

## **Thoughts and Commentary on John Dean's New Book**

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John Dean appears to have collected into one place each and every admission against interest by President Nixon and his senior aides, Bob Haldeman, John Ehrlichman and John Mitchell, from various Watergate books, the Nixon and Haldeman diaries, and the White House tapes.

Before deciding whether Dean's supposed revelations are all that is claimed, it is helpful to re-read President Nixon's 1978 biography, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, particularly the two sections devoted to Watergate: "The Watergate Break-in" (pp. 625-665) and "Watergate Recurs" (pp. 773-791). One might well conclude that much of what Dean claims to reveal today was already admitted by Nixon over thirty-five years ago.

But there is one over-riding area of agreement, between Dean and the president – and that is that Nixon did not fully appreciate the serious nature of the Watergate scandal until their meeting of March 21, 1973, when Dean first spoke of a cancer on the presidency. The ramifications will be explored in greater detail, but Dean admits, for all of the earlier bits and pieces that might be mined from earlier conversations, they were not seen as all that significant until very, very late in the day.

It also should be pointed out that the book is profoundly mis-titled and that Dean's methodology is seriously flawed. The book is not Nixon's defense at all; it is an all-out attack on President Nixon. It's far more accurate to see the book as Dean's defense, his last and best effort to paint a picture of how an innocent young lawyer suddenly and unexpectedly found himself in the midst of a cabal of evil-doers – and how he alone struggled to do the right thing. (See footnote 111 at p. 488 for Dean's tortured explanation of how he ended up with immunity when only wanting to tell the truth, and footnote 7 at p. 543 for his rather astounding assertion regarding finding himself in the midst of a criminal cabal.)

More suspect is Dean's methodology. By focusing only on events mentioned on the tape system and thus skipping any real discussion of what led to the break-in in the first place, of what was done by and between the President's staff outside of his hearing, and of what transpired after the taping system was removed, Dean's book presents only a very selective and partial picture of the Watergate scandal. In essence, it takes the taped conversations out of the context of the overall Watergate scandal. Finally, Dean's supposed

verbatim transcriptions have neither been peer-reviewed nor made available for independent verification.

The question was, and remains, why should anyone today believe Dean's highly selective re-telling? It is, in the words of Jim Croce, "like a jigsaw puzzle with a couple of pieces gone."

## I. The Dean Transcriptions:

In researching his book, Dean claims to have identified some 1,000 Watergate conversations on the White House tapes, which he and his team have transcribed, beginning in 2009 and utilizing digitalized copies produced by the National Archives, as well as new software specifically designed for that purpose. He and his team then eliminated duplicative and irrelevant materials to condense these conversations into more readable and understandable form.

It must have been a prodigious effort. One would have had to review thousands of individual conversations just to identify those that were Watergate-related. And, then to transcribe them "from scratch," as Dean claims to have done, would be a further Herculean task.

Establishing Validity: All of this effort, however, will be of little use to future scholars or to serious students of the Watergate scandal, since Dean has declined to make these claimed verbatim transcriptions available for cross-checking and verification. As he so nicely put it in his first footnote, "Anyone who wants a verbatim copy is welcome to prepare their own transcripts." (p. xviii)

It appears that Dean expects readers to take his work-product at face value, but it is difficult to see how anyone could. After all, the transcriptions have not been prepared by an independent authority or cross-checked in any manner. And Dean is hardly an objective or independent observer, with an over-riding concern for any reputation for veracity. He is, perhaps, President Nixon's severest critic – and one who obviously feels a very strong need to justify his own criminal actions. Without verbatim transcripts as a reference point, it is virtually impossible to ascertain whether Dean's transcriptions are accurate and, as importantly, whether his extensive condensations are appropriate or have omitted exculpatory material.

It would be relatively easy, for example, to compare Dean's newly transcribed versions of certain key conversations with those previously prepared by others, including the White House (and released on April 30, 1974), the House Judiciary Committee (and released in June, 1974) and the

FBI (for use in the cover-up trial in the fall of 1974). In so doing, one could ascertain rather quickly whether Dean's transcriptions are truly "new and improved" or closely follow those done some four decades prior.

Besides, Dean has given such assurances of accuracy and completeness before, only to have to eat his own words. In the 1976 Preface to *Blind Ambition*, Dean attested to its overall accuracy by asserting that he was willing to take a lie detector test regarding its truthfulness. Yet, when under oath during nine days of depositions taken in 1995-1996 in connection with his lawsuit against the publisher of *Silent Coup* (*Dean v. St Martin's Press*, C.A. 92-1807), time and again Dean declined to stand behind the specificity of various quotations and representations in that book. He claimed instead, that much of its dialogue had been a pure invention of his ghost-writer, Taylor Branch, and admitted that he had not even read the final version before it was published.

Selective Use and Quotation: Aside from threshold questions of overall accuracy, the outright misuse of tape transcripts is just what Dean's book is accusing President Nixon of having done many years before:

- He first explains why tape summaries just don't work, criticizing Nixon for reviewing Haldeman's notes about a conversation without listening to the actual tape itself:

"It is possible to get the gist of this conversation in real time, which is largely what Haldeman tried to do and indicate in his abbreviated notes. It is not possible for someone who has not listened to the recording, however, to understand it based on a few summary notes made by someone who has listened to it. For example, the tone of voice of the person speaking can be very telling." (p. 541<sup>1</sup>)

Yet, this is precisely what Dean is asking readers to do with regard to his own summations.

- Dean later accuses the president of providing "misinformation by omitting these facts." (p. 582) Since readers have no idea what Dean may have omitted, he could well be doing precisely what he has accused Nixon of having done.
- He also asserts that Nixon

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<sup>1</sup> All page references are to the Advance Uncorrected Proof copy of Dean's book.

"[W]ould use what he could of [the tapes] to his advantage. In fact, he began doing so as he listened to them, using select material he heard to reassure Haig and Ziegler of his innocence." (p. 590)

Again, there is no way a reader can tell if Dean is doing the same thing.

- He later accused Nixon of selectively choosing material to his advantage:

"[T]he president skimmed through the meetings, plucking out occasional statements by me that were consistent with his defense and dismissing matters or spinning them when they conflicted." (p. 603)

Since Dean so readily accuses others of abusive tape usage, who is to say that he hasn't done many of the same things in his own condensations? Without his verbatim transcripts, there is no way to determine what has been left out.

Honest Disagreements: There also can be authentic differences over the actual wording of particular conversations. For example, Dean assures the reader that Nixon instructed Mitchell to further the cover-up in their conversation of March 22, 1973. Here is Dean's quoted version (which is virtually a word-for-word duplication of the transcript produced by the House Judiciary Committee in 1973 and introduced at the cover-up trial):

"I don't give a shit what happens. I want you all to stonewall it, let them plead the Fifth Amendment, cover up or anything else, if it'll save it, save the plan. That's the whole point." But Nixon had to be realistic, too, so he gave the other side. "And I would particularly prefer to do it that other way, if it's going to come out that way anyway. And that's my view, that with the number of jackass people that they've got that they can call, they're going to - "The president rephrased his thought. "The story they'll get out, through leaks, charges and so forth, innuendo, will be a hell of a lot worse than the story they're going to get out by just letting it out there." (p. 341)

Here is alternative transcription of this same segment, prepared by the White House in response to the House Judiciary Committee's version, but never before released:

I don't give a shit what happens. Go down and sto-, stonewall it; Tell 'em, "plead the Fifth Amendment, cover-up" or anything else, if it'll save 'em—save it for them. That's the whole point.

On the other hand, I would prefer, as I said to you, that you do it the other way [to have everyone tell the truth]. And I would particularly prefer to do it that other way if it's going to come out that way anyway.

And that my view, with the number of jackass people that they've got that they can call, they're going to. The story they get out through leaks, charges, and so forth, and innuendos, will be a hell of a lot worse than the story they're going to get out by just letting it out there.

As any reader can see, there is an considerable difference of opinion over the specific words on this tape – with hugely disparate implications -- but there's no way to cross-check or verify Dean's own transcription and whether it differs at all from transcriptions prepared by a number of other organizations.

## II. Overview

### A. Startlingly Material Omissions:

Dean's methodology is deeply flawed and, because of that, his book is glaringly incomplete as a full discussion of the Watergate scandal, particularly as to what has come to light over the past four decades. His sole focus on the tapes has enabled him to skip over hugely controversial and unsettled topics, including:

- Any detailed discussion of the real rationale for the break-in itself, the allegations of his own involvement, and the unresolved factual questions in those first weeks following the break-in arrests. It is interesting to note that Dean never even mentions or recognizes the issues highlighted in the whole series of books presenting differing views on Watergate, especially those by:
  - Fred Thompson, *At That Point in Time: The Inside Story of the Watergate Committee* (1975),
  - Jim Hougan, *Secret Agenda: Watergate, Deep Throat, and the CIA* (1984),

- Len Colodny and Robert Gettlin, *Silent Coup: The Removal of a President* (1991),
  - James Rosen, *The Strong Man, John Mitchell and the Secrets of Watergate* (2008),
  - Geoff Shepard, *The Secret Plot to Make Ted Kennedy President* (2008), and
  - Phil Stanford, *White House Call Girl* (2014).
- In addition to thus starting his book in the middle of the Watergate story, Dean simply and suddenly stops his narrative on July 16, 1973, the point where the White House tape system was disclosed and removed. He thus omits any real review or discussion of the last thirteen months of the Nixon presidency.
  - The Questions Dean Fears Most: Any presentation of Dean's own actions, particularly mention of the many questions that have been raised with regard to his own possibly criminal acts, has also been omitted. In the Preface, Dean asserts that he became the center piece of the Nixon defense (p. xxv), but then asserts that his Ervin Committee testimony and first book have already detailed his role, so he has omitted further discussion from this book (p. xxiv). But he never discussed them there, either. It is as though he hopes to air-brush any record of own his criminal acts from the Watergate picture. With so many questions remain outstanding, particularly with regard to information that has come to light since Dean's July, 1973 testimony (as well as allegations in later books by Bob Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, Charles Colson, Gordon Liddy, and James McCord, and the sworn testimony given before the House Judiciary Committee and at the cover-up trial), that one wonders about the real reasons for these omissions. Dean might have better explained, for example:
    - How he came to be assigned responsibility for campaign intelligence plan by Haldeman (as mentioned in opening of his March 21, 1973 meeting with President Nixon), particularly in light of the differing description contained in Haldeman's subsequent books.
    - How he recruited Liddy and introduced him to Mitchell and Magruder, particularly in light of the dramatically contrasting version in Liddy's later book.
    - How he came to attend and what was said in connection with the two meetings in Mitchell's office when he was still Attorney General (on 1/27/72 and 2/4/72), again particularly in light of Liddy's book.

- His participation in the June 19, 1972 meeting in Mitchell's apartment, when most folks believe the cover-up was undertaken, particularly in light of the conflicting testimony about that meeting that was rendered by other participants during the course of the cover-up trial.
- How he rehearsed Magruder for his perjured grand jury testimony in his two appearances, after asking him to erase his name from Magruder's date book.
- How he obtained FBI field reports, sat in on interviews and obtained prosecutorial insights – and then improperly shared that information with Watergate defense counsel.
- How he held back and then destroyed possible personally incriminating materials from Hunt's safe – and only fessed up to having done so after having pleaded guilty to single felony.
- How he came to so mischaracterize his first meeting with President Nixon, on September 15, 1972, when he was describing it in his Ervin Committee testimony.
- How he secretly removed campaign funds for personal use on his honeymoon.
- How he acted as "chief desk officer" during cover-up, apparently vastly exceeding the scope of his mission of behalf of his client, the president.
- How he stoutly and consistently resisted any White House disclosure, saying it would harm Watergate defendants, when it appears that he was more concerned with disclosure of his own role in the criminal cover-up.
- How he encouraged Egil Krogh to deny knowledge of Plumber operations in his grand jury appearance, which resulted in Krogh's being indicted for perjury.
- How his own recollections, as told to prosecutors, changed so dramatically during the course of his April, 1973 meetings.
- How his lawyer negotiated with federal prosecutors and with Ervin Committee staff for immunity, setting one off against the other, even as Dean maintained that his only interest was in telling the truth.
- How he came to spend no time whatsoever in prison, even though sentenced to a term of 1 to 4 years for his role in the Watergate scandal.

Selective Usage: Dean has arranged his transcriptions into four categories, corresponding to the four parts of his book (xxiii):

- I. Covering Up (35 tapes)
- II. Containing (158 tapes)

III. Unraveling (110 tapes)  
IV. The Nixon Defense (669 tapes)

But the book contains specific footnoted references to only 503 of these conversations. The implication is that fully half of his alleged Watergate-related tapes are missing entirely or are unworthy of any discussion. There are additional technical problems. For example, footnotes identifying at least three of the early conversations appear to be missing (See, for example, p. 32).

In addition, the extensive use of supposedly full transcriptions fades as one progresses through book. There is the appearance of great detail at the outset, but these condensations are reduced to bare allusions to embarrassing fragments as the book progresses. This is particularly true in the fourth and final section of the book.

Dean also gilds the lily. He constantly characterizes actions and statements of others in pejorative terms: “feigning surprise” “claimed”, “asserted” (See, for example, pp. 312, 398, 406 and 433). It is the same with Dean’s use of the introductory term, “surely” (p. 596). This near-constant pejorative characterization of statements by others raises questions about the accuracy of Dean’s supposed transcriptions, especially where they cannot be independently verified. In essence, Dean is spinning virtually every conversation. In contrast, his own statements are always presented as properly phrased and unquestionably true.

B. Helpful Admissions

Nonetheless, there is any number of very helpful admissions scattered throughout the 719 pages of Dean’s book. For example, he asserts that:

- No Advance Knowledge: No one on the White House staff knew of the Watergate break-in in advance
  - “No doubt [Nixon] was trying to reach for doubters that he had no direct connection with the Watergate break-in, which I am confident was true.” (p. 8)
  - “I had certainly confirmed it months later [that no one on the White House staff knew of the break-in in advance] and still believed it was technically true based on all I knew (p. 288)
  - “Nixon noted that I had said, however, that I did not believe anyone at the White House had advance knowledge of the Watergate break-in (as I later testified, and find remains accurate to this day). (p. 591)

- No White House Receipt of Wiretap Information: Dean concludes that, contrary to Magruder's testimony, Strachan was never sent any wiretap information from the first break-in (May 28, 1972).

"Whether the White House received information from the DNC before June 17, 1972, will forever remain unclear, because Haldeman instructed Strachan to clean their files. But it appears no such information, in fact, was received. Magruder later testified that he showed Strachan the fruits of Liddy's DNC wiretapping operation, but in his testimony Strachan denied he was shown such material. At the time I was reporting to Nixon, Strachan believed he had seen it because the reports he had been sent and destroyed at Haldeman's instruction, after the June 17, 1972, arrests read very much like wiretap reports; they used the language: "From a source believed to be reliable." In the weeks ahead, Strachan and Haldeman would figure out that what had been destroyed were reports from a source planted by Magruder rather than wiretap information. See, Conversation No. [TK]" Footnote 5 at p. 312.

- The 18½ Minute Gap on the tape of June 20, 1972 is historically insignificant.
  - "Haldeman's note-taking procedures have been misunderstood; he did not make a record of or even cite the highlights of what was said at any given session but instead recorded only matters that called for further attention and follow up." (p. 20)
  - " Who was responsible for the 18 ½ minute gap – leaving behind a shrill buzz – on the tape of the June 20, 1972, conversation between President Nixon and H.R. "Bob" Haldeman, and what was erased? Two observations should be made about these questions. First, the answers to them have virtually no historic significance whatsoever as they provide not information about or insight into Watergate that cannot already be found in abundance elsewhere." (p. 653)
- The Smoking Gun tape of June 23, 1972 has been totally misunderstood – and related only to an effort to keep the names of two Democrat donors confidential:

"When revealed by order of the U.S. Supreme Court in late July 1974, this became known as the "smoking gun" conversation, because it was viewed as hard evidence, demonstrating beyond question, that Nixon's final defense about the Watergate break-in in

his April 30, 1973 speech, followed by his May 22<sup>nd</sup> statement, was bogus, which doomed the Nixon presidency. Ironically, this conversation has been mistakenly understood as an effort by Nixon and Haldeman to shut down the FBI's entire Watergate investigation. This appears to be the case only when viewed out of context. In August 1974, when the conversation was revealed, and Nixon and his lawyers had to focus on this conversation, he had long forgotten what was actually involved; they assumed it had the same meaning as everyone else. In reality, it was only an effort by Haldeman to stop the FBI from investigating an anonymous campaign contribution from Mexico that the Justice Department prosecutors had already agreed was outside the scope of the Watergate investigation. In approving this action, however, Nixon slightly expanded the request, saying that the FBI should also stay out of Howard Hunt's CIA-related activities. In fact, this conversation did not put the lie to Nixon's April 30 and May 22, 1973, statements, and had Nixon known that he might have survived its disclosure to fight another day." (Footnote at pp. 55-56)<sup>2</sup>

- There was a clear lack of intent on behalf of the President and his advisors to break the law.
  - "In short, Nixon viewed Watergate in terms of "politics pure and simple," and he played it "tough" because that's how the Democrats and their sympathetic news media partners played it." (p. 95)
  - "A striking number of lawyers found themselves on the wrong side of the law during Watergate, and almost all of them did so out of ignorance of criminal law." (p. 95)
  - "But [Nixon] was thinking politically, not legally. He understood that Magruder had largely cooked this story up by himself. There is no evidence suggesting that it ever occurred to him that this knowledge and approval of Magruder's actions effectively placed him at the top of a conspiracy to suborn perjury. (p. 119)
  - "[I]t struck me that, with the exception of Magruder's perjuring himself . . . everyone else who had crossed the near-invisible lines onto the wrong side of the law had done so out of ignorance." (p. 421)
  - "Nixon did acknowledge that Haldeman and Ehrlichman had "collected money in the beginning for the defense attorney,"

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<sup>2</sup> Dean's explanation is still incomplete. The effort was to prevent FBI interviews of apparent campaign contributions by Ken Dahlberg and Manuel Ogarrio, who were really acting as conduits for contributions from prominent Democrats, including Dwayne Andreas and a group of Texas oil and gas producers.

although their “motives were proper, right?” When no one responded Nixon conceded: “I think what you might say, in fairness, maybe they were trying to see that nothing blew the election. That makes sense. But I don’t think it was obstruction of justice.” Surely [one of Nixon’s attorneys] understood what Nixon could not grasp: Obstruction is obstruction, regardless of motive.” (p. 593)<sup>3</sup>

- President Nixon knew relatively little about the specifics of Watergate prior to his meeting with Dean on March 21, 1973:
  - “In fact, as his new term commenced [in January of 1973], the situation was far worse than he could begin to imagine. This was because he had remained largely uninformed of the facts, partly though his own design but also partly because of the reluctance of Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Mitchell to inform him precisely what had gone on and how matters were or were not being addressed.” (p. 193)
  - “Although Nixon interpreted the information from Colson during their January 5 conversation as more finger-pointing among his subordinates, the truth was that his staff was slowly (and finally) giving him the basic facts about what had actually occurred – while not really explaining their own roles in the affair.” (p. 203)
  - “That applies to Mitchell, too,” I added, since the president seemed both interested and surprisingly unaware of the facts. (p. 267)
  - Nixon said as much himself: “The reason, if I knew all the facts, then I have an idea of what could come out.” (p. 282)
  - Dean gives an excellent characterization of Nixon’s situation as of April 16, 1973: “Clearly the president was starting to develop a new defense: He would say he first learned of the serious nature of the problems on March 21, which was true. (His later claim that he first learned of the cover-up on March 21, however, was not.)” (p. 421)
- The president’s staff was not informing him (or themselves) of their involvement or of what had transpired.
  - Nixon expressed frustration that he did not know all the facts; he had been told conflicting stories, but is clear that he was consistently and adamantly against any cover-up (pp. 232-236).

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<sup>3</sup> In fact, there is considerable legal conflict over the role of intent in crimes such as conspiracy and obstruction, particularly the difference between general and specific intent. This was the point that Nixon was attempting to make in his 1977 interviews with David Frost (the actual interviews, not the later play by Peter Morgan or its subsequent movie version).

- ““I’ve got to know whether [Haldeman] knew about it, and I’ve got to know whether Colson knew about it.” No one had ever laid it out for him, even when he had asked.” (p. 232)
- Dean later admits that, like everyone else on the staff, he was less than candid in telling the president the full truth:

“Not knowing what else I should tell Nixon, I was as vague as Haldeman and Ehrlichman when I explained, “There is a certain domino situation here. If some things start going, a lot of other things are going to start going, and there are going to be a lot of problems if everything starts falling. So there are dangers, Mr. President. I’d be less than candid if I didn’t tell you there are. There’s a reason for us not, not everyone, going up and testifying.”” (p. 270)

- “Haldeman said he understood, yet clearly he was still not giving the president basic information that investigators would later uncover about his role leading up to the Watergate break-in. As the conversation continued, the president could merely speculate about who knew what, in order to assess his exposure.” (p. 280)
- “Conversations like this were remarkably inconclusive, because Haldeman, Ehrlichman and the president were not telling one another all they knew and this lack of candor continued to the end . . .” (p. 286)
- “While Mitchell, Ehrlichman and Haldeman had once discussed the problem among themselves in the early days, they now communicated almost exclusively through me, although Ehrlichman and Haldeman did exchange some information. No one was sharing anything with anyone else, nor with the president, who even at this late date [March 20, 1973] had no real idea of his exposure.” (p. 306)
- But the allegations against H and E seem almost inconsequential when they were asked to resign:

“Petersen gave the president a written document summarizing the charges against the two aides as of that date [April 16, 1973] based on the information I had provided in my off-the-record conversations with the prosecutors: [Acting FBI Director] Gray’s having been given material from Hunt’s safe; Ehrlichman’s having instructed me to “deep six” material found there; Ehrlichman’s ordering Hunt out of the country; Haldeman’s having been informed of my meetings with Mitchell and

Liddy, during which I had rejected Liddy's plan and Haldeman had agreed. But Petersen noted, Haldeman had done nothing to "discontinue" Liddy's activities, and Magruder had told the prosecutors he had delivered to Strachan for Haldeman copies of information from "intercepted telephone conversations." (p. 425)

- The president constantly wanted to get the facts out

"Well, God damn it, as I've often said it, John, if the facts are going to come out, let us help get them out." (p. 284)

- In this regard, Nixon constantly alluded to his experience in the Alger Hiss case as the reason for his belief as to why any cover-up would be worse than the actual facts:

"But the worst thing a guy can do, there are two things, each is bad: One is to lie, and the other is to cover up." Ehrlichman agreed, and Nixon continued, "If you cover up, you're going to get caught. And if you lie, you're going to be guilty of perjury. Now, basically, that was the whole story of the Hiss case." (pp. 105-106).

It is important to understand that Nixon did not see the Hiss case as merely exposing a Soviet spy in the State Department. He remembered it as a devastating scandal for the Truman Administration, who had made it much worse by trying to cover it up.

Other of Nixon's allusions to the Hiss case are at pp. 238, 241, 243, 247, and 250, but may be two dozen actual references. The point is that the president, if asked, would clearly have responded with the advice not to lie or cover-up, because the truth would come out in any event.

- Dean denies that Watergate was part of a larger espionage/sabotage operation, as had been so dramatically claimed by Deep Throat:

"Woodward and Bernstein had been focused on who was responsible for the break-in and on portraying it as part of a larger espionage and sabotage effort. If that operation existed in any organized fashion, I did not (and do not) know who was behind it, and even four decades later I have never found evidence for its existence; it seems, instead, to have been a

fantasy scenario apparently advanced by their Deep Throat source , Mark Felt.” (p. 209)

The importance of Dean’s assertion is explained in Max Holland’s new article on Tim Naftali where he describes how unprepared he was in his oral history interview with Carl Bernstein:

“One of the critical questions that should have been put to them, as any Watergate scholar would know, has to do with the Post’s centerpiece story of 10 October 1972. Occupying the prestigious upper-right quadrant of the front page, it was boldly headlined “FBI Finds Nixon Aides Sabotaged Democrats.” The story was and still is regarded as the “centerpiece” of the newspaper’s pre-election coverage. It seemingly tied together the scandal’s disparate strands and tried to put the break-in into a context, as one element in far-flung program to subvert the Democrats if not the democratic process—which included greasing the way so that Nixon faced the one candidate he wanted to run against the most, George McGovern.”

(<http://www.washingtondecoded.com/site/2014/06/naftali.html>)

- Dean’s quoted materials tend to confirm Ehrlichman’s continued advocacy of getting the facts out, which was the principal defense he sought to introduce at the cover-up trial. (p. 116) He was denied access to all of the other tape recordings, as well as to producing the former president as a witness, so he could not even begin to present this defense.
- In addition, the rationale for second break-in seems to support Mitchell’s legal defense that he never approved of the Liddy plan in the first place.
  - For much of Dean’s book, the discussions on the tapes place the blame for Magruder’s decision to go forward with Liddy’s campaign intelligence plan on pressure from the White House and not on any decision by Mitchell. For example:

[On March 16, 1972] Ehrlichman provided Nixon his well-informed “theory of the case,” weaving facts with his considered speculation, and while there were some gaps in his knowledge, his theory was actually very close to the truth of the matter as it was documented by later investigations.

Ehrlichman described how the pressure built up on Magruder, who probably called Liddy in and said, "I'm getting unbelievable shit from the White House, "so he needed to do something. Liddy, in turn, said he would take care of it, but needed "a hundred grand or whatever." Magruder sent Liddy to Sloan, who wanted to know if the money had been approved by Mitchell. Magruder then called Mitchell, and said, "Listen, you've got to call Sloan and clear this." Ehrlichman reminded the president he was speculating, and then continued: Likely Magruder said to Mitchell, "'John, you've got to call Sloan and clear the expenditure of a hundred thousand dollars cash." And Mitchell said, "Well, what's it for?" "Well," he said, "Gordon Liddy is going to undertake to get that information that I keep getting badgered about from the White House." (pp. 282-283)

- Several other discussions on the tapes place the blame for Magruder going forward on Colson's call. For example:

Reconstructing from his notes, Haldeman summarized the report: Magruder had said, "The whole intelligence plan was hatched here at the White House by Hunt, Liddy and Colson. And Colson called Jeb twice to tell him to get going on this thing, and he specifically referred to the Larry O'Brien information, was hard on that. And Jeb says Hunt and Liddy were in Colson's office, and LaRue was in Jeb's office on that phone call." (p. 355)

- They also blame it on Strachan following up on wanting a campaign intelligence plan, due to Haldeman's tickler system

"Because McCord had claimed I was aware of the Watergate break-in, I would be called to the grand jury, and my testimony would not jibe with Magruder's. As a result, Magruder had told the CRP lawyers, aware that they would tell others, that he had a new version of "what really happened in Watergate." He was claiming that the plan had been cooked up at the White House, that it was triggered when Gordon Strachan told him, "Haldeman has said that you cannot delay getting this operation started any longer. The president had ordered you to go ahead immediately, and you are not to stall anymore. You're to get it done." (p. 346)

- This is repeated again a little later, at the same time that the idea is first presented that perhaps Mitchell did approve Liddy's plan:

Haldeman now reported information I had given him from Paul O'Brien [a CRP attorney], who was "very distressed with Mitchell," because he felt Mitchell "could cut this whole thing off if he would just step forward." Haldeman explained, "As far as O'Brien can determine, Mitchell did sign off on this thing, and Dean believes that to be the case also," although neither thought they could prove it. O'Brien was concerned because others were getting "whacked around" to protect Mitchell. Haldeman repeated for Ehrlichman's benefit Magruder's latest, that Liddy's "superintelligence operation was put together by the White House, by Haldeman, Dean and others." (p. 348)

- Dean says that Petersen said during a 9pm phone call to the president on April 16, 1973, that LaRue had told the prosecutors that Mitchell had approved the Liddy plan at their March 30th meeting in Miami. (p. 427) [This assertion directly conflicts with LaRue's discussions with WSPF prosecutors and his testimony at the cover-up trial. It may be an error in Dean's transcription.]
- Dean also says that Liddy used Mitchell's call (about inadequate intelligence) as the excuse to go back into the Watergate office building for the second break-in. Here, Dean sides with Magruder in asserting that neither Mitchell nor Magruder deliberately sent Liddy back in for the second break-in (p. 404), thus directly contradicting Liddy's own account.
- The first mention of the term "hush money" on the tapes occurs on April 14, 1973, well into the scandal's unfolding. (p. 392) It does not appear anyone was informing Nixon of these payments before his March 21<sup>st</sup> meeting with Dean.

### C. The Very Slippery John Dean:

You wouldn't know it from reading the book, but John Dean is a convicted felon, disbarred and sentenced to a prison term of 1-4 years for his role in the Watergate scandal. He conveniently omits this, along with any mention of the myriad of criminal acts of which he has been accused.

Conrad Black, in his excellent Nixon biography, characterized Dean as the most slippery of the Watergate figures. Here are some examples of how Dean appears to mis-characterize actions or to twist them to support his own point of view:

- Omits mention of his own efforts to determine if Colson was involved in approval of Liddy's plan (p. 32)
- Admits to being "desk officer" for cover-up, but represents himself as a mere transmitter of messages between the people at CRP (Mitchell, Magruder, LaRue, Mardian, etc.) and his White House superiors (Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and President Nixon) (pp. 181 and 240)
- Tells the president about the hiring of Liddy as CRP's general counsel, while omitting any mention of Liddy's all-important campaign intelligence plan (p. 269)
- Alleged comment to Haldeman following the second meeting in the Attorney General's office:
  - Haldeman first repeats Dean's recollection of his comments after the second meeting on the tapes, but it appears to have been presented as a way to help Haldeman. (p. 349)
  - Dean also appears to claim that Kleindienst told the president that Dean had thought he had turned the whole Liddy think off by his comment during that second meeting ("that this should never be discussed in the AG's office). (p. 412)
  - Claims that Haldeman told him after his report of the second meeting, not to do anything, just to stay away from it. (p. 427) [Dean responded under oath in depositions (when it was pointed out that it was not possible for him to have seen Haldeman after this second meeting, as claimed) that perhaps he had seen Haldeman after the first meeting. He claimed that he had a clear memory of what was said, but could not pin down the precise date. But none of his story makes sense unless it occurred after the second meeting. Haldeman ultimately concluded, as he wrote in his book, that he had Dean had been lying all along.]
- Asserted that "No one on the [Ervin] committee made any suggestion whatsoever about my testimony" (p. 619), right after having admitted to having had secret meetings with Sam Dash (p. 617). This is "so Dean": Could he be distinguishing Dash, a committee staffer, from actual members of the Ervin Committee? [It's a question of what the meaning of "is" is!].
- Obliquely claims he did not work with Magruder on his perjury (p. 464). This phrasing also is "so Dean". In his deposition, he

appeared to deny that he suborned perjury because he was not advocating that Magruder lie; he was only helping him to prepare to do so. Yet, he asserts in his book that Nixon, due to knowledge and assent to Magruder's perjury, was himself guilty of conspiracy to suborn perjury. (p. 119)

- Said that he had continued to hope that his colleagues would come forward to confess their own involvement (p. 484), which (without his having admitted having done so) is presumably his explanation of why he didn't mention their involvement to prosecutors until after many meetings had occurred.
- Essentially skipped any real discussion of his March 21, 1973 evening meeting with Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and the president, as well as the subsequent meeting the next afternoon that included John Mitchell, perhaps because their content is not consistent with Dean's story line. This is where Dean confirms that he can and will prepare a Dean Report, which the President can share with the Ervin Committee – and will be used as the basis for closed hearings on testimony from current and former White House staffers. It is the president's salutary response to Dean's disclosures on the morning of March 21<sup>st</sup>. Dean also asserts that he was sent to Camp David the day after the March 22nd meeting and only after he had arrived was he asked to write a report. (p. 340). This is directly conflicted by the tape transcript, particularly the one prepared by the House Judiciary Committee (at HJC, p. 158). There also is a wonderful quote about a Dean conversation with Haldeman's assistant, Larry Higby, where he said "I can't do a damn thing on the report, but I've got sixty pages of working out my own defense, and it's beautiful." (which certainly rings true, even though Dean denies having said it). (p. 518).
- Time and again Dean assures us that Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Mitchell were convicted of perjury for their testimony before the Ervin Committee, without mentioning that such perjury charges were brought only against Haldeman and Mitchell and were almost all peripheral to the central Watergate story (p. 634).
- It appears that the original rationale for Dean talking with a criminal lawyer may have been explained as a way to gain specific criminal legal advice to protect everyone. (p. 359)
- Dean's defense as "the fall guy". (p. 424)
- Says he only revealed the Enemies List stuff in response to a question from Senator Weicker (619), without mentioning that he was Dean's neighbor, had met secretly with him in his negotiations for Senate immunity as Watergate unfolded, and that Weicker had bought Dean's townhouse in 1973, so that Dean could move to Los Angeles.

- Denied removing any documents from the White House (p. 434), but later admitted to providing Houston plan to Sirica (p. 542) and Plumbers stuff to Silbert (Footnote 24, p. 547). Query whether this also related to documents about other of the White House Horrors: the Townhouse Project, the Milk Producer's campaign donations, the president's personal taxes, and the NSC wiretaps – all of which some believe were removed by Dean over the weekend of April 21st. Also, Shaffer threatens to bring RN in on "other things". (p. 520)
- Attempts to explain why he went to Ervin Committee instead of working with the prosecutors (p. 441), but the fact remains that he was offered immunity by Ervin and not by prosecutors.
- Describes his September 15, 1972, meeting with Nixon and Haldeman, without any mention that he had mis-characterized it rather dramatically in his Ervin Committee testimony (p. 155)
- While preparing his own transcripts of the White House tapes took over four years, Dean blithely accuses Nixon of not even bothering to review his own tapes in assembling the facts for his own Watergate defense. Dean then goes on to say that the president's efforts to save himself amounted to a cover-up of the cover-up. (pp. 341-342)
- There is a good deal of back and forth, without any specificity, regarding Nixon's possible actions following their March 21<sup>st</sup> meeting:
  - Dean asserts that Nixon, in their conversation, instructed him to pay Hunt, which is certainly not true, since Dean did nothing following the meeting. Further, they discussed Hunt's demand as remaining unmet when Dean, Haldeman, Ehrlichman and the president gathered at 5pm that same evening. (p. 498)
  - Yet, Dean also says that Haldeman and the president talked about Hunt's last payment "since it involved him", without further explanation. (p. 430)
  - Dean also asserts that Nixon had built his entire defense around not knowing anything before their March 21<sup>st</sup> meeting, but later admitted in his *Memoirs* that he knew more before that date than he had admitted. (p. 540)

#### D. Outright Factual Errors

There are a surprising number of factual errors on items where Dean should have known better, which suggests that Dean either didn't write parts of the book or didn't read the galley proofs (as he apparently didn't do with regard

to his first book, where much of the supposed dialogue turns out to have been added, allegedly without review by Dean, by his ghost writer, Taylor Branch):

- In describing Elliott Richardson's background, the book fails to mention that he had been Secretary of HEW, which was the most long-lasting and significant of Richardson's prior Cabinet-level positions. (p. 530)
- Claims that Buzhardt was Haig's roommate when they were at West Point (p. 551), but Haig's book indicates Buzhardt was a year ahead of him and that Haig hardly knew him. (Haig, p. 340).
- Says that Krogh pleaded guilty to two perjury counts (Footnote 9, p. probably at p. 319 and mistakenly omitted). While Krogh was indicted for perjury, he pleaded to a single felony count of violating Dr. Fielding's civil rights.
- Says that Colson would have been indicted for his involvement with the Plumbers (p. 592), but later indicates (correctly) that Colson really was indicted in that case. (p. 642). There is a further error regarding Colson's plea, which was to having violated Ellsberg's civil rights and not to obstruction of justice, as Dean claims. (p. 644)
- Says that Ehrlichman was indicted for perjury for his testimony before the Ervin Committee (p. 634), but this is not true, as later shown in indictment summary. (p. 642)
- There is a significantly mixed message on the background and meaning of the Smoking Gun tape, which is dismissed as totally misunderstood in the book's beginning (pp. 55-56), yet described in great and damning detail toward the book's end (pp. 548-582 and 645.) it is not just that there is no coordination between these startlingly different descriptions of the same conversation, they appear to have been drafted by different people altogether.
- There are equal conflicts and inconsistencies regarding Nixon's reactions to Dean's disclosure of Hunt's blackmail demands, which were discussed above.
- Dean claims (wrongly) to have hired Charles Shaffer, his criminal defense counsel on April 8<sup>th</sup>. (p. 388) Earlier he said it was on or about March 28<sup>th</sup> (p. 359), which appears to be the better date. Regardless, Shaffer's first meeting with the prosecutors on Dean's behalf occurred on April 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- There is a very strange sentence about Nixon's demand that there be no cover up as being its cause, which makes little sense:

"Had Richard Nixon not encouraged his aides to collect political intelligence by any means fair or foul, or insisted from the moment of the arrests that there must be no cover-up, neither would have taken place." (p. 619)

### III. Summary Observations

- Many of Dean's disclosures are already "old news," because of Nixon's own reconstruction of this period in his *Memoirs*. Nixon and his researchers had access to many of these same tapes, but could not quote them directly under National Archives' strictures. Regardless, the President's 1978 admissions of what he knew and when he knew it are not all that dramatically different from Dean's supposedly "new" discoveries some 35 years later.
- Dean's tape excerpts of what the president may have been told do not prove what he "knew":
  - What comes through loud and clear in Dean's book is that President Nixon was assured of any number of contradictory versions of what had happened, throughout the unfolding of the Watergate scandal. As in many cases, the earliest reports were incomplete and misleading. In addition, as the scandal grew, everyone appears to have been less than forthright about their own particular actions.
  - Busy or distracted people do not always remember what they have been told. Anyone who has been married is no doubt familiar with the accusation from one's spouse, "But, I told you that last week!", when they have absolutely no memory of such a statement.
- It's only human, but what Dean suggests is that each of the president's aides consistently understated or diminished his own role as the scandal progressed. In essence, Dean's book is a continuation of this same process -- of his own personal exculpation and disavowal.
- Another theme that seems consistent throughout Dean's book is the president's never-ending requests for some sort of written report. It is important to remember that the Nixon White House ran on paper, precisely because President Nixon vastly preferred to work from (and think about) written presentations. The National Security Council produced National Security Decision Memorandums (NSDMs) and National Security Study Memorandums (NSSMs); the Domestic Council produced a myriad of papers on domestic issues, and all Presidential meetings and events were the subject of extensive reports submitted in advance. Unlike casual conversation, a written report has substance; it usually reflects a great deal of thought and consideration. It was Nixon's habit to retreat to his hideaway office in the Old Executive Office Building most afternoons for study and reflection on important issues, almost always from written reports. It is no wonder that he kept asking for a written report on Watergate,

but one was never produced in a timely fashion – and certainly never one produced by John Dean. It must have been exceptionally frustrating for the president.

- While not a principal focus of the book, many feel the real explanation for how the cover-up got so out of hand is what is characterized as Dean’s “strategy of containment.” (p. 279) Much of the enduring conflict over Watergate comes from differing testimony as to what Dean was reporting to Haldeman and Ehrlichman as the scandal unfolded. It is quite likely that they simply did not realize that Dean’s efforts to “contain the problem” involved a whole series of overtly criminal acts. Dean later claimed that this was very clear from his oral reports; Haldeman and Ehrlichman claimed otherwise. Nothing in Dean’s book really resolves this core issue, because there is no documentary evidence and their conversations were not recorded.
- This vast difference in recollections is highlighted by Dean’s insistence that it was he who first leveled with the president, while Haldeman and Ehrlichman continued to keep the difficult facts to themselves. But Dean’s great claim to having done so is specifically and solely with regard to conveying the news regarding Hunt’s blackmail demands when he met with the president on March 21, 1973. Yet Dean had only learned of this demand two days before. He had been meeting or talking with the president virtually every day for almost a month. An equally valid argument on “who knew what?” could be made that Haldeman and Ehrlichman did not level with the president because they too had been kept in the dark – by the one person working full time on containing the scandal: John Dean.
- It also is important to remember in this regard that many of the key accusations against Mitchell, Haldeman and Ehrlichman (which figured so prominently at the cover-up trial) were not capable of objective proof and were vigorously denied by others:
  - Magruder claimed that Mitchell had approved funding for the Liddy campaign intelligence plan at their March 30, 1972 meeting in Miami. Both other attendees, Mitchell and Fred LaRue (who was also a government witness) denied this – and Mitchell produced at trial some seven examples of where Magruder said it had been approved by people other than Mitchell.
  - Dean claimed that Ehrlichman ordered Hunt out of the country on June 19, 1972. Both other attendees, Ehrlichman and Colson (who was also a government witness) denied this.
  - Dean claimed that he had told Haldeman of Liddy’s plans following his February 4, 1972 meeting in Mitchell’s Attorney General office. Haldeman didn’t recall this, but took Dean at his word. When no such meeting could be independently verified

(by Haldeman's extensive calendar or memories of his staff), Haldeman concluded the meeting had never occurred. When under oath in his law suit against St. Martin's Press and confronted with these facts, Dean dissembled and said it might have been after the earlier Mitchell meeting. In this book, Dean provides a rather different explanation (See footnote 4 at p. 311).

- Dean testified that when he debriefed Liddy on June 19, 1972, right after the burglary arrests, and asked about White House knowledge, Liddy had responded that Gordon Strachan might have known. But he admitted under oath in those same depositions that he had told no one of Liddy's comment for the year and a half before his trial testimony. In this book, however, he asserts that Liddy's recollection of having said this is probably mistaken (TK).
- The implication throughout Dean's book, however, is that the tapes that he has transcribed and excerpted prove that he had been telling the truth all along. One must continue to wonder, since it remains rather clear that President Nixon (as Dean has admitted) did not fully appreciate the magnitude of the Watergate scandal until very late in the game. Whether it was March 13<sup>th</sup> or March 17<sup>th</sup> or March 21<sup>st</sup> of 1973, is largely irrelevant in the great scheme of things. From that point on, once Dean had retained criminal defense counsel, fled to the prosecutors (and taken with him a series of devastatingly embarrassing documents on a number of unrelated issues), and perfected his side of the story, the president found himself without sufficient documentation, friends or supporters to survive the onslaught.
- Finally, Dean's claim that any conflicts between his testimony and that of Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Mitchell were forever fully and finally resolved when they were convicted on all counts in the Watergate cover-up trial is hardly definitive. A book due out next spring by Regnery History will show how those verdicts were a result of highly improper collusion between judges and prosecutors.

One thing is for sure: Watergate's saga will continue to unfold.

#### IV. The "Real" Nixon Defense

What, then, would be the "real" Nixon defense, in light of everything that we know today?

Briefly,

- Neither Nixon, Haldeman or Ehrlichman knew of the break-in in advance. (admitted by Dean)
- But Dean did, since he had not only recruited Liddy for the position, but had attended the two meetings in Mitchell's attorney general office where they were described.
- Contrary to Dean's assertions that he told Haldeman after the second of those meetings and told Ehrlichman of his own prior involvement right after his walk in the park with Liddy, Dean said nothing to his White House superiors. They orchestrated Mitchell's rapid resignation after the break-in arrests; they would have moved Dean out even faster had they realized he also was at risk of prosecution – and they would never have assigned him lead role in protecting White House interests in the aftermath of the break-in arrests.
- Dean sought that role and, instead of protecting the President's interests as his counsel, essentially cast his lot with those at CRP who were already effectuating a cover-up.
- Every day, all over America, lawyers defend clients accused of criminal wrongdoing, without they themselves committing criminal acts. It simply never occurred to the President, Haldeman and Ehrlichman that Dean was not acting in a perfectly legal capacity as their counsel.
- Of course they complemented Dean's work, on tape and to his face, but he never revealed the extent of his own criminal acts. He was working hard to contain the problem at CRP; they didn't inquire further as to specifics.
- As the go-between conveying information back and forth between people at CRP and the White House, Dean was in an ideal position to protect his own risk of prosecution. The one thing he could not allow was any sort of written report or disclosure of what really had happened, since it would reveal his own criminal acts, beginning with rehearsing Magruder for his perjured grand jury, but also including improperly sharing prosecutorial information with defense counsel and hiding (and then destroying) materials taken from Hunt's safe.
- When Dean informed the President of Hunt's blackmail demands, Nixon's response, announced later that same day (as well as the following day when Mitchell was present), was to inform his staff that they would have to testify, without claim of executive privilege. Dean was to prepare the report that would be the basis for Nixon's public announcement to this effect.
- Instead, as the cover-up collapsed (as it should have), Dean was the first to switch sides, as well as his story, accusing his former superior of having condoned the very illegal acts that he had hidden from them. It is no wonder, when he became their principal accuser, that they felt he had been duplicitous and had to be destroyed.

- The essence of the cover-up story remains the dramatic differences in recollections between Dean on the one side and Haldeman and Ehrlichman on the other. There are no tapes of their many meetings. But one of the reasons the tapes tend to show that Nixon was kept largely in the dark about the true state of affairs may well be because so were Haldeman and Ehrlichman.
- The cover-up jury obviously believed Dean, but the question remains: did these defendants receive a fair trial – or was there judicial and prosecutorial collusion designed to improperly obtain those verdicts?

#### V. Remembering the Real John Dean:

Dean had already encountered difficulties prior to his Watergate fame. His academic record was undistinguished and he was fired for “unethical conduct” from his first and only stint in private practice (a boutique communications firm) after only six months.

As sometime happens in politics, he then experienced a meteoric rise in political positions, ending up as Counsel to President Nixon in 1970.

It was in that position that he has stood accused of having orchestrating a criminal cover-up of those responsible for authorizing and directing the break-in into offices of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate Office building in June of 1972.

When the cover-up collapsed, as it should have, those who were the most intimately involved – and therefore at risk – were the first to run to federal prosecutors to seek immunity for their testimony against their former colleagues. Dean was the clear winner in this race, but held out for full immunity. Prosecutors concluded otherwise and insisted that his own role (as they then perceived it) was such that it required that he be punished, too.

In his continuing pursuit of immunity, Dean’s story began to change. Over the course of a dozen contacts with prosecutors by him or his lawyer during April of 1973, Dean went from offering evidence about those responsible for the original break-in to asserting that there had been a criminal cover-up and that it had been directed by his White House superiors. The pivot point is well documented in prosecution files, as well as at page 253 in Dean’s own book, *Blind Ambition*. It occurs when Charles Shaffer, his criminal defense lawyer, urges him to boost the cover-up to make himself indispensable, since the prosecutors are inclined to bring criminal charges against him for his own involvement with regard to the break-in itself.

Dean: Goddammit, Charlie. I don't want to meet with those bastards.

Shaffer: Listen, John, we don't have any choice. The cat's out of the bag. We've got to pump them full of the cover up now. I've got to up the ante with them to have a shot at immunity. That's your only chance not to be the fall guy.

Dean: I think your strategy of getting immunity is more important than ever now.

But to hear him re-tell it in his current book, he never wanted immunity; he only wanted to tell the truth. It was just that his lawyer was demanding immunity in exchange for his testimony. How peculiar! The fact remains that when the prosecutors took Dean at his word and scheduled his grand jury appearance for May 5, 1973, without immunity, he stiffed them and took the proposed immunity grant from the Ervin Committee instead.

There is a reason that Archibald Cox, the original Special Prosecutor, had no respect for Dean. As portrayed by Richard Ben-Veniste and George Frampton at page 107 of their book, *Stonewall, The Real Story of the Watergate Prosecution* (Simon and Schuster, 1977):

Archie Cox was particularly firm in his personal determination that Dean be prosecuted no matter what. Dean became an *idée fixe* for Cox. True, as a witness Dean would cement otherwise weak cases against Haldeman and Ehrlichman. But Cox preferred, if forced to choose, to take the relatively sure shot at Dean rather than the long shot against Dean's superiors. When the Saturday Night Massacre loomed close, it might have been propitious for Cox to make a deal with Dean and secure Dean's testimony against President Nixon as another weapon to hold the President off. Even then, Cox's determination did not waiver. With all the uncertainties of Watergate that swirled around him—the weakness of evidence against Nixon's top aides without Dean's testimony, the possibility of Presidential culpability, the problems of obtaining White House evidence and of dealing with "national security"—Cox saw Dean's guilt as the one enduring constant. During a particularly difficult period Archie remarked to us, "If everything else goes down the drain the one thing I can cling to is Dean's venality."

## VI. An Alternative Take

Alternatively, one could have a more nuanced view. Dean's book is going to be a fact of life and is not going to go away. Perhaps, like Peter Morgan's Frost/Nixon (which was equally erroneous in many respects), many will feel that Nixon comes across as a rather sympathetic figure. After all, Dean asserts:

- Nixon and his White House staff knew nothing in advance (albeit Dean skillfully excludes his own knowledge)
- Haldeman did not get any of the fruits of the one working wiretap.
- Neither Mitchell nor Magruder explicitly directed Liddy's second break-in.
- Magruder's assertion that Mitchell approved Liddy's campaign intelligence plan on March 30, 1972 surfaces very late in the game.
- Ehrlichman really did advocate full disclosure from the outset.
- The 18 ½ Minute Gap is "historically insignificant" and the smoking gun instruction was to protect the identities of Democrat donors and had nothing to do with Watergate.
- Nixon really didn't appreciate the extent of the cover-up until Dean laid it out for him on March 21, 1973.

Maybe we just say that it is nice to have all of the above confirmed by Dean himself – and point out that

- His resignation was the result of a mistaken interpretation of the smoking gun.
- His alleged abuses of power seem trivial in light of Obama's.
- His accomplishments, both foreign and domestic, can stack up against any President.
- As the world burns, it might be beneficial to have Nixon's expertise in foreign affairs.
- Then quote Ben Bradlee's unpublished comment of May 16, 1990:

"I mean the crime itself was really not a great deal. Had it not been for the Nixon resignation, it would really be a blip in history. The Iran Contra hearing was a much more significant violation of the democratic ethic than anything in Watergate. Watergate was really dirty tricks and arrogance and people thinking they were all-powerful and could ride roughshod over civil liberties, but it wasn't dealing in foreign arms and buying foreign nations and shit like that."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Himmelman, Jeff. *Yours in Truth, a Personal Portrait of Ben Bradlee*. (Random House, 2012), p. 212.