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Journal of Policy History, Volume 24, Number 2, 2012, pp. 157-183 (Article)

Published by Cambridge University Press

DOI: 10.1353/jph.2012.0015



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Deep Throat, Watergate, and the Bureaucratic Politics of the FBI

On May 31, 2005, former FBI associate director W. Mark Felt revealed that he was “Deep Throat,” the shadowy high official whose leaks to the *Washington Post* helped to provoke the Watergate crisis and topple the Nixon presidency. Felt’s confession ended one of the capital’s longest-running guessing games; the hushed phone calls and parking-garage trysts of *All the President’s Men*, co-author Bob Woodward confirmed, were based on encounters with Felt. Media outlets framed the revelation as a drama of individual derring-do, assigning Felt the role of noble whistleblower or despicable traitor, liberal ally or conservative nemesis. As a result, they missed an opportunity to reconsider the larger story of Watergate, perhaps the most mythologized political scandal of the twentieth century. This article argues that Felt’s actions—and, by extension, Watergate itself—must be understood in the context of a long-standing institutional conflict between the Nixon administration and J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI.¹

As an event, Watergate occupies an uneasy place in American political history. Nearly all historians agree that the crisis marked a pivotal moment—“the most serious scandal in the history of U.S. presidential politics,” in the words of Nixon scholar Michael Genovese.² And yet our understanding of Watergate has remained largely fixed since the mid-1970s, when highly politicized narratives of virtue and criminality first took root. Popular accounts tend to devolve into blow-by-blow descriptions of who said what to whom—on White House tapes, in congressional testimony, or in the dozens of memoirs by minor players. To most of the public, Watergate remains the character-driven showdown of *All the President’s Men*, with scrappy young

reporters facing off against a uniquely duplicitous president. In this narrative, Nixon occupies center stage as a power-hungry but paranoid chief executive, seeking absolute control over his enemies and political opponents.³

Academic historians tend to be less convinced of Nixon's singular evil. But they have struggled in recent decades to reconcile the Watergate scandal with broader narratives of political change in the 1970s. One interpretation describes Watergate as a social crisis, a flashpoint for enmities born of Vietnam, the civil rights movement, and Nixon's lifelong clash with liberals. A second takes a more structural approach, framing Nixon's actions as a particularly dramatic example of presidential overreach in the decades-long march toward the "imperial presidency." In this view, the concentration of executive power begun at the turn of the century found its final expression in the hubris of the Nixon presidency. Watergate was the outcome of a larger battle between Congress and the president—and between the president and democratic society—over who would control the domestic purse strings, create policy, and manage the conduct of the Vietnam War.⁴

These interpretations have much to recommend them. But none entirely explains how or why a man like Mark Felt decided to turn against a president who appeared to be one of the FBI's great allies and champions. Felt was no liberal; he applauded Nixon's attacks on college radicals, civil rights demonstrators, and leftists of all stripes. Nor was he a congressional partisan; his entire professional career had been spent at the service of an executive agency. His experience suggests that there may be a third way to think about Watergate: as a struggle not just between the president and Congress, or between Nixon and his enemies, but as a bureaucratic conflict within the executive branch itself.⁵

Among historians, the role of federal bureaucracies in shaping American politics has received relatively little attention. Yet as political scientist Dan Carpenter has noted, the rise of an administrative bureaucracy within the American democratic system has been "one of the most wrenching and controversial changes of the twentieth century," spanning Republican and Democratic administrations alike. Not all bureaucracies—or all bureaucrats—have managed to translate this expansion into significant political power. Where they have been successful, however, bureaucratic entrepreneurs have proved to be some of the most innovative and influential figures in American political history. Successful bureaucrats, Carpenter suggests, have often relied on three key strategies: they built networks of support both inside and outside the formal political system; they fostered reputations for efficiency,

professionalism, and independent expertise; and they made good on these reputations by producing a record of performance that appeared to deliver on their claims. When these conditions were met, Carpenter concludes, bureaucrats often earned a remarkable and even troubling degree of autonomy, characterized by the ability to “induce politicians to defer to the wishes of the agency even when they prefer otherwise.”⁶

J. Edgar Hoover was a master of these bureaucratic arts—a consummate networker and publicist as well as a famously capable administrator. Beginning in the 1920s, he used these skills to shape the FBI into one of the most formidable and popular agencies in the federal service. By midcentury, his G-Man was a widely recognized cultural type: dark suit, spit-shined shoes, the very picture of the professional “government man.” Within the FBI, the agent’s job also came with what Hoover described as a course of “indoctrination,” in which recruits learned how to promote and protect the Bureau’s reputation from critics both within and outside the federal bureaucracy. At the heart of this schooling was the dictum that the Bureau’s success depended on its apolitical professionalism and high public esteem. Throughout his career, Hoover emphasized the FBI’s insulation from patronage politics, warning that partisan activities led inevitably to corruption, inefficiency, and loss of public support. Although he had no shortage of critics, many admirers accepted this equation, promoting Hoover as a man who served the public good rather than any narrow political cause. “Naturally enough, Hoover has his enemies,” the *Milwaukee Sentinel* wrote in 1972, “principally those who would like to see someone less effective and not so completely removed from partisan politics heading the bureau.” His autonomy and popularity as director, Hoover maintained, was both the cause and result of the Bureau’s success.⁷

Historians and critics have often dismissed Hoover’s rhetoric as cover for baser motives, such as unseemly power grabs or the secret desire to cover up FBI sins. But for the men who worked their way up through the ranks, the Bureau’s institutional culture, including its emphasis on professional autonomy, was a serious affair. As Carpenter has pointed out, what matters is not whether an institutional myth is actually true, but whether it is widely believed, either by an agency’s supporters or by its own employees. Mark Felt spent more than thirty years in Hoover’s FBI, rising from trainee to deputy associate director, the number-three slot under Hoover and his associate Clyde Tolson. Along the way, he necessarily absorbed Hoover’s outlook and mind-set. Only by exploring Felt’s identity as a G-man, trained by and loyal to Hoover’s bureaucracy, can we fully understand what happened during the Watergate years.⁸

Hoover's bureaucratic skills gave him remarkable control over the FBI's internal culture and policies. And yet his strategies for achieving that autonomy were often in conflict with each other. Autonomy was not a one-time event; it required constant care and rebalancing. In Hoover's case, the impulse to maintain the FBI's professional, nonpartisan image was frequently at odds with efforts to exert popular political and ideological influence. Throughout his career, Hoover's cozy relationships with congressmen and presidents constantly threatened to undermine the Bureau's reputation as a nonpartisan agency, divorced from the spoils system and power politics. Similarly, his outspoken anticommunist crusades—a key source of FBI cultural authority—were often in tension with his description of the FBI as purely reactive investigative agency.

Hoover's relationships with Felt and Nixon reflected these tensions. Both men shared a lifelong allegiance to the FBI director: Felt as a bureaucratic protégé, Nixon as a political champion and personal friend. But their alliance fractured under the Nixon presidency, as Hoover and then Felt sought to protect the FBI's traditional autonomy from what they viewed as a self-interested political assault by the Nixon administration. Seen only from the outside, Hoover and Nixon appeared to be the best of friends, decades-long allies in the anticommunist cause. Viewed from the standpoint of institutional politics, though, they had long been on opposite sides of some of the most fundamental questions of governance. Hoover believed in the administrative state—in the power of independent bureaucrats, divorced from politics, to serve the public good. Nixon, by contrast, was a man of parties, someone who hated the bureaucracy and believed that loyalty and voter control offered the best hope for effective government. For more than two decades, personal friendship and ideological sympathy papered over those differences. After Nixon's election as president, that tenuous compromise fell apart. When Hoover died in May, 1972, he left behind an executive team led by Felt that was primed to question and resist the Nixon administration's initiatives.

Seen from this perspective, the Watergate scandal that began the following month was less a public battle with Congress or the Democratic Party than an institutional struggle between political allies, contained within the executive branch and locked in conflict over the proper uses of the state. This can perhaps help to explain why Watergate has been so hard to fit in to emerging historical narratives of the 1970s, in which the ideological struggle between liberalism and conservatism, or between Republicans and Democrats, has often taken center stage. Recent historiography has identified the 1970s as a watershed decade for the conservative movement, the missing link between

Goldwater and Reagan. How, then, to think about Watergate, which temporarily damaged the Republican Party but did little to reverse the long-term rise of conservatism? Reconsidering Watergate as an institutional conflict may help to explain its limited impact on these broader political trends.⁹

Felt's revelation, in short, highlights the need to look beyond elections and ideological debate to understand how American state power shaped popular politics, and vice versa. Without the popular turmoil of the late 1960s, the tensions between the FBI and the White House might have remained a muted episode, a source of disgruntlement without particular urgency or significance. Similarly, without the institutional conflicts between the FBI and the White House—culminating in Felt's leaks to Woodward—the popular pageant of Watergate would have been a very different affair. Despite historians' recent emphasis on the ideological struggles of the 1970s, Watergate might best be viewed, especially in its earliest phases, as a struggle between the president and a bureaucracy that he could not control.

In that struggle, neither side looked entirely as one might expect. Hoover often played the civil libertarian, arguing against a concentration of power in the executive even as the FBI conducted its own covert operations. Nixon himself appeared less like an imperial president than like an extraordinarily weak one, struggling to hold on to power and to force federal agencies to accede to his will. One of the most striking aspects of his relationship with the FBI is how seldom Nixon had the upper hand. At nearly every point where Nixon and Hoover found themselves in conflict, Nixon lost dramatically, the elected official giving way to the wishes and desires of the autonomous bureaucrat. Nixon's founding of the Plumbers intelligence unit, often cited as the ultimate example of presidential hubris and overreach, grew in part out of frustration with his inability to control the FBI.

Ultimately, the discontent and public outrage unleashed by Watergate helped to change the FBI much as it transformed the relationship between the president and Congress, and the public's attitude toward the state as a whole. By 1975, Hoover's autonomous bureaucracy, like the imperial presidency, was in freefall, a casualty of congressional committees determined to rein in executive power. In that sense, the story of Watergate, like so many great historical dramas, is a tale of unintended consequences. In the effort to preserve the Bureau's autonomy and save its reputation, Hoover and Felt helped to destroy them.

Richard Nixon's uneasy relationship with the FBI began long before his political career became national news. In 1937, fresh out of Duke law school, he applied to be a Bureau agent, seeking a dependable but challenging

sinecure to ride out the Depression years. For a conservative young attorney drawn to public service, few federal employers were as attractive as the Bureau. In the 1930s, the FBI was a model of New Deal state-building: professionalized, moralistic, expansive in its bureaucratic ambitions. Unlike many other New Deal agencies, however, it had avoided the taint of radicalism, nurturing a masculine, law-and-order culture that better resembled the army than the Works Progress Administration. Since taking the helm in 1924, Hoover had insisted that the Bureau's success came not from individual brilliance or daring exploits, but from the rational application of science, discipline, and proper policy. As proof, he required most agents to possess a law degree as well as a squeaky-clean personal background. Nixon had both. As his FBI contact noted approvingly, his personal appearance was "good," his presentation "self-confident," his features "ordinary" rather than "dissipated." Despite the glowing report, Nixon's application stalled, then collapsed, for reasons never entirely clear. Denied a Bureau post, Nixon returned home to California to practice law.¹⁰

He finally arrived in Washington a decade later as a congressman, swept into office by the Republican mid-term landslide of 1946. During his absence, the stature and scope of the FBI had expanded dramatically, especially in the area of domestic communism. By 1947, as Richard Gid Powers has noted, Hoover was "the leading power of the anti-Communist right."¹¹ Nixon lost little time joining the cause. In March, when Hoover appeared before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, the freshman Nixon prodded him to deliver ever-more-expansive warnings about communist insurrection. The following year, they began to work together on the Alger Hiss case, the cause célèbre that established Nixon as a national figure and created his close public association with the FBI. On January 26, 1950, as Hiss headed off to jail on perjury charges, Nixon gave a triumphant speech on the floor of the House praising the Bureau's dogged work and urging the country, not for the last time, to "give complete and unqualified support to the FBI, and to J. Edgar Hoover, its chief."¹²

The Hiss case marked the beginning of a mutually beneficial relationship that drew upon Hoover's and Nixon's respective political strengths. For the next twenty years, as he moved from congressman to senator to vice president to presidential candidate, Nixon took advantage of Hoover's public stature and investigative abilities to solicit intelligence and shore up flagging campaigns. Hoover in turn embraced Nixon's growing influence to protect and promote his agency. As an elected official, Nixon relied upon Hoover's reputation as an apolitical arbiter to provide a counterweight to his own

mercenary image. Hoover, meanwhile, counted on Nixon to fight for appropriations and, where necessary, to defend his job. From the first, Nixon was a member of the FBI's "Congressional stable," one of many politicians the bureau could turn to "when we want Congressional support for anything," in the description of one of Hoover's top aides.¹³

As self-proclaimed conservatives, Hoover and Nixon shared an animosity toward liberals, elites, professors, the State Department, and, later, the Kennedys, all symbols of an eastern establishment that allegedly held their modest backgrounds and committed anticommunism in contempt. But even in these early years they differed profoundly in their views of the proper orientation and scope of the state. Hoover believed that government functioned best when divorced from politics; public relations and appropriations hearings were necessary evils, not desirable means. He was not above doling out favors and threats to conserve his power, as the historical record amply attests. But he staked his reputation on his image as a nonpartisan bureaucrat, the standard-bearer for a conservative conception of the common good that flourished outside party lines. "Politics itself is public enemy number one," he informed a congressional committee in the 1930s, one of hundreds of such pronouncements made over the course of his lifetime. "Political attempts to hamper and interfere with the Federal and other police and prosecuting agents are the real menace."¹⁴

Nixon, in contrast, was pure party creature, both by reputation and conviction. Like Hoover, he played the Washington power game with skill. Less obviously, as Margaret C. Rung has argued, he also conceived of party rule as a virtue in itself, the ultimate expression of the public will. As early as the 1950s, Nixon had embraced a concept of governance that prioritized Republican loyalty and success over adherence to any well-defined ideology or state-building strategy. In the process, he began to nurse a growing resentment toward federal bureaucrats, whose independent power bases (and often nascent liberalism) insulated them from party rule. "Nixon built his early career on the belief that elected officials, not autonomous bureaucrats or special interests, should govern the nation," Rung writes.¹⁵ Throughout the early years of their alliance, Hoover remained the great exception to this rule, a bureaucrat whom Nixon promoted, respected, and indulged. Only as president did Nixon discover that his old ally, like the rest of the bureaucracy, could be a formidable adversary and obstacle.

What held their alliance together for so many years was not only political utility, but a genuine friendship born of a shared weakness for political gossip and a mutual respect for power. By the mid-1950s, Hoover and Nixon were

regular social companions on the Washington scene, part of a tight-knit circle of influential anticommunists that included wunderkind right-wing attorney Roy Cohn and, for a time, Senator Joseph McCarthy himself.¹⁶ “One of the greatest satisfactions of my time here in Washington has been the constant and steadfast friendship which you have always evidenced,” Nixon wrote to Hoover in 1956, celebrating his reelection as vice president.¹⁷ Hoover returned the sentiments four years later, after John F. Kennedy dashed Nixon’s initial hopes for the presidency itself. “I consider it my deepest honor to have you as a close friend and advisor,” he wrote on November 9, 1960. “Naturally, I hope to have this privilege for many years to come.”¹⁸

These were not idle words. Even as Nixon departed from Washington, the two men stayed in close touch, with Hoover acting as Nixon’s eyes and ears in Washington. In 1962, he urged Nixon to run for governor of California. Six years later, when Nixon accepted the Republican nomination for president, Hoover stood ready to support his campaign. When Nixon’s Democratic rival Hubert Humphrey accused the FBI of operating beyond the law, Hoover responded by accusing Humphrey of playing dirty politics with the FBI. “All Americans should view with serious concern the announced intentions and threats by a political candidate, if elected, to take over and revamp the FBI to suit his own personal whims and wishes,” he wrote in the July 1968 issue of the FBI’s *Law Enforcement Bulletin*, distributed to hundreds of newspapers and police agencies throughout the country.¹⁹ This was as close as Hoover ever came to a partisan endorsement of Nixon. As it turned out, however, he might have been better served by holding back. Although he cheered Humphrey’s loss in November’s presidential election, Hoover was soon delivering similar complaints about Nixon.

If Nixon represented one side of Hoover’s Washington strategy—the public, political alliance—Mark Felt occupied another. For more than thirty years, Felt lived and worked in Hoover’s shadow, a behind-the-scenes enforcer of the director’s rigid disciplinary policies. Raised in Twin Falls, Idaho, Felt had moved to Washington in the mid-1930s to enter the New Deal federal service. While working as a senatorial aide, he attended night law school at George Washington University, one of the chief feeder tracks for Bureau aspirants. Felt was an unspectacular student, nearly failing out of law school on three separate occasions. But the affiliation put him on the fast track to FBI employment. Of the generation of men who came to the FBI in the 1930s and 1940s, many not only followed Hoover’s law school path but also joined his Masonic lodge and his law school fraternity. As Felt noted, this gave the

Bureau a tight-knit culture and a powerful institutional identity. “Whether the agent is born or made,” he later wrote, “it is a fact that the FBI puts a stamp on him—or her—almost as indelible as the mark on a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps.” Felt applied to become an agent in November 1941, less than a month before the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. In January 1942, he reported for training at FBI barracks in Quantico, Virginia.²⁰

Felt later described his training as a trial by fire, a seemingly endless barrage of exams in gun etiquette, hand-to-hand combat, and Bureau policy. The course culminated in a personal meeting with Hoover, perhaps the most nerve-racking test of all. On the final day of classes, newly minted agents lined up in a reception room at Washington’s Mayflower Hotel, where each man briefly approached Hoover and shook his hand. Felt recalled that Hoover cut an imposing figure, arriving promptly at 6:30, impeccably dressed, exuding confidence and authority. This impression changed little over the years, as Felt rose through the hierarchy to become Hoover’s daily confidant and third-in-charge. “Hoover was the complete Director,” he wrote in the late 1970s, lashing back at his boss’s posthumous critics, “self-assured and totally in command.”²¹

Although he took issue with certain rules, Felt claimed to appreciate the discipline and clarity that characterized Bureau life under Hoover, the certainty that stated policies and standards would be enforced. Even seemingly punishing rules—such as the dictum that every phone call be answered within three rings—served the Bureau well, in Felt’s view, cultivating a reputation for efficiency and responsiveness that contributed to the FBI’s public acclaim. More than once, Felt was chastised for minor violations of Bureau code, such as the sin of carrying a pencil in his front suit-jacket pocket. But his performance reviews repeatedly stressed his “singular dedication to the aims and ideals of the Bureau,” as well as his “unflinching loyalty” to the director. Felt especially admired Hoover’s ability to negotiate the pressures of high office while maintaining the Bureau’s autonomy and independence. “He knew the political game and played it to the hilt with Presidents, Attorneys General, and the Congress,” Felt later wrote, “but his goal never went beyond greater independence for the FBI—and for himself as its creator and Director.” This assessment may or may not have adequately captured Hoover’s political ambitions, but it reflected one of the first principles of the FBI bureaucracy: political pressure, Hoover taught, threatened the entire fabric of Bureau life, from its investigative standards to its professional autonomy.²²

As he worked his way up through the lower ranks, Felt had little personal contact with Hoover. He nonetheless learned how to please the director by

anticipating his preferences from afar. At his first post in Houston, Felt learned the importance of the well-crafted case memo. "My reports were just what Hoover wanted," he later wrote, "terse, succinct, and relevant." When he moved to Hoover's Washington headquarters in 1943, he tackled the index-card abstract, which presented all essential details of a given case and, properly executed, could "point Hoover in a desired direction." Perhaps his greatest triumph came a decade later, when Felt managed to deposit Hoover's luggage at a California hotel precisely three minutes after Hoover himself walked through the door, just as the director had ordered. "I must have done it right," Felt recalled, because after that his career skyrocketed.²³

In describing these accomplishments, Felt acknowledged the sometimes petty nature of the FBI's emphasis on paperwork, statistics, and punctuality. But he also showed genuine pride in his identity as a Hoover-trained G-man. His Bureau trajectory reflected this thorough identification with the FBI's internal culture and policies. In 1962, Hoover placed Felt in charge of the FBI's training program, emphasizing "the need for continuous indoctrination of . . . all new employees so that they may realize that they must be FBI symbols at all times." Three years later, he promoted Felt to the post of chief inspector, charged with coordinating the Bureau's rigid and terrifying system of internal inspections. As Felt acknowledged, field agents despised the "goon squad" for its heavy-handed enforcement of everything from weight codes to proper punctuation. As with his other duties, though, he acceded to Hoover's desires, recognizing the importance of the inspection system as a bulwark against public embarrassment and internal disloyalty.²⁴

Among his greatest challenges as inspector was the enforcement of several important and surprising changes in Hoover's approach to covert activities. Beginning in the mid-1960s, both Congress and the Supreme Court had begun to scrutinize FBI surveillance methods delivering confused and often conflicting opinions about the acceptable legal limits on wiretapping and similar operations. In response, beginning in 1965, Hoover had levied perhaps the most unlikely decisions of his entire tenure. Acknowledging "the present atmosphere" of "congressional and public alarm in opposition to any activity which could in any way be termed an invasion of privacy," he ordered FBI agents to scale back dramatically on wiretaps, mail covers, "black-bag" jobs (also known as "surreptitious entries" or illegal break-ins), and other traditional—if not necessarily legal—covert techniques. As chief inspector, Felt was duty-bound to enforce the new practices.²⁵

Like many Bureau executives, Felt viewed Hoover's orders with skepticism, wondering why the director would enact policies that "should have

gladdened the hearts of civil libertarians.”²⁶ Historians, prosecutors, and intelligence officials have since followed suit, debating whether Hoover genuinely intended to forbid such activities or simply to create a paper trail for the courts. The orders seem particularly incongruous given what we now know about COINTELPRO, the FBI’s secret program of disruption aimed at groups such as the Weather Underground, the Black Panthers, and the Ku Klux Klan.²⁷ In this context, it is tempting to see Hoover as nothing more than a hypocrite: preaching constitutional rights while secretly undermining them at every turn. Seen from another angle, however, his restrictions are entirely consistent with his bureaucratic principles. Faced with public criticism that put the Bureau’s reputation—and thus its autonomy—at risk, one CIA official noted, “Mr. Hoover had no recourse but to gradually eliminate activities which were unfavorable to the Bureau and which in turn risked public confidence in the number one law enforcement agency.”²⁸

Actually enforcing this was almost impossible, Felt recalled. At nearly every level of the bureaucracy, agents resisted the pullback, arguing that it would hamper investigations. Some of the greatest resistance came from William C. Sullivan, head of the FBI’s Domestic Intelligence Division and one of the architects of COINTELPRO. Sullivan was no classic G-man: he was short, often unkempt, and a liberal Democrat to boot. Like Felt, however, he had worked his way up through the bureaucracy by learning to please Hoover and guess his intentions. Sullivan argued that the restrictions would all but destroy the domestic intelligence apparatus at a moment when New Left and “Black Hate” groups posed an ever-more-aggressive threat.²⁹ Although Felt managed partially to enforce Hoover’s dictums by 1968, allegedly cutting the number of wiretaps in half, Sullivan soon found a receptive audience for his complaints. As Felt later recalled, the wrangling over wiretaps that began during the Johnson years escalated dramatically once Nixon became president.

One of the remarkable aspects of the growing rifts occasioned by Hoover’s directives was how little anyone outside Washington’s inner circle knew about them. “At the time, in the . . . pre-Watergate period,” Bob Woodward recently explained, “there was little public knowledge of the vast pushing, shoving and acrimony between the White House and the FBI.”³⁰ From the moment he entered office through Hoover’s death in May 1972, Nixon offered nothing but public praise for the FBI director as an impartial, respected civil servant, a fellow embattled conservative facing off against liberal critics. Behind the scenes, however, their relationship began to deteriorate almost immediately. As historian Stanley Kutler has pointed out, Nixon came to the presidency

ready to put his beliefs about “bureaucracy” into practice—in essence, to reshape independent agencies to serve the political will of both his administration and the Republican Party.³¹ For the FBI, this meant immediate White House pressure to expand surveillance of wartime dissenters, political radicals, and Nixon administration critics. To Nixon’s surprise, Hoover dug in his heels against many of these initiatives, defending his new position that such activities were potentially illegal and unsupported by public opinion. The result was one of the strangest but most significant internal battles of Nixon’s first term, with Hoover playing the high-minded champion of civil liberties, while Nixon sought to avoid, undermine, and dismiss his warnings of political catastrophe.

How did this happen? How did two men with a decades-long alliance manage to come to blows over something that neither of them particularly cared about: civil liberties? Most accounts of the FBI under Nixon provide few answers, emphasizing their cooperation on such matters as Supreme Court appointments and political wiretaps rather than their points of dispute. Others have noted the tensions between the FBI and the White House but dismissed them as petty territorial matters, the collision between a paranoid chief executive and his petulant, aging subordinate. Undoubtedly personality quirks played a role in the level of intransigence and backroom plotting that resulted from what was, at heart, a dispute among friends. Yet there was also something deeper at work, a long-standing difference in institutional interest powerful enough to overwhelm their friendship and shared ideology. As Felt later explained, Hoover viewed covert techniques not as bad ethics but as bad policy: in such a contentious environment, they were bound to bring criticism and expose the FBI to undue risk. Nixon, by contrast, grew ever more insistent that the FBI adhere to White House orders. Throughout the Nixon presidency, each man’s position reflected the institutional history that had produced him: Nixon the elected politician, seeking to consolidate partisan power and short-term gain; Hoover the bureaucrat, looking out for his reputation, autonomy, and long-term survival.

Things started well. In December 1968, Nixon summoned Hoover to presidential transition headquarters in New York, assuring the director full and unfettered access to the White House under the new Republican administration.³² Once in Washington, the president staged what amounted to a year-long pageant of support for the FBI. In 1969, in an act of homage all but unheard of for a sitting president, he accepted an invitation to dine at Hoover’s private home on Thirtieth Place. White House adviser John Ehrlichman, who accompanied Nixon to the dinner, recalled that the president viewed the

event in both political and social terms; he “enjoyed the conversation” but was also “sure he benefited politically from his close association with Hoover.” Ehrlichman was less convinced. Like many Nixon loyalists newly transplanted to Washington, he viewed the director as a throwback, a rambling old man who boasted of long-past victories but failed to adapt to the exigencies of the present. In rare concert with Nixon’s prominent critics on the Left, Ehrlichman believed that Hoover’s retirement was coming due.³³

It did not take long for such doubts to spread throughout the Nixon White House. In May 1969, less than five months into the Nixon presidency, the *New York Times* published a report describing the administration’s secret bombing of Cambodia. In response, Nixon, Hoover, and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger crafted a plan to wiretap seventeen members of the foreign policy establishment and Washington press in hopes of finding the leaker. The so-called “Kissinger wiretaps” have often been cited as evidence of an unholy collusion between the White House and the FBI. In reality, neither side ever entirely recovered from the sense of betrayal and mutual suspicion born of the episode. In setting up the taps, Hoover had warned Nixon that public exposure would be a disaster for the administration. The director also went around Nixon to ensure that the White House—not the Bureau—would be blamed in the event of exposure. Nixon wanted no record of the taps; instead, Hoover kept full logs. Nixon hoped to conduct the operation off the record. Hoover demanded—and received—authorization in writing from the attorney general. Nixon was attempting to protect his power by identifying leakers within the foreign policy bureaucracy. Instead, the scuffle over the wiretaps helped to set in motion a six-year conflict with the FBI.³⁴

The most significant episode in that conflict, prior to Watergate, came in June 1970, when Nixon embarked on an ambitious plan to refashion the domestic intelligence establishment, an effort later known as the “Huston Plan.” In retrospect, the story of the Huston Plan seems almost absurd: Nixon attempted to expand surveillance and disruption of the New Left, while Hoover, the movement’s greatest critic and most persistent nemesis, stood in his way. As an institutional battle, however, there is no better illustration of the dynamics that would ultimately shape the Watergate-era dispute between the White House and the FBI. The discussion occurred entirely behind closed doors, with neither public input nor knowledge. It took place among men who shared the same fundamental political principles—conservative pitted against conservative, anticommunist against anticommunist. It unfolded entirely within the executive branch; not a single congressman either knew of

(or, likely, would have supported) the plan. And it placed the career bureaucrat up against the career politician, each seeking control of the FBI's investigative powers.

The dispute began in 1970 with a common concern over the rise in domestic bombings stemming from a radicalized antiwar left. Both Hoover and Nixon interpreted the unrest not as a symptom of public anguish over Vietnam but as a deliberate provocation by disloyal subversives. Where the two men differed was in what to do about it. By early 1970, Nixon had actively begun to pressure Hoover to loosen the FBI's restrictions on mail covers, wiretaps, and black-bag jobs—in essence, to lift the directives put in place five years earlier. Hoover refused. “There is widespread concern by the American public regarding the possible misuse of this type of coverage,” he wrote to CIA director Richard Helms in March 1970, echoing his long-standing concerns about the FBI's public reputation. “The FBI's effectiveness has always depended in large measure on our capacity to retain the full confidence of the American people. The use of any investigative measures which infringe on traditional rights of privacy must therefore be scrutinized most carefully.”³⁵

Faced with such obstinacy, the White House devised a plan to coordinate domestic intelligence not through Hoover but through a council of four rival (and presumably more pliable) intelligence agencies—CIA, Defense, NSA, and Treasury—working in conjunction with the FBI. The initial meeting between the White House and the five agency chiefs on June 5, 1970, went more or less as planned, with all agreeing to explore the idea of increased surveillance and disruption against the antiwar left. Two weeks later, the other four agency chiefs signed off on a report recommending that Nixon expand mail covers, phone taps, and undercover surveillance. Hoover, by contrast, registered strenuous objections, adding his own “footnotes” to the report and thus decimating any appearance of unanimity. “The FBI is opposed to implementing any covert mail coverage,” read one, “because it is clearly illegal and it is likely that, if done, information would leak out of the Post Office to the press and serious damage would be done to the intelligence community.”³⁶ As with the Kissinger wiretaps, Hoover made it clear that he would implement the plan if and only if the president authorized the actions in writing. Attorney General John Mitchell, in turn, recognized the political danger of the situation and urged Nixon to reject the Huston Plan. In late July, the president rescinded his approval, defeated not by liberals or antiwar activists but by pressure within his own administration.

In his memoir, Nixon admitted that he had been thwarted by Hoover's bureaucratic skill. “I knew that if Hoover had decided not to cooperate,” he

wrote, “it would matter little what I had decided or approved.”³⁷ For a former president, this was a remarkable confession. Hoover, with Mitchell’s support, had gone up against the president and won. Hoover continued to do so for the next year, resisting what he viewed as White House efforts to force the FBI to take risks in the name of Nixon’s partisan agenda. The standoff came to a head in June 1971, when Hoover refused Nixon’s appeal to expand FBI scrutiny of defense analyst Daniel Ellsberg, who had recently leaked the Pentagon Papers to the *New York Times* and other publications. Historians and contemporaries have since cited a variety of reasons for Hoover’s stalling, from his friendship with Ellsberg’s father-in-law to his concern, in Nixon’s words, that the press would make Ellsberg a “martyr” at the expense of the FBI.³⁸ Whatever Hoover’s true motivations, the conflict further damaged his relationship with Nixon. Mistrustful of Hoover, panicked by foreign-policy leaks and mounting social challenges, the Nixon administration founded its own covert intelligence division, to be controlled from within the White House. “And thus,” Stanley Kutler has written, “the President of the United States called into being the Plumbers, a group specifically created to do what J. Edgar Hoover would not do without the validation of Nixon himself.”³⁹

As chief FBI inspector, Felt played mostly an observer’s role in the intelligence disputes of Nixon’s early presidency, scrutinizing the Bureau’s policies against “New Left terrorists” without assuming an active investigative stance.⁴⁰ That changed in the middle of 1971. On July 1, with the exposure of the Pentagon Papers barely two weeks old, Hoover called Felt to his office and promoted him to deputy associate director, a newly created position that put Felt in the FBI’s number-three position just below Hoover and the ailing Clyde Tolson—and just above Huston Plan partisan (and Nixon ally) William Sullivan. Felt admired Hoover’s sleight of hand. “Hoover reacted against Sullivan in true bureaucratic fashion,” he wrote, “by a realignment of channels of authority which nudged Sullivan to a lower rung on the Bureau’s promotional ladder.”⁴¹ Sullivan retaliated by handing the White House the only existing logs of the Kissinger wiretaps, in anticipation of his forced resignation in September 1972.⁴² Despite the turmoil, Felt recognized what Sullivan’s departure meant for his future career. Given Tolson’s poor health, Felt suddenly appeared to be the aging Hoover’s hand-picked successor to lead the FBI.

Over the next year, Felt found himself embroiled in repeated conflicts with the White House, where the FBI’s reputation sank to an all-time low. When internal leaks exposed details of the SALT negotiations, Felt recalled, Hoover sent him to the White House to coordinate the inquiry only to have

Nixon turn instead to the CIA. In early 1972, the FBI investigated allegations that the ITT Corporation had bribed Nixon staffers; when the Nixon White House asked the FBI lab to change its assessment of the evidence, Hoover once again refused. In his memoir, Nixon acknowledged that he made plans to fire Hoover, who was aging and increasingly unpopular in addition to being uncooperative. When the president quietly inquired about the possibility of resignation, however, the director declined—or, rather, agreed to retire if Nixon would issue a direct request. It was the same technique Hoover had used to document the Kissinger wiretaps, and to thwart the Huston Plan, and it produced a similar effect. Fearing a backlash from Hoover's right-wing supporters, as well as the possible exposure of White House operations, the president agreed that it would be best for Hoover to stay in office until further notice.⁴³

In the end, it was death rather than resignation that brought Hoover's conflict with Nixon to a close. On the night of May 1, 1972, Hoover died in his sleep, a few days short of his forty-eighth anniversary as head of the FBI. Nixon's final hurrah reflected the pattern he had been developing for years. Publicly, he was Hoover's greatest ally, ordering federal flags to fly at half staff, delivering Hoover's eulogy at the National Presbyterian Church, and mourning the director as "one of my closest personal friends and advisers."⁴⁴ Privately, he made ready to dismantle the autonomous bureaucracy that the director had spent half a century creating. On May 3, Nixon appointed deputy attorney general L. Patrick Gray, a man with limited police experience and even fewer ties to Hoover, as the acting director of the FBI. In their initial meeting, according to an internal White House memo, he instructed Gray "to consolidate control of the FBI, making such changes as are necessary to assure its complete loyalty to the Administration."⁴⁵

To the public, the Gray announcement was a minor event, a temporary fix while Nixon contemplated what to do without the legendary Hoover. To much of the FBI hierarchy, however, it was an act of overt hostility. On May 19, less than three weeks after Hoover's death, former Bureau official and Nixon campaign security chief Louis Nichols wrote to the president warning of serious discontent within the FBI. "I fear that a tragic mistake has been made, altho I hope not, but the effect is to tell the world you don't have confidence in the people in the Bureau," Nichols wrote.⁴⁶ Felt was in shock as well. In his memoir, Felt admitted that he expected to lead the Bureau after Hoover's death. Barring that, he had assumed that someone else with FBI training—even Sullivan perhaps—would be appointed in his place. "It

did not cross my mind that the president would appoint an outsider to replace Hoover," he wrote. "Had I known, I would not have been hopeful about my future."⁴⁷

His dismay mounted as Gray began to chip away at some of Hoover's long-standing internal policies. In retrospect, many of Gray's changes at the Bureau were simply updates for the times: he relaxed the standards of dress and deportment, admitted women, and allowed agents to drink coffee and liquor in previously forbidden circumstances. To Felt, however, the changes looked like assaults on the very institutional culture that had given the FBI its bureaucratic success under Hoover. From Gray's first day in office, Felt saw him as little more than a political hack, appointed to "convert the Bureau into an adjunct of the White House machine."⁴⁸ As Gray's son Ed recently noted, the Watergate break-in a month later simply heightened these preexisting tensions, transforming the FBI's battle with the White House into a national crisis. "Without Watergate it would have been a tight little backstage drama. It got Shakespearian only because the stage got lit up and the whole country started watching."⁴⁹

In the standard story of Watergate, the FBI is often assigned the role of stooge, a bumbling and fully compromised detective force most notable for its subservience to Nixon. Under Gray's leadership, the story goes, the FBI so distorted its criminal inquiry that far more righteous actors—congressional committees, swashbuckling reporters, stern but far-sighted judges—were forced to step in and take over. There is some truth to this picture. Gray allowed White House officials to sit in on Watergate-related interviews. (He later argued that he never suspected high officials might be involved.) More disturbingly, he burned political espionage files at White House counsel John Dean's request, a move that ultimately cost him the post of Bureau director. And yet judging the FBI's role in Watergate based on Gray's actions provides only a limited picture of the complicated institutional dynamics that allowed the scandal to unfold. Faced with a rebellious old guard, Gray exercised little genuine control over the FBI bureaucracy. If anything, his appointment only increased the deep and developing rift between Hoover's FBI and the Nixon White House. As in the Hoover years, the appearance of collusion and political sympathy during the Watergate era masked a deeper clash of institutional cultures and interests.⁵⁰

In the months between the Pentagon Papers leak and Hoover's death, Nixon had increasingly avoided rather than confronted the FBI on controversial matters. He turned instead to the Plumbers, the secret team of White House intelligence operatives, Cuban anticommunists, and White House

staffers charged with conducting sensitive White House investigations. The team had begun its work with a break-in at the Los Angeles office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist in late 1971. By the middle of 1972, with the presidential campaign at full throttle, they had ventured into political dirty tricks. On May 28, less than a month after Hoover's death, the Plumbers installed wiretaps at Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate Hotel. Three weeks later, on June 17, they returned to the site, apparently to adjust the taps for better reception. A Watergate security guard happened to notice one of the doors taped open and, fearing burglary, called the local police. Five men, all with ties to the White House, were arrested. This marked the formal beginning of the Watergate scandal.⁵¹

Under ordinary circumstances, a suspected burglary would have fallen under the jurisdiction of the Washington, D.C., police. In this case, the political sensitivity of the location and the presence of wiretapping equipment triggered an investigation by the FBI. Almost immediately, this put the Bureau in a confusing relationship with the Nixon White House: Were executive-branch staffers to be treated as potential targets or as superiors and fellow investigators? The conflict was particularly pronounced for Gray, who had been appointed just a month earlier and was still hoping for a permanent position. But it was complicated for Felt as well, who found himself charged with investigating the very White House that had recently passed him over. As the senior executive with investigative experience, Felt immediately took charge of the day-to-day management of the Watergate investigation—a circumstance that put him in a unique position to influence the FBI's interactions with the White House. Within forty-eight hours, he also began speaking with Bob Woodward.

In his 1979 memoir, Felt adamantly denied giving tips to Woodward. "I never leaked information to Woodward and Bernstein or to anyone else!" he wrote.⁵² In truth, as Woodward revealed in 2005, the two men had been friends for several years by that point, though they had few mutual acquaintances and never advertised their association. From the first, Felt had struck Woodward as a company man. "Somewhat to my astonishment," he recalled, "I found that Felt was an admirer of J. Edgar Hoover."⁵³ Felt had been quietly forthcoming throughout their friendship, offering Woodward information about the scandal-ridden antitrust case against ITT as well as the May 1972 assassination attempt against former Alabama governor George Wallace.⁵⁴ On June 19, two days after the Watergate break-in, Felt confirmed to Woodward that White House employee E. Howard Hunt was likely involved. Over the next several months, as the Watergate scandal evolved from a local

burglary into a national sensation, he met with Woodward repeatedly to confirm or deny critical information.

Contrary to Watergate myth, Felt did not get away with doing this—at least not entirely. By the end of 1972, the Nixon administration suspected that Felt was leaking to the *Post*, as well as to *Time* magazine and the *New York Times*, though Nixon declined to fire him for fear of further disclosure.⁵⁵ Woodward, for his part, received tips from numerous sources in the White House, the Justice Department, and other federal agencies, as well as within the Nixon campaign. In that sense, the status of Deep Throat as an iconic whistleblower is little more than a triumph of Hollywood mythmaking, nicely burnished by decades of political gossip. And yet there can be little question that Felt posed a genuine danger to the Nixon administration. As the operational head of the FBI's Watergate investigation, he had access to hundreds of interviews and speculative reports beyond the initial break-in prosecution. In addition, his training in Hoover's FBI had prepared him to do battle with the White House.

Why *did* he do it? Since 2005, many commentators have pointed to Felt's personal anger at being snubbed by the Nixon administration as the main inspiration for his leaks. Others have portrayed him as "the hero who started it all," a lone wolf acting to defend the Constitution and the public interest against the depredations of a lawless White House.⁵⁶ Woodward recalled that Felt actually appeared entirely amoral about the whole matter—far more interested in preserving the FBI's institutional prerogatives than in either high-minded principle or personal revenge. "He never really voiced pure, raw outrage to me about Watergate," Woodward wrote. "The crimes and abuses were background music. Nixon was trying to subvert not only the law but the Bureau. Watergate became Felt's instrument to reassert the Bureau's independence and thus its supremacy."⁵⁷

Woodward's view seems to square with Felt's own statements. By the time he confessed to his role as Deep Throat in 2005, Felt was ill and elderly; though he confirmed his great secret, he offered little by way of public explanation. In the weeks that followed, one *Washington Post* writer lamented that Felt's fragile mental health would forever deny Americans the full truth "about his thoughts at the time."⁵⁸ And yet Felt was quite open during the Watergate years about his opinions of the Nixon White House, if not about his role as Deep Throat. In a speech at Rutgers University in October 1973, for instance, Felt attacked the Nixon administration for its hyper-political approach to governance, arguing that "there was too much interference from the White House" in matters properly reserved for an independent Bureau.

“I stand behind the basic policy we had under J. Edgar Hoover,” he declared. “He was a strong director and no one could push him.”⁵⁹ He echoed these themes six years later in his memoir *The FBI Pyramid*, published to little notice or acclaim well after the public furor of Watergate had subsided. To men in the FBI, Felt reflected, the Gray appointment and the Watergate scandal seemed to be one and the same—part of a mounting attack that was both personal and professional. “We faced no simple burglary,” he explained, “but an assault on government institutions, an attack on the FBI’s integrity, and unrelenting pressure to unravel one of the greatest political scandals in our nation’s history.”⁶⁰

For a man often portrayed as a lone actor, these are striking statements—acknowledgments that Hoover’s institutional culture and tradition of bureaucratic autonomy, not simply bravado or personal revenge, shaped Felt’s actions during Watergate. Thinking of Felt in this way also provides one of the nicer ironies of the late Nixon years. Even today, Watergate remains known primarily as a high point of crusading investigative journalism, one of the few triumphal moments of a 1970s liberalism in decline. As it turns out, the most mythologized of the Watergate actors was a buttoned-down conservative intelligence officer who had far more in common with Richard Nixon than with his liberal enemies. Felt cooperated with Woodward not to preserve the American constitution or to limit the imperial presidency, as the standard Watergate myths would suggest, but to protect the legacy of J. Edgar Hoover.

It took more than two years after the Watergate burglary for Nixon to admit complicity in the cover-up and resign the presidency. During that time, Gray left office under a cloud of scandal, much to the satisfaction of Felt and other Hoover loyalists. By late June 1973, Felt himself was gone as well, forced from office as part of Nixon’s order that the Bureau be “cleaned out” of its vestigial Hoover men.⁶¹ According to Woodward, Felt continued to talk with reporters even after his retirement, urging the *Post* to investigate gaps of a “suspicious nature” on the White House tapes.⁶² What the tapes finally revealed seemed to confirm Felt’s suspicion that the White House was out to undermine the Bureau. On August 5, 1974, the famous “smoking gun” tape revealed that Nixon had deliberately instructed the CIA to disrupt the FBI’s Watergate investigation. Three days later, on August 8, Nixon resigned.

From one perspective, Nixon’s resignation might be seen as an FBI victory, testament to the power and influence of Hoover’s bureaucratic system. Faced with opposition from the White House, Hoover loyalists helped to oust

an unpopular successor, expose high crimes and misdemeanors at the White House, and exact their revenge on a hostile president. In the end, however, the burst of congressional inquisition and public outrage that characterized the final stages of the Watergate saga brought the FBI under new scrutiny as well. In 1975, less than a year after Nixon's resignation, Senator Frank Church (D-Idaho) launched an unprecedented series of hearings into FBI and CIA abuses, documenting the Huston Plan, the Kissinger wiretaps, and the rise of COINTELPRO, among other matters. The result was a devastating indictment of Hoover's tenure. Far from being the guardian of liberty and integrity so often advertised by the Bureau press office, the committee concluded, the FBI was a rogue agency that had abused the civil liberties as well as the trust of millions of Americans, an image that has dominated popular perceptions of Hoover ever since.

Coming on the heels of Watergate, the Church Committee's revelations helped to shape what has arguably been the dominant political interpretation of the early 1970s: that it was an age of disillusionment with government, a warning for future generations about the dangers of unaccountable power. Certainly this is a lesson that can bear repeating, especially since so many of the reforms enacted in the 1970s have been curtailed if not altogether disregarded in present-day counterterrorism efforts. But it is not entirely accurate to say that unaccountable power, at least as it was expressed in Hoover's FBI, was a simple force for ill. Under Hoover, the FBI's consolidation of power prevented Nixon from enacting the Huston Plan and forced the White House to accept responsibility for its own dirty tricks. After Hoover's death, FBI resentment over White House efforts helped to expose those crimes and bring down a corrupt president.

In those limited instances, both Hoover and Felt served the cause of precisely those congressional liberals and civil libertarians who later castigated the FBI for its abuses. It would be absurd to suggest that the FBI therefore provides a model of good governance. What it does provide is a spur to think in more complicated ways about the virtues and pitfalls of bureaucratic power, and about the ways that the administrative state has helped to shape popular politics in the twentieth century. Both Felt and Nixon were products of the modern state, leaders who benefited from the support, guidance, and institutional power of J. Edgar Hoover. And yet their very different roles within the state—and their differing interpretations of bureaucracy—brought them into an implacable conflict with profound consequences not only for the FBI but for the federal government as a whole. The Watergate scandal emerged in part because of the sudden power vacuum occasioned by

Hoover's death. But the institutional conflict between Nixon and the FBI might never have emerged absent the broader social crisis of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In that sense, we cannot understand the popular pageant of Watergate without accounting for the deep institutional tensions within the executive branch. At the same time, we cannot understand those behind-the-scenes conflicts without making sense of broader political and ideological pressures. The study of the state and the study of popular politics must be conducted together.

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NOTES

1. Felt's revelation was first published in a *Vanity Fair* article authored by Felt family lawyer and friend John D. O'Connor. O'Connor, "I'm the Guy They Called Deep Throat," *Vanity Fair*, July 2005, <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2005/07/deepthroat200507>. For the *Washington Post's* confirmation, see David von Drehle, "FBI's No. 2 Was 'Deep Throat,'" *Washington Post*, 1 June 2005, A1. For examples of the long-running guessing game about Deep Throat's identity, see esp. Leonard Garment, *In Search of Deep Throat: The Greatest Political Mystery of Our Time* (New York, 2000), and John W. Dean, *Unmasking Deep Throat: History's Most Elusive News Source* (New York, 2002). James Mann identified a high FBI official as the most likely source in an influential 1992 essay that also provided background on the "institutional" conflict between the FBI and the White House. Mann, "Deep Throat: An Institutional Analysis," *Atlantic Monthly*, May 1992, at <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1992/05/deep-throat-an-institutional-analysis/4084>. Although Woodward and Bernstein have confirmed Felt's identity, several Nixon experts continue to speculate that Felt was not Deep Throat, that Woodward had multiple sources for the information attributed to Felt, or that Felt acted in concert with other officials in the FBI and the Nixon administration. See esp. Jonathan Aitken, "Why I Believe the Real Deep Throat Will Never Be Revealed," *Mail on Sunday* (London), 2 June 2005, 26; L. Patrick Gray III, with Ed Gray, *In Nixon's Web: A Year in the Crosshairs of Watergate* (New York, 2008). For Woodward's memoir of his relationship with Felt, see Bob Woodward, *The Secret Man: The Story of Watergate's Deep Throat* (New York, 2005). For Woodward's original account of "Deep Throat," see Woodward and Carl Bernstein, *All the President's Men* (New York, 1974). For a succinct example of the "hero or villain" debate, see David Cook and Randy Dotinga, "A Mystery Solved, But 'Deep' Issues Linger," *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 June 2005, A2.

2. Michael A. Genovese, *The Watergate Crisis* (Westport, Conn., 1999), 3.

3. In the 1970s, Watergate produced a rash of narrative histories by journalists. The most important are Washington Post staff, *Fall of a President* (New York, 1974); New York Times staff, *End of a Presidency* (New York, 1974); Barry Sussman, *Great Coverup: Nixon and the Scandal of Watergate* (New York, 1974); Theodore White, *Breach of Faith: The Fall*

of *Richard Nixon* (New York, 1975); J. Anthony Lukas, *Nightmare: The Underside of the Nixon Years* (New York, 1976); Woodward and Bernstein, *All the President's Men and The Final Days* (New York, 1976).

4. The most influential scholarly work on Watergate is Stanley Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon* (New York, 1990). For useful analyses of the cultural and historiographical debates surrounding Watergate, see Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory* (New York, 2002); David Greenberg, *Nixon's Shadow: The History of an Image* (New York, 2003); Ruth P. Morgan, "Nixon, Watergate, and the Study of the Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 217–38. For the origins of the "imperial presidency" theme, see Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston, 1973). For scholarly overviews of Watergate, see esp. Genovese, *The Watergate Crisis*; Keith W. Olson, *Watergate: The Presidential Scandal That Shook America* (Lawrence, Kans., 2003); Thomas Maxwell-Long, *Watergate and the Resignation of Richard Nixon: Impact of a Constitutional Crisis* (Washington, D.C., 2004). Many biographies and cultural histories of the Nixon years contain useful analyses of Watergate. See esp. Garry Wills, *Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-Made Man* (New York, 1979); Herbert S. Parmet, *Richard Nixon and His America* (Boston, 1990); Michael A. Genovese, *The Nixon Presidency: Power and Politics in Turbulent Times* (New York, 1990); Tom Wicker, *One of Us: Richard Nixon and the American Dream* (New York, 1991); Stephen A. Ambrose, *Nixon, Volume III: Ruin and Recovery, 1973–1990* (New York, 1991); Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York, 1994); James Cannon, *Time and Chance: Gerald Ford's Appointment with History* (New York, 1994); Richard Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House* (New York, 2001); Elizabeth Drew, *Richard M. Nixon* (New York, 2007); Conrad Black, *Richard Nixon: A Life in Full* (New York, 2007).

5. James Mann first hinted at this explanation in his 1992 *Atlantic Monthly* essay, speculating that "identifying Deep Throat would clarify our view of the Nixon Administration and would enhance our understanding of the underlying institutional forces at work in Washington during the late 1960s and early 1970s." Mann, "Deep Throat: An Institutional Analysis." Kutler's *Wars of Watergate* also provides useful background for addressing the problem of bureaucracy within the Nixon administration, but he devotes only cursory attention to the FBI itself, and to its internal culture and history of bureaucratic autonomy. See Kutler, 94–96.

6. Daniel P. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862–1928* (Princeton, 2001), 4–5. For other relevant literature on the rise of twentieth-century bureaucratic entrepreneurs and bureaucratic autonomy, see esp. James W. Doig and Erwin C. Hargrove, *Leadership and Innovation: A Biographical Perspective on Entrepreneurs in Government* (Baltimore, 1987); Brian J. Cook, *Bureaucracy and Self-Government: Reconsidering the Role of Public Administration in American Politics* (Baltimore, 1996); Carpenter, *Reputation and Power: Organizational Image and Pharmaceutical Regulation at the FDA* (Princeton, 2010). As Claire Potter has noted, most work on federal policy and bureaucracy among historians has focused on the evolution of the social welfare state, rather than on police and security agencies. Potter, *War on Crime: Gangsters, G-Men, and the Politics of Mass Culture* (Newark, N.J., 1998), 1–3. For an excellent model of the study of bureaucracy and social welfare policy, see Martha Derthick, *Agency Under Stress: The Social Security Administration in American Government* (Washington, D.C., 1990).

7. For “indoctrination,” see J. J. Casper to John Mohr, “W. Mark Felt . . .,” 24 October 1962, section 4, FBI FOIA 67-276576-330 (William Mark Felt); “77 Years Young,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 1 January 1972, box 229, J. Edgar Hoover Scrapbooks, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md. (hereafter JEHS). For overviews of Hoover’s career, see esp. Richard Gid Powers, *Secrecy and Power: The Life of J. Edgar Hoover* (New York, 1987); Athan Theoharis and John Stuart Cox, *The Boss: J. Edgar Hoover and the American Inquisition* (Philadelphia, 1988); Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York, 1991); Anthony Summers, *Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover* (New York, 1993). Of these, only Powers seriously analyzes Hoover’s rhetoric and approach to state-building on its own terms. The other major biographers, like much of the sensational literature on Hoover, take the approach of exposé, seeking to highlight the contrast between Hoover’s rhetoric and action. For an early analysis of Hoover as a bureaucratic entrepreneur, see Eugene Lewis, *Public Entrepreneurship: Toward a Theory of Bureaucratic Power: The Organizational Lives of Hyman Rickover, J. Edgar Hoover, and Robert Moses* (Bloomington, 1980).

8. For Carpenter, see *Reputation and Power*, 9–15.

9. Within the burgeoning literature on the rise of the American right, the subject of Watergate has been noticeably absent. The main exceptions can be found in books that treat the 1970s as a synthetic decade. Even here, though, Watergate is often segregated into a chapter with little relationship to the broader trends of the book. See, for example, Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York, 2001); Edward Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York, 2006).

10. For quote, see J. H. Hanson, “Report of Interview with Applicant Richard M. Nixon for appointment as Special Agent,” 17 July 1937, FBI 67-102459-4 (Richard Nixon). For an account of the controversy over Nixon’s failed appointment, see Irwin Gellman, *The Contender: Richard Nixon, The Congress Years, 1946–1952* (New York, 1999), 5–8.

11. Powers, *Secrecy and Power*, 289.

12. Richard Nixon, “The Hiss Case—A Lesson for the American People,” 26 January 1950, reprinted in Rick Perlstein, ed., *Richard Nixon: Speeches, Writings, Documents* (Princeton, 2008), 55.

13. The quote is from William C. Sullivan, one of Felt’s chief Bureau rivals, describing a typical FBI relationship with a key politician—in that case, Gerald Ford. Robert Fink, Interview with William C. Sullivan, 2 May 1976, L. Patrick Gray III Papers, in the possession of Ed Gray, East Lyme, N.H. (hereafter LPGP), 5. See also p. 22.

14. Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, 193.

15. Margaret C. Rung, “Richard Nixon, State, and Party: Democracy and Bureaucracy in the Postwar Era,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (June 1999): 421.

16. In the spring of 1953, for instance, Nixon, Hoover, and McCarthy all attended a party celebrating Cohn’s appointment as counsel for McCarthy’s Committee on Expenditures in Executive Departments. Ambrose, *Nixon*, vol. 1, 313.

17. Nixon to Hoover, 15 December 1956, box 19, folder 7, Richard M. Nixon: Pre-Presidential Papers (Special Files, J. Edgar Hoover, 1949–61), Richard M. Nixon Library & Birthplace, Yorba Linda, Calif. (hereafter RMN-PPP-JEH).

18. Hoover to Nixon, 9 November 1960, box 19, folder 13, RMN-PPP-JEH.

19. Hoover, “Message from the Director,” *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, July 1968, 1.

20. For Felt's GW records, see Tierney, "William Mark Felt . . .," 12 January 1942, section 1, FBI FOIA 67-276576-8 (Felt). For quote, see W. Mark Felt, *The FBI Pyramid from the Inside* (New York, 1979), 17. Felt's 1979 memoir is a remarkable source of insider commentary on the FBI's bureaucratic culture. Written while Felt was under indictment for violating the civil rights of the families of New Left militants, the book offers a self-serving and not entirely reliable account of the FBI's activities in the early 1970s (most notably in Felt's vehement denial that he was Deep Throat). Nonetheless, his account of his rise to power under Hoover, and of Hoover's impact on the men who served under him, offers some of the best-available descriptions of the FBI's internal bureaucracy and bureaucratic culture in the postwar years. In 2006, in the wake of Felt's Deep Throat confession, PublicAffairs rereleased the memoir under the title *A G-Man's Life: The FBI, Being "Deep Throat," and the Struggle for Honor in Washington*. The updated version of the memoir contains editorial interventions and speculative commentary by Felt family friend John O'Connor, who attempts to fill in the gaps about Felt's role as Deep Throat. It also contains serious reediting. As a result, despite its factual flaws, the earlier version of Felt's memoir offers a more persuasive firsthand account of Felt's outlook and relationship with the Hoover bureaucracy. Where not otherwise indicated, basic events in Felt's life have been drawn from the 1979 work. An official FBI biography of Felt's early career can be found in the Bureau's administrative history at the Lyndon Johnson presidential library. "Administrative History, Department of Justice, Vol. 13, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Part 19a, Doc. Sup [1 of 2]," box 10, Administrative History, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin. For the updated memoir, see Felt with John O'Connor, *A G-Man's Life* (New York, 2006).

21. Felt, *The FBI Pyramid*, 196.

22. For pencil, see J. P. Mohr to Clyde Tolson, "Mark Felt . . .," 23 July 1953, section 2, FBI FOIA 67-276576-118 (Felt). For quotes, see Hoover to Felt, 26 January 1972, section 5, FBI FOIA 67-276576-423 (Felt); Felt, *The FBI Pyramid*, 196-97.

23. For quotes, see Felt, *The FBI Pyramid*, 27, 30, 47. Felt's FBI personnel file reinforces the outlines of his published narrative on the hotel incident and includes a letter of praise from Hoover for his efficient work. Hoover to Felt, 28 July 1956, section 2, FBI FOIA 67-276576-185 (Felt).

24. J. J. Casper to John Mohr, "W. Mark Felt . . .," 24 October 1962, section 4, FBI FOIA 67-276576-330 (Felt); Felt, *The FBI Pyramid*, 45.

25. United States Senate, *Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities* [Church Committee Final Report], vol. 2 (Washington, D.C., 1976), 109.

26. Felt, *The FBI Pyramid*, 101.

27. Volume 3 of the Church Committee Final Report remains one of the finest sources on COINTELPRO. For additional overviews, see esp. Nelson Blackstock, *COINTELPRO: The FBI's Secret War on Political Freedom* (New York, 1998), and James Kirkpatrick Davis, *Spying on America: The FBI's Domestic Counterintelligence Program* (Westport, Conn., 1992). For more detailed studies of the FBI's operations against particular left-wing movements, see esp. Davis, *Assault on the Left: The FBI and the Sixties Antiwar Movement* (Westport, Conn., 1997); Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York, 1991); David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr., from "Solo" to Memphis* (New York, 1981).

28. Church Committee Final Report, vol. 3, 931.

29. For Sullivan's account of the wiretapping controversy, see William C. Sullivan with Bill Brown, *The Bureau: My Thirty Years in Hoover's FBI* (New York, 1979), 147–249.

30. Woodward, *Secret Man*, 33.

31. Kutler, *Wars of Watergate*, 94–96.

32. Powers, *Secrecy and Power*, 439.

33. John Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power: The Nixon Years* (New York, 1982), 163.

34. As with most covert programs, the details of the Kissinger wiretaps are still highly contested. For balanced and detailed accounts of the FBI's role in the operation, see Lukas, *Nightmare*, 49–67; Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, 625–39. In their memoirs, both Nixon and Kissinger claim that Hoover was the one who first suggested wiretaps after a series of leaks in the early spring. See Nixon, *Memoirs*, 287–88; Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston, 1982), 119–20. For an example of the emphasis on collusion, see Church Committee Final Report, vol. 2, 122.

35. Hoover to Richard Helms, 31 March 1970, reprinted as Exhibit 51, *Intelligence Activities--Senate Resolution 2: Hearings Before the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities of the United States Senate*, 94th Cong., 1 sess. (hereafter Church Committee Hearings), vol. 2 (Washington, D.C., 1976), 354.

36. Church Committee Final Report, vol. 3, 946. Despite eliminating its own mail-cover program, the FBI continued to take advantage of intelligence obtained in this manner by other intelligence agencies.

37. Nixon, *Memoirs*, 475.

38. *Ibid.*, 513.

39. Kutler, *Wars of Watergate*, 111.

40. For Felt's official assessment of the Domestic Intelligence Division in 1970, see Felt to Tolson, "Inspection—Domestic Intelligence Division," 23 April 1970, section 7, FBI FOIA 67-205182 (Sullivan).

41. Felt, *The FBI Pyramid*, 133.

42. Sullivan's personnel file contains an extensive account of his forced retirement, as well as the FBI's hunt for the Kissinger wiretap logs. See section 8, FBI FOIA 67-205182. For Sullivan's account, see Sullivan, *Bureau*, 218–50.

43. For Felt's recollections, see Felt, *The FBI Pyramid*, 155–74. For Nixon's account of his conversations with Hoover, see Nixon, *Memoirs*, 597.

44. "Statement by the President on the Death of J. Edgar Hoover, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation," 2 May 1972, 11:10 a.m., box 4, folder 4, FG 17-5, White House Central Files, Nixon Presidential Papers, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md. (hereafter Nixon NARA). In 2010, much of the Nixon presidential collection was transferred to the Nixon library in Yorba Linda, California.

45. Ehrlichman, Memorandum for the President, 3 May 1972, 2:45 p.m., box 3, folder 5, FG 17-5, White House Central Files, Nixon NARA.

46. Nichols to Nixon, 19 May 1972, box 4, folder 6, FG 17-5, White House Central Files, Nixon NARA.

47. Felt, *The FBI Pyramid*, 178.

48. *Ibid.*, 277. For Gray's defense of his tenure and policy changes at the FBI, see Gray, *In Nixon's Web*, esp. 54–58. A copy of Felt's 1979 memoir in the possession of Gray's son Ed contains fascinating margin notes by Gray contesting Felt's portrayal of his FBI tenure and labeling Felt's accusations "unctuous" (112), "mendacious" (112), "phony" (134), "viciously

false" (258), full of "baloney" (133), and Felt himself a self-serving "liar" (211). Gray does not, however, contest Felt's loyalty to Hoover or the FBI's strangely insular culture, noting that Hoover "had these guys so brainwashed they even talked like him" (111). Gray, marginal notes, Felt, *The FBI Pyramid*, LPGP.

49. Gray, *In Nixon's Web*, 301.

50. For the FBI's description and assessment of the criticism leveled at its investigation, see "Watergate investigation—OPE Analysis," 5 July 1974, FBI 139-4089.

51. Among the architects of the Plumbers was former FBI agent G. Gordon Liddy. For Liddy's account of his activities in both capacities, see Liddy, *Will: The Autobiography of G. Gordon Liddy* (New York, 1980).

52. Felt, *The FBI Pyramid*, 226. Even in 1979, Felt's denials were carefully worded, models of bureaucratic misspeak. He claimed, for instance, that he "never gave any FBI documents" to reporters—not quite the same as saying that he provided no information (312). Similarly, his claim that "I never leaked information to Woodward and Bernstein or to anyone else!" left open the possibility that he did, in fact, confirm what they already knew, or point them in the right direction.

53. Woodward, *Secret Man*, 33.

54. *Ibid.*, *Secret Man*, 17. Where not otherwise noted, details of Woodward's and Felt's relationship are drawn from Woodward's memoir. In 2003, Woodward and Bernstein sold their Watergate papers to the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin. After Felt's 2005 revelation, Woodward added his Deep Throat-related notes to the collection. Digital reproductions of Woodward's notes of his conversations with Felt can be found online at <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/web/woodstein/deepthroat/index2.html>. Gray's son Ed has identified alleged discrepancies in the notes, suggesting that Woodward's notes combine his interviews with Felt as well as other government officials. Gray, *In Nixon's Web*, 289–302.

55. Kutler, ed., *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes* (New York, 1997), 344.

56. O'Connor, "I'm the Guy," at <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2005/07/deepthroat200507>.

57. Woodward, *Secret Man*, 214.

58. Bill Emmott, "A Leak and a Promise," *Washington Post*, 10 July 2005.

59. Mike Wolk, "Ex-Hoover Aide Says 'White House Meddled with FBI,'" *Courier Post* (Camden, N.J.), in SAC Newark to Director, "W. Mark Felt," 12 October 1973, section 6, FBI FOIA 67-276576-443x (Felt).

60. Felt, *G-Man's Life*, 193.

61. Kutler, *Abuse of Power*, 344. In the end, Felt himself fell victim to some of the same forces that his Watergate activities had helped to unleash. In 1978, five years after he resigned from the bureau, federal prosecutors indicted Felt, along with Gray and FBI inspector Ed Miller, for civil liberties violations committed in the bureau's campaign against the Weather Underground. This was the first such criminal indictment ever issued against high-ranking intelligence officials (though the charges against Gray were soon dropped). According to the indictment, Felt had cooperated in scaling back the director's restrictions on domestic intelligence after Hoover's death, authorizing illegal break-ins at the homes of WUO members and their families. He was a Hoover loyalist, but only up to a point. Nixon himself testified at the trial, arguing that Felt's actions were justified in the name of national security. For a description of the trial, see Woodward, *Secret Man*, 140–47.

62. Woodward, *Secret Man*, 102–3.