



Some Questions To Keep in Mind

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JOHN MITCHELL is something else. He was the President's friend, partner, campaign manager and Attorney General. He could reach Mr. Nixon without saying, "Please, Mr. Haldeman," or, "By your leave, Mr. Ehrlichman." He could talk to the President man to man and across the board.

So Mitchell is a central figure in reading the Watergate riddle. And these are some of the questions I think everybody will want to keep in mind as he testifies.

First, there are questions regarding that nearly forgotten event, the abortive break-in on Democratic headquarters back in June 1972. Mitchell himself has acknowledged that, prior to the break-in, he had three times heard the project proposed. Thus on June 17, after the burglars had been caught in the act, Mitchell was not in the dark. He knew the incident had important connections to the campaign committee and to the White House.

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SO WHAT did he then do? Did he investigate the burglary in any serious way? If he did, what did he find out? If he didn't, why didn't he? And what actually was his role in ordering the break-in?

What about telling the President then and there? Though their friendship seems to have cooled at the time, Mitchell and Mr. Nixon were certainly seeing each other. They had a talk on June 20. But about what? Why did he then resign as campaign manager on July 1?

Did the President ask Mitchell about Watergate? If he did, did Mitchell lie? If the President didn't ask, how can anybody believe his claims that he was consistently trying to get to the bottom of the affair?

A third set of questions has to do with

the domestic espionage activities carried out by the FBI when Mitchell was Attorney General and now inextricably linked with Watergate. What about the so-called national security wiretaps on White House staff members and reporters? Did Mitchell order those taps? How did he know national security was involved? Did the President tell him?

How about the break-ins and taps not conducted by the FBI? Did Mitchell order the action against the psychiatrist of Daniel Ellsberg? Or against the roommates of Mary Joe Kopechne only a few days after her death in the Chappaquiddick incident? Or on the home of this columnist? If he didn't, were those actions legal?

Where did Mitchell develop the quaint idea that he could authorize wiretaps on American citizens without court orders? Does he stand, despite a mountain of contrary evidence, by his sworn testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee on March 14, 1971, that he had no Republican Party responsibilities on that date?

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FINALLY, there pours forth a flood of questions about a Watergate cover-up. The equivalent of a cast of thousands has testified that Mitchell was deep into hush money and promises of clemency. What does he himself have to say about involvement in the elaborate plot to obstruct justice?

More interesting, how much did President Nixon know of the cover-up?

The upshot of all these questions is whether Mitchell can dispel the doubts which must be resolved before the President can expect to get out from under the black shadow of Watergate.