

Watergate Brings Down Nixon

MAIN IDEA

Nixon's involvement in the Watergate scandal caused a political crisis that forced him to resign.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Watergate led many Americans to have less confidence in government and politicians.

TERMS & NAMES

Committee to Reelect the President

Watergate scandal

ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

Barbara Jordan grew up in a poor home in Houston, Texas, in the 1940s. After graduating from Boston University Law School in 1959, she became interested in politics. She began her career as a volunteer worker for John Kennedy in his 1960 presidential campaign against Richard Nixon.

Jordan went on to become the first African-American woman from the South elected to the U.S. Congress. In 1974, at impeachment hearings in the House Judiciary Committee, Jordan warned that Nixon's actions during that campaign and his presidency were threats to the Constitution.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

My faith in the Constitution is whole, it is complete, it is total, and I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution [lessening], the subversion [undermining], the destruction of the Constitution.

Barbara Jordan, speech in House Judiciary Committee, July 25, 1974

In this section, you will read about the events that led Nixon, Jordan, and the nation into the political nightmare that ended his presidency.

The 1972 Presidential Election

The 1972 presidential campaign did not appear to be much of a race for President Nixon. His diplomatic successes in China and the Soviet Union and Kissinger's negotiations to end the Vietnam War were triumphs for the president. The Republicans nominated him overwhelmingly for reelection.

Nixon's Democratic opponent was George McGovern. McGovern was a liberal senator from South Dakota who spoke out against the Vietnam War. McGovern had strong support from young people, African Americans, and members of the women's movement. But Nixon won with the largest victory of any Republican candidate to that time.



As a member of the House Judiciary Committee, Representative Barbara Jordan of Texas recommended the impeachment of President Nixon.

Taking Notes

Use your chart to take notes about Nixon's presidency.

President	
Nixon	
Ford	
Carter	

HISTORY throughART

The Watergate scandal was the subject of thousands of political cartoons. Here, cartoonist Paul Conrad shows Nixon attempting to tap the telephones at the Democratic Party headquarters in the Watergate building.

What do you think the cartoon suggests about Nixon's involvement in the Watergate scandal?

Image not available for use on this CD-ROM. Please refer to the image in the textbook.

The Watergate Scandal

An almost certain victory in the 1972 presidential election had not been enough for Nixon. He had wanted to win big. By doing so, he would help Republicans take control of Congress, and he would gain more power. To ensure this landslide victory, many people working for him engaged in various illegal activities.

These activities started coming to light on June 17, 1972. Five men were caught breaking into Democratic Party headquarters in the Watergate office-apartment complex in Washington, D.C. The burglars had cameras and listening devices for the telephones. They were linked to Nixon's reelection campaign staff, called the **Committee to Reelect the President**. Nixon may not have known in advance about the break-in. But in less than a week, he was talking to his aides about covering up any White House connection to the Watergate burglary to avoid a scandal.

The cover-up involved lies told by President Nixon and his aides. It involved payments to the Watergate burglars and others to lie. It involved using the CIA to halt an FBI investigation of Watergate. These illegal actions by Nixon and his aides to cover up Watergate and other related crimes came to be called the **Watergate scandal**.

The Watergate break-in stayed on the back pages of most newspapers in the 1972 campaign. But some reporters kept investigating. They found more evidence tying Nixon to Watergate. In February 1973, the Senate began an investigation. The threat to Nixon's presidency was building.

Nixon Resigns

The Senate Watergate investigation began with the questioning of members of the reelection committee and the White House staff. Within six weeks, the investigation was closing in on the president's closest advisers—H. R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, former Attorney-General John Mitchell, and John Dean. On March 21, 1973, Dean, one of the president's attorneys, spoke to Nixon about the worsening situation.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

I think that there is no doubt about the seriousness of the problem we've got. We have a cancer within, close to the Presidency, that is growing. It is growing daily.

John Dean, quoted in *The White House Transcripts*

Dean was warning about money needed to keep the burglars quiet. Nixon agreed to pay the "hush money." He now clearly had committed a crime.

As more Watergate information was being uncovered, Dean decided to tell all to the Senate. He said that the president had been involved in the

ReadingHistory

A. Making

Inferences Why did Nixon want a big win in the 1972 presidential election?

Background

Eventually, 25 members of the Nixon administration were convicted and served prison terms for crimes connected to Watergate.

cover-up for months. But Nixon denied any knowledge. It was Dean's word against Nixon's until mid-July. Then a White House aide revealed that Nixon had been taping conversations in his office. A long battle over the tapes began in the courts.

Meanwhile, more bad news came for Nixon. It was revealed that Vice-President Spiro Agnew had accepted bribes as governor of Maryland and continued taking them as vice-president. Not wanting to face impeachment, Agnew resigned in October 1973. Nixon then nominated Congressman Gerald Ford of Michigan as the new vice-president.

Evidence of the president's role in the cover-up continued to grow, but he told the country that he had done nothing wrong. He said, "I am not a crook." Then, in January 1974, the House Judiciary Committee began an impeachment investigation. It reviewed court testimony, Senate transcripts, and documents from special prosecutors. Nixon did not give them his tapes but released edited transcripts. The committee felt it had a strong case even without the tapes. In July, both Democrats and Republicans on the committee approved impeachment charges.

On August 5, Nixon was forced by a court order to release full transcripts of the tapes. The evidence that he had been involved in the cover-up from the beginning—what investigators called "a smoking gun"—had been recorded on the tapes. On August 9, 1974, Richard Nixon resigned. Vice-President Gerald Ford was then sworn in as the next president.

Watergate was one of the worst political scandals in the nation's history. Many Americans lost faith in the government and its leaders. This lack of confidence weakened the government, especially the president. As you will read in the following section, the next two presidents—Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter—worked hard to try to restore the presidency.



President Nixon put on an upbeat face as he left Washington after resigning on August 9, 1974.

ReadingHistory

B. Recognizing

Effects How did the Watergate scandal change many Americans' view of their government?

Section 2 Assessment

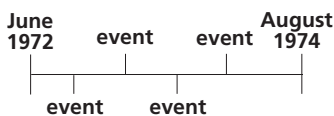
1. Terms & Names

Explain the significance of:

- Committee to Reelect the President
- Watergate scandal

2. Using Graphics

Use a time line like the one below to trace the events of the Watergate scandal.



Which event made Nixon's downfall almost certain?

3. Main Ideas

- Why did Nixon want a big win in the 1972 election?
- What kinds of illegal activities was Nixon involved with in the Watergate scandal?
- What was the outcome of the Watergate scandal?

4. Critical Thinking

Forming and Supporting Opinions What do you think would have happened if President Nixon had apologized for Watergate rather than trying to cover it up?

THINK ABOUT

- when the break-in occurred
- how the nation reacted to past scandals

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

TECHNOLOGY

LANGUAGE ARTS

Interview someone who remembers Watergate. Either create a **radio broadcast** of the interview or write it as a **question-and-answer magazine feature**.