



Three presidential administrations, those of Ulysses S. Grant, Warren Harding, and Richard Nixon, have oozed corruption. The Nixon impropriety is distinct for two important reasons. Whereas Grant and Harding were not personally involved, Nixon was a willing participant. And, while the dishonesty of the Grant and Harding presidencies (as examples, the Whiskey Ring and Teapot Dome, respectively) were at the base level about personal financial gain, the Watergate scandal represented lust for political power. That fact, coupled with the high degree of Nixon's involvement, is alarming. (Whether or not Nixon approved the initial action is unknown; his knowledge of the crime, within just three days, is confirmed). From nothing more than an apparent "third-rate burglary" (Nixon's words) at the Democratic National Headquarters in Washington's Watergate office complex, the case ballooned into a "national nightmare" (words of President Gerald Ford, Nixon's successor). The scandal was solved by a combination of dogged investigative journalism by the *Washington Post* (namely reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein); a secret informer called "Deep Throat" (named after a popular current pornographic movie of the same title); numerous Oval Office tapes (eventually secured from Nixon's grasp through *United States v. Nixon*); and damning turncoat testimony by one of Nixon's pawns (White House counsel John Dean). [So absorbed in corruption was the Nixon administration that more than 40 officials—the Vice-President, four Cabinet members, and several top White House aides, among others—would be named in criminal indictments \(some apart from Watergate\), sooner or later. The charges included obstruction of justice, fraud, extortion, burglary, perjury, violation of campaign funding laws, illegal wiretapping, destruction of evidence, and conspiracy to commit illegal acts.](#) Nixon would not be subjected to judiciary action; in August of 1974 evidence and circumstances against him were so insurmountable that he resigned (the first President ever to do so) rather than face certain removal from office as a result of impending impeachment proceedings.