

Watergate, But Worse

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On the anniversary of the Watergate break-in, I reflect on a few things. I recall watching the televised hearings which outlined in stunning detail an amok, power-mad President and “All The President’s Men” who carried out his alarming, authoritarian dictates. I remember reading the Woodward / Bernstein book, and watching the Redford / Hoffman movie of that name.

I recall my father telling me that Nixon—after a long career of Communist hunting—hurt America more by his criminal activities than any communist ever had. Most of all, I’ve been thinking about the brief, typed letter of resignation signed by Richard M. Nixon, delivered to then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. I saw that letter framed on the wall of the George McGovern home in Washington, DC.

Watergate began simply, with a concern for “leaks” to the media about the Nixon Administration’s inner workings. A zealous official organized a special unit called “the plumbers” to stop the “leaks.” Soon, this group was involved in much more than imposing internal discipline.

They were casing the offices of the Brookings Institute plotting to fire-bomb them, and breaking into the offices of Daniel Ellsberg’s psychotherapist, trying to exert prior restraint over embarrassing files now known as the Pentagon Papers. These serious crimes represented an effort by the Nixonian Republicans to subvert our right to vote.

Leading Senate Watergate investigator, Sen. Sam Ervin said, *“if these allegations prove to be true, what [the Republicans] were seeking to steal was not the jewels, money or other precious property of American citizens, but something much more valuable—their most precious heritage: the right to vote in a free election.”*

Sadly, today’s Republicans remain just as hostile to our voting rights as the Nixon-Era Republicans. Watergate was not an aberration. It’s Republican business as usual. Several months after the VoterGate election-theft of 2000, serious legal and political issues remain unresolved. The people spoke, but at Bush’s urging, the US Supreme Court overruled the majority of the people in the US and Florida who preferred Al Gore.

Al Gore should be the President today. Period. Any full, fair count of the legal votes cast in Florida would reflect. Bush campaign officials in Florida knew this, but filed one lawsuit after another and lied to the American people.

Seating the loser as president upsets everything we hold sacred in America. Letting lust for power and corruption prevail over the peoples’ will instantly invalidated the “trust the people” premise of the Bush campaign. Without remorse or awareness of irony, team Bush fashioned the most hollow “victory” in history.

In their capacity as elected Florida officials and George W. Bush for President Florida committee co-chairs, Jeb Bush and Katherine Harris shut down the basis of our government. They halted the process as soon as their man could claim a lead, and controlled the sabotaged democracy every step of the way afterward.

They hired a Republican corporation to “purge” legal voters from the lists, which the US Civil Rights Commission found violated the Voting Rights Act. They blocked and delayed vote counting, then complained the counts weren’t done on time. They solicited, “fixed” and manufactured 1000s of absentee votes, and hand counted ballot in six pro-Bush counties.

Their misconduct tainted Bush’s claims of victory. As a political matter, they may have “won” but only at the cost of the legitimacy and credibility presidents need to lead. Their machinations far outweighed the final “official” margin: 527.

Remember President Nixon lost his legitimacy after winning a stunning 49 state landslide. Watergate was about trying to cover up election dirty tricks committed on his behalf. In Watergate, the realization struck like lightning that our President was indeed “a crook.”

We were already at war in Vietnam, and suddenly another national trauma arose. We faced a Constitutional crisis, but the other branches of government stepped in, and the man overwhelmingly supported by voters mere months before had to resign from his office. The process worked, we regained “normalcy,” life went on, and America was better for it.

