



Nixon's Paranoia: The Links between  
Watergate, The Pentagon Papers, and  
Nixon's Resignation

JE

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The political lesson of Watergate is this: Never again must America allow an arrogant, elite guard of political adolescents to bypass the regular party organization and dictate the terms of a national election. - Gerald Ford, March 1974

The Watergate Scandal began when five “plumbers” broke into the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee located in the Watergate Hotel Complex in Washington D.C. At 2:30 a.m., on June 17, 1972, a security guard discovered a burglary in-progress,” and called the police. (Kutler, 19 and 31) The subsequent arrest of the “plumbers,” who turned out to be government operatives, sparked media and public attention and ultimately exposed crimes sanctioned by then President Richard Nixon. One such crime was the lesser-known burglary of the office of a Los Angeles psychiatrist, Dr. Lewis Fielding.

Daniel Ellsberg, a former Defense Department analyst who had initially been supportive of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, had begun seeing Dr. Fielding when his views about the war turned negative. In June 1971, Ellsberg, leaked a secret government study about the Vietnam War to the *New York Times* and other newspapers. The publication of what became known as the Pentagon Papers not only led to both break-ins, but more importantly to one of the most significant First Amendment decisions in Supreme Court history, and also set off a chain reaction leading to President Nixon’s involvement in the Watergate Scandal in May and June of 1972, and his subsequent resignation from the Presidency in August of 1974.

To put it mildly, Richard Milhous Nixon, the 37th President of the United States, was embarrassed by the publication of the Pentagon Papers. His administration was already suffering as a result of growing anti-war sentiment. Not only was the new information damaging to the war effort, it was also a serious breach of security. Whether or not Nixon was seriously

concerned that publication might endanger the country, he was definitely aware that the articles reflected badly on his presidency. The “Plumbers” were created to deal with Nixon’s image problem which is how they found themselves in Dr. Fielding’s office stealing his file on Ellsberg. Presumably the administration wanted information they could use to discredit Ellsberg. They were also sent to uncover what they could from Democratic National Headquarters in the Watergate Complex.

Nixon had reason to be concerned about his re-election even though he had much to be proud of during his first term:

His accomplishments while in office included revenue sharing, the end of the draft, new anti-crime laws, and a broad environmental program. As he had promised, he appointed Justices of conservative philosophy to the Supreme Court. One of the most dramatic events of his first term occurred in 1969, when American astronauts made the first moon landing”(whitehouse.gov).

Despite these accomplishments, as Vietnam War raged on throughout Nixon’s first term, he began to worry about his chances for reelection in 1972. In an effort to gain popularity, and after being criticized by Democratic nominees for not moving fast enough in Vietnam, Nixon cut the number of troops by 70,000, and

In an effort to destroy Communist supply routes and base camps in Cambodia, President Nixon gave the go-ahead to "Operation Breakfast." The covert bombing of Cambodia, conducted without the knowledge of Congress or the American public. (Vietnam Online).

Nixon was growing more paranoid that he would not get reelected. He worried the bombing of Cambodia, would ruin his reelection bid. Nixon was under the impression that if the American public found out about his bombing Cambodia without telling them, they would not be willing to reelect him. His lack of force in dealings in Vietnam, and then the overcompensation that ended in his bombing Cambodia could be considered the main weak points of his first term.

It was later revealed that during his bid for reelection in 1971, he was involved in the highly controversial robbery of the Watergate Complex in Washington D.C.

Nixon, as some Presidents before him, used a system of tapes to record his Presidential conversations. These recording systems were installed to preserve the history of posterity. Originally, Nixon had used note-takers to collect records of his Presidential dealings, but was not pleased with this system of notes because he thought that the tone of voice and the nuance of someone's expression were also very important to accurately present the tone of a meeting; a note taker could not accurately supply that information. Nixon once reported that note takers were nothing more than "scribbling intruders." The answer to Nixon's problems came from former President, and Nixon's predecessor Lyndon Johnson. In an off handed comment, Johnson said that Nixon had made a mistake removing his recording systems, and thus, Nixon re-established the taping systems previously used by Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson. These tapes would become the main proof of Nixon's involvement in the burglary of the Watergate Complex known today as the Watergate Scandal.

Nixon was worried about his getting re-elected in the 1972 election. In an attempt to discredit some of his democratic opponents he asked G. Gordon Liddy, who was a former FBI agent, to come up with some plans that would make his opponents look bad. Liddy offered the re-election campaign plan known as "Operation Gemstone." On January 29 1971 Liddy showed John Mitchell, the head of the Committee to Reelect the President, the operation that costs over one million dollars. "Gemstone was a response to pressure from President Nixon to compile intelligence on Democratic candidates and party officials, particularly Democratic National Committee Chairman, Lawrence O'Brien." ([www.historycommons.com](http://www.historycommons.com).)

“Operation Gemstone” was broken up into three subcategories, “ruby,” “sapphire,” and “diamond.” These operations consisted of some of the following ideas. “Kidnapping, or surgically relocating,” prominent antiwar and civil rights leaders by “drugging” them and taking them “across the border,” and/or “using a pleasure yacht as a floating brothel to entice Democrats and other undesirables into compromising positions, where they could be tape-recorded and photographed.” These were mere suggestions given to Mitchell by Liddy. Mitchell told Liddy to come back with a cheaper plan.

E. Howard Hunt was previously a CIA agent before getting involved with Nixon:

As a member of the plumbers, Hunt wrote a memo to Charles Colson in July 1971. Under the heading “Neutralization of Ellsberg,” Hunt proposed collecting “overt, covert, and derogatory information,” the end of which would be to “destroy his [Ellsberg’s] public image and credibility.” This led the plumbers breaking into the office of Ellsberg’s psychiatrist, Dr. Lewis Fielding ([www.ford.utexas.edu](http://www.ford.utexas.edu)).

Daniel Ellsberg released the Pentagon Papers, a secret study by the Department of Defense into Presidential dealings in Vietnam. This led slightly to Nixon’s paranoia about getting re-elected for his second term. The “plumbers” actually burglarized the office of Lewis Fielding on September 9, 1971.

Daniel Ellsberg released the pentagon papers when he started to have negative feelings about the war. Ellsberg was one of the men that had composed the pentagon papers, which included the top secret knowledge of the bombing of Cambodia. He secretly photocopied the document and gave a copy of it to the *New York Times*, his reasoning being that it was information the public deserved to know. *The New York Times*, and subsequently some other newspapers, then began to publish the Pentagon Papers in a series of articles based off of the information found in them. Nixon was enraged by this. Nixon’s fear of the people finding out about his secret military action was turning into reality. This pressured him into taking illegal

action to try and get re-elected. One for this illegal action took was that of the break-in to the Watergate Complex.

On June 17, 1972 at around 1:50 a.m. Frank Wills, a security guard for the Watergate Complex located at 2600 Virginia Avenue, Washington DC, noticed that

a door connecting a stairwell with the hotel's basement garage had been taped so it would not lock.” He took that tape off the door and went back to his post. He then noticed that ten minutes later a new piece of tape had been placed on the door. After noticing this he called the police. Three local officers dressed in civilian clothing responded to the call and noted that every door from the stairwell up to the sixth floor had been taped to stop them from locking (washingtonpost.com).

The door on the sixth floor, on which Democratic National Committee occupies the entire floor, had been jimmed open.

“All wearing rubber surgical gloves, the five suspects were captured inside a small office within the committee's headquarters suite” (washingtonpost.com). They carried bugging equipment as well as \$2,300 all in 100 dollar bills. When they were caught, there were two drawers containing files that, it has been speculated, they were going to photograph. It was not immediately apparent why these men would want to bug these offices. Later on, it was revealed that four of the convicted men had rented rooms at the Watergate hotel the night before the burglary. After attorneys had obtained search warrants they checked these hotel rooms and found another \$2,400 also in 100 dollar bills as well as six suitcases containing additional bugging devices.

It is important now to revisit Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers in order fully understand the reasoning behind the Watergate Break-In that was just described.

Nixon was not very concerned upon first seeing the Pentagon Papers released as articles in the *New York Times* because the things being published in them did not occur under his presidency. He was more concerned with finding and punishing the person who had given the *New York Times* the documents. Attorney General John Mitchell was worried that if the Nixon Administration did not take immediate action against the times, they would forfeit their right to do so, so he asked Nixon's permission to send a low-key formal warning to the *New York Times* regarding any more publications. Nixon reluctantly agreed and the warning was sent. The warning, however, was not as low-key as Nixon had imagined.

The telegram that John Mitchell sent to the *New York Times* not only threatened criminal prosecution under the Espionage Act, but also demanded that the *Times* cease all printing of the Pentagon Papers and return all the information they had been given to the Department of Justice immediately. The *Times* responded to this telegram saying that they would not cease publication of the Papers, but they would accept any final decisions made by the courts.

Henry Kissinger, Nixon's National Security Advisor and Secretary of State during his respective terms as President, was worried about how Nixon was handling the Pentagon Paper crisis. He thought that the continuous releasing of the papers could harm the United States current relationship with China, as well as the peace dealings in Vietnam. This led him to urge Nixon into taking legal action against the *Times*, which consequently led to Nixon's belief that the *New York Times*, as well as Ellsberg were conspiring against him. On June 15, 1971, Nixon ordered that a law suit be delivered upon the Times.

To be clear, President Nixon was not worried about what the *Times* was writing, or the effect it would have on national security, but was actually trying to make a strong example out of them in case of any future conspirators against him. Nixon was still not worried about his own

secrets coming out, because all that had been reported on at the time was about the Kennedy and the Johnson administrations. Even though the Justice Department had started their case against the New York Times, Nixon was not planning an immediate push against their continued publication of the Pentagon Papers.

By this time, he was only concerned about the potential impact the case's outcome would have on the second stage in his battle to defend the presidency. An adverse ruling, he feared, might hurt his plan to launch a grand jury to indict Ellsberg (millercenter.org).

In a meeting on June 17, 1971, President Nixon decided to blackmail former President Johnson into speaking out about the Pentagon Papers, in a desperate attempt to remove the negative press from his own dealings. Nixon and his staff had been attempting to get Johnson to speak out all week, but their attempts had been futile. It was after many attempts to persuade Johnson to speak out that Nixon's then Chief of Staff Haldeman suggested that the President use files containing damaging information about Johnson's decision to stop bombing North Vietnam in 1968 against him. Haldeman told Nixon that the files containing information on the bombing halt were being held at the Brookings Institution. Nixon then ordered a break-in to obtain the files. "Now, for the first time since the Pentagon Papers articles had run off the presses, the President of the United States had advocated the use of undeniably illegal action. It would prove not to be the last(millercenter.org )."

On June 25, 1971, The Supreme Court agreed to preside over the case of the United States vs. *The New York Times*, but by this time many other newspapers, including the *Washington Post*, had started publishing portions of the Pentagon Papers as well. Nixon had decided to change his focus to the prosecution of Daniel Ellsberg and decided that whatever the Supreme Court's decision was on that case, that he would still make an example out of Ellsberg,



trying to prevent any other conspiracies from arising. Nixon began to worry that the Attorney General, J Edgar Hoover would not do his best to try the case against Ellsberg because he had a personal relationship with Ellsberg's father-in-law. Nixon sent John Mitchell to convince Hoover to do anything he could do to make sure that Ellsberg got what Nixon thought he deserved.

In 1972, Richard Nixon ran for reelection, and after defeating George McGovern with 61% of the popular vote he started his second term in office. It was during this term that Nixon was first accused of illegal actions. These actions included being involved in the Watergate Scandal and the robbery of Lewis Fielding's office.

In order to make sure that Ellsberg went to jail, Nixon decided he would have to conduct his own investigation using whatever means necessary.

The leak of the Pentagon Papers was the catalyst behind the Nixon administration's amplified willingness to break the law in pursuit of its own agenda. Rather than entering the history books as just another leak of classified material, Ellsberg's actions managed to institutionalize a profound paranoia in the psyche of a Presidential administration, convincing the President that he would never be safe from a vast radical "conspiracy" seeking to destroy him. It was this paranoia that led to the creation of the White House Special Investigations Unit. Informally referred to as the Plumbers, this unit was the ultimate manifestation of Nixon's determination to use covert and extralegal means not only to investigate Ellsberg, but to fight back against the putative liberal conspiracy. (millerceneter.org.)

The Watergate Trial began in 1973 and was presided over by the honorable Judge Sirica.

"When Judge John Sirica gavelled the trial of the Watergate Seven to order on January 8, 1973, federal investigators had already discovered a covert slush fund used to underwrite nefarious activities against Democrats. The money and the men on trial could be linked to the Committee to Re-elect the President (CRP)(ford.utexas.com)."

In addition to the five burglars, there were two other men: G. Gordon Liddy, and E. Howard Hunt connected to the scandal and thus the trial. Five of these men pled guilty to charges and two pled not guilty, but were sentenced.

The money found in the hands of the Watergate burglars was traced back to the committee to reelect the President. James McCord was one of the burglars, and the only one to plead not guilty. While he was thinking over his long prison sentence, he decided to take matters into his own hands. He decided to write a letter to Judge Sirica.

In it, he claimed that high White House officials had pressured the defendants to plead guilty. The five who pleaded had perjured themselves at the urging of “higher-ups.” “With the letter’s release, the saga moved decidedly from being a police story to a political story. (ford.utexas.com)”

After receiving notice of McCord’s letter, Nixon decided that he was going to need to run some “covert operations” and thus asked his Chief of Staff, Haldeman, who he thought could be trusted to run such operations. Haldeman replied that John Dean could. John Dean had started at the White House as an aide and then grew to become part of Nixon’s legal counsel. He became a major part of the Watergate Operations and was trusted to handle the political fallout that occurred when the Scandal was first broken to the public. When he read the letter that McCord had written to Judge Sirica, he became unnerved. “Dean met with the President to warn him of the metastasizing problem of the cover-up, telling Nixon of “a cancer ... close to the presidency” and of the increasing demands by the burglars for money. (ford.utexas.edu)”

Dean lost his nerve and hired his own lawyer, afraid that the Administration was going to try and make him their fall guy. When Nixon did not receive a written report that Dean was supposed to hand in, he fired Dean in April of 1973.

Under cover of limited immunity, Dean testified before the Senate Watergate committee in late June, claiming the President was involved in the cover-up, that Nixon knew about hush

money paid to the burglars, and that Ehrlichman ordered evidence be destroyed. Further, Dean claimed, Nixon had known about the break-in as early as September 15, 1972. (ford.utexas.edu)

After the courts received Dean's testimony they demanded that Nixon give up the tapes that he had recorded using his Oval Office tape recorders. Nixon refused and was glad that he had ordered that the taping system be removed a week earlier. To make matters even worse, Spiro Agnew, Nixon's Vice President, resigned and was found guilty of bribery and tax evasion. Nixon appointed Gerald Ford to be his new vice-President. This was the first and only time a Vice President had ever resigned. "That same day, the U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Washington ruled that Nixon must turn over the tapes to Judge Sirica. (ford.utexas.edu)" Nixon tried to come to a compromise by giving the courts edited versions of the tapes, but that offer was turned down. Nixon was angered by this and ordered that the case prosecutor, Mr. Cox, be fired. The Attorney General refused and resigned. Nixon then ordered the man who took his place to fire Cox, this man also resigned. Finally the new Attorney General agreed to Nixon's demands. Cox was fired.

President Nixon has tonight discharged Archibald Cox, the Special Prosecutor in the Watergate case. The President took this action because of Mr. Cox's refusal to comply with the instructions Friday night that he was not to invoke the judicial process further to compel production of recordings, notes, or memoranda regarding private Presidential conversations." (Fulsom, 158)

The American public was outraged by this discharge and called for Nixon's impeachment. After hearing the public's pleas Nixon agreed to release the tapes unedited. (In the meantime, U.S participation in the Vietnam War, officially ended in January 1973 when the Paris Peace Accords were signed.) The tapes, which contained many conversations about the break in to Daniel Ellsberg's therapist office and discussions about how to cover up the Watergate break in, caused civil outrage. When the public received this information calls for

impeachment began to course across the country. One of the most outraging parts of the tapes' release was that over 18 minutes of one of the tapes had been erased. Nixon claimed he did not have anything to do with this. His secretary as well as other office workers refuted this statement. After this final straw the Supreme Court began the impeachment process. In order to avoid the embarrassment of impeachment Richard Nixon resigned on August 8, 1974; Gerald Ford took office shortly after Nixon's resignation and offered the ex-President a full pardon, telling the American people that this needed to be a time to heal.

Ellsberg's actions highlight the need for "whistle blowers", not only in society in this time period, but in the present as well. Without his committing the illegal act of photocopying and distributing the Pentagon Papers, it is possible that the truth of Nixon's actions in Cambodia never would have come out. Nixon could have gone on serving his second term without a second thought about his actions in Vietnam. Thanks to Ellsberg's actions, limits were placed on the President's power through amendments to the Freedom of Information act as well as putting into place laws such as the Financial Disclosure Act. The Freedom of Information Act stops the President from waging undeclared war, and the Financial Disclosure Act gives the government the power to look into the President's spending. This was a classic example of the American checks and balances system in which one branch of the government looks into the dealing of another to make sure it is fair.

It is possible that if Ellsberg had not submitted the Pentagon Papers for publication, the Watergate Scandal may not have occurred. Nixon created "the plumbers" to break into Lewis Fielding's office and steal Ellsberg's file. Without the Watergate Scandal Nixon may have remained popular in the polls since people would not have known of his bombing of Cambodia and his secret dealings in Vietnam. The break into Fielding's office was the first episode in

which were show Nixon's willingly illegal acts . In hindsight, if Ellsberg had not released the Pentagon Papers, Nixon might not have had to resign. It was the publication of the Pentagon Papers that caused Nixon to create the "plumbers" and without the plumbers, the Watergate break-in would have been nearly impossible to carry out, therefore the Publication of the Pentagon Papers lead to Nixon's accessibility to break-into the Watergate Complex which ended up being the reason for his resignation.

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