

# Watergate

Rifle - Search through  
 Pergery - Lie under oath  
 Condoned - Agreed to  
 Proliferating - Multiplying, expanding

Watergate is the name of a luxury apartment complex on the Potomac River in Washington, DC. It is also the name given to a political scandal that reached the highest levels of the U.S. government and ultimately forced a president to resign. The president was Richard Nixon.

Nixon fought ferociously for every political success he achieved. As Dwight Eisenhower's vice-presidential running mate in 1952, he was almost pushed off the ticket by a scandal over political contributions. In 1960 he lost the presidential race by the narrowest of margins to John Kennedy and, when he ran for governor of California in 1962, he lost again. Six years later he defeated Hubert Humphrey for the presidency but the result was a squeaker. Running for reelection in 1972, he would leave nothing to chance. This time he intended to win big to make up for all the disappointments and close races of the past.

The collection of crimes and deceptions called Watergate grew out of this win-at-all-costs attitude. Running Nixon's 1972 reelection campaign was former attorney general John Mitchell, head of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President (CRP). Under him was a collection of political operators and tricksters. The CRP (called "CREEP" by the Democrats) had large amounts of money, much of it extracted from corporations by promises of government favors or threats of disfavor and laundered to disguise its origins.

If the CRP had stopped at drowning the Democrats in cash, disaster could have been avoided. But Mitchell and other Nixon cronies insisted on using every trick in the book to confuse, distract, unbalance, and obstruct their opponents. One of these "dirty trick" operations was a break-in on June 18, 1972, at the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate complex by a group nicknamed the "plumbers," apparently to  rifle files for incriminating information on the Democrats and to bug their telephones. The break-in was discovered by

the police while underway, and the Watergate burglars were arrested and indicted.

Nixon apparently did not order the break-in, nor, it seems, did he know about it until his aides told him a week later that the men caught at the Watergate worked for either the White House or the CRP. His accusers would claim, however, that he approved the efforts of aides H. R. Haldeman, John Dean, and John D. Ehrlichman to hide the connection between the Watergate "plumbers" and the administration and, still more serious, to offer the arrested men executive clemency and money in exchange for their silence. In the end, it was this cover-up attempt that brought the president down.

During the summer and fall of 1972, George McGovern, the Democratic presidential candidate, sought to make the mysterious Watergate break-in a campaign issue, but the administration was able to hide it until after the Republican election sweep in November. Then the cover-up began to come apart. In January 1973 the "plumbers" were tried before Judge John Sirica, and one of them confessed that he and his fellow defendants had committed perjury in denying their connection to the White House. In February the Senate established a select committee to investigate Watergate, headed by Sam Ervin of North Carolina, and in May the committee began televised hearings that revealed that the break-in had originated with the CRP and that the president may have condoned an attempt to obstruct justice. On July 16, 1973, one of the witnesses before the Ervin committee revealed that since 1971 all confidential discussions in the Oval Office and the Executive Office Building had been taped, which meant that everything that Nixon and his colleagues had said and done about Watergate could be checked. Meanwhile, two *Washington Post* reporters, Carl Bernstein and Robert Woodward, intrigued by the mysterious events at the Watergate, began to follow a trail of proliferating leads. Their sensational revelations soon ignited a race among the media to ferret out details of the complex operations of the CRP and other administration agents. The public watched transfixed as almost daily new details emerged of misdeeds by the White House.

Nixon resisted every effort to make him surrender the tapes to a special prosecutor he had agreed, under pressure, to appoint. When the prosecutor, Archibald Cox, became too aggressive, Nixon fired him in what came to be called the "Saturday Night Massacre." The storm of public outrage that followed forced Nixon to appoint another prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, a conservative Texas lawyer who refused to be intimidated. In late April 1974, under the prodding of Jaworski and Congress, Nixon released 1200 pages of edited tape transcript that revealed the president as a mean-spirited, bigoted, win-at-any-price man, but contained no "smoking gun" directly linking him to an illegal attempt to obstruct justice.

On May 1 the House Judiciary Committee denied that the transcripts submitted represented full compliance with their demands; Nixon had