

# In 2 Years, Watergate

## At End, Nixon Had Lost Confidence of Populace

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WASHINGTON, Aug 8 — It was a tragedy in three acts.

In 1972, Richard M. Nixon—a man who had often failed, who had been derided by the fashionable and the intellectual, who had made and remade himself into a winner—arrived at the pinnacle of his career. In 1973, he found himself besieged by his enemies, forced onto the defensive. And in 1974, he fell from power, humiliated as no predecessor has ever been.

Almost forgotten, by the time Mr. Nixon tendered his resignation, were his days of glory only two years ago, when he began dismantling the cold war that had dominated American politics for a quarter-century, with his dramatic journeys to Peking and Moscow and the signing of the first limitation on the deadly nuclear arms race. Almost forgotten were his successes in ending American involvement in the bitterly divisive Vietnam war and in halting the draft.

Gone was the sweeping mandate Mr. Nixon had won from the American electorate in November, 1972, when he carried 49 states (all but Massachusetts plus the District of Columbia with the help of what he liked to call the "silent majority"—the middle-class Americans of the suburbs and small towns and farms. Gone were the dreams of an historic realignment that would make the Republicans the majority party by stripping blue-collar workers and Southerners from Franklin D. Roosevelt's coalition.

### Felled by Watergate Scandal

By the end, Mr. Nixon had lost the confidence of the populace that had voted overwhelmingly to give him a second term, his "approval rating" in the polls plunging from well over 65 per cent in 1972 to 25 per cent recently. He had lost the confidence of newspapers that had always supported him, of the professional politicians who had always considered him one of their own, and he had lost even some of his old friends.

He had been brought low by the Watergate scandal and the whole galaxy of ancillary horrors—by the participation of his closest associates in them, by his own protracted efforts to explain them away and, finally, by his public admission that he had been an early participant in efforts to conceal the facts of Watergate. But even before this damaging admission, most of the American people had concluded that he was not the kind of man they wanted to lead them, and he was left increasingly alone in the White House, a leader who had squandered his trust.

Scarcely had Mr. Nixon taken the oath of office for his second term when the Watergate scandals, at most a minor irritant in June, 1972, blew apart his carefully contrived world. One revelation piled on another. The White House responses swung erratically from defense of the President's aides to their resignations.

Each time, the explanations

and speeches were advertised as the final word; each time, they raised more questions than they answered. Ultimately, when it seemed that he might be ejected from office through impeachment and conviction, when it seemed that he might drag down the Republican party with him, he ended the agony with the resignation so many had demanded.

Those demands had swelled to floodtide in recent days with a series of setbacks for the President's case. On July 24, the United States Supreme Court ruled, 8 to 0, that he could not withhold 64 crucial tapes from the special Watergate prosecutor. On the same day, the House Judiciary Committee began the debate that was to generate three articles of impeachment against Mr. Nixon, charging obstruction of justice, abuse of power and the withholding of evidence.

But the final blow to the President's support was administered by Mr. Nixon himself. Aware that damaging tapes would ultimately be made public, the President admitted publicly that he had ordered a halt to the investigation of the Watergate break-in only six days after it occurred, and had kept evidence of this from his lawyers and the Judiciary Committee's impeachment inquiry. With these acknowledgements, virtually all support for Mr. Nixon on Capitol Hill vanished overnight.

Mr. Nixon's downfall grew out of the nature of the man. Secretive, suspicious, a compulsive loner, he surrounded himself with men of similar bent.

He fostered what John W. Dean 3d, once his White House counsel, later termed "a climate of excessive concern over the political impact of demonstrations, excessive concern over leaks and insatiable appetite for political intelligence, all coupled with a do-it-yourself White House staff, regardless of law." That led to Watergate and other excesses, and to a frenzied effort to hide the truth about them.

### The Fielding Break-In

Some of the seeds were sown even before 1972. On the night of Sept. 3, 1971, a team of burglars led by E. Howard Hunt Jr., a former Central Intelligence Agency operative, broke into the office of Dr. Lewis Fielding, a psychiatrist who had treated Dr. Daniel Ellsberg, the man who turned over the Pentagon papers to newspapers. Mr. Hunt was on the White House payroll, part of an organization known as the Plumbers, because their job was to stop leaks.

But it was in 1972 that most of the damage was done. Corporations such as American Airlines, the 3M Company, Goodyear Tire and Rubber and Gulf Oil were persuaded to make illegal campaign contributions.

A political espionage and dirty tricks operation was set in motion under a young California lawyer named Donald H. Segretti. And, on June 17, a team of burglars led by James W. McCord Jr., also a veteran

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# Scandal Brought Down President Who



United Press International

Mr. Nixon and Mr. Agnew after being nominated at Republican National Convention, Oct. 22, 1972, in Miami Beach.

clandestine agent, broke into the Democratic National Committee's headquarters to plant listening devices. They were caught—and at that moment, there began a momentous struggle to find out precisely what had been going on in Richard Nixon's White House.

At first, the effort to limit the damage—to conceal the ties of the malefactors to the White House inner circle—seemed to be succeeding. All during the campaign, as the Democrats struggled to make Watergate into an issue that could be used against Mr. Nixon, attention remained focused on the seven men who had been indicted in the break-in. Nothing about the Fielding burglary surfaced, and there were only the vaguest hints about illegal fund-raising.

The White House clung to its assertions that no members of the staff had been involved, and the election returns seemed to suggest that the repeated denials were believed.

The American public appeared to be accepting the comment of Ronald L. Ziegler, the President's press secretary, who called the Watergate break-in a "third-rate burglary." All the while, some of the President's closest associates were arranging for payoffs to the seven original defendants in order to buy their silence.

That things began to come

apart early in 1973 was due principally to the relentless digging of a few newspaper reporters, the tough tactics of Judge John J. Sirica, who never really believed what he heard in the trial of the original seven, and the decision to talk by a few members of the conspiracy, notably Jeb Stuart Magruder and Hugh W. Sloan Jr. of the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

Too many people knew too much to preserve the cover-up after that. And as the cover-up began to unravel, other accusations were hurled at the President, many of them unrelated to Watergate itself, but all contributing to a picture of a man who had improperly used his office.

In the newspapers, in the nationally televised deliberations of the Senate Watergate committee and elsewhere, Mr. Nixon underwent a kind of trial by public opinion. The year brought him little solace; and he must have sensed that with each day, his situation became more and more difficult. Again and again he was forced to retreat. Even a bare-bones listing of the episodes suggests their cumulative force:

¶**THE FALL OF L. PATRICK GRAY 3d.** Mr. Gray was the President's choice to replace the late J. Edgar Hoover as director of the Federal Bureau of Invest-

igation. It developed at his confirmation hearings and later that he had turned over the "raw" F.B.I. files on the Watergate investigation to Mr. Dean. He had destroyed possible evidence in the case by burning it with his Christmas trash. A beaten man, he confessed: "I had a responsibility, I believe, not to permit myself to be deceived, and I failed in that responsibility." In doing so, he crippled morale at the agency and called into question Mr. Nixon's judgment in choosing him in the first place.

¶**THE ELLSBERG CASE.** On April 27, Judge W. Matthew Byrne Jr. of United States District Court in Los Angeles made public the Fielding burglary, throwing the trial of Dr. Ellsberg into disarray. The Government had belatedly informed him of the Plumbers' operation. Later, the judge disclosed that he had been approached by John D. Ehrlichman, the President's top aide for domestic affairs, and offered the directorship of the F.B.I. Still later, it came to appear that the Watergate cover-up had been plotted to prevent word of the Ellsberg burglary from leaking out. Again, the impression created was one of crudeness, insensitivity, irresponsibility, perhaps even illegality, in the highest councils of Government.

¶**OTHER OPERATIONS**

¶**AGAINST THE PRESIDENT'S FOES.** The White House, it was discovered, maintained lists of enemies, including such varied figures as Joe Namath, the New York Jets' quarterback, and Joseph Kraft, the columnist. It also placed taps on the telephones of reporters and suspect members of the White House staff, especially those who worked with Henry A. Kissinger on national security affairs.

¶**THE I.T.T. CASE.** It was alleged that the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation had pledged \$400,000 to help defray the costs of the 1972 Republican National Convention—then scheduled to be held in San Diego—in return for settlement of an antitrust suit. There were other allegations that the quid pro quo was standard operating procedure in the Nixon White House, including the "sale" of ambassadorships; a suspicious campaign contribution from Robert L. Vesco, the fugitive financier, and contributions from political action funds maintained by milk producers that were purportedly linked to a decision to raise Federal milk price supports.

¶**THE WHITE HOUSE TAPES.** It was disclosed at the Watergate hearings, almost inadvertently, that the President had secretly taped most of his personal and telephone conversa-

# Had Wide Mandate

tions at the White House and at the Executive Office Building—including most of the discussions about Watergate. The disclosure hurt Mr. Nixon first because the taping operation seemed shifty and unfair to many Americans, and second because it set off a protracted struggle for the tapes themselves between the White House and investigative agencies.

The President ultimately lost the fight over these tapes, and the result proved fatal for his Administration. A huge batch of edited tape transcripts made public last spring did his cause more harm than good, and the release of three more transcripts on Aug. 5—tapes that confirmed his own participation in the cover-up—provided the remaining doubters with the conclusiveness they had sought, what had come to be known as the "smoking gun" in the President's hand.

**THE "SATURDAY NIGHT MASSACRE."** On April 30, 1973, Mr. Nixon yielded to a rising clamor and appointed Elliot L. Richardson as Attorney General with the power to name a special prosecutor. Mr. Richardson chose Archibald Cox, a Harvard professor with close ties to the Kennedy family, and Mr. Cox promptly went to court with a subpoena for nine key tape recordings of White House conversations; it was the first subpoena against a President in 166 years. Mr. Nixon resisted, lost in the Federal District Court, and the appeals court, and then, on Oct. 20, 1973, ordered Mr. Cox dismissed. Both Mr. Richardson and his deputy, William D. Ruckelshaus—two men with a reputation for moderation and probity—refused to carry out the order and quit. The action loosed a firestorm of criticism, serious impeachment talk was heard on Capitol Hill for the first time, and Mr. Nixon was forced to retreat, giving up the tapes and naming a new special prosecutor, Leon Jaworski.

**THE PRESIDENT'S TAXES.** Perhaps nothing more offended the average taxpayer than the news that Mr. Nixon—claiming huge exemptions on a donation of his Vice-Presidential papers to the National Archives, and a number of others that were considered questionable—had paid relatively low Federal income taxes in his first four years in the White House. Ultimately, in April of 1974, just as millions of Americans were preparing their 1973 returns, Mr. Nixon agreed to pay \$432,787.13 in back taxes plus interest after the Internal Revenue Service and Congressional investigators concluded that he had underpaid.

For by that time, the process of impeachment was well under way for the first time since the Reconstruction Era. Mr. Nixon had been taking one blow after another, still refusing to step down "even if hell freezes over," as one spokesman said.

His staff had been stripped, with Mr. Dean dismissed, Mr. Ehrlichman and H. R. Halde- man, the chief of staff, resigned, and all three—plus more than a dozen others—under indictment.

Even Vice President Agnew, a pliant figure during the first-term courtship of the silent majority, had added to the President's burden. He had resigned in disgrace, pleading no contest to tax fraud as a result of a series of payoffs from Maryland engineering firms.

As 1974 unfolded, the pres-

sure on Mr. Nixon to release more tapes became almost intolerable. Finally, on April 30, he surrendered a mass of heavily censored transcripts to the House Judiciary Committee, hoping with one desperate gamble to still the storm.

It didn't work. The transcripts were pock-marked with the word "unintelligible," and memories of an unexplained 18½-minute gap in an earlier tape raised suspicions. Mr. Nixon refused to supply additional tapes sought by the committee and the prosecutor. And what was on the tapes was more damaging than helpful.

If they presented no unambiguous evidence of criminal acts, as the White House maintained, they showed a President who was profane, indecisive, prolix, concerned more with saving his own skin than getting at the truth, and deeply involved in discussions about employing perjury and hush money to insulate himself from scandal.

The transcripts were among the most fascinating documents ever made public on the subject of the Presidency—and they certainly provided the most unflattering picture ever revealed of Richard Nixon.

They showed him to be a loner, confident of the loyalty of only few men, driven toward revenge against those he saw as his special enemies. Of a man described to him as a friend, he comments first with an expletive, then adds: "Nobody is a friend of ours. Let's face it."

Again, during a discussion in the fall of 1972, when his re-election was assured, he instructs Mr. Dean: "I want the most comprehensive notes on those who tried to do us in. They didn't have to do it . . . They are asking for it and they are going to get it."

But it was the release on Aug. 5 of three transcripts of Presidential conversations with Mr. Haldeman on June 23, 1972, that sealed Mr. Nixon's fate. Having turned them over to Judge Sirica under the Supreme Court's historic order, Mr. Nixon could hope for no more than to make them public along with his own interpretations of them before they became public in the course of the impending trials of his former aides.

Like the April 30 batch, these transcripts provided insights into the President's personality and views of the legal and ethical questions confronting him. But they went further, specifically showing that Mr. Nixon had ordered a halt to the Federal Bureau of Investigation inquiry into the Watergate break-in. This, coupled with his admission that he had withheld the information from his own lawyers as well as the House Judiciary Committee, was widely interpreted as a confession of guilt.

There were other damaging statements in the tapes—tough language, advice on how to "stonewall" a grand jury, plans on using the F.B.I. and the Internal Revenue Service to punish enemies, disparaging references to associates and other remarks about Jews, Negroes and other ethnic groups.

But the shock waves generated by these revelations were finally overwhelmed by the sense that history was closing in on the last days of a Presidency and that, this time, not even the gritty, never-say-die Richard Nixon could stand fast.