

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN  
Department of History

History 902

Fall 1985

WATERGATE

Mr. Kutler

I. ASSIGNED READING

Elizabeth Drew, WATERGATE JOURNAL.

II. FIRST PAPER

First week: What was Watergate? What do you think is its place in American history? In short, was it significant? Why or why not? Obviously, these are loaded questions and you will be tempted to tell me what you think I want to hear. But I want you to tell me what you really think is so. In some ways, I might be happier to hear that you think the whole affair trivial, a tempest in a teapot, a blip on the historical screen. Someone has described Watergate as a pimple on the elephant's ass. Some pimple; some ass, I say. In any event, be candid and be prepared to defend your answer. I want just a brief statement -- 2-3 pages.

Your paper is due in my mailbox (4th floor) on Tuesday, September 10. We will discuss your ideas at the next seminar meeting.

III. SECOND PAPER

I want a brief essay, approximately 8-10 pages in length, that will offer a summary interpretation of your impressions of Watergate. What I am after here is to get a historical perspective from people who essentially were non-observers -- in short, unlike myself, those who were too young to have been emotionally involved in the subject. I want you to write about: "What does Watergate mean to me?" Was it a tempest in a teapot, a great to-do about nothing? Or did it constitute some transforming event in the history of American politics and/or the history of the American presidency? How and why?

This discussion inevitably will lead to some consideration of the "lessons" and "meaning" of Watergate. What were the lessons? Are they remembered or are they forgotten? And from here -- and just as inevitably, I suppose -- did the system work? In short, what do you as a historian see as the salient meaning of Watergate for our times?

This paper is due Monday, December 2. We will use it as the basis of discussion at the end of the semester.

IV. FINAL PAPER

Final papers are due on Friday, December 13. I am leaving a few days afterward to lecture abroad and I would like to read the papers while I am overseas. Your paper should be approximately 18-25 pages in length, properly footnoted. In addition, I would like you to append a brief critical discussion of your sources.

## V. SUGGESTED TOPICS

- 1) Ford's nomination as Vice President.
- 2) Nixon and impoundment. Congressional Budget and Impoundment Act of 1974-- as impact.
- 3) Foreign policy impact.
- 4) Executive privilege and the tapes.
- 5) The President and the cover-up.
- 6) The Saturday Night Massacre: causes, effect, reaction, etc.
- 7) The role of the CIA.
- 8) The Agnew resignation: cause, effect, reaction.
- 9) Profile of Ervin and House Judiciary Committees. What, if any, had been their links -- both pro and con -- with Nixon and the administration?
- 10) The impact of tape revelations.
- 11) An analysis of shifting tides of public opinion polls.
- 12) Post-mortems on the role of the media and public attitudes toward it.
- 13) John Dean's testimony: compare Ervin, trial, and HJC records.
- 14) An analysis of one of the trials -- Mitchell's or Haldeman/Ehrlichman.
- 15) Compare Ervin Committee testimony of Mitchell, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, etc. with subsequent tape revelations.
- 16) Analyze evidence for any one of the charges presented to the House Judiciary Committee.
- 17) Impact: campaign finance legislation.
- 18) Nixon's responses, 1972-1974 -- and since. Trace and analyze the discrepancies and inaccuracies of his remarks.
- 19) The pardon. Evaluate: "The pardon, on the whole, was unwise, both for President Ford and the nation."
- 20) Evaluate reaction to the resignation.
- 21) Compare factual renditions in various memoirs: Nixon, Ford, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Dean, etc.
- 22) The battle for Nixon's tapes and papers, including post-resignation litigation. The Nixon Papers and Tapes: The controversy over privatization.
- 23) The FBI: Dupe, Incompetent, or Co-conspirator?
- 24) U.S. vs. Nixon: Expectations and Compliance.
- 25) Executive Privilege: Claims and Counter-Claims.
- 26) August 1984: 10th anniversary observations and evaluations.
- 27) The Cultural Context: humor, satire -- what else? Cartoon and photo caption books and pamphlets.
- 28) Theories of the Break-in: Hougan and Kinoy, for example.
- 29) Nixon and the Right Wing.
- 30) Journalism: did television alter the impact of the story? That is, did it become a big one because of television -- i.e., Ervin hearings, etc.?