

Breaking From the Gate

He took one look at the scene below and fled to the bathroom. In the half-darkness of a summer night the street seemed to be filled with motorcycles, squad cars, paddy wagons and men running in all directions. In the middle of the melee were his men being led away ... Emerging from the bathroom, he made straight for the white phone by the bedside. "I've got to call a lawyer ... They've had it."

Another flashy thriller by Watergate defendant E. Howard Hunt? Not exactly. This time Hunt serves as subject, not as author. The melodramatic passage, describing how Hunt witnessed the Watergate bunglers being bagged by police, comes from "Watergate," a brash new narrative by the London Sunday Times' "Insight Team."

Out last week, "Watergate" is the third and gaudiest entry in a publishing fad that threatens to rival the current booms in diet books and can-do sex manuals. The networks may be taking note of polls showing growing public antipathy to the investigation, but no such

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anxiety has slowed the presses. By 1974, no fewer than 28 Watergate tomes will clog the bookstores. Their purveyors range from The Washington Post's Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein through McGovern campaign director Frank Mankiewicz to Timothy James, a suburban New York high-school student whose 45-page "Watergate Scorecard" recently appeared on Manhattan newsstands. Included in the ink flood are chronologies, parodies, analyses, indignations, justifications (by James McCord and Jeb Magruder) and a Talmudic volume from The New York Times, which Bantam Books editor Marc Jaffe modestly assesses as "a basic book for the long term that will be referred to in law schools and college courses."

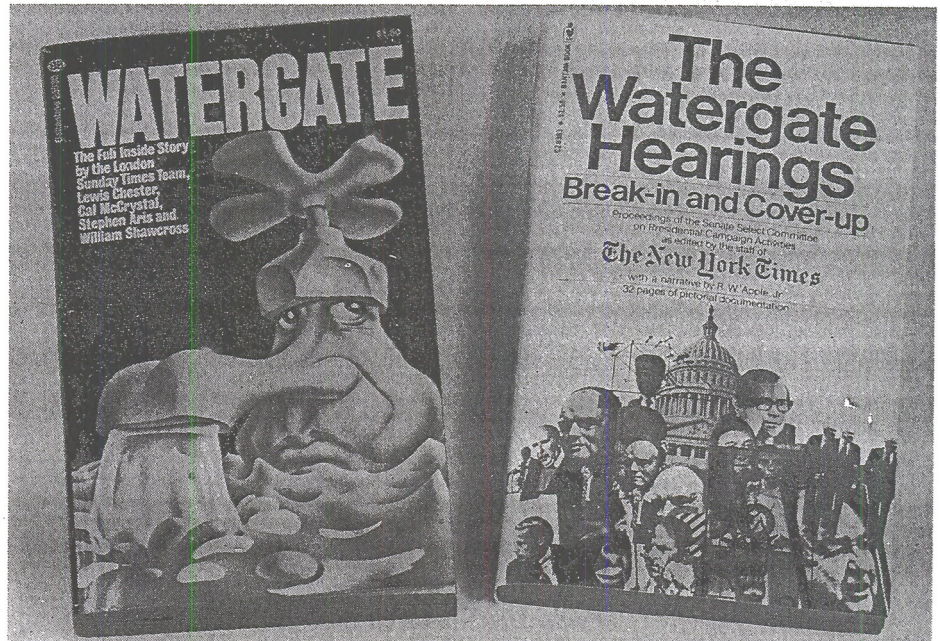
It was the looming New York Times book, in fact, that catapulted The Sunday Times's team into such hasty print. "It was important that we come out first," explains Lewis Chester, editor of the four-man London squad. "We're the cheeky outsiders. The outsider has to nip in on time or else everyone will read the hometown paper's book." Hunkered down in a loft in New York's Chinatown between stints of Washington interviews, the Insighters toiled twelve-hour days for twelve weeks to produce the 267-page Ballantine paperback. Its approach is aptly symbolized by its cover design—a grotesque caricature of President Nixon as a water faucet whose nose disgorges the flood of Watergate. "Our point of view is less constrained than that of The New York Times," concedes William Shawcross, who covered the Senate hearings for the team. "We've tried to make Watergate part of a much larger canvas. Anyone familiar with Nixon's policy in Cambodia and Vietnam will find Watergate familiar. It is just another dirty trick."

Nevertheless, the book does take an

occasional swipe at the other side—notably the Washington press corps. The White House "rehearsal" group for press briefings last fall, note the Insighters, hammered spokesman Ron Ziegler with far tougher questions than those submitted by reporters at the briefings themselves. Despite its somewhat overwrought tone, "Watergate" is a highly readable unraveling of the threads in "the mantle of sanctimony" that made the 1972 election—at least to a dyspeptic British eye—"the most corrupt in American history."

Cover-up: Unlike "Hoax," the Insight team's dissection of the Clifford Irving scandal, the book breaks no new factual ground. But then neither does the New York Times entry, which Bantam will publish next month. "Our major new contribution is a Watergate chronology," explains Gerald Gold, general editor of the 900-page "The Watergate Hearings: Break-in and Cover-up." "Ours is the only one you can go through day by day to see who was doing what to whom." The going will not be easy: there will be 520 pages of transcripts of testimony; profiles of witnesses, senators and counsels; key documents placed in evidence; and most of President Nixon's public Watergate statements.

To stitch it all together, New York Times White House correspondent R.W. Apple Jr. has contributed a 30,000-word narrative. "I am not standing here as an omniscient critic and saying, 'Here is where we went wrong, folks,'" emphasizes Apple. "The objective of the book is to provide a useful reference tool. I hope it will be unpretentious and competent." Undoubtedly it will, but whether even the most politically involved citizen—after absorbing 181 hours of the Watergate hearings on TV—will want to slog through it all again in print remains anything but perfectly clear.



The ink flood: From London's Sunday Times and The New York Times