

# Journalism During the Watergate Scandal

## By Olivia Hess

### Break-in at the Watergate

#### Aspects That Led To The Washington Post Investigation:

#### The Break-In

During Richard Nixon's second term a break-in occurred at Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate office complex in Washington D.C.. News quickly spread and five burglars were found guilty of the break-in. Commotion in the Washington Post office drew the attention of two Washington Post reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. Through the most intense investigative reporting ever seen at the time, these two reporters successfully connected the Nixon administration to the burglary. Further investigation of the administration and those closely connected to it led to the discovery of multiple abuses of political power by the Nixon administration. The investigative journalism during the Watergate scandal has contributed greatly to the way in which journalists in the 21st Century go about inspecting stories.

#### The Plumbers

The plumbers were originally a covert White House Special Investigations Unit, hired by Richard Nixon, to prevent the leaking of classified information to the media. However, this group turned to doing illegal activities when it began working with the Committee to Re-elect the President (CRP). The group was headed by John Erlichman; Others members included G. Gordon Liddy, who was recruited by White House Counsel John Dean to perform intelligence gathering for the CRP, E. Howard Hunt, Egil Krogh, David Young, and CIA liason John Paisley. Once the unit branched out by doing work with CRP, their work became to harass Nixon's opponents. They did this through various measures, such as wiretaps, burglaries and intercepted mail.

#### The Burglars

Five men were arrested on June 17, 1972 after being caught breaking into the Democratic National Committee Headquarters at the Watergate office complex. These five men, pictured below, were charged with attempted burglary and attempted interception of telephone and other modes of communication (1). The burglars were hired by the plumbers to carry out the break-in, which was arranged by CRP. The break-in was discussed under a project called Operation Gemstone, a operation that referred to a series of illegal acts initially suggested by G. Gordon Liddy, featured above the picture of the burglars (2). The funding for these clandestine acts was obtained by laundering money through Mexico.

1. Watergate.info, "Watergate Burglars," <http://watergate.info/burglary/burglars> (April 2, 2016)

2. *Washington and Lee Yearbook* (Lexington, VA: Washington and Lee University, 1981), 99.



G. Gordon Liddy, far left, the General Counsel to the Finance Committee of CRP (2).



Left to right: James McCord, Jr., Virgilio Gonzalez, Frank Sturgis, Eugenio Martinez, and Bernard Baker

The Watergate Burglars (1).

# The Investigation

**During the first couple months of investigative reporting, Woodward and Bernstein were strongly questioned and doubted by other newspapers. Despite these doubts, the duo continued to explore the watergate scandal.**

## The Source

On June 19, 1972, *Washington Post* journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein received information from a government official who was given the nickname "Deep Throat". During a phone call with Woodward and Bernstein, Deep Throat told the journalists that former Nixon staff member and former CIA agent Howard Hunt was undoubtedly involved in the scandal. This bit of information gave the two journalists enough leverage to call an investigation of all of the White House's activities, which significantly sped up a trial that would have otherwise been an exceptionally slow and lengthy one. Deep Throat, later revealed as W. Mark Felt, is the most famous anonymous source in American history. Felt was the number two official at the F.B.I who helped Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein bring down Richard M. Nixon. To maintain the secrecy of their source, Woodward would often take numerous taxis and walk long distances to meet with Felt in the middle of the night. Their book *All the President's Men* confirms that Felt mainly affirmed information Woodward and Bernstein received from other sources (3).



W. Mark Felt with his wife, Audrey, on NBC's "Today" show in Washington in 1978. (5)

## Failures of FBI

During the Watergate trial of G. Gordon Liddy and James McCord, Washington Post reporters Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward began looking over the exhibits and papers filed as evidence with the court. Woodward called the phone numbers listed in the address books of the burglars. One of the first people he called said, "The FBI? They never, never contacted me. I never talked to them." Woodward was appalled that the FBI had made such a fundamental investigative failure of not calling every single person listed in the books. Woodward and Bernstein wrote a long analysis of the trial, titled "Still Secret: Who Hired Spies and Why," observing that the Liddy and McCord trial is notable for "questions that were not asked, answers that were not given, witnesses who were not called to testify, and some lapses of memory by those who were" (6). At the bond hearing for Liddy and McCord after the trial, Judge John Sirica stated he hoped the proposed Senate investigation would find out what the trials did not.



Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein (4).

## Intercepted Letter

During their investigation, Woodward and Bernstein intercepted a letter written by James McCord, one of the burglars, to Judge John Sirica. In the letter McCord stated, "there was political pressure applied to the defendants to plead guilty and remain silent" (7). Throughout the letter McCord wrote that he preferred to speak with the Judge himself and not anyone in the government, whose decisions would have been affected by President Nixon (8). The discovery of this letter allowed the court system to successfully find G. Gordon Liddy guilty on accounts of conspiracy, burglary, and wiretapping Democratic headquarters.

3. Carl Bernstein, and Bob Woodward. *All the President's Men* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1974), 132.

4. Columbia Journalism Review, ed., "The Moments," Columbia Journalism Review, [http://www.cjr.org/feature/the\\_moments.php](http://www.cjr.org/feature/the_moments.php). (March 22, 2016).

5. Tim Weiner, "W. Mark Felt, Watergate Deep Throat, Dies at 95," *The New York Times*, [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/19/washington/19felt.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/19/washington/19felt.html?_r=0). (May 3, 2016).

6. Bob Woodward, and Carl Bernstein, "Still Secret - Who Hired Spies and Why," *The Washington Post*, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/still-secret---who-hired-spies-and-why/2015/09/21/24102d0a-6075-11e5-9757-e49273f05f65\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/still-secret---who-hired-spies-and-why/2015/09/21/24102d0a-6075-11e5-9757-e49273f05f65_story.html) (May 4, 2016).

7. Watergate.info, "James McCord's Letter to Judge John Sirica," <http://watergate.info/1973/03/19/mccord-letter-to-judge-sirica.html> (January 24, 2016).

8. Ibid.

6 "there is a way to untie the watergate knot" ---cant give you any new names and "I won't" but everything points in direction of what called "offensive security." 6

remember "You don't do those 1500 interviews and not have something on your hands" it's a lot, "but please be balanced and send out men to check everything---alot of it is routine."

"these not brilliant guys" and much of Rep. intelligence-gathering activities was routine stuff --- check out everyone working for candidates---some of that reported directly to Stans or someone in "Meat shop" ---very concerned w. fund raising, check to see if any Demo out rounding up money every indication "now this is from talk and limited region report reading" that half of rep. security fund was on intelligence gathering for fund raisers

some of this was "offensive" believe to check people out and sort of "semi-black mail" to get money."

Gray has said "that Mitchell involved and knew" but what extent is unclear "things got out of hand" was favorite statement from heavies (at FBI) if Mitch. involved in any illegal "then only Pres. and Mitchell know that."

Mitchell conducted his invest for 10 days and "was going crazy---we had guys assigned to him to help" w. Rep. invest. found all sorts of new things. irony that Hunt assigned to invest. for 1/2 day---then pulled off and fired (June 18) "told to pack his desk and leave town forever." by Ehrlichman "no less a person than that."

keeps saying to check every lead " could write stories next xmas." or ~~xxxxxxx~~ well beyond that. <sup>To</sup>

\*\* four basic personnel groupings for the operation :  
 1. Hunt 2. Novl group but stopped early ---not know when but "early" 3, convention group  
 4. primary states.  
 "no names but everyone in the book"

\* have established that not one of "games" we unearthed was free lance---this imp. every one was tied in. rumor that opening a grand jury on west coast to look into non-watergate flings.

(rat fucking means double cross---so be careful, he suspects it a reference to infiltration into a ~~xxxxxxx~~ Demo. campaign as double agent.

( osher e.g. to check---"those guys" who set up draft Teddy ---one was a Hunt operative. give thorough going over.

tr for ad one

Bob Woodward's notes from one of the many early morning parking garage meetings with Deep Throat (9).

9. Harry Ransom Center, "Mark Felt Notes," [http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/web/woodstein/deepthroat/felt\\_notes1.html](http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/web/woodstein/deepthroat/felt_notes1.html) (May 4, 2016).

# Media

According to an article written by Leonard Downie, the "dogged investigative reporting by Woodward and Bernstein and their colleagues eventually helped probe other news media, federal investigators and Congress to act, leading to more revelations, criminal prosecutions, Senate hearings and ultimately Congressional impeachment hearings" (9).

## The Post Stories

For months following the break-in, Woodward and Bernstein wrote front page stories that revealed connections between the burglary and CRP.

Their first story, the Dahlberg story, was released on August 1, 1972. This story included the detailed discovery of a \$25,000 cashier's check from Kenneth Dahlberg, Nixon's Midwest campaign finance chairman, that had been deposited into the bank account of one of the Watergate burglars (10). The release of this article sparked three investigations. Without Woodward and Bernstein's investigative skills the cover-up of the Dahlberg story could have succeeded.

The most important story was released on October 10, 1972. This story, the Segretti story, disclosed that the burglary at the Watergate hotel was part of a political spying program run by the White House (13). In their book *All The President's Men*, Woodward and Bernstein wrote, "Watergate could have been scheduled before the president's re-election chances looked so good and perhaps someone had neglected to pull the plug" (14).

10. Leonard Downie, "The Newshound Bites." *The World Today* 68, no. 4 (2012): 21. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41962776>.

11. Barry Sussman, "Kenneth Dahlberg's Role in Watergate," *The Huffington Post*, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/barry-sussman/kenneth-dahlbergs-role-in\\_b\\_1005342.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/barry-sussman/kenneth-dahlbergs-role-in_b_1005342.html) (May 4, 2016).

12. Harry Ransom Center: The University of Texas at Austin, "Dahlberg Story," [http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/web/woodstein/post/dahlbergstory\\_detail.html](http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/web/woodstein/post/dahlbergstory_detail.html) (May 4, 2016).

## Reporters vs. Nixon

Many news reporters were not very fond of Richard Nixon. If the media had liked him, he could have benefited from the media's ability to prevent certain stories from being written. Members of the press, both fueling Nixon's early career and destroying him later, abandoned standards of objectivity. In the end, this relationship fueled disaster by pushing the country towards the events that occurred during the Watergate Scandal.

Former President Nixon had a way of dealing with reporters that was different than any other President before him. While intimidating journalists and avoiding White House reporters, are now common presidential practices, they were originally Nixonian tactics. The resignation of Richard Nixon is seen as a victory for the media; Reporters successfully destroyed the life of a man that made their career's especially difficult. Investigations done by Woodward and Bernstein helped expose the President's criminal activities which resulted in his eventual downfall.

In an interview with David Frost in May 1977, President Nixon admitted "I brought myself down" (15). Acknowledging that he made a mistake and was, therefore, removed from office by journalists who jumped at the opportunity to take down a man they saw as a sneak.



Former President Richard Nixon with David Frost on the first day of their interview in 1977 (16).



A snippet of the famous Dahlberg Story by Woodward and Bernstein (12).

13. Harry Ransom Center: The University of Texas at Austin, "Segretti Story," [http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/web/woodstein/post/segretistory\\_detail.html](http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/web/woodstein/post/segretistory_detail.html) (May 4, 2016).

14. Bernstein and Woodward, *All the President's Men*, 58.

15. The Guardian, "I Have Impeached Myself," <http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2007/sep/07/greatinterviews1> (May 5, 2016).

16. Brian Stelter, "David Frost, Interviewer Who Got Nixon to Apologize for Watergate, Dies at 74," *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/02/world/europe/david-frost-known-for-nixon-interview-dead-at-74.html> (May 2, 2016).

# The Cover-Up

## The Tapes

Between the early months of 1971 and July of 1973, President Richard Nixon secretly recorded around 3,700 hours of phone calls and meetings with members of executive offices. These recordings played a leading role in the resignation of the 37th president on August 9, 1974. They remain the greatest treasure of information ever left by a president, as well as the most complex, controversial set of presidential records in United States history. Alexander Butterfield, the former deputy assistant to Nixon, revealed the existence of the White House Tapes. Once Butterfield informed the public that a taping system existed, the Supreme Court made Nixon give up the tapes.

While Nixon claimed that he was not aware of his administration's attempt to cover up the break in, the discovery of the "Smoking Gun" tape stated otherwise. This recording was the piece of evidence that stated Nixon's role in the Watergate cover-up. In this tape Nixon said, "Don't, don't lie to them to the extent to say there is no involvement but just say this sort of a comedy of errors, bizarre without getting into it" (17).

## Denial

In the days of the Investigation of the Nixon, his administration continuously denied their involvement in the break-in. During a White House press conference on August 29, 1972, Nixon praised the work of his White House counsel, John W. Dean, in investigating the Watergate case. It was at this press conference that Nixon said, "I can say categorically that [Dean's] investigation indicates that no one on the White House staff, no one in this administration, presently employed, was involved in this very bizarre incident." This statement caused Woodstein to release additional investigative stories which quickly sparked more in depth investigations by the FBI and Congress.

## The Hearings

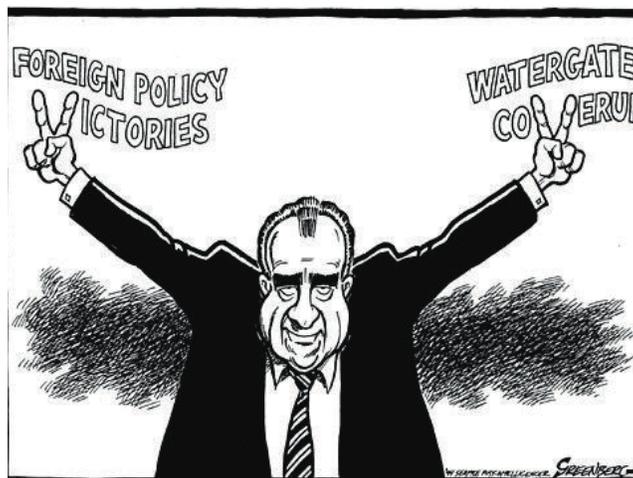
Each member of the Senate knew the seriousness of the Watergate Scandal, leading the Senate to vote, 77 to zero, to create an investigative committee. Known as the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Committee Activities, the council was chaired by Senator Sam Ervin, a democrat from North Carolina.

Beginning on May 17, 1973, the Watergate hearings were publicly aired on television, receiving views from Americans all over the country. During the Senate hearings, John Dean went against the statement President Nixon had made in a White House press conference and confirmed that Nixon not only knew of the break-in, the President had directed in the cover-up.

As the hearings continued, Nixon discovered things were not going his way. Attorney General nominee Elliot Richardson was forced by the Senate and American public to appoint Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox to supervise the Senate-run investigation into the Watergate burglary and related federal crimes. His investigation led him to a confrontation with Nixon when he subpoenaed the tapes the President had secretly recorded of his Oval Office conversations. Aware of the troubling situation he was in, Nixon gave Cox a direct order to stop looking for tapes and other materials. When Cox refused to do so, Nixon fired him in an incident that became known as the "Saturday Night Massacre" (21).



Time Magazine cover depicting Nixon and the public's desire to impeach him (18).



Nixon's double peace sign political cartoon by Steve Greenberg (22).

17. Watergate.info, "The Smoking Gun Tape," <http://watergate.info/1972/06/23/the-smoking-gun-tape.html> (January 29, 2016).

18. Time Magazine, "The Push to Impeach," <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,1101731105,00.html> (May 8, 2016).

19. Bernstein and Woodward, *All the President's Men*, 79.

20. The History Channel, "Televised Watergate Hearings Begin," <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/televised-watergate-hearings-begin> (May 12, 2016).

21. Bart Barnes, "Watergate Prosecutor Faced down the President," *The Washington Post*, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/watergate-prosecutor-faced-down-the-president/2012/05/31/gJQAoxBQGV\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/watergate-prosecutor-faced-down-the-president/2012/05/31/gJQAoxBQGV_story.html) (May 11, 2016).

22. Steve Greenberg, "Nixon Double Peace Sign," *Cartoon Movement*, <http://www.cartoonmovement.com/p/150> (May 7, 2016).

# The Aftermath

## Nixon's Resignation Government Distrust

Facing impeachment and removal from office, Nixon officially resigned on August 9, 1974. The night before on August 8, Nixon addressed the American public over national television from the Oval Office. In his speech Nixon highlighted his successes as president, hoping to defend his record (23). Nixon explained that he had "never been a quitter" and that leaving office before he had finished his term was against every fiber of his being. While attempting to tell the public of his dedication to the American people, he also informed them that he had done his best to uphold the oath he said when he took office, "consecrate my office, my energies, and all the wisdom I can summon to the cause of peace among nations." (25). To some Americans this statement of upholding the oath came as a surprise because while he may have had the trust and friendship of foreign nations, he did not have the trust or amity of his own nation.

For many Americans, the summer of the Senate Select Committee hearings in 1973 was a time of anger and shock, one that shaped, for better or worse, public attitudes toward government and leaders. The scandal led to a widespread distrust of government that has changed the political calculus for many issues. The nation watched the White House become isolated from the rest of the American government as Nixon tried to save his presidency in the face of abuse of government power and attempts at cover-up. Each revelation of this scandal, to this day, gives voters another reason not to trust their elected officials. It appears that Americans are unable to look at government the same way again.

## Woodward and Bernstein

After writing quite possibly the greatest reporting story of all time, Woodward and Bernstein have gone down in history as two of the most influential journalists ever. Their best-selling book, *All the President's Men*, focused public attention on the young reporters, especially after Hollywood turned it into a movie starring Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman. This film immortalized the chain-smoking anonymous source called "Deep Throat," who met Woodward at night in deserted parking garages after first signaling for meetings with detailed codes. Released two years after Nixon's resignation, the movie caused Woodward and Bernstein's fame to continually increase. The American public not only saw them as the famous reporters that took down the president but also as celebrities who were played by extremely well known actors in the movie.

23. David A. Graham, "Nixon's Resignation: 40 Years Later," *The Atlantic*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/08/nixons-resignation-40-years-later/375447/> (May 11, 2016).

24. Jack Mirkinson, ed., "Bob Woodward, Carl Bernstein Weigh in on Washington Post Sale, Jeff Bezos," *The Huffington Post*, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/06/woodward-berstein-washington-post-sale-jeff-bezos\\_n\\_3712090.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/06/woodward-berstein-washington-post-sale-jeff-bezos_n_3712090.html) (May 6, 2016).

25. Graham, "Nixon's Resignation: 40 Years," *The Atlantic*.



Carl Bernstein (left) and Bob Woodward (right) at the Washington Post (24).

# Journalism in 2016

In a speech given to Washington and Lee University alumni, in the spring of 2016, Carl Bernstein made it clear that it is a journalists job to find the "best obtainable version of the truth". Without this the notion of the public good will be lost in American society.

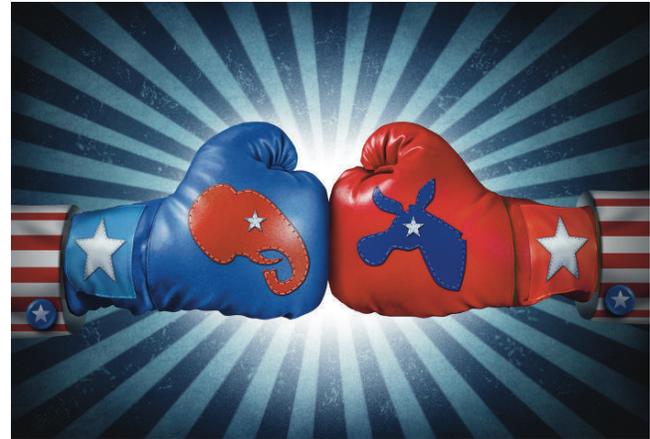
In the 21st century journalists are not attempting to discover the truth but, instead, to write an article that will obtain the publics attention whether it is true or false. News sources such as *People Magazine* and the *National Enquirer* are two types of news informants that only discuss celebrity and entertainment gossip rather than significant world-wide knowledge.

While the journalism that occurred during the Watergate Scandal is an example for future reporters to follow, the affect of Watergate on the media appears to have been somewhat short-lived. Although it is constantly referred to as "the greatest reporting story of all time", the story and the investigative motives used in Woodstein's reporting have not been successfully used by any journalism since the scandal. If the press followed the steps that Woodward and Bernstein took, the effect of Woodstein's journalistic work would be exponentially greater and the legacy of Watergate would live on.

## Presidential Election

The 2016 Presidential Election has been all over the news for months. The media and journalists' investigative stories about the candidates, however, appeared far too late in the election process. There has been little coverage of the candidates lives and their records. In times when high scale investigative journalism is necessary, reporting similar to that done by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein is the type of writing journalists in 2016 need to employ.

Few newspapers in 2016 are dedicated to investigative reporting. In the 21st century there are often deadlines that must be met, preventing reporters from searching for the truth. Journalists often turn down a story that requires an abundance of time so that they may write numerous short stories in the same amount of time, hoping to be paid more as a result of the extra articles.



Tensions between the two parties (26).

## Coverage

While there may not be enough investigation of the candidates, the scandal has led to more aggressive coverage of the White House and the president inside of it. The relationship between the White House and the media was forever changed by Watergate. Watergate's impact on journalism wore off too quickly and that public-service investigative reporting was soon replaced by monotonous journalistic impulses.

## Access for Accountability

Journalists in the 21st century have begun to trade access for accountability. Reporters do not want to ask the difficult questions because they are too caught up in being in the presence of the rich and famous. If they worked with the journalistic integrity that Woodstein did, writers would continue to grow and allow the legacy of Watergate to live on.



Bob Woodward (left) and Carl Bernstein (right) at the Watergate Office Complex 40 years after the break-in (27).

26. Aaron Miles, "Politics, Social Media, and the 2016 Presidential Election," Social Media Today, <http://www.socialmediatoday.com/social-networks/aweiner/2015-08-18/politics-social-media-and-2016-presidential-election-in-graphic> (May 8, 2016).

27. NPR Staff, "40 Years On, Woodward and Bernstein Recall Reporting on Watergate," National Public Radio, <http://www.npr.org/2014/06/13/321316118/40-years-on-woodward-and-bernstein-recall-reporting-on-watergate> (May 11, 2016).