Nixon’s Inevitable Road to Watergate: A Psychoanalysis

Using the Path Dependent Model

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A fish stinks from the head down. This is a phrase that means when an entity such as a state or organization fails, the leadership is usually the root cause. Therefore it is apropos to connect this expression with President Richard Nixon and the Watergate scandal. The scandal that eventually brought down the Nixon Presidency has become so ingrained in the American psyche that any act of impropriety, political or not, seems to be affixed with the suffix -gate. As stated by Machiavelli in *The Prince*, “the ends justify the means.” Therefore the overall desired objective, or its end, is what matters more than the steps taken toward that objective, or its means. In the case of Richard Nixon and his inner circle, the unlawful means that were conducted were disregarded during the midst of his reelection as their main focus instead centered the attaining the desired ends. These actions pinpoint the first path dependent example evident in the Nixon Administration. Nixon would then proceed to embark on a second path dependent road immediately following the Watergate break-in and subsequent cover-up as a result of his obsession with absolute power and grandiose personality, as well as the simultaneous pursuit of upholding the office of the presidency while trying to maintain his innocence. His demise began as a result of the Watergate break-in that occurred on June 17, 1972, but there were events that took place prior that can be connected with the break-in, as well as give a glimpse into Nixon’s inner fears. His personal paranoia combined with the American political development concepts of path dependency and increasing returns sent him on the inevitable path toward Watergate and his downfall as President of the United States.

**Preemption, Presidential Character, and Psychoanalysis**

Before addressing the various aspects of Nixon’s psychological persona, it is important to look at the office of the presidency from an American political development standpoint. One of the most important authors in this field is Stephen Skowronek. In his book *The Politics*
Presidents Make, Skowronek categorizes the Presidents into four distinct categories: Reconstruction, Disjunction, Articulation, and Preemption. Richard Nixon was categorized in the last category of preemption. Presidents of preemption “stand out for the attention both for their aggressive employment of the powers of their office and for their wrenching political impacts.”

Another crippling element associated with preemption is flaws of character. Skowronek points out that “aggressive leaders in politics of preemption tend to get themselves impeached de facto, if not de jure,” as a result of their disruptive effects.

For Skowronek, the fact that preemptive Presidents get elected in the first place is an accomplishment by itself. This is due to the fact that these Presidents are caught in the middle of the political spectrum; they are not only dealing with a strong opposition, but also the orthodox establishment who believe that these Presidents have strayed from their ideological foundations. As a result preemptive leaders are forced to act unilaterally. They are in positions where maintaining as much control as possible is pivotal to the success of their administration. “Since preemptive leaders rely heavily on their own individuality, they more easily open themselves up to attacks on a personal level and thus are often judged as moral degenerates.”

Along with this analysis, Skowronek also describes the problems that can occur with preemptive Presidents. “Out to reset national politics and government on their own terms, these Presidents provoked major constitutional crises over the legitimate exercise of Presidential power, crises that temporarily warded off the portents of a political reconstruction with a convulsive campaign against executive usurpation.”

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1 Stephen Skowronek. The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), 44.
2 Skowronek, The Politics Presidents Make, 44.
3 Skowronek, The Politics Presidents Make, 458.
4 Skowronek, The Politics Presidents Make, 44-45.
The issue of timing and the events that take place within these time periods are important. As will be described later in the paper, Nixon believed that he had to exhibit more power than his office commanded in order to secure the safety of the American people. Despite these beliefs, the reality is that there was no need for a President of reconstruction at this point in time. As Skowronek points out in his book, the reconstruction period requires a dramatic altering of the current political establishment, while trying to shift the country in a different direction. Although it was necessary during periods such as the Civil War and Great Depression, it was unnecessary during the Nixon administration. Preemptive Presidents possess similar ideological goals as reconstructive Presidents, but the resiliency of the current establishment prevents their implementation.

Some important aspects of preemption would become evident later as the Watergate scandal unfolded. “Preemptive leaders place their own personal code at center stage in order to distinguish themselves from both the dominant regime and their own minority party.”\(^5\) It is difficult to understand exactly what drove Nixon to these unnecessary lengths. The prospects for President’s Nixon’s reelection became most favorable once Democratic candidate Edward Muskie was out of the race. The eventual nominee, George McGovern was defeated easily, with Nixon winning 49 out of 50 states and 61% of the popular vote. “Perhaps he was driven to do so because he was the lead actor in a government of enemies.”\(^6\) Skowronek later makes the conclusion that Nixon would largely be known as a moral degenerate incapable of rising above nihilism and manipulation.\(^7\)

\(^{5}\) Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make*, 458.


\(^{7}\) Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make*, 458.
Even though Skowronek makes an extremely convincing argument regarding preemptive Presidents, it is important to offer a different perspective on Nixon. Although the politics of preemption were undoubtedly present in the Nixon presidency, one key aspect that deserves attention is a psychological analysis of the 37th President. Although the Presidents that are categorized into Skowronek’s groups may possess similarities, there could also be a wide array of differences between them in terms of psychological makeup. While the time period in which one is President is important in determining successes or failures, the internal dynamics of a President influence the path they embark upon and the decisions they will make while in office. Therefore an examination of the paranoid personality of Richard Nixon will enable us to analyze even deeper into some of the events leading up to and surrounding Watergate, as well as the continued debacle afterwards.

Nixon’s early life points out the dynamic forces that underlined his political character, world view, and style. Nixon, whose childhood consisted of trauma and insecurity, was caught in the middle of an extraordinarily tense situation at home. The formation of Nixon from his childhood experiences was touched upon by James David Barber in his book *Presidential Character*. “As he grew, he had to develop an identity of his own, which would confirm his manliness; to achieve he must work and fight, but always on his own, out from under the controlling influence of anyone else.”

8 The suffering he experienced as a child pushed him to excel in school, and framed the belief in his own mind that he could accomplish anything if he worked hard enough. Barber states that problems could occur for Nixon if dramatic crises escalated into tragedies; this would occur when Nixon was confronted with a severe threat to his

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power. Threats to his independence, as well as the feelings of losing control and being entrapped forced him to move toward forms of rigidification in order to deal with these external forces.

Nixon’s persona is so vital to the study of Watergate that it deserves an in-depth analysis. After conducting my research, I would classify Nixon as having a borderline narcissist personality. According to the authors from the book *Richard Nixon, A Psychobiography*, some traits of the narcissistic personality are “being preoccupied with self-importance and fantasies of endless success and lofty rank; they exhibit grandiosity.” Grandiosity is one of the components of a narcissistic personality. If the grandiose part of the personality is not maintained, “the individual could feel humiliated, may suffer from psychosomatic symptoms, and experience envy, rage, and paranoid fears.” As a result of these symptoms, these people may often attack those whom they consider agents of their downfall, as well as those whom they envy, in order to recapture their grandiose self. The authors in the aforementioned book define Nixon as having an exaggerated personality. “Nixon organized his personality at such a level that he had an exaggerated need to be ‘number-one’ in his own eyes as well as in the eyes of others, to maintain his self-esteem and to avoid the anxiety of acknowledging his hunger-self.”

The reasons for having to feed his grandiose personality relate to why he was so obsessed with the White House tapes. By keeping the tapes exhibits the fact that Nixon not only had oral greediness and anal retentiveness, but also ensuring that his grandiosity would never go hungry. These obsessive motivations “may explain why he did not destroy the tapes after their existence was disclosed and why he protected and fought so fiercely once they were subpoenaed.” By having to give up the tapes would an intrusion into Nixon’s world; it would completely destroy

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his need to control every situation, leading to a possible anxiety or psychosomatic reaction. Even after his presidency, Nixon still waged the battle to regain custody of the tapes. Although his need to gather information about political opponents may be seen as being politically savvy, it appears to me that it had more to do with satisfying his internal demands. For example, in the 1972 Election, Nixon posted his supporters at every speaking engagement of his Democratic opponent, George McGovern. “Nixon wanted to know what was on, what kind turnouts they were getting, and how they were handling them.”

Nixon’s internal grandiosity “self-motivated him to be bold and active and to respond to the demands that came from within in his attempts to change his environment and to secure a lofty place for himself in history.” The periods of time when Nixon was at his worst was when he could not control his grandiose personality, along with his devalued hunger-self coming into his consciousness with full force. Such a situation caused Nixon to react in a suspicious and paranoid manner. At times when his grandiosity was threatened, he believed it vital to protect himself by any means necessary, including irrational and politically-damaging actions. This paranoid personality could be exemplified in his peculiar obsession with Howard Hughes, a billionaire entrepreneur who was paying a lobbyist fee of $180,000 to then Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Lawrence O’Brien. Nixon confided in his Chief of Staff, H.R. Haldeman that he wanted to persecute O’Brien one way or the other. Haldeman would later add

Nixon pushed hard for information tying Larry O’Brien to Howard Hughes, and I could see where that desire could be pushed in trying to find out something through the DNC [Democratic National Committee]… Nixon caused the [Watergate] break-in… He indirectly caused it by setting the tone and putting somewhat relentless demands on me and [Special Counsel to the President Charles] Colson, and maybe through other sources on the campaign… to get information on Hughes’s connection to O’Brien. I would not be surprised to find

somewhere Nixon saying [on the tapes] ‘I want information on Hughes and I want you to get it. I don’t want excuses. I want information.’

I think it is also important to note that Hughes had given a loan to Nixon’s brother, Donald, a person with whom Nixon was in constant competition. The combination of having Hughes associated with O’Brien and Nixon’s brother could have been interpreted by Nixon’s personality as posing threats to his desires for all encompassing power.

One of the other traits associated with narcissism is a sense of immortality. “Richard Nixon’s preoccupation with it reinforced his sense of self-sufficiency and his wish to be number-one. This in turn affected his reactions and decisions.”

His formation of this outlook was determined by events that took place earlier in his family life (losing two brothers to illnesses), political life (assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and attempted assassination of Alabama Governor George Wallace), and personal life (overcoming death on a number of occasions until he eventually died of natural causes at an advanced age). In elaborating on the correlation between this sense of immortality and his political life, Nixon never saw himself as defeated, but rather that he would rise again at another point in time. After losing the 1960 Presidential Election, Nixon concluded that someday he would be back, but was not leaving forever. To me, this belief of immortality was reflected through Watergate; Nixon believed wholeheartedly that regardless of any type of backlash he would face politically, he would always be able to overcome it. “Like the mythical phoenix that crashes to the earth, burns, and then rises again from its own ashes, he would do the same.”

The burglars that were arrested during the break-in on June 17, 1972 were in possession of electronic equipment. One of the burglars, Frank Sturgis would later admit that they had been

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16 Volkan, Richard Nixon: A Psychobiography, 104.
ordered to dig up any information on Hughes. “Apparently Nixon’s unconscious psychological motivations made irrational decisions seem logical: breaking the law became a minor issue in the grand scheme of obtaining desired information, which was necessary in order to achieve his internal anxieties.”\(^\text{18}\)

Originally Nixon had agreed to stay out of the Watergate situation, leaving it solely up to the Committee to Re-Elect the President (CREEP) to carry out the objectives. However, what is interesting to note here is Nixon’s desire to be involved with what was going on all the time. He could not relinquish control, regardless of the fact that something such as Watergate could eventually be leaked back to the White House.

One of the more intriguing theories tied to the break-in is the CIA Trap Theory. Adherents of this theory state that “Nixon’s desire to bring the CIA under White House control, to coordinate and centralize the intelligence operations under the White House umbrella, deeply disturbed members of the agency.”\(^\text{19}\)

Similar situations were taking place in the FBI, where new director Patrick Gray was under pressure to conform to the political control of the White House. Those who support the CIA Trap Theory argue that the break-in was botched on purpose in order to maintain a sense of autonomy. Another reason would be to create problems for Nixon politically. There is speculation that the CIA had advanced knowledge of the break-in; one of the burglars, Eugenio Martinez was still on the payroll when the break-in occurred. Normal procedures would have required Martinez to notify his case officer regarding the projects he was involved in. Regardless of whether or not this theory is true, it is clear that Nixon had the desire to bring diverse bodies together under a centralized, controllable situation. Therefore, he could watch over them to monitor their activities while simultaneously maintaining his leadership.

\(^{18}\) Volkan, Richard Nixon: A Psychobiography, 135.
\(^{19}\) Volkan, Richard Nixon: A Psychobiography, 136.
It is important to also touch upon James David Barber’s categorization of Nixon in his book, *The Presidential Character* since the frame of this paper centers on Nixon’s personality. Barber classifies Nixon as an active-negative President. This categorization is accurate based on the characteristics that Barber uses to describe these types of Presidents. First much of the active-negative type is consumed with self-concern; regardless of the situation at hand, the attention will shift back to him, his problems, and how he is doing. The attention is predominately evident in regards to power; there is a constant struggle to determine whether one is winning or losing, as well as gaining or falling behind. “The active-negative’s perfectionistic conscience lends to his feelings about himself an all-or-nothing quality. He wavers between grandiosity and despair; there is a now-or-never quality.”20 The need to control and maintain power leads an active-negative President toward controlling their aggression; despite provocations, they will control their anger. The combination of the denial of self-gratification mixed with the tendencies to control aggressive impulses present the continuous struggle of either fighting or quitting. Throughout the Watergate scandal, Nixon fought for as long as he could, continuously denying the fact that he had previous knowledge of the illegalities. However, even though he won some battles along the way, he eventually lost the “war” at the end by being forced to relinquish the remaining White House tapes, which led to his inevitable downfall. Those of the active-negative character tend to focus on personal enemies; especially ones whom they feel treat them with condescension. However the most pervasive feeling that Barber identifies is a sense of obligation. “He is a man under orders, required to concentrate, to produce, to follow out his destiny as he sees it.”21 There are also traces of path dependency within this personality. Active-negative Presidents believe that because they are fulfilling some sort of destiny, they find it

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20 Barber, *The Presidential Character*, 81.
21 Barber, *The Presidential Character*, 82.
difficult to look for alternatives and to make adjustments when the course they are on proves to be unproductive. “The Watergate saga—particularly the cover-up—took its shape from Nixon’s old sense that nothing would be right unless he controlled the way of it.”

Nixon constantly insisted throughout Watergate for him and his trusted allies to act effectively in order to control the events, ride through the investigation, and be able to emerge from it in the lead.

**Theoretical Analysis**

An important article that correlates with the Watergate scandal is one written by Paul Pierson. In his article “Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics,” Pierson analyzes the components of time horizons, path dependency, and increasing returns. Unlike the economic approach that focuses primarily on long-term time horizons, politics operates strictly in the short-term. This is obvious due to the fact that politicians only serve in office for a limited amount of time, whereas the economy is a timeless entity. Because of the temporary time limit every politician faces, they predominately think in the short-term. Therefore steps are taken within each politician’s inner circle to help guarantee future political success.

The Watergate scandal also correlates with Pierson’s theory of path dependency because of the ways in which he defines the concept throughout his article. This includes “particular courses of action, once introduced, that can be virtually impossible to reverse,” and “once started down the path, the cost of reversal is very high with entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements that obstruct an easy reversal of the original choice.”

A process is seen as being path dependent if the outcome in any period depends on history and can depend on their order. This puts forward the argument that “history matters.” Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpol state that there are supposed “critical junctures triggering feedback mechanisms that reinforce the

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recurrence of a particular pattern into the future. Once actors have ventured down a particular path they are very likely to find it difficult to reverse course.”

Path dependent sequences take on a form of inertia- once processes are set in motion, they will continue to stay in motion, while continuously moving toward their specific outcomes. Once on the path, political alternatives that once seemed plausible might now seem lost; to stay on the path will also provide positive feedback mechanisms known as increased returns. In the context of this paper, this theory is exemplified in the actions of Nixon and his administration in both path dependent occurrences. Pierson points out in his article that long-term consequences are often difficult to link with a politician once they are out of office. However, Nixon was not as lucky in this regard, as the long-term consequences of him and his inner circle’s actions did not surface years after his presidency, but came shortly after the break-in. Another component of path dependency along with self-reinforcing processes that produce increased returns are mentioned in an article by James Mahoney as reactive sequences. These sequences are orderly and causally connected events. “The sequences are reactive in the sense that each event within the sequence is in part a reaction to temporally antecedent events. Thus each step in the chain is dependent on prior steps.”

Usually within these sequences, the final event in the sequence is typically the outcome under investigation with the chain of events leading up to the outcome.

Nixon had to deal with two different forms of path dependence; the first path dependence road he embarked upon was the collaborative effort to ensure his reelection in 1972. In accounting for only the short-term results, he and his inner circle failed to consider the long-term implications and thus had to deal with the consequences of their illegal actions in this first occurrence of path dependency. Although the increased returns were significant as Nixon won a

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landslide victory, staying on the path would produce severe repercussions soon thereafter. The second path dependence encounter was his personal determination to uphold his own legacy and to maintain the integrity of the office of the presidency once the Watergate scandal started being linked to the White House. However, Nixon then proceeded to offer whoever he could as sacrificial lambs, including some of his closest allies who had helped him achieve his first path dependence objective. He was unable to emerge from Watergate unscathed, therefore making his second attempt at increasing his returns unsuccessful while simultaneously tainting the office of the presidency. The important aspect to consider is that Nixon would have won reelection in 1972 without Watergate; therefore he would have gained the same increased returns had he chosen to embark on the alternative path. This idea correlates with the article “Path Dependence” written by Scott Page. In the article, Page suggests that a common misunderstanding is always linking path dependency with increased returns without factoring in negative externalities along with it. The common assumption is that “if a process generates two possible paths, then some outcome must be more prevalent in one path than in the other. That is true. However, it need not be increasing returns that causes one outcome to be selected more often. Almost any externalities can alter the outcome.” These externalities include “behavioral routines, social connections, or cognitive structures around an institution.” These behavioral routines are present within Nixon and his administration. Nixon’s engrained and internal paranoia led him to believe that committing the illegalities were the only way he could attain his ultimate objectives, when in fact they would have been achieved had he taken the alternative path in the first place. These negative externalities were prevalent in both path dependent pursuits undertaken by Nixon.

While he achieved substantial increased returns in the first path dependent situation, he

27 Page, “Path Dependence,” 89.
simultaneously created negative externalities by allowing the illegalities to take place, leading to the subsequent investigation into Watergate. Then his failed second path dependent pursuit did not obviously produce increased returns for him as he was eventually forced to resign; and the negative externalities that resulted were the staining of the office of presidency, and the loss of the trust of the American people.

In the field of political science, path dependency has been largely correlated with historical institutionalism. “The central claim of historical institutionalism is that choices formed when an institution is being formed or when a policy is being formulated, having a constraining effect into the future.” This can occur because both policies and institutions can be difficult to transition to another course once they have been engrained for a significant period of time. Therefore history does matter because various components that have been established at that point in time can severely constrain those involved with that same situation in the future. However, there are still noticeable holes and criticisms regarding path dependency stemming from the multiple uses of the concept without any clear consistency. For example, according to Adrian Kay, “in order to show constrained change, and thus identify a path dependent process, it is also necessary to show that what did not happen could not have happened.” Therefore in the case of Nixon and Watergate, a path dependency model might fall short in drawing a strong correlation, even though one’s options may narrow the further along the path they go. A countering argument to my thesis could be made, stating that despite psychological issues, Nixon’s road to Watergate was not inevitable, but merely the path he chose to embark upon. Nixon had two different paths he could have taken; one path would have been the one in which he could have conducted a cleaner, professional campaign as opposed to one that he chose.

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instead. However, Nixon’s personality set him on the opposite course many years prior to the 1972 election. The series of traumatic incidents that took place before his presidency are not excuses for Watergate. While other Presidents may have experienced setbacks in their lives, few if any had those impediments permeate into their presidency and reach the negative level of Nixon.

Although the events that led to his political demise occurred during his presidency, I think there is another event that took place years before which sets the stage for the inevitability of Watergate. This would be Nixon’s defeat to John F. Kennedy in the 1960 Presidential election. After his defeat Nixon’s campaign manager Len Hall said to him, “You know Dick, a switch of only 14,000 votes, and we would have been the heroes and they would have been the bums.”30 Nixon himself even reflected on the outcome of the election by stating, “As I review in retrospect those significant events twelve months later, I am the first to recognize that if the year 1960 could be relived, I would revise some decisions and would do some things that I did not do.”31 I believe these passages correlate to the “ends justify the means” approach that was taken by Nixon and his reelection campaign. This relates to immortal part of Nixon’s personality; he vowed to himself that he would back on the national stage shortly. However, it appears that not winning the 1960 election caused him to embark on the path of ensuring his future victories in Presidential elections, regardless of the costs that were taken along the way. Although the main focus of this paper is Watergate and the events leading up to it, the 1960 election provides significant insight into Nixon’s election strategy of winning by any means necessary in future Presidential elections.

31 Nixon, Six Crises, 294.
**Pentagon Papers and Plumbers**

One of the significant pre-Watergate events was the Pentagon Papers, leaked by a former aide to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara named Daniel Ellsburg. The story leaked to the press explained how President Lyndon Johnson had misled Congress and the public about casualty figures, government strategy, and US troop involvement in Vietnam. When the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the press regarding the printing of the Pentagon Papers, Nixon was irate, immediately beginning a countdown of who was to blame. He told Presidential Assistant Charles Colson “we’ve got a counter-government here and we’ve got to fight it. I don’t give a damn how it’s done. Do whatever has to be done to stop these leaks…I don’t want to be told why it can’t be done. This government cannot survive; it cannot function if anyone can run out and leak. I want to know who is behind this…”

32 Nixon had a meeting shortly thereafter with Chief of Staff H.R. Hardeman, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and Attorney General John Mitchell, in which he compared the Ellsburg situation to that of Alger Hiss, a former State Department official imprisoned for perjury after investigations were conducted by Nixon while he served in the House of Representatives. Nixon wanted to defeat Ellsburg in much the same way he was able to defeat Hiss; by exploiting him through the press. Nixon also had desires to authorize break-ins to the Brookings Institute, a political think-tank, in order to dig up any information that could be leaked to the press and used against the Democrats. In regards to the press, Nixon stated, “those sons of bitches are killing me…we’re up against an enemy, a conspiracy. They are using any means. We are going to use any means. Is that clear?”

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In the summer of 1971, Nixon orchestrated the formation of “The Plumbers,” a special investigations unit created by Domestic Policy Chief John Ehrlichman, given the main task of

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33 Reeves, President Nixon, 339.
plugging the leaks of White House information to the press. The group was not only created for Nixon’s oversight, but also because the FBI and CIA were seen as unreliable sources. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover had a close relationship with Ellsburg’s father-in-law, and the CIA mainly focuses on issues abroad. Ehrlichman chose his protégé, Bud Krogh and Kissinger’s former personal assistant, David Young to head up the special investigations unit. Along with Krogh and Young were E. Howard Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy, past workers of the CIA and FBI respectively. “Both were right-wing ideologues who had neither political nor moral qualms over using illegal methods against those they regarded as enemies of the state.”

Krogh later recalled that the President wanted him to proceed with zeal comparable to what Nixon exercised. The President’s wish fired up and overshadowed every aspect of the unit’s work. Krogh would later state that Ehrlichman repeatedly informed him that the President considered the work of the Plumbers “a matter of highest national security and not to discuss it under any circumstances.”

Various tasks were performed by this group including tapping the phone of newsmen, the burglary at the office of Lewis Fielding, Daniel Ellsburg’s psychiatrist and the fabrication of a State Department cable linking the Kennedy administration to the assassination of President Diem of South Vietnam. The break-in to the office of Lewis Fielding was named “Hunt/ Liddy Special Project No. 1,” and was devised by Young. If the Plumbers were able to gather any type of information that could be used against Ellsburg, they could discredit him as a lunatic. The permission was given for the Plumbers to engage in the covert activity of breaking into the office; Colson later concluded this break-in was approved by Ehrlichman with Nixon’s knowledge. This project was headed by Bernard Barker, who had worked for Howard Hunt while he was a CIA officer. Barker recruited two other men, Felipe DeDiego and Eugenio


Martinez. However, the mission was a failure as they were unable to locate any files pertaining to Ellsburg. Ehrlichman would later describe the break-in as the “seminal Watergate episode;” Krogh considered this incident to be far worse than Watergate, for this first demonstrated to him the administration’s commitment to illegal activities. Charles Colson, Special Assistant to the President, met with Nixon to discuss further plans regarding Ellsburg. Colson wanted to place Ellsburg into the middle of an anti-government conspiracy threatening to dismantle the credibility of the US throughout the world. Nixon could then be presented as a hero by standing up to this “counter-government.” Colson also wanted to use the Pentagon Papers as a way to discredit both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, similar to the earlier tactics of trying to tie Kennedy in with the assassination of South Vietnamese President Diem.

In order to do so, Howard Hunt collected 240 cables between Washington and Saigon from October and November of 1963. After reading through the original transcripts, there was no link between Diem’s murder and Kennedy; Diem and his brother Nhu, were actually killed by officers of their own army on November 1, 1963. However, in order to still accomplish the goal as portraying the murder as Kennedy’s idea, Hunt performed a drastic measure. “Using a razor blade to cut his words, and some paste, then photocopying his handiwork, he fabricated a cable dated October 29, 1963 to the American embassy in Saigon; the phony cable read: “At highest level meeting today, decision reluctantly made that [we should not] intervene in behalf of Diem or Nhu in event they seek asylum.”36 Actions such as the break-in at Fielding’s office and fabrication of the cable are examples of the path dependent course that those in Nixon’s inner circle took to ensure his reelection.

36 Reeves, *President Nixon*, 371.
According to Eli Chesen, “Nixon’s very edict to form the Plumbers unit is an extension of omniscience. Recalling that his psychological security thrives on knowing as much as possible about everything, the organization of the Plumbers can be interpreted as merely another mechanism for acquiring knowledge or intelligence.”\(^{37}\) This obsession with direct control over everything was the underlying reason for the Plumbers unit in the first place. The ability to control this group was unlike the insignificant amount of power that he could exert over federal agencies such as the CIA, FBI, NSA, or IRS. Being in complete command of the situation pertains directly to Nixon’s psychological make-up, which requires that he have total control over himself and his environment. Through this intelligence gathering, he could increase his power over his so-called “enemies,” whether it entailed politicians, the media, or some other component of society. Nixon lived in constant fear that these enemies would be able to produce information that could lead to his political demise. However, by having the Plumbers conduct operations such as wiretapping on newsman’s phones, Nixon could “monitor closely and constantly the degree to which his protective shell is being penetrated. He can then fortify any weakness before it gets out of control.”\(^ {38}\) Nixon was also afraid of anyone whom he thought could read his mind, which includes psychiatrists. The break-in at Daniel Ellsburg’s psychiatrist’s office reinforces that sentiment. Since the job of the psychiatrist is to help interpret thoughts and “read minds,” Nixon may have believed that by attaining Daniel Ellsburg’s medical records, he could use it blackmail him. It is ironic that Nixon would be in favor of gathering information from a place that probably scared him to death. The very reason Daniel Ellsburg was later placed on trial is because the leaking of the Pentagon Papers to the press was a direct attack


\(^{38}\) Chesen, *President Nixon’s Psychiatric Profile*, 166-167.
on Nixon’s pursuit of grandiosity and complete power, while simultaneously trying to remain in his shell.

The Committee to Reelect the President, also known as CREEP, was established in March 1971. One the tasks they were involved with was taking part in a series of spying operations and schemes to disrupt Democratic campaigns. In order to ensure Senator Edmund Muskie’s demise in his bid for the Democratic nomination, CREEP recruited a Washington taxi driver to drive Muskie around. For $1,000 a month, the driver would report to members of CREEP regarding what he heard and saw while with Muskie. This would be followed by the Canuck Letter written by Director of White House Communications, Ken Clawson, in February of 1972, two weeks before the New Hampshire primary. This letter implied that Muskie was prejudiced against Americans of French-Canadian descent; although untrue, it led to the inevitable implosion of Muskie’s campaign, producing a weaker Democratic candidate, George McGovern. In regards to CREEP, G. Gordon Liddy, a former FBI agent became counsel to the committee, and James McCord, a former FBI and CIA officer joined CREEP as a security coordinator. McCord’s specialty was physical security; protecting buildings against spies. In early 1972, G. Gordon Liddy presented a plan entitled “Operation Gemstone” to John Mitchell, the former Attorney General who was soon taking over as Chairman of CREEP, as well as White House Counsel John Dean. This operation was a $1 million project, and was seen as the answer to the pressure put on by Nixon to produce more intelligence on Democratic candidates and on the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Larry O’Brien. There were also sub-operations with names such as “Diamond,” “Ruby” and “Sapphire.” Liddy’s original idea was centered on the upcoming Democratic and Republican national conventions. Liddy proposed hiring training squads to relocate prominent radicals that could surface at the Convention, as well
as leasing a pleasure craft; Liddy then wanted to hire women to seduce Democratic officials to the craft, which would be wired for both sounds and sights to try and intercept information from the officials. Mitchell believed the idea to be a little too extreme, so he asked Liddy to reevaluate his ideas. Liddy was able to condense the costs down from $1 million to $500,000, and centered his idea on surveillance and targets. “The top priority, they concluded was O’Brien; Liddy had plans for surveillance of both his convention office at the Democratic National Committee headquarters and in the Watergate complex along the Potomac River.”

**Watergate**

The first break-in at the Watergate complex occurred on May 28, 1972, with the Cubans browsing through DNC files, as well as removing documents to photograph. James McCord installed taps on two phones, and after testing them, decided they worked to his satisfaction. On June 14, 1972, G. Gordon Liddy informed Howard Hunt that the group had to return to the Watergate offices because one of the bugs was installed incorrectly. The volume on the phone of Larry O’Brien’s secretary was so low that it yielded no information. On the night of June 16th leading into the early hours of the 17th, Hunt brought back James McCord, Bernard Barker, Virgilio Gonzalez, Eugenio Martinez, and Frank Sturgis. McCord volunteered to tape the locks of the doors. However, he put the tape on horizontally, making it visible to security guard Frank Willis, who proceeded to take it off. The burglars gained entrance by taking a back door off its hinges. Willis spotted the new tape on the door, and called the police. Plain-clothed officers responded to the call, entering the hotel without being detected by Hunt’s lookout. The lookout notified Hunt via walkie-talkie about the police once he saw them with their flashlights and drawn guns inside the hotel. Hunt tried to dispatch a call to Barker, but he had turned off his

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39 Reeves, *President Nixon*, 431.
radio because of the static. The police made their way down from the 8th to the 6th floor, where they then spotted the tape in the doorway. Once the police found the burglars, Barker notified Hunt that they had been caught. Hunt and Liddy hurriedly left the room after packing the electronic equipment into two suitcases. However, they left behind “thirty-two consecutively numbered $100 bills, two address books with Howard Hunt’s name and White House telephone number, and a $6.36 check from Hunt to his country club. The police found it all the next day.”

On June 18th, CREEP Chairman John Mitchell announced that “neither McCord nor the others had operated on behalf of the campaign committee.” Mitchell also proclaimed that the administration had no prior knowledge of McCord’s actions, and was thus not carrying out any direct orders from the White House. Mitchell stated “[McCord] was the proprietor of a private security agency who was employed by our committee months ago to assist with the installation of our security system.” In regards to the break-in, Mitchell stated that he was surprised and dismayed at those reports. Then in a classic Nixonian-type way, Mitchell turned the situation around to make it appear as though Nixon was the victim, was being blamed for false charges. “We have our own security problems.” Those involved in the actual break-in were burying and burning equipment, hiding wiretap gear, as well as shredding and burning documents. The White House employed various tactics of their own. “The White House was doing things criminal bosses who don’t want to get convicted do: fouling the chain of evidence, putting detectives off their scent, lying, inventing alibis- obstructing justice.” Press Secretary Ron Ziegler dismissed the break-in as a third-rate burglary, thus being too messy and not well-financed enough to be a

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40 Reeves, President Nixon, 500.
41 Stanley L. Kutler, The Wars of Watergate, 189.
43 Perlstein, Nixonland, 678.
44 Perlstein, Nixonland, 680.
job of those within the government. Democratic Chairman Lawrence O’Brien, who was one of the main targets with the wiretaps, held a press conference on the 20th, announcing that he was filing a $1 million damage suit against CREEP. O’Brien’s press conference mapped out the link between CREEP and the White House by linking Colson as one of the participants; by this point, Howard Hunt’s name as well as James McCord’s employment in the reelection committee had become public. O’Brien stated, “no mere statement of innocence by Mr. Nixon’s campaign manager, John Mitchell, former attorney general, will dispel these questions…only the most searching professional investigation can determine to what extent if any, the Committee for the Reelection of the President is involved in this attempt to spy on Democratic headquarters.”

That same day Colson met with Nixon suggesting that the White House go on the offensive. They both agreed that someone was spying on the President’s reelection campaign. Nixon wanted an article written as well as a speech presented reminding the public about the Pentagon Papers. “Colson also thought to trace another anti-Nixon ad to Senator George McGovern, which would then make eavesdropping at the Watergate hotel look like child’s play.”

Nixon stated that if any attack was mounted against him or his administration, he would just stonewall the information. Two days later, Nixon met with reporters assuring them that the White House had no involvement in the Watergate incident. However, six days later, John Mitchell resigned as Chairman of CREEP. In the process, Mitchell also dismissed Liddy, who had worked with Ehrlichman on “law enforcement matters,” participated with the Plumbers, as well as being linked with Howard Hunt and the five Watergate burglars. The Watergate break-in was part of a seamless web. However, as much as Nixon tried to deflect his involvement in his campaign, it was apparent that he was the puppeteer behind the curtain, directing those in his inner circle to

45 Perlstein, Nixonland, 678.
46 Stanley L. Kutler, The Wars of Watergate, 112.
carry a multitude of activities to ensure his reelection victory. This high level of involvement was reiterated by White House Assistant Alexander Butterfield in a later testimony; Butterfield claimed that for over two years, Nixon and his aides directed the committee’s operations. The formation of CREEP, as well as the bypassing of the Republican National Committee was a reflection of Nixon’s need for control, as described earlier in the paper by Eli Chesen. It is important to emphasize that the direction that CREEP headed was steered directly from the White House. Events that occurred in CREEP or with the RNC were not strictly the ideas of the members in those groups. It seems that those in Nixon’s inner circle saw him as someone that could not be disobeyed; they were simply following orders. There are similar traces of this approach put forth by Guy Adams and Danny Balfour in their book Unmasking Administrative Evil. One of their arguments discusses the concept of moral inversion. Because of the fact that administrative evil is masked, no one has to actually accept an invitation to commit any evil act. “Rather the invitation may come packaged as a good and worthy project, representing what we call a moral inversion, in which something evil or destructive has been redefined as good and worthy.” People working within the circle could have become so immersed with continuing down the same path, they may have not realized the severity of their illegal actions until after the fact. One can see the correlation with the administrative evils listed above to the Nixon administration. It is not as though Nixon and his inner circle saw their illegalities as evil; they seemed convinced that their actions were based on the fact that they were merely following orders that would achieve the overall objective of Nixon winning reelection, followed by Nixon’s individual pursuit of protecting the office of the presidency.

H.R. Haldeman, Nixon’s Chief of Staff and right-hand man met just about daily with Nixon in late 1971 through 1972; most of the discussion centered on campaign information and little was about policy. When Nixon appointed Mitchell as Chairman of CREEP in February 1972, it was agreed that he would report directly to Haldeman, who would serve as a conduit. In this case, if Hardeman is the middle man, who would be the man to whom he would relay the information from Mitchell? It could have been none other than Nixon himself. As with any situation that affected him closely, Nixon had to keep a tight leash. The investigation into Watergate eventually exposed most of the “dirty tricks” carried out by Nixon’s inner circle. Nixon saw these tricks as nothing more than retaliation for similar actions that had been done to him in the past. “I told my staff that we should come up with the kind of imaginative dirty tricks that our Democratic opponents used against us and others so effectively in previous campaigns.” As the investigation into Watergate got deeper, the prosecutors discovered that the five burglars as well as Hunt and Liddy had important ties to CREEP and the White House, and all received money from questionable campaign contributions. This leads one to the question of what was the purpose of the break-in. What was its overall end and what specific purpose did it serve? Various theories have surfaced in regards to these questions, and have been described by Stanley Kutler in his book *The Wars of Watergate*. Although they all may be credible scenarios, the reality is that one may not ever know for sure what the real causes were, but the effects are readily apparent.

**The Cover-Up**

Haldeman designated John Dean with the task of ensuring that Nixon was not implicated in the White House scandal. Haldeman had been impressed with Dean, for he exemplified

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similar qualities that the Chief of Staff held toward the President; pliancy, reliability, obedience, as well as being consumed by a blind ambition and loyalty of service. Although John Dean himself was not involved in the cover-up, he still became the orchestrator behind the numerous factions involved with the scandal. The idea for the cover-up was determined by Nixon and his Chief of Staff. The President was involved in the cover-up from Day One, Haldeman would later reveal, thus trying to conced his own involvement. Those on the inner circle not only feared being investigated on Watergate, but also for other groups such as the Plumbers; therefore Dean became one of the “project managers” regarding Watergate. Haldeman needed someone to handle the cover-up and Dean was the right man for the job. Dean had “worked in Congress on a committee to reform criminal laws, as well as serving in the Justice Department;”49 Haldeman also saw Dean as an intelligent, courteous young man who did his job efficiently.

Three days after the break-in occurred, Nixon learned of Hunt and Liddy’s connection to CREEP, but did not order Haldeman or anyone else to inform the FBI. Nixon discussed with Haldeman how to raise money for the burglars as well as bringing in pressure on the FBI from the CIA as a way to limit the investigation. Following from this meeting was another meeting between these two men on June 23\textsuperscript{rd}; in a meeting that would prove to be of the utmost significance later as the investigation unfolded, Nixon and Haldeman took steps to try and cover-up any links between the burglars, CREEP, and the White House. “Their actions in legal terms constituted in obstruction of justice. In political terms, in the public’s perception, the cover-up projected an indelible impression that Nixon was personally involved in the crime.”50 With the FBI moving in quickly to investigate the break-in, Nixon and Haldeman ordered for the cooperation of the CIA. They knew the FBI was aware of the Cuban burglars’ CIA links, had

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been able to trace the source of the burglars’ money, and realized this would implicate CREEP. However, Nixon then tried to distance himself from both the CIA and FBI, telling Ehrlichman that he did not want to discuss Watergate with either agency. Nixon and his collaborators were able to bring the FBI investigation to a halt by insisting that this was a secret CIA operation, to which the FBI would serve no purpose. The irony in this situation is the fact that acting FBI Director Patrick Gray was leading a strong investigation of the break-in because he wanted to impress Nixon by being able to effectively follow the scent. Little did he know at the time where that scent had originated.

Nixon would later insist that his actions were not criminal; the way he seemed to perceive himself is in fact comparable to the types of moral inversion being carried out by those on his inner circle. Nixon justified his knowledge of the illegalities inside his administration on the grounds that he did not feel that the erosion of the office of the Presidency, nor a possible defeat in the 1972 General Election would be in the best interest of the country. As he would later describe in his memoirs, “I was simply handling in a pragmatic way an annoying and strictly political problem. I saw Watergate as politics pure and simple. We were going to play it tough.”

This could be justified on the grounds that the opposing side would operate in the same fashion when given the opportunity to do so. However, Nixon’s reflection is purely a reference to John Locke and his insight into the executive prerogative as discussed in an article written by Larry Arnhart. John Locke has defined this power “to act according to discretion, for the public good, without the prescription of the law and sometimes against it.” The executive prerogative also is reliant upon three specific factors; “the nature of people, the nature of legislative power,

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and the nature of nature.”53 The prerogative is necessary because the people demand it, with the assumption it will be used for the overall public good. Another key aspect of the prerogative is the need for quick political action in order to handle problems not governed by law. While this approach may be seen as justified in cases of Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt, it is difficult to connect it with Nixon. This problem is discussed in the book The Imperial Presidency by Arthur Schlesinger. “Schlesinger denies the validity of Nixon’s claims to prerogative power, but he concedes that Lockean prerogative is available to the President for use in emergencies.”54 The overall goal of Locke’s approach is to use these discretionary powers in order to work toward the greater good of society; however a fine line exists between discretionary power and abuse of power, which Nixon blatantly crossed.

John Dean’s work, which had been to cover up any leaks that could be linked to the White House, had been seen as evidence that the administration was doing all it could in the investigation. Nixon himself even stated that situation was a disaster already, so there was no need to try and cover anything up. On September 15th, 1972, after a meeting between Nixon and Dean, the President applauded Dean for the great job. Although Dean may have known better, he was simply following the orders of his boss. Nixon informed Dean he wanted “the most comprehensive notes on all of those who are trying to do us in.”55 The Democrats were forcefully trying to bring Nixon down, so this was Dean’s chance to assist the President in retaliation. Despite Nixon’s worries, Dean convinced Nixon that Watergate had not affected his reelection campaign.

Dean had also received a memorandum from Kenneth Parkinson, the attorney for the CREEP Finance Committee, as well as CREEP Finance Chairman Maurice Stans. CREEP and

55 Stanley L. Kutler, The Wars of Watergate, 224.
Stans were under investigation by the Banking and Currency Committee, mostly led by Congressman Wright Patman, who was trying to follow the financial transactions surrounding CREEP. However, due to pressure from the administration, the momentum of the Banking and Currency Committee came to a halt. Patman was also thrown into a smear campaign by being linked to a Greek man, who opposed the Greek junta and was labeled a Communist. To further dispel the situation, Nixon wanted House Minority Leader Gerald Ford to take the lead. “Ford charged that Patman had started a political witch hunt, and offered his assurances that no one in the White House or CREEP had been involved.” However, Patman was not easily suppressed. On October 31st, he released the staff report of the House and Banking Currency Committee, which linked CREEP officials to the burglars, while also accusing the White House of a cover-up. Although the effects of this report were minimal at the time, they still provided significant effects in the long run. It produced a level of paranoia which was increased after the information provided by acting FBI Director Patrick Gray in early March 1973. After Gray’s Senate Confirmation Hearings in which he discussed his relationship with Nixon, Dean and other White House staff members regarding Watergate, Nixon knew he had to do something. These incidents increased the amount of paranoia running through the President and his administration, causing the cover-up to be expanded and intensified, thus widening the gap for future errors or exposure. Things would only get worse from this point for Nixon.

On March 21, 1973, Dean met with Nixon telling the President that the White House defenses were crumbling and their plan to cover-up Watergate was failing. The issue of hush money was becoming a focal point in the cover-up. Dean was informed by Liddy that the Watergate defendants needed money for living expenses. Nixon’s lawyer, Herbert Kalmbach

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was enlisted to raise the money, and he distributed it to the defendants through a committee and Howard Hunt’s lawyer. Dean saw this situation as ‘most troublesome’ for it involved Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell, and Dean in obstruction of justice. Haldeman informed Nixon that he had authorized the use of $350,000 cash reserve in his safe to pay the defendants. Howard Hunt was also demanding $122,000, and was threatening to destroy Domestic Policy Advisor Ehrlichman if he did not receive the money. Hunt had dirt on Ehrlichman for the Ellsburg break-in and other illegal actions. Nixon believed it was important to keep Hunt under control; he knew a lot about the illegalities within the White House that could not only sink Ehrlichman, but Charles Colson, another person close to the President. Nixon concluded with Dean that blackmail money was appropriate in hopes of being able to put a lid on the investigation. However Dean informed Nixon that this would not be enough; with possible “indictments looming for Haldeman because of the break-in connection, and Ehrlichman because of the Ellsburg case, Nixon sensed a great danger to himself.”\textsuperscript{57} In figuring out where to go from here, Nixon conducted a meeting with Ehrlichman, Haldeman, Mitchell, and Dean. Nixon had the idea of relying on Dean to come up with another heroic plan to save his administration from erosion, similar to the cover-up tactics he used during the 1972 election. However, even at this point, Nixon did not believe Watergate to be a main issue, but that it would become one eventually. At a meeting the next day, the decision was made for Dean to write a report stating those who were involved as well as those who were not involved. This was not only a defensive barrier for Nixon, but it would also provide a reference point to the extent of the knowledge that the White House possessed in the cover-up. However, no Dean Report was ever written, as Dean determined that this could have

\textsuperscript{57} Stanley L. Kutler, \textit{The Wars of Watergate}, 277.
severe negative repercussions that would involve everyone from the President down. However, as the Watergate plot thickened, Nixon knew a plan would have to be devised soon.

The US Attorney’s Office had determined that Jeb Magruder, White House Aide and Deputy Director of CREEP had willingly committed perjury under the direction of Dean. Magruder and his lawyers began extended discussions with the Attorney’s Office, leading to a confession and plea bargain. Magruder’s discussions with prosecutors resulted in Mitchell and the CREEP operation being blamed for everything, thus shifting the Watergate scandal away from the White House. The same day that Magruder was discussing his information with prosecutors, “Nixon, Haldeman, and Ehrlichman devised a convoluted plan to convince Mitchell to assume responsibility for the whole affair.”\(^{58}\) Ehrlichman gave the President a report which correlated with Magruder’s story and thus offered up another form of documentation that dismissed White House involvement in either the break-in or the cover-up. The report portrayed those such as Mitchell, Liddy, Magruder, as well as other CREEP officials or lawyers as having “misinterpreted White House requests from Haldeman and Colson for intelligence, planned and executed the break-in and then sought to cover up their activities.”\(^{59}\) Aside from the request from Mitchell to Dean to help raise money for the defendants, there was no other mention of anyone within the administration as having any knowledge of the situation. Ehrlichman correctly assumed that by this point, Dean was ready to testify, but he incorrectly assumed that the White House Counsel would confine his remarks only to Magruder or Mitchell. Nixon met with Haldeman and Ehrlichman on April 14\(^{th}\) 1973, discussing more strategies to keep Mitchell out in center stage and enable Nixon to maintain his grandiose position. Nixon wanted Mitchell to take responsibility for everything. Kutler points out that everyone had an agenda; Nixon’s agenda was

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to ensure that the office of the presidency was left intact. However, when Ehrlichman met with Mitchell to discuss the plan, Mitchell threatened Ehrlichman, telling him that he had information of his own that he could use against the White House.

Nixon was not only growing unsure of Mitchell, but also of John Dean, who had been recently mentioned by Magruder as the one who helped him commit perjury. The prosecutors were also becoming increasingly interested in Haldeman’s possible links to wiretap intelligence. However, even under this pressure, Haldeman remained a loyal solider to the President. Nixon was realizing that the heat was increasing for both Haldeman and Ehrlichman; the former because of Watergate and the latter because of the Plumbers. John Dean, however, became the main focus of Nixon, and he wanted Ehrlichman to ensure that Dean would not say anything that would tarnish the presidency. By the time of Nixon’s request, Dean had already spoken to prosecutors. “Dean’s conversations with the prosecutors at first centered on Magruder and Mitchell, but then expanded to the role of the President’s aides, including information on the Fielding break-in.”

When Dean realized he was the scapegoat, he escalated his charges toward the President. Now it was no longer a sense of containment within the White House, but was now damage control.

On April 16th, Nixon had a meeting with Dean that centered on the Watergate break-in, and when Nixon had knowledge of it. Although the break-in had been discussed at the September 15th meeting, Nixon wanted to persuade Dean to the contrary. He tried to emphasize that he had no prior knowledge of Watergate before their meeting in March. Simultaneously, Nixon was also trying to ally himself with Assistant Attorney General Henry Peterson, who was assigned to investigate Watergate. Nixon wanted to convince Peterson of his desire to get to the

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60 Stanley L. Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate*, 300.
bottom of this matter and find the truth. Kutler describes the outstanding effort that Nixon was putting forward at this point in time; “appropriating the ideas of others, feigning ignorance, expressing incredulity, and bewilderment, manipulating subordinates for his own protection, and typically concerned about the public-relations aspect of this case, the President struggled for survival. That he eventually failed is no adequate measure of his effort.”

After his meeting with Dean, the President met with White House Aide Leonard Garment, who told Nixon that the only way to save his presidency was to get rid of everyone including Ehrlichman and Haldeman.

The overarching important mission at this point was for Nixon to save his presidency. He had been engaging in illegal activities since June 1972. Along the way, Nixon was prepared to sacrifice his good friend, former partner, and close advisor, John Mitchell; the former Attorney General along with Ehrlichman and Haldeman were the President’s sacrificial lambs. These events that happened in April, although tedious, provide significant insight into Nixon’s paranoia. He originally surrounded himself with people within his inner circle who he thought he could trust; these men were deathly loyal and engaged in acts of moral inversion as a result. However once the infighting stemming from the investigation began to spread through the White House like wildfire, Nixon seemed to begin crumble internally as well. These were the same men who helped stonewall the investigation from originally reaching the White House in the first place, and he was now in the uncomfortable position of having to possibly fire these men or keep them around and hope they would leave on their own accord. However, as a way to diminish the severity of the situation, Nixon assured himself that Ehrlichman and Haldeman had no campaign connection. He wanted the story to continue as follows: John Mitchell was the culprit for everything, Nixon had not spoken to Dean about the cover-up until after the election, Haldeman

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had nothing to do with the break-in or wiretaps, and Ehrlichman’s involvement with the Plumbers was justified on the grounds of national security. With the threat of John Dean still looming, Nixon told Haldeman to keep the tapes from the March 21st meeting (where the break-in and money for the Watergate defendants were discussed) a secret. At this point, it would have been a devastating blow to Nixon if the public attained knowledge of the tapes.

On Sunday April 29th, Nixon summoned Haldeman and Ehrlichman to Camp David and demanded their resignations. Nixon told Haldeman “I’m the guilty one, mentioning his giving free reign to Colson, his allowing Dean to maintain the cover-up, and his mistake in allowing Mitchell to run his campaign.”62 The next evening Nixon addressed the nation. As a way to protect himself from enemies and opposition, Nixon admitted no guilt whatsoever, believing that admitting any involvement would only lead him being ripped apart by his enemies. He questioned the motives of others, blamed externals, and again reiterated that he had no knowledge of Watergate before his March 21st meeting with Dean. Nixon knew this was the beginning of the end. With Ehrlichman and Haldeman out of the picture, he had not only lost both of his arms, but his main loyalists and defenders. Nixon spent the remaining 465 days in office fending off his enemies, themselves once the pursued, but now the pursuers. There was now no Mitchell, Dean, Haldeman, or Ehrlichman to cover the mistakes and misdeeds of the administration.

**Nixon’s Fight to the End**

Nixon was determined to fight the Watergate war with everything he had in him. In early 1974, resignation was not on Nixon’s mind. He believed to do so would not only be an admission of guilt, but establish a precedent that could be used toward future Presidents. Nixon

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wrote “above all else: dignity, command, faith, head high, no fear, build a new spirit, drive, act like a President, and act like a winner. Opponents are savage destroyers, haters. Time to use full power of the President to fight overwhelming forces arrayed against us.” In his State of the Union address on January 30, 1974, Nixon claimed he had given Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski all the information he needed to move forward with the scandal, and bring justice to the guilty and clearance to the innocent. Nixon reiterated his obligation to uphold the obligation to support the office of the presidency, do nothing to weaken the office itself, while continuing to serve the American people. As Special Prosecutor Jaworski began to listen to the taped conversations, he began to realize the extent of the mess to which he was now involved. Jaworski concluded that Nixon had full knowledge of the scandal and subsequent cover-up. “Nixon schooled his aides to commit perjury and moved people around as a chessman to cover this thing up.” On December 19, 1973, the Senate Select Committee issued three subpoenas for additional materials, but were rejected by the President on grounds that he must protect the executive branch from incursions made by other branches. However, the tapes, including the infamous one with the 18 and a half minute gap had already been delivered by Nixon’s lawyer, Fred Buzhardt to Judge John Sirica on November 26th. Once Jaworski and his staff heard the tapes, they believed they had a case against Nixon. After this realization, Jaworski recalls that “Nixon got tremendously jittery and much of the earlier spirit of cooperation dissipated.” Jaworski also questioned why the taping system was left in place because of the wrongful conduct of the President on these tapes. When Jaworski pushed for more material to be released, Nixon’s lawyer and Special Counsel James St. Clair backed the President, suggesting to the Special

63 Stanley L. Kutler, The Wars of Watergate, 443.
64 Stanley L. Kutler, The Wars of Watergate, 445.
65 Stanley L. Kutler, The Wars of Watergate, 448.
Prosecutor that instead of demanding the tapes themselves, “submit written interrogations concerning their contents, a tactic designed to forestall written litigation.”\footnote{Stanley L. Kutler, The Wars of Watergate, 449.}

A new threat was imminent from the White House Judiciary Committee, which also demanded tape recordings for themselves. However, in this case, the House had an absolute constitutional right to consider impeachment, which posed the problem as to how far Nixon could extend his failure to cooperate. This situation conflicted with Nixon’s personal dilemma of cooperating with the House or maintaining the integrity of the presidency. On April 29\textsuperscript{th}, Nixon announced the releasing of the tape transcripts. However what worried him most was “that the tapes threatened the degree of confidentiality so vital to the functioning of the presidency. He also admitted that the transcripts were at odds with previous sworn testimony.”\footnote{Stanley L. Kutler, The Wars of Watergate, 453.} Nixon hoped that the release of the transcripts would help to clear his name from the cover-up, and show that he was trying to do what was best for the American people at this time. As much as he tried to plead ignorance, the devil was in the details. The transcripts ruined his public standing and left him open to criticism from Congressional Republicans and the media. Although the transcripts did not provide a “smoking gun” by linking Nixon to an impeachable crime, it did provide a glimpse into the paranoid and sleazy environment that had existed in the Nixon Administration. The transcripts also increased public opinions for Nixon to prove his innocence, resign, or suffer the consequences of impeachment. The fact that there were increased calls for Nixon to release more material to the Judiciary Committee shows there were new “enemies” in Nixon’s paranoid world.

The key tape that had not been released at this point in time was from June 23, 1972, just six days after the Watergate break-in. This was a conversation between Nixon and Haldeman in
which a plan was devised to use the CIA in order to disrupt the FBI’s investigation of the burglary. Nixon refrained from releasing the tape because he did not know how this particular tape could be excerpted properly. The June 23, 1972 tape was ultimately the “smoking gun.” On July 24, 1974, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that Nixon must submit the remaining tapes. His second path dependent was nearing its end. However, this time, Nixon would not emerge victorious. On July 27, 1974 the House Judiciary Committee voted 27 to 1 to recommend the first article of impeachment against the president: obstruction of justice. The second article (abuse of power) was passed on July 29th, 1974 and third article (contempt of Congress) on July 30th, 1974. With impeachment charges approaching quickly, Richard Nixon resigned as President of the United States on August 9th, 1974. Although the House Committee had voted in favor of impeachment, Nixon resigned before the full articles of impeachment could be voted upon by the full House of Representatives. Nixon escaped the possibility of having to stand trial with the chance of being convicted for the illegalities he committed during Watergate because he was later pardoned by President Ford.

**Conclusion**

Although it may be difficult to place any exact amount of blame on Nixon for the Watergate break-ins, the events take on a Nixonian theme of ensuring power over his adversaries and having omnipotent control. In this case the “enemies” were members of the Democratic Party, as well as others who posed threats to his grandiosity. If the break-in would have been successful, and the burglars were able to attain useful pieces of information, Nixon and his inner circle could have used that intelligence in order to suppress the “enemies.” The recurring themes that were present throughout the Nixon administration portrayed a sense of paranoid overkill. Any approach was taken to get the job done regardless of whether or not it was legal. The
ultimate goal of winning re-election in 1972 put Nixon and his inner circle on the path of no return. The costs of diverting from this path were too high, and the increasing returns of staying on the path were too great. The fallout from Watergate was not only a political defeat, but a psychological one as well; in Nixon’s case it meant the intolerable loss of control. The reality is that no one is above the law, not even the President of the United States. As time carries on, Watergate, the dynamics of the burglary, and those involved will fade from the consciousness of history. “The burglary itself- its planning, its flawed execution, and even its motives- ultimately must been seen as part of a behavior pattern characterizing the President, and his aides that stretched back to the beginning of the Nixon administration.”68 However, what will not be mitigated would be the constitutional crisis generated by the administration’s behavior after the break-in occurred. The behavior led to crimes of cover-up and obstruction of justice by high administrative White House officials, including Richard Nixon himself. If not for the break-in, Nixon may have been considered one of the best Presidents ever. However, his entrenched involvement in Watergate will forever supersede his foreign and domestic achievements. One of the great ironies of Nixon’s legacy is his determination throughout the Watergate investigation to maintain the integrity of the executive branch. However, he was the one who tarnished the office of the presidency more than anyone in recent history and perhaps ever.

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