



# The Great Coverup: Nixon and the Scandal of Watergate

*Barry Sussman*

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No American history, government, or journalism collection is complete without this new edition of *The Great Coverup: Nixon and the Scandal of Watergate*, by Barry Sussman, the best account of the fall of Richard Nixon. It is a dramatic case study of tenacious reporting and suspenseful twists and turns in the political crime of the century.

John Dean, Nixon's White House counsel, said ten years after the break-in, "When people ask me which book they should read to understand Watergate, I recommend this one... Serious Watergate students report this is the best overview of the subject. I heartily agree. Anyone who wants to understand Watergate, and not make a career of it, should read *The Great Coverup*." (Reviews and excerpts are here: <http://www.watergate.info/sussman/>.)

A key Nixon goal was to limit the Watergate investigation to the break-in alone, making it appear to be little more than politics as usual. But by September, 1973, as Sussman, who was the Washington Post's special Watergate editor, spells out, Watergate was

clearly the ultimate in political crimes... Under Nixon the CIA had been dragged into domestic affairs; the investigation and findings of the FBI had been subverted; the Justice Department had engaged in malicious prosecutions of some people and failed to act in instances where it should have; the Internal Revenue Service had been used to punish the President's alleged enemies while ignoring transgressions by his friends and by the President himself; the purity of the court system had been violated; congressmen had been seduced to prevent an inquiry into campaign activities before the election; extortion on a massive scale had been practiced in the soliciting of illegal contributions from the nation's great corporations; the President had secretly engaged in acts of war against a foreign country... and agents of the President were known to have engaged in continued illegal activities for base political ends.

Soon afterward Nixon fired the special prosecutor investigating him, the first act in the Saturday Night Massacre, and a few days after that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, in an ominous cold war message, announced that American armed forces had been put on alert because of Soviet troop and military equipment movement. It was to some the most serious incident since the Cuban missile crisis, but to others a ruse, a crude attempt to get support for a President in a time of crisis.

*The Great Coverup* was named one of the best books of the year by the New York Times when first published. Wrote David Halberstam of Sussman: "From the start, the Post was thus unusually lucky. It had the perfect working editor at exactly the right level." In their book, Woodward and Bernstein noted that Sussman was "given prime responsibility for directing the Post's Watergate coverage," and added:

Sussman had the ability to seize facts and lock them in his memory, where they remained poised for instant recall. More than any other editor at the Post, or Bernstein and Woodward, Sussman became a walking compendium of Watergate knowledge, a reference source to be summoned when even the library failed. On deadline he would pump these facts into a story in a constant infusion, working up a body of significant facts to support what otherwise seemed like the weakest of revelations. In Sussman's mind, everything fitted. Watergate was a puzzle and he was a collector of the pieces.

If there was a “politics as usual” aspect to Watergate, Sussman writes, it was in the help Nixon got from members of both political parties. Therein lies one of the book’s many lessons: Watergate would have been brought to a close much sooner except “for the help powerful men on Capitol Hill extended to their President.”

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