

WATERGATE: NIXON'S DOWNFALL

WATERGATE AND THE COVER UP

- **What Happened:** President Richard Nixon's involvement in the Watergate scandal forced him to resign from office.
- **Today, we will:**
 - Explain how Richard Nixon's approach to the Presidency led to the Watergate scandal
 - Describe how Nixon and high-ranking government officials worked to cover up the details of the break-in
 - Explain how these events led to impeachment proceedings and Nixon's resignation

PART I: PRESIDENT NIXON AND HIS WHITE HOUSE

The Watergate scandal had its roots in Nixon's approach to the presidency.

NIXON' S APPROACH

- Nixon took an “imperial” approach to the presidency – the president was above the law, almost like a king
- Previous presidents such as Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson had increased the power of the presidency
- Nixon approached the presidency with this same attitude, and took it even further, often not considering the constitutional implications of what he was doing
 - Impounding of funds to stop certain Congressional programs from working
- Nixon surrounded himself with and confided in a small, fiercely loyal group of advisers
 - H.R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, John Mitchell
- This group helped develop the sense that they were above the law in their actions

THE COMMITTEE TO RE-ELECT THE PRESIDENT

- Nixon's re-election team often sought out different ways of gaining an advantage in the election of 1972
- June 17, 1972, 2:30 A.M. – A guard at the Watergate hotel caught five men breaking into the headquarters of the Democratic National Convention
 - Planned to steal documents, plant phone taps, etc.
- It was soon discovered that this was orchestrated by an organization known as the Committee to Re-elect the President
 - James McCord – former CIA agent
 - John Mitchell – directed the team and their break-in

THE COVER-UP

- The Nixon administration quickly worked to cover-up the break-in
- The White House asked the CIA to ask the FBI to stop investigating the cover-up on the grounds that it would be bad for national security
- The Watergate burglars were given \$450,000 to buy their silence
- When newspapers and others confronted the administration, it denied all allegations
 - Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the *Washington Post*, through a source within the government, continued to follow the information they had

PART II: THE COVER-UP UNRAVELS

As the investigation of the Watergate break-in went forward, many sources began to indicate that Nixon had been involved in the cover-up

THE INVESTIGATION BEGINS

- First, the Watergate burglars themselves were tried for the break-in
 - The trial judge, John Sirica, stated that he thought that the burglars had not acted alone
 - Just before the burglars were sent to prison, one of them, James McCord, sent a letter to Sirica telling him that he had lied under oath, and he hinted that some high-ranking members of the Nixon administration might be involved
- When McCord let on that there was more than what appeared, this news caught the interest of the public and Congress

MEMBERS OF CREEP

Watergate Criminals: The Committee to Re-elect the President



Kenneth H.
Dahlberg



Fred LaRue



E. Howard Hunt



G. Gordon
Liddy



James W.
McCord



Jeb Stuart
Magruder



John N.
Mitchell



Donald
Segretti



Hugh W.
Sloan



Maurice
Stans

NIXON'S REACTION

- Nixon quickly dismissed John Dean, and announced the resignations of H.R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, and Attorney General Richard Klendienst (had replaced the previous attorney general, John Mitchell, after he resigned)
- Nixon went on television and denied any attempt at a cover-up.
 - Would appoint a new attorney general, and authorized him to appoint a new special prosecutor to investigate any cover-up
- This didn't stop Congress from pursuing investigations - May, 1973, the Senate began its own investigation of the Watergate cover-up
- Over the course of the summer, different members of the Nixon administration testified in front of the Senate's Watergate committee
 - Americans watched on television

WHAT DID THE PRESIDENT KNOW?

- “What did the president know and when did he know it?” – This was the question investigators asked
- John Dean answered this question by saying that President Nixon had been deeply involved in the cover-up.
 - Even referred to a meeting in which he and other presidential advisers discussed strategies for continuing the cover-up
- The investigation reached a breakthrough when presidential aide Alexander Butterfield revealed that Nixon had taped virtually all of his presidential conversations
- The Senate committee demanded that Nixon hand over the tapes

THE SATURDAY NIGHT MASSACRE

- Archibald Cox sued Nixon for the release of the tapes
- Nixon refused – presidential privacy, national security
 - Also ordered the Attorney General to fire Cox
 - The Attorney General, Elliot Richardson, refused to fire Cox
 - The Deputy Attorney General also refused to fire Cox, he was fired
 - Solicitor General Robert Bork fired Cox
 - Leon Jaworski replaced Archibald Cox, and he continued to try to get the tapes from Nixon
- The House Judiciary Committee began to discuss the possibility of an impeachment hearing for Nixon
- Completely unrelated, Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned after it was discovered that he had accepted bribes
- Nixon nominated Gerald Ford to the office of Vice President, and Congress confirmed the nomination

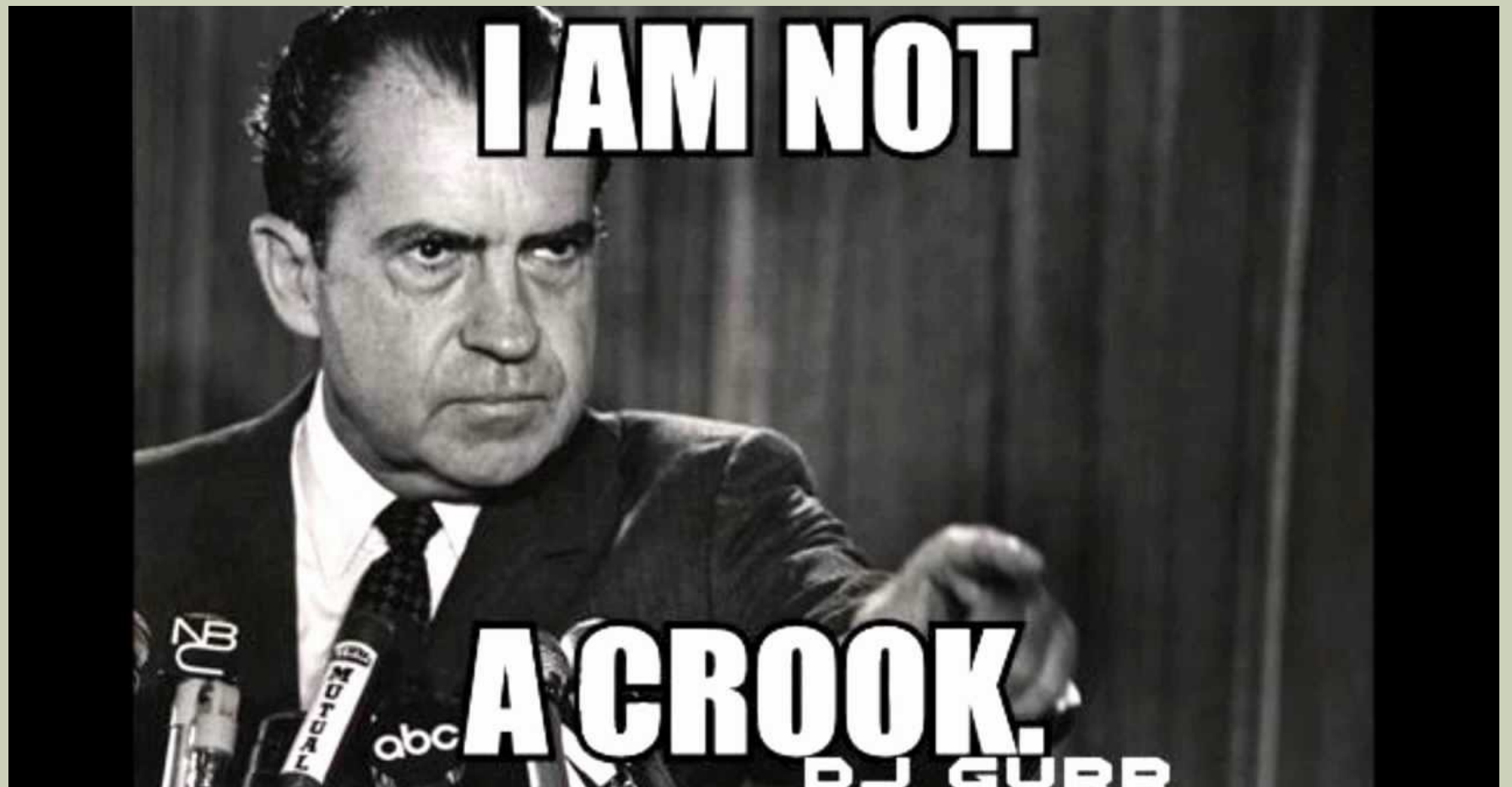
PART III: THE FALL OF A PRESIDENT

As evidence
against
Nixon
mounted,
Nixon
resigned
from office.

NIXON WITHHOLDS THE TAPES

- Nixon announced in the spring of 1974 that he would release edited transcripts of White House conversations about Watergate
- Investigators demanded that Nixon give the unedited tapes – Nixon refused
- The Supreme Court ruled unanimously that Nixon had to hand over the tapes
 - Nixon had said that this would put national security in danger, but the Supreme Court ignored this – even the President couldn't withhold information about a criminal act
- Nixon defended himself in press conferences
 - “I am not a crook.”

I AM NOT A CROOK



NIXON RELEASES THE TAPES

- Even without the tapes, the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee believed there was enough evidence to impeach Richard Nixon on:
 - Obstruction of justice
 - Abuse of power
 - Contempt of Congress – refusing to obey the Congressional subpoena to release the tapes
- Nixon released the tapes
 - Contained many gaps in the playback
 - One tape contained an eighteen-and-a-half minute gap
 - Nixon said that his secretary had accidentally erased part of the conversation
- The investigators did find a tape that revealed that Nixon had known about his administration's role in the break-in, and had agreed to plan the cover-up and obstruct the FBI's investigation

NIXON RESIGNS

- August 8, 1974 – Nixon announced his resignation from office
 - Admitted no guilt – made some bad judgments
- Nixon resigned the following day, and Gerald Ford was sworn in as the 38th president of the United States



NIXON'S PARDON

- September 9, 1974 - President Ford issues a Presidential pardon for “any offenses he has committed or may have committed” during his Presidency.
- President Ford’s reasoning was that a lengthy investigation and trial of a former President for crimes that he may have committed in office would degrade the office of the Presidency and divide a nation in need of healing.
- This action probably cost President Ford any chance he may have had to win a Presidential term in his own right in 1976.

THE LEGACY OF WATERGATE

- After Nixon resigned, 25 members of the administration were convicted of crimes and served prison terms
- Taken together with the effects of Vietnam, Watergate seemed to increase people's distrust for government in the United States
- Today, presidential or other high-ranking scandals often have the “-gate” suffix added to them
 - “Spy-gate” – Bill Belichick's cover-up of spying efforts in the National Football League
 - Also Filegate, Nannygate, Travelgate, Emailgate – scandals involving Bill and Hilary Clinton