

NYT 6/7/73
Warning Signals . . .

"With hindsight, it is apparent that I should have given more heed to the warning signals I received along the way about a Watergate cover-up, and less to the reassurances," President Nixon stated on May 22. Noteworthy among White House pronouncements on Watergate, this is a statement that is growing ever truer as the disclosures mount.

The White House has now confirmed that Mr. Nixon met numerous times early this year to discuss the Watergate morass with his former counsel, John W. Dean 3d. Another former aide, John D. Ehrlichman, has given sworn testimony about his many contacts with Watergate figures, including passing references to discussions with the President on the subject. He claimed that throughout February, Mr. Nixon was unable to get a coherent report of the Watergate matter "in its broadest aspects" from Mr. Dean.

Yet the President told the American people in his April 30 television speech: "I discounted the stories in the press that appeared to implicate members of my Administration or other officials of the campaign committee. Until March of this year, I remained convinced that the denials were true and that the charges of involvement by members of the White House staff were false."

In other words, in all these discussions over many weeks and months, nothing was said that seriously aroused Presidential suspicions. But by Mr. Nixon's own accounts, there were in-house grounds for disquiet long before that—even if one ignored the newspaper stories day after day, as Mr. Nixon apparently chose to do.

On July 1, 1972, just two weeks after the fateful burglary, Mr. Nixon's trusted campaign manager and confidant, John N. Mitchell, abruptly resigned. Did the President never wonder why? Even if, according to versions now current, Watergate was not mentioned when the two men discussed the former Attorney General's withdrawal, did Mr. Nixon not feel it worthwhile to look discreetly for a possible connection? On July 6, the acting director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation informed the President personally that "the matter of Watergate might lead higher."

When, subsequently, the President admitted that "unethical, as well as illegal, activities took place in the course of the campaign," he stated "none of these took place with my specific approval or knowledge." Perhaps he should explain activities which may have occurred with his "non-specific" approval or knowledge.

A few weeks ago The Times published a letter from a reader with an assessment which is standing up well to the test of time and new disclosures: "Either [Mr. Nixon] knew what was happening and is therefore responsible, or he did not know and is therefore irresponsible."