

# White House and Watergate: Some Questions and Answers

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There are still more questions than answers about the Watergate scandal. What follows is an attempt to suggest the often inconclusive dialogue between newsmen and the most knowledgeable sources, specifically on the matter of how high and how broadly the Nixon Administration was involved in the Watergate bugging and the ensuing cover-up.

**Q. Was President Nixon himself involved in either part of the Watergate plot?**

A. There is no charge and no evidence, direct or hearsay, that the President understood the broad reach of the Watergate conspiracy before last March 21. At his news conference on April 17, Mr. Nixon said that on March 21 he heard "serious charges" and began his own new inquiry into the case.

**Q. Has not John W. Dean 3d, the former White House counsel, said he could implicate the President in the cover-up?**

A. The issue of Newsweek out tomorrow relates two incidents that Mr. Dean is said to believe "associate" the President with the conspiracy, but both stories rest on Mr. Dean's assumptions, not the President's words.

In the first incident, Mr. Nixon is quoted as thanking his counsel for a "good job" after the Watergate indictments last August seemed to exonerate the White House staff. But the President could have meant simply that the grand jury had confirmed Mr. Dean's report, as the President's in-house investigator, that no current staff members were involved.

The second incident suggests, without direct quotes, that the President made a pretrial commitment of executive clemency to E. Howard Hunt Jr., one of the original conspirators. But Mr. Dean does not say he knows how the matter was put to the President—most particularly, whether the President was told that clemency was a condition for keeping Hunt silent.

**Q. Short of the President, how high has the conspiracy been traced?**

A. The extent of complicity in the original bugging raid is still unclear. But the investigators have recently been told by participants, whose names have not been disclosed, that the subsequent plot to present a perjured cover-up in the first Watergate investigation and trial enlisted the efforts of among others, Mr. Nixon's former Attorney General, John N. Mitchell; his personal lawyer, Herbert W. Kalmbach; his chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman; and his chief assistant for domestic affairs, John D. Ehrlichman.

**Q. Would not these men have informed the President about an operation that involved wholesale violations of law and diverted hundreds of thousands of dollars from his campaign fund?**

A. None of the Nixon inner circle have yet described what they did, much less what they told the President or when. Mr. Nixon's television address the

evening of April 30 left open the question of whether, as has been reported, some individuals tried to warn him of official wrongdoing. "Until March of this year," he said, "I remained convinced that the denials were true and that the charges of involvement by the White House staff were false."

**Q. But is it not unlikely that the President's aides would have acted independently?**

A. The evidence on this point is circumstantial. Senator Edward W. Brooke, a Massachusetts Republican, has said it is "inconceivable" that the President did not know what his closest associates were doing. Kenneth P. O'Donnell, who held Mr. Haldeman's job for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, has recalled that the Presidents he served grilled their staffs relentlessly and questioned campaign expenditures as small as \$25. Mr. Haldeman had never been known to take initiatives that the President did not want. Yet no explicit suggestion has been made that Mr. Nixon was told of the cover-up.

**Q. Has President Nixon instructed his departed aides to tell all?**

A. Not quite. In new instructions on "executive privilege" issued last Thursday, the President said that past and present aides should refuse to answer all investigators' questions about "conversations with the President, conversations among themselves [involving communications with the President] and as to Presidential papers." He has also decreed that the secrecy of national security information is still binding.

**Q. Will not these rules block a solution of the Watergate mystery?**

A. That remains to be seen. The White House explained last week that executive privilege was not a haven for illegality, since the official arts it covers could not possibly include crimes — an argument that seems to assume categorically that the President was not involved in wrongdoing. Investigators can be expected to press for abandonment, in this case, of executive privilege, a vague doctrine on which Mr. Nixon has already relaxed his once-rigid insistence.

**Q. How many members of the President's senior White House and campaign staff are clearly not involved?**

A. The two conspicuous survivors on Mr. Nixon's domestic staff, Leonard Garment, the new White House counsel, and Ronald L. Ziegler, the press secretary, are thought to be beyond suspicion of participation in the Watergate affair. Clark MacGregor, who succeeded Mr. Mitchell last fall as the Nixon campaign manager, is also thought not to have been involved. And it has not yet been hinted that Henry A. Kissinger, the President's adviser on foreign affairs, had anything to do with the plot.

**Q. Beyond the White House gates, how much of the Federal Government was involved in the Watergate bugging and related ventures?**

A. The only official involvement of a Government agency uncovered so far is that of the Central Intelligence Agency, which provided equipment, disguises and facilities to two members of the Watergate team, E. Howard Hunt Jr. and

G. Gordon Liddy, when they reportedly directed the burglary at the office of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist in 1971.

**Q. Is not the C.I.A. expressly barred from operating within the United States?**

A. Essentially yes. The law forbids the agency from exercising "police, subpoena, law-enforcement powers or internal security functions."

Some Federal officials involved in prosecuting the Watergate case believe that the C.I.A. broke the law in the Ellsberg case. But agency officials say they did not know beforehand that any burglary was being planned. The agency does have authority to protect "intelligence methods and sources from unauthorized disclosure," language that might be cited to defend the agency's interest in Dr. Ellsberg.

**Q. Is there a direct connection between the Ellsberg case burglary and the Watergate raid?**

A. As to ultimate purpose, it is not clear. The Ellsberg break-in was part of the White House effort to get personal information on the man suspected of making public the so-called Pentagon papers; the real purpose of the Watergate bugging has never been explained. But the chief personnel and their methods were common to both expeditions. Whether or not there was any further connection—a single mastermind of both events, for example—it is clear that spy tools and tactics were engaged in a domestic criminal investigation and then extended to a political campaign.

**Q. Does the C.I.A.'s involvement mean that Mr. Kissinger's National Security Council, the White House contact for most of the C.I.A.'s activities, must have known about the break-in in the Ellsberg case?**

A. Not necessarily, according to early indications. David Young, one of the men who reportedly supervised Hunt's researchers, had earlier been detached from Mr. Kissinger's staff. Preliminary interviews suggest that the White House clearance for Central Intelligence Agency aid to the Ellsberg burglars came from me, Ehrlichman, not from Mr. Kissinger.

**Q. Have not the Watergate stories involved men in the Departments of Interior, commerce and transportation, and also the Republican National Committee?**

A. Between the election and the most recent disclosures, a number of the Watergate principals were installed in, and subsequently dismissed from Federal jobs. Jeb Stuart Magruder, a deputy Nixon campaign manager went to the Commerce Department. Egil Krogh Jr. a former White House aide who has taken public responsibility for the Ellsberg burglary, was briefly the Under Secretary of Transportation. George K. Gordon was dismissed from the Interior Department two weeks ago, following reports that he organized student spies against antiwar Democrats. And Kenneth Reitz quit the Republican National Committee after he was named as Mr. Gordon's boss.