learned that several of those involved were former C.I.A. operatives and members of the White House plumbers unit. Nixon feared that unrestricted investigation of Watergate would have imperiled the secrecy of the legal covert operations of both the C.I.A. and the plumbers. So he instructed Assistant Attorney General Petersen to "stay out of national-security matters" while investigating Watergate. Also he passed the word to Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Kleindienst, Deputy C.I.A.

Director Vernon Walters, and the F.B.I.'s L. Patrick Gray.

But they went Nixon one better. They attempted to cover up not only national-security operations but Watergate as well. "It now appears," the President said on May 22, "that there were persons who may have gone beyond my directives and sought to expand my efforts to protect the national-security operations..."

Selling Point: This theory explains some of the more overt attempts at cover-up: White House interference in the F.B.I. investigation, Ehrlichman's telling Dean to take the papers found in Hunt's safe and "deep six" them into the Potomac, the offer of executive clemency and money to keep Hunt quiet about his other secret activities.

Drawback: No evidence has been given which proves that national security was jeopardized.

THE WASHINGTON POST THEORY

Proponent: Katharine Graham, publisher of *The Washington Post*.

Thesis: In a plot to discredit *The Washington Post*, false information was being fed to unsuspecting *Post* reporters in the Fall of 1972, leading them to write stories connecting Watergate to the White House; these stories would later be disproved, thus severely damaging the credibility of *The Post*.

Selling Point: There is no doubt that a mutual antagonism between *The Post* and the Nixon Administration did exist, and the White House was particularly enraged at *The Post* for publishing the Pentagon Papers. Furthermore, last fall John Mitchell ominously warned *Post* reporter Carl Bernstein that "Katie Graham is going to get her tit caught in a big fat wringer."

In October, 1972, *The Post* ran a "source" story about five men authorized to approve payments from Nixon's secret espionage fund. Campaign chief Clark MacGregor called the story "malicious... unsubstantiated" and said the Watergate-White House link was "a charge which *The Post* knows—and half a dozen investigations have found—to be false." Later, it turned out no such testimony had been presented to the grand jury.

Drawback: The story was true anyway.

Disposition of Theory: Inoperative.

THE VENDETTA THEORY

Proponent: Senator Carl T. Curtis (R., Nebraska).

Thesis: Anti-Nixon conspirators, unable to bear his victory last November, are deliberately distorting the facts around Watergate to malign him. Senator Curtis explains, "Watergate has brought into being a determined and militant coalition, whose object is not justice, but rather 'to get Nixon.' These include (1) the Nixon-haters, (2) a group of politico-sadists, (3) a small segment of newsmen who prefer political propaganda over objective reporting, (4) a few extreme partisans, (5) those politicians willing to exploit any issue for personal publicity."

Selling Point: This would explain the persistence of the issue over the past sixteen months.

Drawback: See Manufactured-Issue Theory.

MANUFACTURED-ISSUE THEORY

Proponents: Ron Ziegler; Spiro Agnew; *First Monday* (the newsletter of the Republican National Party); the Burlington (Vermont) *Free Press*.

Thesis: Watergate has been purposely made into a national issue by the press, which has transmogrified a simple "caper" into an enormity of national significance.

Selling Point: Press circulation has risen dramatically since the Watergate revelations. Journalists have found it a profitable lode to mine.

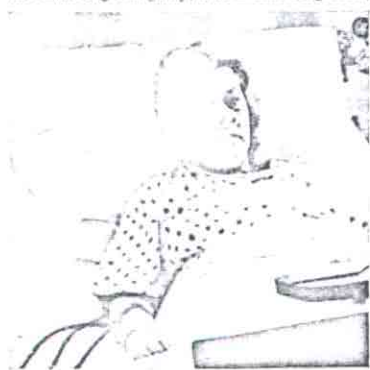
Drawback: Nixon himself has demonstrated the importance of Watergate by replacing virtually the entire White House staff (Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Dean, Chapin, Colson), two Cabinet officers, and the acting F.B.I. director. (Former Cabinet officers, Mitchell and Stans, were also indicted in a related matter.)

HORROR STORIES COVER-UP THEORY

Proponent: John Mitchell.

Thesis: Mitchell permitted the cover-up because he feared the White House horror stories would be exposed if the truth about Watergate ever got out. So, the cover-up was not exactly a cover-up of Watergate. (See Accidental Cover-Up Theory.)

Selling Point: The horror stories included the Ellsberg burglary, the Diem forgeries,



kidnapping of Dita Beard, fire-bombing of Brookings Institution, wiretapping of newsmen, etc., and they were pretty hair-raising.

Drawback: Why cover up the horror stories?

Retort: To reelect Nixon.

Re-retort: Why?

ALL-AMERICAN THEORY

Proponents: John Wayne, Ronald Reagan, Robert F. Beaver.

Thesis: Watergate was not a crime. "Political espionage is as American as apple pie," according to Robert F. Beaver (treasurer of the elite Lincoln Club in Orange County). Watergate was, in the words of John Wayne, "a damned panty raid" carried out by people Ronald Reagan defended as "not criminals at heart."

Selling Point: None.

Drawbacks: There have already been seven convictions.