

Discussion & Review Questions

1. Towards the beginning of the video, Mr. Hewitt contends that, “Watergate was first and foremost a political war between the President, Richard Nixon, and the media which in those pre-cable days meant ABC, CBS, NBC, the New York Times, and the Washington Post. The media’s aim, in the words of British historian Paul Johnson, ‘was to use publicity to reverse the electoral verdict of 1972...’” Why do you think that the mainstream media hates Conservative Presidents? Explain. Do you think that the mainstream media should work towards influencing against and taking direct action against the will of the voters? Why or why not?
2. When discussing the events after the Nixon re-election campaign associates were caught breaking into the DNC headquarters, Mr. Hewitt speculates that, “Today, most would conclude that if he [President Nixon] simply acknowledged his campaign’s responsibility, ‘owned it’ as we say, fired those responsible, and apologized, the whole sorry mess would have been rendered the minor incident it was.” Do you agree with Mr. Hewitt that this scenario was highly possible? Why or why not? Why do you think that President Nixon did not respond in this way, by ‘owning it’ and apologizing? Explain.
3. A little further along in the video, Mr. Hewitt explains that, “... the scandal grew beyond his [President Nixon’s] control. Three men made sure of that: a publicity-seeking judge, a revenge-seeking FBI official, and a partisan special prosecutor. The judge was John Sirica. Suspecting a vast conspiracy, Sirica threatened the burglars with lifetime prison sentences if they didn’t rat out the people who authorized the crime. The media loved Sirica. For a time, he was the most famous jurist in the country.” Do you think that a sitting judge should ever intimidate and even threaten defendants? Why or why not? Do you think that the media should have given Judge Sirica so much attention? Why or why not?
4. Mr. Hewitt goes on to note that, “The vengeful official was FBI Deputy Director Mark Felt, known by his code name ‘Deep Throat.’ Felt thought he deserved to become head of the FBI. But Nixon appointed someone else. So Felt leaked a steady stream of tips to the Washington Post writing team of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. Meeting secretly, he told them where to look and what questions to ask. Without him, the duo would have gotten nowhere. Because of him, they became folk heroes.” Why do you think that Mr. Felt used the press to attempt to ‘get back at’ President Nixon? Explain. To whom do you think Woodward and Bernstein became folk heroes, and why? Explain.
5. At the end of the video, Mr. Hewitt laments and warns that, “The support of Republican Senators far from assured, and deeply concerned that an impeachment trial would paralyze the country in the middle of the Cold War, Nixon was boxed in. He resigned from office on August 9, the first and only President to do so. The media had its victory. And a newfound sense of power. The country has not been the same since.” What power did President Nixon’s resignation give to the media? Explain. Do you think that any facet of media should wield such enormous power? Why or why not? What do you think that Mr. Hewitt means when he states that the country has not been the same since- in what ways has the country not been the same? Explain.

Extend the Learning:

Case Study Richard Nixon and the press

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “When Nixon Met the Press ,” then answer the questions that follow.

1. Who was Phil Potter, and what was his view of Richard Nixon? What did members of the press do, in terms of standards of objectivity, when covering Nixon? What caused the press corps to turn on the young Nixon? What lesson about the press corps did Nixon learn in his early campaigns for Congress? Who was Alger Hiss, and why did Nixon’s involvement with him earn Nixon so much hate from the press? Why did the press corps begin toting tape recorders on the campaign trail? Who was Arthur Hays Sulzberger, and what did he write in a letter to Vice Presidential candidate Nixon? Who was Earl Mazo, and how did he feel about Nixon? What percentage of the press corps were ‘all-out supporters’ of John Kennedy in the presidential campaign against Nixon? Who was Willard Edwards, and how did he characterize the attitude and behavior of the press towards Nixon? What can the Watergate burglary be traced to? Who were ‘the alphas in the wolf pack’ of the press that kept the Watergate scandal alive and escalated it? Which of Nixon’s enemies conspired against him?
2. Why is it wrong for the press to be so politically biased instead of objective? Explain. Do you think it is possible for the press to ever be objective? Why or why not? How does the modern era of ‘fake news’ exacerbate and complicate the myriad of problems presented by the extremely biased press?
3. What is the main point that Mr. Hewitt is making in the video? Explain.

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History Dept.

When Nixon Met the Press

Just because he was paranoid doesn't mean the media wasn't out to get him.

By JOHN ALOYSIUS FARRELL

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Phil Potter was one of the finest journalists of his generation. He served as a war correspondent during World War II, got wounded covering the Korean War, and was one of the few reporters who tried to hold Sen. Joseph McCarthy to basic standards of fairness and accuracy during the Red scare of the 1950s.

In 1947, Potter was in Greece, covering the civil war between communist and government forces for the *Baltimore Sun*, when a delegation of U.S. congressmen arrived. He was particularly

impressed by young Richard Nixon—a California freshman who had insisted on traveling to the combat zone for a firsthand look at the war. “Nixon came up where the action was while the others...stayed down in the fleshpots of Athens,” Potter recalled, admiringly. “There was a curiosity and an energy to him.”

Potter’s favorable view of Nixon faded, however, when the journalist returned home and took over the “Red Beat” for the *Sun*. He came to view then-Vice President Nixon as a sneak and a hatchet man: playing fast and loose with facts, smearing foes with innuendo, painting them as communist dupes. By 1960, covering the presidential election, Potter was openly rooting for John F. Kennedy to defeat Nixon. “We’re going to get the son of a bitch now,” a startled colleague heard Potter declare, after Nixon fared poorly in a presidential debate.

The national press corps was much like Potter: they loved Nixon, and then they hated him. Understand that, and Nixon’s implosion makes sense. It’s a media story, in more ways than one. First there’s the largely forgotten opening chapter: Nixon’s spectacular rise – he went from House freshman to the vice presidency in just six years – was built on exceptionally favorable notices in the press. “As typically American as Thanksgiving,” the *Washington Times Herald* raved, after Nixon was elected to Congress. “[I]f he bears out his promise, he will go far.” Then the media turned on him, and helped the Democrats drive him from office.

In both fueling Nixon’s early career – and then destroying him later – members of the press abandoned professed standards of objectivity. And Nixon’s innate wariness, in turn, evolved into arrant hatred. In the end, this dysfunctional relationship helped fuel a national tragedy. It put the country on the road to Watergate.

On Aug. 9, 1974, Nixon resigned the presidency, a skip ahead of near certain impeachment. Forty years later, unlocked archives – at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library, the papers of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein at the University of Texas, and the hundreds of interviews of leading political and journalistic figures conducted by the late David Halberstam for his books on the Cold War era, which were opened this spring at the Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University – confirm, with often startling candor, the mutually hostile attitudes of Nixon and his pursuers.

From the beginning, there was little objectivity in the journalistic coverage that launched Nixon into American politics. It was wildly favorable. At home, he was a darling of California’s conservative publishers—most notably the Chandler family, owners of the *Los Angeles Times*. And when Nixon first went national, he did so with the help of a rules-bending Washington bureau chief from the *New York Herald Tribune*, who helped craft the gleaming mythos surrounding Nixon’s pursuit of Alger Hiss, the Soviet spy, in the famed “Pumpkin Papers” case.

“These hearings were eminently fair. They were conducted with skill and dignity and with respect for the rights of witnesses,” the *Los Angeles Times* proclaimed in a 1949 editorial on the Hiss case. “They were guided by Rep. Richard M. Nixon of California, whom the *New York Herald Tribune* describes as ‘perhaps the ablest and most earnest member’ of the Committee.... He performed a great service for the Committee, the Congress and for his country.”

But Hiss was just one of several liberal icons flattened by Nixon in his climb to power. The list also included Rep. Jerry Voorhis, who was defeated by Nixon in 1946; Rep. Helen Gahagan Douglas, who was crushed by him in an ugly Senate race in 1950; and Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson, whipped by the Eisenhower-Nixon ticket in 1952 and 1956. Those victories caused the press corps, led by liberal journalists like Drew Pearson, and publications like *The Nation* and *The New Republic*, to turn on the young Republican.

The bad taste from those early campaigns lingered. Consider Howard Simons, the managing editor at the *Washington Post* during Watergate, who strived to meet the best standards of his profession. But journalists are only human, he told Woodward and Bernstein, in an interview now available in their papers at the University of Texas. Simons had been “a kid who grew up with Nixon being the *bête noire* in the Hiss case and Helen Gahagan Douglas,” he told his young colleagues. And “I carry all that with me, still.” The same could be said by much of the press corps.

The crimes of Watergate – bugging, burglary, obstruction of justice – were real. As Nixon told David Frost in their famous 1977 interviews, “I brought myself down.” But it is equally true that the 37th president of the United States was ushered from office by journalists who savored the opportunity.

Nixon’s earliest experience with the press was corrupting: the lesson he took from his early campaigns for Congress was that the game was rigged.

In Nixon’s 1946 contest with Voorhis, in the rural 12th congressional district of Los Angeles County, candidates got favorable press coverage by buying it. The district was peppered with small towns, served by little daily and weekly newspapers. The editors would run a Nixon press release as a story, or write a glowing endorsement, if his campaign purchased advertising. When “we bought an ad for \$300...we could often get an editorial,” one Nixon adviser, McIntyre Faries, recalled in an oral history for the University of California.

Nobody worried about conflicts of interest. Nixon’s campaign manager, Roy Day, was a sales executive for the Pomona newspaper, guaranteeing good coverage in the eastern half of the district. The editor of Nixon’s hometown paper in Whittier, Rex Kennedy, was a local GOP committeeman. Voorhis was outspent, 10-to-1, and ignored when he tried to get his side of the story in the local newspapers. They “wouldn’t put my stuff in,” he’d recall.

The Republicans seized Congress in 1946 and the new GOP Speaker, Rep. Joseph Martin of Massachusetts, named Nixon to the House Un-American Activities Committee. HUAC, as it was known, had been a mire of Red baiting and bigotry under the leadership of its knuckle-dragging Democrats. Nixon brought professionalism to its activities, winning early, good reviews. He was spotted as a comer by Bert Andrews, the bureau chief of the *Herald Tribune*, whose colleagues long remembered Andrews squiring around Washington the raw young congressman in the ill-fitting overcoat. “Bert...was his confidante...almost his mentor,” *Time* magazine’s Lou Banks told Halberstam.

In August 1948 the capital was jolted by the testimony of Whittaker Chambers, a *Time* editor and repentant former communist, who told the committee that Hiss – foreign policy adviser to Franklin Roosevelt, Harvard Law School graduate and viscount of the New Deal – was one of a nest of communists in the federal government. Hiss was fine looking, eloquent and well connected. He demanded to testify, denied the charges and thoroughly intimidated the other members of the committee.

Nixon faced a turning point. He believed that Chambers was telling the truth about Hiss, but challenging the New Deal establishment was a prodigious risk for a no-name freshman. Nixon found few allies in Harry Truman's administration. The congressman turned instead to Andrews and the *Trib*, who joined in Hiss's crucifixion.

"We won the Hiss case in the papers," Nixon would tell H.R. Haldeman, his chief of staff, and Henry Kissinger, his national security adviser, in a 1971 conversation captured on the White House taping system. "I had to leak stuff all over the place....I played it in the press."

The chase reached its climax in December, when HUAC investigators retrieved microfilm evidence that Hiss was a spy, hidden by Chambers in a hollow pumpkin on his Maryland farm. Nixon, exhausted by the ordeal, was on a holiday cruise with his wife Pat when he received a telegram from Andrews:

DOCUMENTS INCREDIBLY HOT. LINK TO HISS SEEMS CERTAIN...MY LIBERAL FRIENDS DON'T LOVE ME NO MORE. NOR YOU. BUT FACTS ARE FACTS AND THESE ARE DYNAMITE.

Nixon and his allies arranged for a Coast Guard seaplane to meet him and fly him back to the States. The news of the Pumpkin Papers, and a photograph of the crusading congressman emerging from the aircraft, made front pages across the country. It was a tremendous coup for an unknown pol (in secret collusion with a sympathetic journalist), but Andrews was prescient: the liberal elite would love Nixon no more. The New Deal's image had been tarnished. The handsome Hiss was heading toward prison. The *Trib's* great competitor – The New York Times – and other liberal organs had sided against HUAC, and been shown up by an upstart from Nowheresville.

It was a learning moment for a young idealist. Nixon had come to Washington, done his duty, battled his country's enemies and exposed a spy – only to reap the rancor of ideologues in the press. At least that's how he saw it, disregarding the support from the *Trib* that helped make his coup possible. "The Hiss case just stayed with him and never went away, and the wounds and the feeling about the press that happened there are very basic to him," Nixon's friend and aide Robert Finch told Halberstam. "There was, for a long time, a corrosive effect. And there was genuine anger there, I mean real anger...real hostility, something that went so deep as to make a man embattled."

The Hiss case made Nixon a national figure. He gave speeches around the country, wrote up his account for the fawning *Reader's Digest*, and jumped into the 1950 Senate race, where he

wound up facing Douglas, a spirited former actress who had won renown as a champion of women, minorities and the underprivileged.

Once more, the press played an artful role on Nixon's behalf. The *Los Angeles Times* dominated the Southland, and its political editor, Kyle Palmer, was California's kingmaker. The feisty, Machiavellian journalist, an elven worshipper of wines, wives and Malibu real estate ("Kyle loved the high life," Dorothy Chandler, the wife of the *Times* publisher Norman Chandler, would recall) became Nixon's latest mentor, and the *Times* threw in with Nixon, ensuring that he clinched the Senate seat. "Kyle was a cocky little fellow, very bright, very conservative," former California Gov. Pat Brown told Halberstam. "He loved Nixon with a passion."

Dick and his wife Pat took to the road, touring the state's small cities and towns in a borrowed station wagon, campaigning as a wholesomely photogenic, typically suburban postwar couple. Back at headquarters Nixon's campaign manager – a prodigy in the use of public relations techniques named Murray Chotiner – loosed a tide of statements claiming that Douglas was soft on communism, including one infamous "pink sheet" printed on rose-colored paper.

The *Los Angeles Times* pitched in. "Left-wing" and "demagogic" Helen Douglas was an "extremist," and "emotional" and "a scolding woman," Palmer wrote. Her votes in Congress "placed her...with Communist sympathizers." She "voted the Communist Party line in Congress innumerable times," the *Times* editorialized. "She is the darling of the Hollywood parlor pinks and Reds."

The election was over, almost before it began, when the North Korean communists invaded South Korea in June. In that tense season Douglas's liberalism, and her reasoned approach toward communism, proved no match for the hardball tactics that earned Nixon, in the course of that campaign, the nickname "Tricky Dick." Like Voorhis, Douglas was so shell-shocked by her loss that she forever withdrew from elective politics.

Nixon now had three New Deal coonskins on his wall, to which he soon added the pelt of yet another darling of the left-leaning press — California's liberal Republican Gov. Earl Warren. In the summer of 1952, Nixon deftly undermined Warren's presidential campaign in California on behalf of Dwight Eisenhower, and was rewarded by being selected as Ike's running mate.

Nixon's swelling roster of foes ganged up to ruin him: Warren's allies in California leaked word of a fund that Nixon used to defray political expenses like stamps, long distance phone calls and Christmas cards. The *New York Post*, at the time still a liberal tabloid, took the lead – "SECRET RICH MAN'S TRUST FUND KEEPS NIXON IN STYLE FAR BEYOND HIS SALARY" it blared – and the wire services bore the story across the land. Even moderate Republican broadsheets, like Nixon's old ally, the *Herald Tribune*, called on him to step down from the ticket.

Eisenhower temporized: his advisers were divided. ("Shit or get off the pot," Nixon told Ike.) But it was Ike's hesitation that gave Nixon an opportunity to go over the head of the pols and press — to appeal to the people in a televised address. The Checkers speech, as it came to be called, was then, and for years after, ridiculed for Nixon's mawkish account of his meager

finances, his modest household, Pat's "respectable cloth coat" and his children's love of their cocker spaniel, Checkers. But there is no denying Nixon's nerve and savvy. Millions of listeners responded, urging Ike to keep Nixon on the ticket. The Checkers speech saved him. It was a singularly brilliant use of the new electronic medium.

Nixon's respect for a free press was now thoroughly corroded. In his first six years in politics he had learned that you could buy favorable coverage, and profit or be ruined in the hands of partisan journals like the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Post*. It was hard not to be cynical, and hurt, and both Dick and Pat emerged from these years with wounds that never healed. He came to believe that "'freedom of the press' was often a handy refuge for subtle as well as overt character assassination," as William Robinson, a former *New York Herald Tribune* executive who would go on to advise Eisenhower, later concluded about the young Nixon.

With the new medium of television, Nixon thought he had found his way out. Like many brainy people, he was shy and insecure in social settings. He believed he was unlikable, and the response from journalists to his fumbling attempts at camaraderie only seemed to confirm it. He could not mix easily with the boys on the bus, or with his aides, or other politicians. Television seemed to obviate the need.

"He saw that night what television can do and he was in awe – he was absolutely spellbound. You could see the change," Nixon's media adviser for the Checkers speech, Ted Rogers, told Halberstam. From that time on, if a member of the pencil press was late for the motorcade, Nixon would say "Fuck 'em, let's go." They were the enemy. He didn't need them. He could go over their heads.

"He had so much to hide, and he would never give of himself, and reporters sense that and they push. A reporter's job is to find things out," James "Scotty" Reston, the columnist and bureau chief for *The New York Times*, told Halberstam. "He was never one of the boys...He always had that sense that if people knew him then they would not really like him."

Nixon's was one of the country's rare, substantial vice presidencies. He got high marks for an impromptu debate with Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, for the courage he showed when his motorcade was attacked by a mob in Venezuela, and for the steadiness he displayed when Eisenhower suffered a heart attack.

During a youth rally at the 1972 Republican National Convention, an unexpectedly warm embrace from Sammy Davis, Jr. again exposed Nixon as ill-at-ease in the limelight. | AP Photo

But even before the Checkers speech, Nixon had taken the role of Republican hatchet man. Eisenhower – the beloved wartime hero – stayed above the fray. Nixon got down in the gutter. He didn't actually call Stevenson a homosexual or Dean Acheson and Harry Truman traitors, but he trafficked in insinuation. He would be quoted by the press, and deny he said it, and rage in hurt surprise when the press corps began to tote tape recorders on the campaign trail – another

new practice, required to keep Nixon honest, they would later tell Halberstam – to record his speeches.

Nixon's first term as vice president coincided with McCarthy's reign of terror and error. His job was as the go-between: to represent Eisenhower among the McCarthyites, and the McCarthy wing to the White House. *The New York Times* especially irritated him. "It is good indeed to have your appraisal of the men who...represented the *New York Times* during the past campaign," publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger wrote Nixon, after the vice president complained of unfavorable coverage in 1954. But none would be rebuked. "It was the considered and unanimous judgment of all of us...that what we said was warranted. I am sorry that it was that way."

Nixon had shown signs of growth, but "I still have reservations about him," Sulzberger, an Eisenhower supporter, told a friend in a 1956 letter about Nixon and the McCarthy faction. "I fear that wing as some people fear the devil."

At *The Washington Post*, publisher Phil Graham also saw signs of new depth and maturity that tempered his innate dislike of Nixon. That didn't keep Herblock, the *Washington Post* cartoonist, from drawing Nixon and McCarthy as brothers in arms, carrying brushes and buckets of tar. Those first Herblock cartoons captured some of Nixon's apple-cheeked youthfulness, but the caricature quickly morphed into an angular, spider-like figure, with a heavy five o'clock shadow, crawling from the sewers. "It was the opportunist, the political thuggery in him," the cartoonist explained to Halberstam.

By 1956, Nixon's place on the Republican ticket became an issue when Eisenhower tried to dump him. Though Nixon survived, the White House staff undermined the vice president with the press, as presidential aides are wont to do, and found a receptive audience.

"There was something about" Nixon "that put us off," Earl Mazo, a *Trib* reporter, told Halberstam. "Part of it was ideology. Most reporters were Democrats. We all loved Adlai — we all loved his phrasing and the fact that he cared about writing." And Nixon? "There was a sense of distrust, a sense that Nixon was somehow not worthy. That he was shady."

The distrust had a source, Mazo discovered, when he started work on a biography of Nixon. His subject "was so goddamn shy" that politics "was just painful for him." The press was "part of an inquisition to Nixon," Mazo said. "We were the representatives of a hostile world, a world trying to tear him down and find out what he wanted to hide in a personal way. It wasn't really political. It was trying to reveal him to be a poor and clumsy boy. He was more that than anything else."

Ike's victory that year made Nixon his heir apparent. He spent much of his second term as vice president trying to persuade journalists that he had mellowed and matured — that a "new Nixon" would be running to succeed Eisenhower in 1960.

Many, like Potter, didn't believe it; they had witnessed too much. At one point in the 1956 election Nixon had seethed at the arch questions he received from a group of college editors at

Cornell University, waited until he was back on the campaign plane, and then erupted at his media adviser, Ted Rogers, for staging the event. Potter had to pull the crazed vice president off Rogers. (“He went for me like a caged animal,” Rogers told Halberstam. “He was going to kill me. He was out of his mind.”) Such episodes were hard to forget, especially in the nuclear age. “What scares the hell out of me is that you would blow sky high over a thing as inconsequential as this,” Nixon’s press secretary, Jim Bassett, scolded him. “What in God’s name would you do if you were president and got into a really bad situation?”

Then there was Nixon’s 1960 rival for the presidency, glamorous Jack Kennedy. The press loved him, and he was everything that Dick Nixon was not: handsome, rich, Harvard-educated, witty and literary. He could cuss a blue streak like Nixon (they both served in the U.S. Navy during World War II) and chew the hide off reporters who wrote unflattering stories. But Kennedy mixed that gruff behavior with insidious flattery and charm. The capital’s corps of political reporters plunged happily into the tank. The press on Kennedy’s campaign train were “really rather quite tilted toward Kennedy,” Mazo told Halberstam. “There was a kind of feeling of identification...almost a swagger.”

“Their adulation of Kennedy was...open,” said Willard Edwards, a correspondent for the staunchly Republican *Chicago Tribune*. “They regarded service with Kennedy as a lover regards a honeymoon and assignment to Nixon as...an enforced association with a discreditable character.”

“Ninety percent of this press corps...were all-out supporters of Kennedy. They were not only opposed to Nixon, they were outspoken in their hatred and contempt,” said Edwards. “When Nixon was making a speech, there was a constant murmur of ridicule.... It was an extraordinary hostility and I can recall no precedent for it in all the campaigns I have covered.”

No question, Nixon made crucial errors in the presidential election of 1960, errors that had nothing to do with biased coverage. A dozen factors led to his razor-thin loss to Kennedy. Yet this was the contest that marked the start of the conservative lament that right-leaning candidates face the bias of a “liberal media” in America. The conservative journal, *Human Events*, led the charge, joined by journalists at the *Chicago Tribune* and the New York *Daily News*. Mazo and others suspected that the election had been stolen by Democratic trickery in Illinois and Texas and other states – but only his *Trib* launched a significant investigation of the results .

Nixon bit his tongue in 1960, but his hostility gushed forth in November 1962, after he lost the California gubernatorial race to Pat Brown. The *Los Angeles Times* had a new publisher, and new editors, who were determined to end its reputation as a mouthpiece for southern California conservatism. “Nixon was infuriated and baffled,” Frank McCullough, a Times editor, told Halberstam. “Here had been the sugar tit of all time, the *Los Angeles Times*, and we had taken it away from him.”

Tired and haggard, after a sleepless and emotional night, Nixon met reporters at an extraordinary press conference on the morning after Election Day.

“My philosophy with the press has never really gotten through,” he told them. “For 16 years, ever since the Hiss case, you’ve had a lot of fun...you’ve had an opportunity to attack me....”

“I leave you gentlemen now and you will now write it. You will interpret it. That’s your right. But as I leave you I want you to know – just think how much you’re going to be missing,” he said. “You won’t have Nixon to kick around anymore because, gentlemen, this is my last press conference....”

Nixon’s tirade earned him little sympathy. Five nights later, ABC News ran a half-hour special: “The Political Obituary of Richard Nixon.” Among those invited to comment was Alger Hiss, the spy.

A series of stunning events – Kennedy’s assassination, Lyndon Johnson’s folly, Republican Sen. Barry Goldwater’s disastrous campaign for the presidency in 1964 – left an open field for Nixon’s victorious return to presidential politics in 1968. There was a new “New Nixon,” and a strategy dependent upon television, directed in part by a young Roger Ailes. “Nixon felt his only real shot was to avoid the press, and go around it,” Ailes told Halberstam, “and the black box was there.”

Nixon’s use of television in his first term as president was, with few exceptions, a success. But he just could not be happy circumventing the press: he needed to defeat it.

The Watergate burglary can be traced to his confrontation with *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and the rest of the nation’s newspapers in the Pentagon Papers case, where Nixon ordered his Attorney General to suppress publication of a secret Defense Department history of the Vietnam War, which had been leaked by antiwar activist Daniel Ellsberg.

“Do you think, for Christ’s sake, that *The New York Times* is worried about all the legal niceties. Those sons of bitches are killing me,” Nixon told his aides, ordering them to stage a break-in at the Brookings Institution, to retrieve Defense Department documents stored there. The Left and the Press were against him. “They’re using any means. We’re going to use any means.”

After taking that battle to the Supreme Court, and losing, Nixon authorized the creation of a team of “plumbers” to stop leaks and smear leakers. Within weeks, they had botched a break-in at the office of Ellsberg’s psychiatrist. That same team of clowns would, a year later, get caught breaking into Democratic headquarters at the Watergate.

The old enmities bled out during the Watergate scandal. The alphas in the wolf pack – the *Washington Post*, CBS, *the Los Angeles Times*, *Time* and the wire services – kept the story alive through the fall of 1972. *The New York Times* contributed, in early 1973, with the first report of hush money payments. Federal prosecutors, congressional inquisitors and Judge John Sirica then shattered the coverup with tactics that would have – had the target not been Nixon – spurred cries of protest from civil libertarians.

The Watergate-era journalists had many, and varied, motivations. More than a few reporters opposed the Vietnam War, and saw Nixon's efforts to find "peace with honor" as a cover for an escalation of the violence. There were personal gripes too: the long-lasting disdain for Nixon felt by the older hands was aggravated when Nixon chose Ron Ziegler, a brusque apparatchik, as his press secretary at the expense of Herb Klein, a longtime mediator between the press and the president. It was, Ailes told Halberstam, "an insult to the press" for Nixon to name a press secretary so "arrogant and ignorant."

Post editor Benjamin Bradlee was moved most by ambition and competitive zeal, his subalterns told Halberstam. It was not ideology, but *The Chase* and *The Story* that drove Bradlee. The same was said by their colleagues of investigative reporters like Bob Woodward, *Time* magazine's Sandy Smith, Seymour Hersh at *The New York Times* and Jack Nelson's team at the *Los Angeles Times*.

But it was no secret in Washington how many of them openly favored Democrats. Bradlee, for one, didn't shy from boasting about his close friendship with Kennedy. ("Kennedy was instinctively graceful and natural, Nixon was instinctively graceless and programmed," Bradlee wrote in his memoir about JFK. "I wanted Kennedy to win.") Hersh and other leading journalists, like *The Boston Globe*'s Robert Healy, had worked on Sen. Eugene McCarthy's antiwar campaign in the 1968 election. And, in a revealing interview with Halberstam, Carl Bernstein discussed how his parents, members of the old Left, had been blacklisted in the Red Scare of the 1950s. Bernstein told Halberstam that he segregated his feelings about his parents' experience during Watergate. He wasn't looking for payback, Bernstein said, just chasing "a damn good story." But colleagues at the *Post* wondered.

And just because Nixon was paranoid didn't mean his enemies weren't conspiring to get him. As the Nixon of an earlier era had leaked information to convict Hiss in the press, so did the Watergate investigators and prosecutors work the media now. When the scandal seemed to ebb at the start of 1974, the Watergate special prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, held off-the-record evenings with the *Time* magazine staff, and other organizations, assuring them that Nixon was guilty of an impeachable offense. Famed lawyer Edward Bennett Williams, whose law firm, for a time, represented both *The Washington Post* and the Democratic Party, played a similar role with Bradlee. "I never had one residual doubt that we would get Nixon's ass," Williams told Halberstam.

Nixon's team gave as good as it got. The White House asked the FBI for a list of the homosexuals in the Washington press corps. Vice President Spiro Agnew attacked broadcast journalists as a liberal "un-elected elite" in jolting speeches in 1969. Journalists like columnists Mary McGrory and Tom Wicker joined Hollywood figures such as Paul Newman, Carol Channing and Steve McQueen, pro quarterback Joe Namath and major Democratic Party donors on White House enemy lists, which were compiled, in the memorable description of Nixon counsel John Dean, "to use the available federal machinery to screw our political enemies." Some journalists were merely denied access. But the federal licenses of *The Washington Post*'s television stations were challenged by Nixon supporters and the Justice Department filed antitrust actions against the networks. *Post* publisher Kay Graham told Halberstam how she

would awaken, during Watergate, “in cold terror” in the morning. It was a war, and both sides were committed.

There is no doubt that Nixon deserved impeachment. He had joined in a conspiracy to thwart the investigation of a serious crime. “I gave them a sword,” he said, speaking of Watergate and his enemies in the interviews he gave to Frost in 1977.

Nor is there any question that the press joined Nixon’s enemies in wielding the sword. “They stuck it in. And they twisted it with relish,” Nixon told Frost. “And I guess if I’d been in their position, I’d have done the same thing.”



QUIZ

Watergate

- 1. Watergate was first and foremost a war between President Nixon and _____.**
 - a. Speaker Carl Albert
 - b. the media
 - c. China
 - d. Wall Street

- 2. What did the media have against President Nixon?**
 - a. He was despised by the East Coast Liberal elite
 - b. He was a staunch anti-Communist
 - c. He refused to abandon South Viet Nam
 - d. all of the above

- 3. President Nixon's second presidential term was won in a 49-state landslide.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

- 4. Who was the Special Prosecutor in the Watergate investigation?**
 - a. Kenneth Starr
 - b. Robert Mueller
 - c. Archibald Cox
 - d. Newbold Morris

- 5. President Nixon resigned from office on _____.**
 - a. July 24, 1974
 - b. August 9, 1974
 - c. April 14, 1973
 - d. June 24, 1973



QUIZ: ANSWER KEY

Watergate

1. Watergate was first and foremost a war between President Nixon and _____.
 - a. Speaker Carl Albert
 - b. the media
 - c. China
 - d. Wall Street

2. What did the media have against President Nixon?
 - a. He was despised by the East Coast Liberal elite
 - b. He was a staunch anti-Communist
 - c. He refused to abandon South Viet Nam
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