

Dean Key to Both Cover-Up, Exposure

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Without John Dean, there could not have been a Watergate cover-up. Without John Dean, the cover-up might have remained largely intact.

Dean brought more than a knowledge of the law to the role he played in the cover-up. He knew first-hand how the Justice Department worked, he was on a first-name basis with the men supervising the investigation, and he relied on bonds already established to help him perform his mission. And when he saw that mission had failed and decided to save himself, there was probably nobody who did more than Dean to destroy what he had so carefully worked to construct.

Whether he acted on his own initiative, as the White House charged later, or on orders from above, former White House counsel John W. Dean III was the most active figure in the cover-up.

"The way you've handled it, it seems to me, has been very skillful . . . putting your fingers in the dikes every time that leaks have sprung here and sprung there," Richard M. Nixon told him on Sept. 15, 1972, when the cover-up was going along swimmingly.

Later on, Nixon had cause to describe Dean as a "loose cannon," to worry "if the son-of-a-bitch had a tape recorder on him" when Dean talked with Nixon on March 21, 1973.

Nixon's fear of Dean was not without justification.

Dean did not act alone in the cover-up. By his account, he took orders from the

White House chief of staff, H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, top presidential domestic adviser John D. Ehrlichman and former Attorney General John N. Mitchell. Dean's testimony in the Watergate cover-up trial helped convict those three, along with former Assistant Attorney General Robert C. Mardian.

Herbert W. Kalmbach, who began as Nixon's personal lawyer with an obscure law practice and moved with Nixon's success to the representation of major corporations, was called in early by Dean to raise money to keep the original seven Watergate conspirators silent about what they knew. Kalmbach testified that he thought what he was doing was for "humanitarian" reasons, but he acted as though he were a spy on a secret mission.

Jeb Stuart Magruder, a cosmetics executive who caught the political bug and by his own statement lost his moral compass, also figured heavily in the cover-up and in the subsequent uncovering of it.

Like Dean, Magruder was in on the ground floor of the Watergate scandal, attending meetings with Dean and Watergate conspirator G. Gordon Liddy in Mitchell's office, where the plans for the break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters were hatched.

When the Watergate burglars were caught on June 17, 1972, Magruder fabricated part of the cover story that threw the FBI off the trail. Magruder, coached by Dean, prepared false testimony to give to the federal grand jury that investigated the break-in. And Magruder con-

tinued his perjury at the original trial in January, 1973.

Kalmbach bailed out early, in the fall of 1972, but he had a wealth of information about how the Nixon political and personal finances were handled that supported a series of indictments and convictions beyond the Watergate cover-up.

Kalmbach played a role, Magruder was important, but Dean was crucial.

Dean, according to one source familiar with the case, "was the only guy in there who understood what had to be done." Dean arranged the money payments. Dean obtained FBI files from FBI Acting Director L. Patrick Gray III after Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen and Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst had rebuffed his attempts.

"Dean gets the Dictabelts from everyone, Dean gets the memos from everyone. Dean is the White House lawyer. Dean is the man," this source said.

"He's the only man who knew how to do it, who knew what the pressure points were and who could ingratiate himself with people. And he exploited them unmercifully," the source said.

And when Dean saw that it could not last and his warnings to Nixon were unheeded, he brought the whole structure down.

Dean tipped the prosecutors to the Ellsberg break-in, providing a whole new dimension to the Watergate cover-up.

Dean revealed the administration's 1970 plan to use wiretaps, burglaries and mail searches to monitor the activities of radical groups.

Dean revealed the "enemies list" and the Nixon administration's attempts to use government agencies to punish its opponents. Dean's charges formed the basis of the investigation into Nixon's participation in the cover-up. And, finally, Dean's testimony provided the first indication that tapes of Nixon's conversations existed.

Samuel Dash, chief counsel to the Senate Watergate committee, provided this estimate of Dean's importance in a letter to U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica:

"It is enough to say that but for John Dean's testimony and the White House tapes he helped us uncover, Mr. Nixon would still be President and the trial . . . before your honor might not have taken place or would certainly have been of an entirely different nature."