

WATERGATE AS DEMOCRATIC RITUAL

In June 1972, employees of the Republican party made an illegal entry and burglary into the Democratic party headquarters in the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C. Republicans described the break-in as a “third-rate burglary,” neither politically motivated nor morally relevant. Democrats said it was a major act of political espionage, a symbol, moreover, of a demagogic and amoral Republican president, Richard Nixon, and his staff. Americans were not persuaded by the more extreme reaction. The incident received relatively little attention, generating no real sense of outrage at the time. There were no cries of outrage. There was, in the main, deference to the president, respect for his authority, and belief that his explanation of this event was correct, despite what in retrospect seemed like strong evidence to the contrary. With important exceptions, the mass news media decided after a short time to play down the story, not because they were coercively prevented from doing otherwise but because they genuinely felt it to be a relatively unimportant event. Watergate remained, in other words, part of the profane world in Durkheim’s sense. Even after the national election in November of that year, after Democrats had been pushing the issue for four months, 80 percent of the American people found it hard to believe that there was a “Watergate crisis”; 75 percent felt that what had occurred was just plain politics; 84 percent felt that what they had heard about it did not influence their vote. Two years later, the same incident, still called “Watergate,” had initiated the most serious peacetime political crisis in American history. It had become a riveting moral symbol, one that initiated a long passage through sacred time and space and wrenching conflict between pure and impure sacred forms. It was responsible for the first voluntary resignation of a president.

How and why did this perception of Watergate change? To understand this

one must see first what this extraordinary contrast in these two public perceptions indicates, namely that the actual event, "Watergate," was in itself relatively inconsequential. It was a mere collection of facts, and, contrary to the positive persuasion, facts do not speak. Certainly, new "facts" seem to have emerged in the course of the two-year crisis, but it is quite extraordinary how many of these "revelations" actually were already leaked and published in the preelection period. Watergate could not, as the French might say, tell itself. It had to be told by society; it was, to use Durkheim's famous phrase, a social fact. It was the context of Watergate that had changed, not so much the raw empirical data themselves.

To understand how this telling of a crucial social fact changed, it is necessary to bring to the sacred/profane dichotomy the Parsonian concept of generalization. There are different levels at which every social fact can be told (Smelser, 1959, 1963). These levels are linked to different kinds of social resources, and the focus on one level or another can tell us much about whether a system is in crisis—and subject, therefore, to the sacralizing process—or is operating routinely, or profanely, and in equilibrium.

First and most specific is the level of goals. Political life occurs most of the time in the relatively mundane level of goals, power, and interest. Above this, as it were, at a higher level of generality, are norms—the conventions, customs, and laws that regulate this political process and struggle. At still a higher point there are values: those very general and elemental aspects of the culture that inform the codes that regulate political authority and the norms within which specific interests are resolved. If politics operates routinely, the conscious attention of political participants is on goals and interests. It is a relatively specific attention. Routine, "profane" politics means, in fact, that these interests are not seen as violating more general values and norms. Nonroutine politics begins when tension between these levels is felt, either because of a shift in the nature of political activity or a shift in the general, more sacred commitments that are held to regulate them. In this situation, a tension between goals and higher levels develops. Public attention shifts from political goals to more general concerns, to the norms and values that are now perceived as in danger. In this instance we can say there has been the generalization of public consciousness that I referred to earlier as the central point of the ritual process.

It is in light of this analysis that we can understand the shift in the telling of Watergate. It was first viewed merely as something on the level of goals, "just politics," by 75 percent of the American people. Two years after the break-in, by summer 1974, public opinion had sharply changed. Now Watergate was regarded as an issue that violated fundamental customs and morals, and eventually—by 50 percent of the population—as a challenge to the most sacred values that sustained political order itself. By the end of this two-year crisis period, almost half of those who had voted for Nixon changed their minds, and two-thirds of all voters thought the issue had now gone far beyond politics.¹ What

had happened was a radical generalization of opinion. The facts were not that different, but the social context in which they were seen had been transformed.

If we look at the two-year transformation of the context of Watergate, we see the creation and resolution of a fundamental social crisis, a resolution that involved the deepest ritualization of political life. To achieve this “religious” status, there had to be an extraordinary generalization of opinion vis-à-vis a political threat that was initiated by the very center of established power and a successful struggle not just against that power in its social form but against the powerful cultural rationales it mobilized. To understand this process of crisis creation and resolution, we must integrate ritual theory with a more muscular theory of social structure and process. Let me lay these factors out generally before I indicate how each relates to Watergate.

What must happen for an entire society to experience fundamental crisis and ritual renewal?

First, there has to be sufficient social consensus so that an event will be considered polluting (Douglas, 1966), or deviant, by more than a mere fragment of the population. Only with sufficient consensus, in other words, can “society” itself be aroused and indignant.

Second, there has to be the perception by significant groups who participate in this consensus that the event is not only deviant but threatens to pollute the “center” (Shils, 1975: 3–16) of society.

Third, if this deep crisis is to be resolved, institutional social controls must be brought into play. However, even legitimate attacks on the polluting sources of crisis are often viewed as frightening. For this reason, such controls also mobilize instrumental force and the threat of force to bring polluting forces to heel.

Fourth, social control mechanisms must be accompanied by the mobilization and struggle of elites and publics that are differentiated and relatively autonomous (e.g., Eisenstadt, 1971; Keller, 1963) from the structural center of society. Through this process there the formation of countercenters begins.

Finally, fifth, there has to be effective processes of symbolic interpretation, that is, ritual and purification processes that continue the labeling process and enforce the strength of the symbolic, sacred center of society at the expense of a center that is increasingly seen as merely structural, profane, and impure. In so doing, such processes demonstrate conclusively that deviant or “transgressive” qualities are the sources of this threat.

In elaborating how each one of these five factors came into play in the course of Watergate, I will indicate how, in a complex society, reintegration and symbolic renewal are far from being automatic processes. Durkheim’s original ritual theory was developed in the context of simple societies. The result was that “ritualization” was confidently expected. In contemporary fragmented societies, political reintegration and cultural renewal depend on the contingent outcomes of specific historical circumstances. The successful alignment of these forces is very rare indeed.

First, there must emerge the capacity for consensus. Between the Watergate break-in in June 1972 and the Nixon-McGovern election contest in November, the necessary social consensus did not emerge. This was a time during which Americans experienced intense political polarization, though most of the actual social conflicts of the 1960s had significantly cooled. Nixon had built his presidency, in part, on a backlash against these 1960s conflicts, and the Democratic candidate, George McGovern, was the very symbol of this “leftism” to many. Both candidates thought that they, and the nation, were continuing the battles of the 1960s. McGovern’s active presence during this period, therefore, allowed Nixon to continue to promote the authoritarian politics that could justify Watergate. One should not suppose, however, because there was not significant social reintegration during this period that no significant symbolic activity occurred. Agreement in complex societies occurs at various levels. There may be extremely significant cultural agreement (e.g., complex and systematic agreement about the structure and content of language) while more socially or structurally related areas of subjective agreement (e.g., rules about political conduct) do not exist. Symbolic agreement without social consensus can exist, moreover, within more substantive cultural arenas than language.

During the summer of 1972 one can trace a complex symbolic development in the American collective conscience, a consensual development that laid the basis for everything that followed even while it did not produce consensus at more social levels.² It was during this four-month period that the meaning complex “Watergate” came to be defined. In the first weeks that followed the break-in at the Democratic headquarters, “Watergate” existed, in semiotic terms, merely as a sign, as a denotation. This word simply referred, moreover, to a single event. In the weeks that followed, the sign “Watergate,” became more complex, referring to a series of interrelated events touched off by the break-in, including charges of political corruption, presidential denials, legal suits, and arrests. By August 1972, “Watergate” had become transformed from a mere sign to a redolent symbol, a word that rather than denoting actual events connotated multifold moral meanings.

Watergate had become a symbol of pollution, embodying a sense of evil and impurity. In structural terms, the facts directly associated with Watergate—those who were immediately associated with the crime, the office and apartment complex, the persons implicated later—were placed on the negative side of a system of symbolic classification. Those persons or institutions responsible for ferreting out and arresting these criminal elements were placed on the other, positive side. This bifurcated model of pollution and purity was then superimposed onto the traditional good/evil structure of American civil discourse, whose relevant elements appeared in the form indicated in table 6.1. It is clear, then, that while significant symbolic structuring had occurred, the “center” of the American social structure was in no way implicated.

This symbolic development, it should be emphasized, occurred in the public

Table 6.1 Symbolic classification system as of August 1972

<i>The Watergate "structure"</i>	
<i>Evil</i>	<i>Good</i>
Watergate Hotel	Nixon and staff/White House
The burglars	FBI
Dirty Tricksters	Courts/Justice Department's prosecution team
Money raisers	Federal "watchdog" bureaucracy
<i>American Civil Culture</i>	
<i>Evil</i>	<i>Good</i>
Communism/fascism	Democracy
Shadowy enemies	White House—Americanism
Crime	Law
Corruption	Honesty
Personalism	Responsibility
Bad presidents (e.g., Harding/Grant)	Great presidents (e.g., Lincoln/Washington)
Great scandals (e.g., Teapot Dome)	Heroic reformers

mind. Few Americans would have disagreed about the moral meanings of "Watergate" as a collective representation. Yet while the social basis of this symbol was widely inclusive, the symbol just about exhausted the meaning complex of Watergate as such. The term identified a complex of events and people with moral evil, but the collective consciousness did not connect this symbol to significant social roles or institutional behaviors. Neither the Republican party nor President Nixon's staff nor, least of all, President Nixon himself had yet been polluted by the symbol of Watergate. In this sense, it is possible to say that some *symbolic* generalization had occurred but that value generalization within the social system had not.

It had not because the social and cultural polarization of American society had not yet sufficiently abated. Because there was continued polarization, there could be no movement upward toward shared social values; because there was no generalization, there could be no societal sense of crisis. Because there was no sense of crisis, in turn, it became impossible for the other forces I have mentioned to come into play. There was no widespread perception of a threat to the center, and because there was none there could be no mobilization against the center. Against a powerful, secure, and legitimate center, social control forces like investigative bodies, courts, and congressional committees were afraid to act. Similarly, there was no struggle by differentiated elites against the threat to (and by) the center, for many of these elites were divided, afraid, and immobilized. Finally, no deep ritual processes emerged—that could have happened only in response to tensions generated by the first four factors.

Yet in the six months following the election the situation began to be reversed. First, consensus began to emerge. The end of an intensely divisive election period allowed a realignment that had been building at least for two years prior to Watergate. The social struggles of the 1960s had long been over, and many issues had been taken over by centrist groups.³

In the 1960s struggles, the Left had invoked critical universalism and rationality, tying these values to social movements for equality and against institutional authority, including, of course, the authority of the patriotic state itself. The Right, for its part, evoked particularism, tradition, and the defense of authority and the state. In the postelection period, critical universalism could now be articulated by centrist forces without being likened to the specific ideological themes or goals of the Left; indeed, such criticism could now be raised in defense of American national patriotism itself. With this emerging consensus, the possibility for a common feeling of moral violation emerged, and with it began the movement toward generalization vis-à-vis political goals and interests. Once this first resource of consensus had become available, the other developments I have mentioned could be activated.

The second and third factors were anxiety about the center and the invocation of institutional social control. Because the postelection developments described above provided a much less “politicized” atmosphere, it became safer to exercise social control. Such institutions as the courts, the Justice Department, various bureaucratic agencies, and special congressional committees could issue regulations in a more legitimate way. The very effectiveness of these social control institutions legitimated the media’s efforts, in turn, to spread Watergate pollution closer to central institutions. The exercise of social control and the greater approximation to the center reinforced public doubt about whether Watergate was, in fact, only a limited crime, forcing more “facts” to surface. While the ultimate generality and seriousness of Watergate remained open, fears that Watergate might pose a threat to the center of American society quickly spread to significant publics and elites. The question about proximity to the center preoccupied every major group during this early postelection Watergate period. Senator Baker, at a later time, articulated this anxiety with the question that became famous during the summertime Senate hearings: “How much did the President know, and when did he know it?” This anxiety about the threat to the center, in turn, intensified the growing sense of normative violation, increased consensus, and contributed to generalization. It also rationalized the *invocation* of coercive social control. Finally, in structural terms, it began to realign the “good” and “bad” sides of the Watergate symbolization. Which side of the classification system were Nixon and his staff really on?

The fourth factor was elite conflict. Throughout this period, the generalization process—pushed by consensus, by the fear for the center, and by the activities of new institutions of social control—was fueled by a desire for revenge against Nixon by alienated institutional elites. These elites had represented

“leftism” or simply “sophisticated cosmopolitanism” to Nixon during his first four years in office, and they had been the object of his legal and illegal attempts at suppression or control. They included journalists and newspapers, intellectuals, universities, scientists, lawyers, religionists, foundations, and, last but not least, authorities in various public agencies and the U.S. Congress. Motivated by a desire to get even, to reaffirm their threatened status, and to defend their universalistic values, these elites moved to establish themselves as countercenters in the years of crisis.

By May 1973, almost one year after the break-in and six months after the election, all of these forces for crisis creation and resolution were in motion. Significant changes in public opinion had been mobilized, and powerful structural resources were being brought into play. It is only at this point that the fifth crisis factor could emerge. Only now could there emerge deep processes of ritualization—sacralization, pollution, and purification—though there had certainly already been important symbolic developments.

The first fundamental ritual process of the Watergate crisis involved the Senate Select Committee’s televised hearings, which began in May 1973 and continued through August. This event had tremendous repercussions on the symbolic patterning of the entire affair. The decision to hold and to televise the Senate’s hearings was a response to the anxiety that had built up within important segments of the population. The symbolic process that ensued functioned to canalize this anxiety in certain distinctive, more generalized, and more consensual directions. The hearings constituted a kind of civic ritual that revived very general yet nonetheless very crucial currents of critical universalism and rationality in the American political culture. It recreated the sacred, generalized morality on which more mundane conceptions of office are based, and it did so by invoking the mythical level of national understanding in a way that few other events have in postwar history.

These hearings were initially authorized by the Senate on specific political and normative grounds, their mandate being to expose corrupt campaign practices and to suggest legal reforms. The pressure for ritual process, however, soon made this initial mandate all but forgotten. The hearings became a sacred process by which the nation could reach a judgment about the now critically judged Watergate crime. The consensus-building, generalizing aspect of the process was to some extent quite conscious. Congressional leaders assigned membership to the committee on the basis of the widest possible regional and political representation and excluded from the committee all potentially polarizing political personalities. Most of the generalizing process, however, developed much less consciously in the course of the event itself. The developing ritual quality forced committee members to mask their often sharp internal divisions behind commitments to civic universalism. Many of the committee staff, for example, had been radical or liberal activists during the 1960s. They now had to assert patriotic universalism without any reference to specific left-

wing issues. Other staffers, who had been strong Nixon supporters sympathetic to backlash politics, now had to forsake entirely that justification for political action.

The televised hearings, in the end, constituted a liminal experience (Turner, 1969), one radically separated from the profane issues and mundane grounds of everyday life. A ritual *communitas* was created for Americans to share, and within this reconstructed community none of the polarizing issues that had generated the Watergate crisis, or the historical justifications that had motivated it, could be raised. Instead, the hearings revived the civic culture on which democratic conceptions of "office" have depended throughout American history. To understand how a liminal world could be created it is necessary to see it as a phenomenological world in the sense that Schutz has described. The hearings succeeded in becoming a world "unto itself." It was *sui generis*, a world without history. Its characters did not have rememberable pasts. It was in a very real sense "out of time." The framing devices of the television medium contributed to the deracination that produced this phenomenological status. The in-camera editing and the repetition, juxtaposition, simplification, and other techniques that allowed the story to appear mythical were invisible. Add to this "bracketed experience" the hushed voices of the announcers, the pomp and ceremony of the "event," and we have the recipe for constructing, within the medium of television, a sacred time and sacred space.⁴

At the level of mundane reality, two ferociously competitive political forces were at war during the Watergate hearings. These forces had to translate themselves into the symbolic idioms of the occasion; as a result, they were defined and limited by cultural structures even as they struggled to define and limit these structures in turn. For Nixon and his political supporters, "Watergate" had to be defined politically: what the Watergate burglars and coveruppers had done was "just politics," and the anti-Nixon senators on the Watergate committee (a majority of whom, after all, were Democratic) were characterized simply as engaged in a political witch hunt. For Nixon's critics on the committee, by contrast, this mundane political definition had to be opposed. Nixon could be criticized and Watergate legitimated as a real crisis only if the issues were defined as being above politics and involving fundamental moral concerns. These issues, moreover, had to be linked to forces near the center of political society.

The first issue was whether the hearings were to be televised at all. To allow something to assume the form of a ritualized event is to give participants in a drama the right to forcibly intervene in the culture of the society; it is to give to an event, and to those who are defining its meaning, a special, privileged access to the collective conscience. In simple societies, ritual processes are ascribed: they occur at preordained periods and in preordained ways. In more complex societies, ritual processes are achieved, often, against great odds. Indeed, in a modern society the assumption of ritual status often poses a danger and a threat to vested interests and groups. We know, in fact, that strenuous efforts were made

by the White House to prevent the Senate hearings from being televised, to urge that less television time be devoted to them, and even to pressure the networks to cut short their coverage after it had begun. There were also efforts to force the committee to consider the witnesses in a sequence that was far less dramatic than the one eventually followed.

Because these efforts were unsuccessful, the ritual form was achieved.⁵ Through television, tens of millions of Americans participated symbolically and emotionally in the deliberations of the committee. Viewing became morally obligatory for wide segments of the population. Old routines were broken, new ones formed. What these viewers saw was a highly simplified drama—heroes and villains formed in due course. But this drama created a deeply serious symbolic occasion.

If achieving the form of modern ritual is contingent, so is explicating the content, for modern rituals are not nearly so automatically coded as earlier ones. Within the context of the sacred time of the hearings, administration witnesses and senators struggled for moral legitimation, for definitional or ritual superiority and dominance. The end result was in no sense preordained. It depended on successful symbolic work. To describe this symbolic work is to embark on the ethnography, or hermeneutics, of televised ritual.

The Republican and Administration witnesses who were “called to account for themselves” pursued two symbolic strategies during the hearings. First, they tried to prevent public attention from moving from the political/profane to the value/sacred level at all. In this way, they repeatedly tried to rob the event of its phenomenological status as a ritual. They tried to cool out the proceedings by acting relaxed and casual. For example, H. R. Haldeman, the president’s chief of staff who was compared to a Gestapo figure in the popular press, let his hair grow long so he would look less sinister and more like “one of the boys.” These administrative witnesses also tried to rationalize and specify the public’s orientation to their actions by arguing that they had acted with common sense according to pragmatic considerations. They suggested that they had decided to commit their crimes only according to standards of technical rationality. The secret meetings that had launched a wide range of illegal activities, and considered many more, were described not as evil, mysterious conspiracies but as technical discussions about the “costs” of engaging in various disruptive and illegal acts.

Yet the realm of values could not really be avoided. The symbol of Watergate was already quite generalized, and the ritual form of the hearings was already in place. It was within this value realm, indeed, that the most portentous symbolic struggles of the hearings occurred, for what transpired was nothing less than a struggle for the spiritual soul of the American republic. Watergate had been committed and initially justified in the name of cultural and political backlash, values that in certain respects contradicted the universalism, critical rationality, and tolerance on which contemporary democracy must be based. Republican and Administration witnesses evoked this subculture of backlash values. They

urged the audience to return to the polarized climate of the 1960s. They sought to justify their actions by appealing to patriotism, to the need for stability, to the “un-American” and thereby deviant qualities of McGovern and the Left. They also justified it by arguing against cosmopolitanism, which in the minds of backlash traditionalists had undermined respect for tradition and neutralized the universalistic constitutional rules of the game. More specifically, Administration witnesses appealed to loyalty as the ultimate standard that should govern the relationship between subordinates and authorities. An interesting visual theme that summed up both of these appeals was the passive reference by Administration witnesses to family values. Each witness brought his wife and children if he had them. To see them lined up behind him, prim and proper, provided symbolic links to the tradition, authority, and personal loyalty that symbolically bound the groups of backlash culture.

The anti-Nixon senators, for their part, faced an enormous challenge. Outside of their own constituencies they were not well known; arrayed against them were representatives of an administration that six months before had been elected by the largest landslide vote in American history. This gigantic vote had been, moreover, partly justified by the particularistic sentiments of the backlash, the very sentiments that the senators were now out to demonstrate were deviant and isolated from the true American tradition.

What was the symbolic work in which the senators engaged? In the first instance, they denied the validity of particularist sentiments and motives. They bracketed the political realities of everyday life, and particularly the critical realities of life in the only recently completed 1960s. At no time in the hearings did the senators ever refer to the polarized struggles of that day. By making those struggles invisible, they denied any moral context for the witnesses’ actions. This strategy of isolating backlash values was supported by the only positive explanation the senators allowed, namely, that the conspirators were just plain stupid. They poked fun at them as utterly devoid of common sense, implying that no normal person could ever conceive of doing such things.

This strategic denial, or bracketing in the phenomenological sense, was coupled with a ringing and unabashed affirmation of the universalistic myths that are the backbone of the American civic culture. Through their questions, statements, references, gestures, and metaphors, the senators maintained that every American, high or low, rich or poor, acts virtuously in terms of the pure universalism of civil society. Nobody is selfish or inhumane. No American is concerned with money or power at the expense of fair play. No team loyalty is so strong that it violates common good or makes criticism toward authority unnecessary. Truth and justice are the basis of American political society. Every citizen is rational and will act in accordance with justice if he is allowed to know the truth. Law is the perfect embodiment of justice, and office consists of the application of just law to power and force. Because power corrupts, office must enforce impersonal obligations in the name of the people’s justice and reason.

Narrative myths that embodied these themes were often invoked. Sometimes these were timeless fables, sometimes they were stories about the origins of English common law, often they were the narratives about the exemplary behavior of America's most sacred presidents. John Dean, for example, the most compelling anti-Nixon witness, strikingly embodied the American detective myth (Smith, 1970). This figure of authority is derived from the Puritan tradition and in countless different stories is portrayed as ruthlessly pursuing truth and justice without emotion or vanity. Other narratives developed in a more contingent way. For Administration witnesses who confessed, the committee's "priests" granted forgiveness in accord with well-established ritual forms, and their conversions to the cause of righteousness constituted fables for the remainder of the proceedings.

These democratic myths were confirmed by the senators' confrontation with family values. Their families were utterly invisible throughout the hearings. We didn't know if they had families, but they certainly were not presented. Like the committee's chairman, Sam Ervin, who was always armed with the Bible and the Constitution, the senators embodied transcendent justice divorced from personal or emotional concerns. Another confrontation that assumed ritual status was the swearing-in of the witnesses. Raising their right hands, each swore to tell the truth before God and man. While this oath did have a formal legal status, it also served the much more important function of ensuring moral degradation. It reduced the famous and powerful to the status of everyman. It placed them in subordinate positions vis-à-vis the overpowering and universalistic law of the land.

In terms of more direct and explicit conflict, the senators' questions centered on three principle themes, each fundamental to the moral anchoring of a civic democratic society. First, they emphasized the absolute priority of office obligations over personal ones: "This is a nation of laws not men" was a constant refrain. Second, they emphasized the embeddedness of such office obligations in a higher, transcendent authority: "The laws of men" must give way to the "laws of God." Or as Sam Ervin, the committee chairman, put it to Maurice Stans, the ill-fated treasurer of Nixon's Committee to Re-Elect the President (CRETP), "Which is more important, not violating laws or not violating ethics?" Finally, the senators insisted that this transcendental anchoring of interest conflict allowed America to be truly solidaristic—in Hegel's terms, a true "concrete universal." As Senator Wiecker famously put it: "Republicans do not cover up, Republicans do not go ahead and threaten . . . and God knows Republicans don't view their fellow Americans as enemies to be harassed [but as] human being[s] to be loved and won."

In normal times many of these statements would have been greeted with derision, with hoots and cynicism. In fact, many of them were lies in terms of the specific empirical reality of everyday political life and especially in terms of the political reality of the 1960s. Yet they were not laughed at or hooted down.

The reason was because this was not everyday life. This had become a ritualized and liminal event, a period of intense generalization that had powerful claims to truth. It was a sacred time, and the hearing chambers had become a sacred place. The committee was evoking luminescent values, not trying to describe empirical fact. On this mythical level, the statements could be seen and understood as true—as, indeed, embodying the normative aspirations of the American people. They were so seen and understood by significant portions of the population.

The hearings ended without making law or issuing specific judgments of evidence, but they nevertheless had profound effects. They helped to establish and fully legitimate a framework that henceforth gave the Watergate crisis its meaning. They accomplished this by continuing and deepening the cultural process that had begun before the election itself. Actual events and characters in the Watergate episode were organized in terms of the higher antitheses between the pure and the impure elements of America's civil culture. Before the hearings, "Watergate" was already a symbol redolent with the structured antitheses of American mythical life, antitheses that were implicitly linked by the American people to the structure of their civil codes. What the hearings accomplished, first, was to make this cultural linkage explicit and pronounced. The "good guys" of the Watergate process—their actions and motives—were purified in the resacralization process through their identification with the Constitution, norms of fairness, and citizen solidarity. The perpetrators of Watergate, and the themes which they evoked as justification, were polluted by association with symbols of civil evil: sectarianism, self-interest, particularistic loyalty. As this description implies, moreover, the hearings also restructured the linkages between Watergate elements and the nation's political center. Many of the most powerful men surrounding President Nixon were now implacably associated with Watergate evil, and some of Nixon's most outspoken enemies were linked to Watergate good. As the structural and symbolic centers of the civil religion were becoming so increasingly differentiated, the American public found the presidential party and the elements of civic sacredness more and more difficult to bring together (see table 6.2).

While this reading of the events is based on ethnography and interpretation, the process of deepening pollution is also revealed by poll data. Between the 1972 election and the very end of the crisis in 1974, there was only one large increase in the percentage of Americans who considered Watergate "serious." This occurred during the first two months of the Watergate hearings, April through early July 1973. Before the hearings, only 31 percent of Americans considered Watergate a "serious" issue. By early July, 50 percent did, and this figure remained constant until the end of the crisis.

Although a fundamental kind of ritual experience had clearly occurred, any contemporary application of cultural theory acknowledges that such modern rituals are never complete. In the first place, the symbols evoked by ritual process must be carefully differentiated. Despite the frequent references to presi-

Table 6.2 Symbolic classification system as of August 1973

<i>The Watergate "Structure"</i>	
<i>Evil</i>	<i>Good</i>
Watergate Hotel	White House
Burglars	FBI
Dirty Tricksters	Justice Department
Money raisers	
Employees of CRETP and Republican party	
Former U.S. attorney John Mitchell and secretary of Treasury	Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox
President's closest aides	Senators Ervin, Weicker, Baker
	Federal "Watchdog" Bureaucracy President Nixon
<i>American Civil Culture</i>	
<i>Evil</i>	<i>Good</i>
Communism/fascism	Democracy
Shadowy enemies	White House—Americanism
Crime	Law
Corruption	Honesty
Personalism	Responsibility
Bad presidents (e.g., Harding/Grant)	Great presidents (e.g., Lincoln/Washington)
Great scandals (e.g., Watergate)	Heroic reformers (e.g., Sam Ervin)

dential involvement, and despite the president's shadow throughout the hearings, poll data reveal that most Americans did not emerge from the ritual experience convinced of President Nixon's involvement. In the second place, the ritual effects of the hearings were unevenly felt. The Senate hearings were most powerful in their effect on certain centrist and left-wing groups: (1) among McGovern voters whose outrage at Nixon was splendidly confirmed; (2) among moderate Democrats who even if they had voted for Nixon were now outraged at him, particularly after many had crossed party lines to vote for him; (3) among moderate or liberal Republicans and independents who, while disagreeing with many of Nixon's positions, had voted for him anyway. The latter two groups were particularly important to the entire process of Watergate. They were prototypically crosspressured, and it was the crosspressured groups who, along with radical McGovern supporters, became most deeply involved in the hearings. Why? Perhaps they needed the hearings to sort out confused feelings, to clarify crucial issues, to resolve their uncomfortable ambivalence. Certainly such a relative stake can be found in the poll data. In the period mid-April 1973 to late June 1973—the period of the hearings' beginnings and their most dramatic revelations—the growth among Republicans who thought Watergate "serious" was 20 percent and among independents 18 percent; for Democrats, however, the percentage growth was only 15 percent.⁶

The year-long crisis that followed the hearings, from August 1973 to August 1974, was punctuated by episodes of moral convulsion and public anger, by renewed ritualization, by the further shifting of symbolic classification to include the structural center—the Nixon presidency—and by the further expansion of the solidarity base of this symbolism to include most of the significant segments of American society. In the wake of the Senate hearings, the Special Prosecutor's Office was created. It was staffed, though not chaired, almost entirely by formerly alienated members of the left-wing opposition to Nixon, who with their assumption of office made publicly accepted professions of their commitments to impartial justice, a process that further demonstrated the powerful generalizing and solidarizing phenomenon underway. The first special prosecutor was Archibald Cox, whose Puritan and Harvard background made him the ideal embodiment of the civil religion. Nixon fired Cox in October 1973 because Cox had asked the courts to challenge the president's decision to withhold information from the Special Prosecutor's Office. In response there was a massive outpouring of spontaneous public anger, which newspaper reporters immediately dubbed the "Saturday Night Massacre."

Americans seemed to view Cox's firing as a profanation of the attachments they had built up during the Senate hearings, commitments to newly revived sacred tenets and against certain diabolical values and tabooed actors. Because Americans had identified their positive values and hopes with Cox, his firing made them fear pollution of their ideals and themselves. This anxiety caused public outrage, an explosion of public opinion during which three million

protest letters were sent to the White House over a single weekend. These letters were labeled a “flash flood,” a metaphor that played on the precrisis signification of the word “Watergate.” The metaphor suggested that the scandal’s polluted water had finally broken the river gates and flooded surrounding communities. The term “Saturday Night Massacre” similarly intertwined deeper rhetorical themes. In the 1920s a famous mob killing in gangland Chicago had been called the “St. Valentine’s Day Massacre.” “Black Friday” was the day in 1929 when the American stock market fell, shattering the hopes and trust of millions of Americans. Cox’s firing, then, produced the same kind of symbolic condensation as dream symbolism, but on a mass scale. The anxiety of the citizenry was deepened, moreover, by the fact that pollution had now spread directly to the very figure who was supposed to hold American civil religion together, the president himself. By firing Cox, President Nixon came into direct contact with the molten lava of sacred impurity. The pollution that “Watergate” carried had now spread to the very center of American social structure. While support for Nixon’s impeachment had gone up only a few points during the Senate hearings, after the “Saturday Night Massacre” it increased by fully 10 points. From this flash flood came the first congressional motions for impeachment and the instauration of the impeachment process in the House of Representatives.

Another major expansion of pollution occurred when the transcripts of White House conversations secretly taped during the Watergate period were released in April and May 1974. The tapes contained numerous examples of presidential deceit, and they were also laced with presidential expletives and ethnic slurs. Once again, there was tremendous public indignation at Nixon’s behavior. By his words and recorded actions he had polluted the very tenets that the entire Watergate process had revived: the sacredness of truth and the image of America as an inclusive, tolerant community. The symbolic and structural centers of American society were further separated, with Nixon (the representative of the structural center) increasingly pushed into the polluted, evil side of the Watergate dichotomies. This transcript convulsion helped define the symbolic center as a distinct area, and it demonstrated that this center was neither liberal nor conservative. Indeed, most of the indignation over Nixon’s foul language was informed by conservative beliefs about proper behavior and civil decorum, beliefs that had been flagrantly violated by Nixon’s enemies, the Left, during the polarized period that preceded the Watergate crisis.

In June and July of the year following, legal proceedings began against Nixon in the House of Representatives. These impeachment hearings were conducted by the House Judiciary Committee, and they marked the most solemn and formalized ritual of the entire Watergate episode. This proved to be the closing ceremony, a rite of expulsion in which the body politic rid itself of the last and most menacing source of sacred impurity. By the time of these hearings the symbolization of Watergate was already highly developed; in fact, Watergate

had become not only a symbol with significant referents but also a powerful metaphor whose self-evident meaning itself served to define unfolding events. The meaning structure associated with “Watergate,” moreover, now unequivocally placed a vast part of White House and “center” personnel on the side of civil pollution and evil. The only question that remained was whether President Nixon himself would finally be placed alongside them as well. The House hearings recapitulated the themes that had appeared in the Senate hearings one year before. The most pervasive background debate was over the meaning of “high crimes and misdemeanors,” the constitutional phrase that set forth the standard for impeachment. Nixon’s supporters argued for a narrow interpretation that held that an officer had to have committed an actual civil crime. Nixon’s opponents argued for a broad interpretation that would include issues of political morality, irresponsibility, and deceit. Clearly, this was a debate over the level of system crisis: were merely normative, legal issues involved, or did this crisis reach all the way to the most general value underpinnings of the entire system? Given the highly ritualized format of the hearings, and the tremendous symbolization that had preceded the committee’s deliberations, it hardly seems possible that the committee could have adopted anything other than the broad interpretation of “high crimes and misdemeanors.”

This generalized definition set the tone for the hearings’ single most distinctive quality: the ever-recurring emphasis on the members’ fairness and the objectivity of its procedures. Journalists frequently remarked on how congressmen rose to the sense of occasion, presenting themselves not as political representatives of particular interests but as embodiments of sacred civil documents and democratic mores. This transcendence of wide partisan division was echoed by the cooperation among the Judiciary Committee’s staff, which, in fact, had actually set the tone for the committee’s formal, televised deliberations. Key members of the staff had, in the 1960s, been critics of establishment activities like the Vietnam War and supporters of antiestablishment movements like civil rights. Yet this partisan background never publicly surfaced during the vast journalistic coverage of the committee’s work; even right-wing conservatives never made an issue of it. Why not? Because this committee, like its Senate counterpart one year before, existed in a liminal, detached place. They, too, operated within sacred time, their deliberations continuous not with the immediate partisan past but with the great constitutive moments of the American republic. They were framed the great patriots who had signed the Declaration of Independence, created the Constitution, and resolved the crisis of the Union that had started the Civil War.

This aura of liminal transcendence moved many of the most conservative members of the committee, southerners whose constituents had voted for Nixon by landslide proportions, to act out of conscience rather than political expediency. The southern bloc, indeed, formed the key to the majority coalition that emerged to support three articles of impeachment. Revealingly, this same coali-

tion purposefully eschewed a fourth article, earlier proposed by liberal Democrats, that condemned Nixon's secret bombing of Cambodia. Though this earlier article did refer to a real violation of law, it was an issue that was interpreted by most Americans in specifically political terms, terms about which they still widely *disagreed*. The final three impeachment articles, by contrast, referred only to fully generalized issues. At stake was the code that regulated political authority, the question of whether impersonal obligations of office can and should control personal interest and behavior. It was Nixon's violation of the obligations of his office that made the House vote his impeachment.

After Nixon resigned from office, the relief of American society was palpable. For an extended period the political community had been in a liminal state, a condition of heightened anxiety and moral immersion that scarcely allowed time for the mundane issues of political life. When Vice-President Ford ascended to the presidency, there were a series of symbolic transformations that indicated ritualistic reaggregation. President Ford, in his first words after taking office, announced that "our long national nightmare is over." Newspaper headlines proclaimed that the sun had finally broken through the clouds, that a new day was being born. Americans effused about the strength and unity of the country. Ford himself was transformed, through these reaggregating rites, from a rather bumbling partisan leader into a national healer, the incarnation of a "good guy" who embodied the highest standards of ethical and political behavior.

Before continuing with my account of the symbolic process after this reaggregation, I would like to return, once again, to the fact that modern rituals are never complete. Even after the ritual ceremony that consensually voted articles of impeachment and the ritual renewal with President Ford, poll data reveal that a significant segment of American society remained unconvinced. Between 18 and 20 percent of Americans did not find President Nixon guilty, either of a legal crime or of moral turpitude. These Americans, in other words, did not participate in the generalization of opinion that drove Nixon from office. They interpreted the Watergate process, rather, as stimulated by political vengeance by Nixon's enemies. The demographics of this loyalist group are not particularly revealing. They were of mixed education and from every class and occupation. One of the few significant structural correlations was their tendency to be from the South. What did, apparently, really distinguish this group was their political values. They held a rigid and narrow idea of political loyalty, identifying the belief in God, for example, with commitment to Americanism. They also held a deeply personalized view of political authority, tending much more than other Americans to express their allegiance to Nixon as a man and to his family as well. Finally, and not surprisingly, this group had reacted much more negatively than other Americans to the left-wing social movements of the 1960s. The fact that they were committed to a polarized and exclusivist vision of political solidarity reinforced their reluctance to generalize from specifically political issues

to general moral concerns. Such generalization would have involved not only criticism of Nixon but the restoration of a wider, more inclusive political community. In voting for Nixon they had supported a candidate who promised to embody their backlash sentiments and who had appeared, during his first years in office, inclined to carry out their wishes for a narrow and primordial political community.

The period of social reaggregation after Watergate's liminal period—the closure of the immediate ritual episode—raises, once again, the problem of the dichotomizing nature of Western social theory, for it involves the relationship between such categories as charisma/routine, sacred/profane, generalization/institutionalization. (See “The Dilemma of Uniqueness,” chapter 2.) On the one hand, it is clear that with Ford's ascension a much more routine atmosphere prevailed. Institutional actors and the public in general seemed to return to the profane level of goal and interest conflict. Political dissensus once again prevailed. Conflicts over the inflationary economy captured the news for the first time in months, and this issue, along with America's dependence on foreign oil, loomed large in the congressional elections of autumn 1974.

According to the theories of routinization and specification, or institutionalization, the end of ritualization ushers in a new, postsymbolic phase, in which there is the institutionalization or crystallization of ritual spirit in a concrete form. The most elaborated theory of this transition is found in the works of Smelser (1959, 1963) and Parsons (Parsons & Bales, 1955: 35–132). Here, post-crisis structures are described as evolving because they are better adapted to deal with the source of initial disequilibrium. Generalization is ended, then, because of the efficiency with which newly created structures deal with concrete role behavior. Now, to a certain extent, such new and more adaptive institution-building did occur in the course of the Watergate process. New structures emerged that allowed the political system to be more differentiated, or insulated, from interest conflict and allowed universalism to be more strongly served. Conflict-of-interest rules were developed and applied to presidential appointments; congressional approval of some of the president's key staff appointments, like director of the Office of Management and Budget, was instituted; a standing special prosecutor's office was created, the attorney general being required to decide within thirty days of any congressional report on impropriety whether a prosecutor should actually be called; finally, federal financing of presidential election campaigns was passed into law. There were, in addition, a range of more informally sanctioned institutional innovations: the post of chief of staff became less powerful; the doctrine of executive privilege was used much more sparingly; Congress was consulted on important matters.

Durkheim and Weber would tend to support this dichotomous picture of crisis resolution. Weber, of course, saw most political interaction not as cultural but as instrumental. When charismatic episodes did occur, they would be deflated by an inevitable process of routinization triggered by the demands for

control exerted by the leader's self-interested staff after his "death (Weber, 1968: 246–55)⁷." Durkheim's understanding is more complex. On the one hand, Durkheim saw the nonritual world as thoroughly profane, as nonvaluational, as political or economic, as conflictual, and even in a certain sense as nonsocial (Alexander, 1982: 292–306). At the same time, however, Durkheim clearly overlaid this sharp distinction with a more continuous theory, for he insisted that the effervescence from rituals continued to infuse postritual life for some time after the immediate period of ritual interaction.

Though the crisis model of generalization-specification has been taken from functionalist analysis, the notion of generalization as ritual has been drawn from Durkheim. The analysis of social crisis presented here, therefore, has given much more autonomy to symbolic process than would a purely functionalist one. Generalization and ritualization are not engaged, in my view, purely for psychological or social-structural reasons—either because of anxiety or the inefficiency of social structures—but also because of the violation of ardently adhered-to moral beliefs. Symbolic processes occur as much to work out issues on this level as to provide more efficient structures for addressing specific, "real" disequilibrating problems. It is for this reason that ritualization is succeeded not by merely structural change but also by continued cultural effervescence. The recharged antinomies of the cultural order, and the emotional intensity that underlies them continue to create moral conflict and, often, to support significantly different cultural orientations.

As compared, for example, to the aftershocks of the Dreyfus Affair, the effervescence of Watergate must be understood in terms of *relative* cultural integration. "Watergate" came to be viewed—and this is extraordinarily significant in comparative terms—not as an issue of the Left or the Right but rather as a national issue about which most parties agreed (see Schudson, 1992). There were, it was universally agreed, certain "lessons of Watergate" from which the nation had to learn. Americans talked incessantly in the period between 1974 and 1976 about the imperatives of what was referred to as "post-Watergate morality." They experienced this as an imperious social force that laid waste to institutions and reputations. "Post-Watergate morality" was the name given to the effervescence from the ritual event. It named the revived values of critical rationality, antiauthoritarianism, and civil solidarity, and it named the polluted values of conformity, personalistic deference, and factional strife. For several years after the end of liminality, Americans applied these highly charged moral imperatives to group and interest conflict and to bureaucratic life, demanding radical universalism and heightened solidarity at every turn.

For the adult population, therefore—the case seems to have been somewhat different for children—the effect of Watergate was not increased cynicism or political withdrawal. Quite the opposite. Ritual effervescence increased faith in the political "system" even while the distrust it produced continued to undermine public confidence in particular institutional actors and authorities. Insti-

tutional distrust is different from the delegitimation of general systems per se (Lipset & Schneider, 1983). If there is trust in the norms and values that are conceived of as regulating political life, there may actually be more contention over the wielding of power and force (see Barber, 1983). In this sense, political democracy and political efficiency may be opposed, for the first lends itself to conflict while the second depends on order and control.

In the immediate post-Watergate period, a heightened sensitivity to the general meaning of office and democratic responsibility did indeed lead to heightened conflict and to a series of challenges to authoritative control. Watergate became more than ever before a highly charged metaphor. It was no longer simply a referent for naming events that objectively occurred but a moral standard that helped subjectively to create them. Members of the polity, inspired by its symbolic power, sought out sinful behavior and tried to punish it. The result was a series of scandals: “Koreagate” and “Billygate” on the American scene, for example, and “Winegate” abroad. Indeed, the symbolic power of the metaphor has proved remarkably durable up to today. It set the narrative framework within which President Clinton’s actions during “Monicagate” were judged.

The giant explosion of Watergate into the American collective conscience in 1973 and 1974 produced aftershocks of populist antiauthoritarianism and critical rationality.

1. Almost immediately after the reaggregation ceremonies, there unfolded in close succession a series of unprecedented congressional investigations. Nelson Rockefeller, Ford’s vice-presidential nominee, was subjected to a long and heated televised inquiry into the possible misuses of his personal wealth. Enormous televised investigations were also launched by the Congress into the secret, often antidemocratic working of the CIA and the FBI, institutions whose patriotic authority had previously been unquestioned. This outpouring of these “little Watergates,” as they were called, extended well into the Carter administration of 1976–80. Carter’s chief assistant, Bert Lance, was forced out of office after highly publicized hearings that badly impugned his financial and political integrity. Each of these investigations created a scandal in its own right; each followed, often down to the smallest detail and word, the symbolic form established by Watergate.

2. Whole new reform movements were generated from the Watergate spirit. There The Society for Investigative Reporting emerged, a new organization that responded to the spurt of morally inspired, critical journalism by those journalists who had internalized the Watergate experience and sought to externalize its model. Federal crime investigators—lawyers and policemen—formed white-collar crime units throughout the United States. For the first time in American history significant prosecutorial resources were shifted away from the conventionally defined, often lower-class criminals to high-status office-holders in the public and private domains. Inspired by the Watergate model, it became the established, a priori conviction of many city, state, and federal prosecutors that

office-holders might well commit crimes against the public. By ferreting them out and prosecuting them, they tried to maintain the moral alertness of all authorities to the responsibility of office as such.

3. In the months subsequent to reaggregation, authority was critically examined at every institutional level of American society, even the most mundane. The Boy Scouts, for example, rewrote their constitution to emphasize not just loyalty and obedience but critical questioning. The judges of the Black Miss America beauty pageant were accused of personalism and bias. Professional groups examined and rewrote their codes of ethics. Student-body officers of high schools and universities were called to task after little scandals were created. City councillors and mayors were “exposed” in every city, great and small. Through most of these controversies, specific issues of policy and interest were not significantly considered. It was the codes of office themselves that were at stake.

These mundane institutional events, in other words, were actually motivated by the heightened symbolic polarities of post-Watergate culture. This reverberation is further demonstrated by the continuation of other, less specifically Watergate-related themes. There were continuous assertions, for example, that America was morally unified. Groups that had been previously excluded or persecuted, most particularly those associated with the Communist Party, were publicly cleansed. I have already mentioned that those institutions most responsible for political witch hunts, particularly the FBI, were reprimanded for their un-Americanism. Books, articles, movies, and television shows appeared about the immorality and tragedies associated with “McCarthyism,” painting persecuted fellow-travelers and communists in a sympathetic and familiar light. The antiwar movement assumed, through the same retrospective refiguring process, a respectable, even heroic light. No doubt inspired by this rebirth of community, fugitive leaders of New Left underground organizations began to give themselves up, trusting the state but particularly the American opinion-making process to give them a fair hearing. It was within the context of this same spirit of re-integration that the first elected president after Watergate, Jimmy Carter, issued a full and complete pardon to those who had illegally but peacefully resisted the Vietnam war.

Through it all the vividness of Watergate’s impure symbols remained strikingly intact. Trials of the Watergate conspirators, former cabinet officers, and high-ranking aides generated large headlines and great preoccupation. Their published confessions and *mea culpa*s were objects of intensely moral, even spiritual dispute. Richard Nixon, the very personification of evil, was viewed by alarmed Americans as a continuing source of dangerous pollution. Still a source of symbolic power, his name and his person became representations of evil (chapter 4), forms of what Durkheim called the “liquid impure.” Americans tried to protect themselves from this polluting Nixonian lava by building walls. They sought to keep Nixon out of “good society” and isolated in San Clemente,

his former presidential estate. When Nixon tried to buy an expensive apartment in New York, the building's tenants voted to bar the sale. When he traveled around the country, crowds followed to boo him and politicians shunned him. When he reappeared on television, viewers sent indignant, angry letters. Indeed, Nixon could escape this calumny only by traveling to foreign countries, though even some foreign leaders refused to associate with him in public. For Americans, there was an extraordinary fear of being touched by Nixon or his image. Such contact was believed to lead to immediate ruin. When President Ford pardoned Nixon several months after assuming office, Ford's honeymoon with the public abruptly ended. Tarnished by this (however brief) association with Nixon, he alienated such a large body of the electorate that it cost him the subsequent presidential election.

The spirit of Watergate did eventually subside. Much of the structure and process that had stimulated the crisis reappeared, although it did so in a significantly altered form. Nixon had ridden a backlash against leftist modernity into office, and after his departure this conservative movement continued. It now, however, assumed a much more antiauthoritarian form. Social movements like the tax revolt and the antiabortion movement combined the post-Watergate spirit of critique and challenge with particularistic and often reactionary political themes. Only six years after Watergate ended, Ronald Reagan was swept into office on many of the old backlash issues, yet on the Reagan presidency too there continued to be a noticeable post-Watergate effect. For if Reagan was even more conservative than Nixon, he was committed to carrying out his reaction against the Left in a democratic and consensual way. This commitment may not have been a personal one, but it was enforced unequivocally by the public mood and by the continuing vitality of the potential countercenters to presidential power.

Not only did the rightward movement of American politics reappear, but the authoritarianism of the "imperial presidency" regained much of its earlier force. As the distance from Watergate increased, concrete economic and political problems assumed greater importance. Solving foreign crises, inflation, energy problems—the American people focused more and more on attaining these elusive "goals." These generated demands for specificity and efficacy, not for generalized morality. Given the structure of the American political system, these demands for efficacy necessitated a stronger executive. The concern about the morality of authority became increasingly blunted by demands for strong and effective authority. Jimmy Carter began his presidency by promising the American people "I will never lie to you." He ended it by making a strong presidency his principal campaign slogan. By the time Reagan became president, he could openly disdain some conflict-of-interest laws, reemploy some of the less-polluted Watergate figures, and move to wrap executive authority once again in a cloak of secrecy and charisma. These later developments do not mean that Watergate had no effect. The codes regulating political authority in America had

been forcibly renewed, codes that, even when they are latent, continue to affect concrete political activity. Politics in America had simply, and finally, returned to the “normal” level of interests and roles.

The Iran-Contra affair of 1986–87 demonstrated both sides of the Watergate denouement—social normalization and political conservatism on the one hand and continuing normative vitality and broad democratic conventions on the other. Like Nixon and other presidents who were confronted with institutional blockages, Reagan subverted office obligations to attain his conservative foreign policy goals by illegal means. When the Democrats took back control of the Congress in November 1986, and the conservative mood of American public opinion began to change, the polarized social environment that had legitimated Reagan’s actions weakened. It was in this changed context that “Contragate” crystallized and institutional barriers against the President’s Central American forays put in place. In the midst of the furor in the public media and contentious congressional hearings, Reagan’s actions were transformed for many Americans from a questionable political strategy into an abuse, even usurpation, of power. Because this attack on earthly power was intertwined, once again, with a renewal of ideal codes, this usurpation was described as a dangerous, polluting deviation from the democratic discourse of civil society (chapter 6). These events never reached the crisis proportions of Watergate; few events in a nation’s history ever do. Yet without the “memory of justice” provided by that earlier crisis, it is doubtful that the Administration’s actions would so easily and quickly have been transformed into an affair. Ten years later, another American President learned this lesson again, in a much harder way.

Scandals are not born, they are made.