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Three decades later, Bradley, Woodward recall Watergate

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Thirty years ago this month, the president of the United States was flanked by the courts, Senate committees and the media as they moved closer to the top of the Watergate scandal — Richard M. Nixon, who sought to use the CIA to block the FBI's investigation.

In the spring of 1973, Nixon accepted the resignations of his two right-hand men, H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman. That summer the country found out that Nixon ran a secret taping system in the White House. On Oct. 10 of that year the vice president, Spiro T. Agnew, resigned after pleading no contest to income tax evasion charges. On Oct. 20 Nixon ordered the firing of the special prosecutor, Archibald Cox.

From the time Nixon men broke into the Watergate complex on June 17, 1972, looking for dirt on the Democrats for that year's presidential election, The Washington Post had been digging into the story.

"It's amazing to me 32 years later, we're still talking about Watergate," Ben Bradley said Friday, recalling the events and the 400-plus stories the paper wrote after the break-in.

Bradley, the editor of the Post at the time and Bob Woodward, one of the two reporters chasing the Watergate story, re-

counted those days to a packed hall Friday night at St. Mary's College of Maryland.

During that time, Bradley said trenches were dug between the White House and the media. Nixon and his administration went to war with the media, especially The New York Times and The Washington Post, after they printed The Pentagon Papers, a classified history of the Vietnam War, in 1971.

Woodward added that the Nixon administration was skilled at suppressing information.

It was in this environment that the stories on the Watergate break-in began with The Washington Post. It started as a police story, but these burglars were unusual. They were well-dressed, carried lots of cash and two of them had the phone number to the White House in their address book. And when the burglars went in front of the judge for arraignment, Woodward swore he heard one of

them say he worked for the CIA.

Woodward called the White House and asked Howard Hunt why his name and number was in the burglars' address book. "Oh, my God," was Hunt's response.

From there out, it was a matter of persistent digging to find how far into the White House that this attempt at illegal political espionage went.

The late Katharine Graham was the publisher of The Washington Post at the time and Woodward recalled that she kept him and Carl Bernstein

going when the information trail dried up.

She asked them when the truth about the Watergate scandal would be known. Woodward replied perhaps never.

"Never? Don't tell me never," Graham told them.

According to his taped transcripts, Nixon said on May 11, 1973, "If I were Katharine Graham, I'd hate Nixon, too ..."

Nixon's last taped conversation was recorded July 12, 1973. That night, the president went to the hospital for viral pneumonia. The next day, Alexander Butterfield, a former aide to Haldeman, told the Senate Select Committee that Nixon ran a voice-activated taping system, which was unknown to almost all of the White House staff.

When that revelation came out, Woodward said, "It was unbelievable."

"I find it hard to believe to this day, but God love him ... " Bradley said.

The Supreme Court eventu-

ally ordered that Nixon turn over the tapes pertinent to the Watergate cover-up. In the year leading up to that, Nixon fought vehemently to keep his tapes private as presidential property.

On Aug. 9, 1974, Nixon left the office of the presidency, the first and only U.S. president to resign. That day he gave his staffers a televised farewell address, which Woodward said was filled with "psychiatric moments."

During the unscripted advice Nixon offered, he said, "Those who hate you don't win, unless you hate them and then you destroy yourself."

"Hate was the poison. Hate is what did him in," Woodward said. "We had a president who was a man of hate."

"Nixon, not the Post, got Nixon," Bradlee said.

Nixon held grudges and directed his staff to use the IRS to look into opponents' tax information and ordered the Secret Service to spy on Sen. Edward Kennedy when it was thought he would run against Nixon in 1972. "The Plumbers," men hired by White House aide Charles Colson, broke into offices looking for incriminating information.

On July 1, 1971, Nixon was recorded as saying in response to the continued publication of The Pentagon Papers, "We're up against an enemy, a conspiracy. They're using any means. We are going to use any means, is that clear?" When the Senate committee questioned Nixon's men, they used the defense of national security to justify their black-bag operations.

On Friday the standard question, now three decades old, was asked of Bradlee and Woodward — just who was "Deep Throat," the secret source who helped guide the paper's investigation?

Woodward offered what has become his standard response. "Once he dies, it will be disclosed," he said.

Bob Woodward (left) speaks about the days of Watergate while Ben Bradlee listens.



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