

FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

MID-TERM ASSESSMENT

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BY

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According to Robert Woodward in his book SHADOW, what were the impacts and implications of the Watergate travesty during the Nixon Presidency – for future presidencies? Do you agree with Woodward on any or all points made in his work?

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Watergate had a profound impact on the American presidency. The scandal created an aura of distrust in the American presidency by the public and media alike. It resulted in the media closely scrutinizing every presidential action with indiscretion. No longer would a president receive the benefit of the doubt for an action. With the media increasing its coverage of presidential shortcomings and flaws, the pedestal of the imperial presidency fell to where a credibility gap developed between what presidents said and what the public believed really happened. This loss of trust in the Chief Executive is what resulted in the passage of the Freedom of Information Act during Gerald Ford's term in office. Unintentionally, the passage of this act added further distrust in the president because Congress had to override this act after Ford vetoed it.

Nixon's improprieties in the Watergate cover-up left many questions in people's minds. As author Bob Woodward asks, "Could another president be a criminal? Did presidents talk and plot in private like Nixon? Would another president have to resign?" President Ford, after succeeding to the presidency, tried to comfort the American public by telling them, "Our long national nightmare is over." However, for the American presidency, troubles were just beginning.

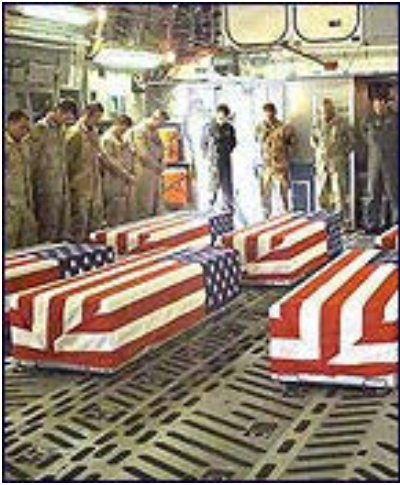
Soon after being sworn in, Ford pardoned Nixon, believing that what he was doing was an innocent act. However, many of his aides tried to warn him that the public would be wary about the quick pardon. Ford was told that the public would believe that

there was a deal struck between he and Nixon before Nixon stepped down. But Ford would not listen to his advisors and subsequently pardoned Nixon, believing that Nixon was suffering from an emotional breakdown. An investigation of the pardon resulted in Ford trying to hide facts so it would not appear that the pardon was preordained. Ford's attempted cover-up of part of the truth resulted in further suspicion in the president. Reagan in the 1980s lost a great deal of support after his involvement with the Contras in Nicaragua was discovered. In the 1990s, Clinton's cover-up of his involvement with Monica Lewinsky made the public increasingly distrustful of the president and his actions.

In the world of politics today, the legacy that Nixon has left on the presidency continues to have a big impact. In 2003, George W. Bush decided to take America to war against Iraqi dictator and President Saddam Hussein. Bush convinced the majority of Americans that Hussein posed an imminent threat to America and that he had weapons of mass destruction that he planned on using against America within a short period of time. However, reports have since concluded that Hussein did not have any weapons of mass destruction. This invasion of Iraq has led to the world turning against America because Bush acted unilaterally in his quest to remove the Iraqi dictator, when other governments had not sufficiently concluded that Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. Bush also made the American public believe that the Iraqis would welcome America with open arms as liberators, but that also was not the case either.



More and more Americans have come to realize that the invasion of Iraq was the “wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time,” as Senator John Kerry has expressed in criticism that the Iraq War was a diversion in the war on terror. With pictures from the media showing symbols of the atrocities in Iraq, it has left more Americans disgusted and distrustful of the President Bush and the presidency at large.



Bob Woodward explains in the book *Shadow* that when mistakes are made, the president should release the facts as fast as possible to avoid suspicion. This is a very crucial part of a democracy. But he is right in his belief that presidents after Nixon still have not learned that trait. When presidents do wrong, they continue to compound the problem through cover-ups and further lies. As in the case of Iraq, when weapons of mass destruction were not found, the United States turned the invasion into a humanitarian mission to cover up its mistake. This scenario was just one more in a generation filled with lies that presidents since Nixon have tried to use to cover up their mistakes.

Was William Bennett's rage about the DEATH OF OUTRAGE solely about sex and denial in the White House OR something else about the Clinton Administration and fundamentalist frustration on many fronts?

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In his book *Death of Outrage: Bill Clinton and the Assault on American Ideals*, William J. Bennett rage about the Death of Outrage does not lie solely on the basis of sex and denial in the White House. He argues that American society takes its moral lead from the President. Bennett believes that dismissing Clinton's sexual misconduct will ultimately lead to the demise of morals in American society, which are necessary to have a prosperous country. He believes that Clinton's actions should not be excused just because there was a prosperous economy. However, Bennett needs to understood that while the president should be held to a higher standard than the rest of the public in order to set a role model, parents in the household are ultimately responsible for setting moral examples for their children. He is shifting the blame for the lack of moral values in America onto the president when moral values should begin at home. After all, presidents are not the religious leaders that Bennett seems to think they are.

Bennett seems to want a president who commits no sins. Seemingly a devout religious man, Bennett forgets that to make mistakes is to be human. He is trying to take Clinton's humanity away from him, along with his private life. Bennett does not believe that presidents are entitled to a private life because they are elected public officials. It should be added that because Clinton is a public figure, the public had the right in 1996 to vote him out and Congress held the right at any time to remove him from office for improprieties. Bennett claims that Bill Clinton has assaulted American ideals, but it

seems that Mr. Bennett is the one who has attacked them. He believes that the ideal of being “innocent until proven guilty” is not good enough and that it is just an excuse for Clinton’s action (p. 121). This type of attack on our constitutional government is part of the right-wing conspiracy, which Bennett claims does not exist, that tried to remove Clinton from office as payback for Nixon’s forced resignation.

Throughout the book, Bennett continually talks about the intentions of the framers of the Constitution, as if he was an expert, when the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case explained that the Constitution is an evolving document. This means that the Supreme Court is supposed to interpret the Constitution. But I’m sure that Bennett would write that claim off by talking about the Court as “liberal and activist,” as if that was a bad thing. This claim was derived from the fact that Bennett has written off all the good things that Clinton did for the country, allowing the economy and thus the American people to prosper. But still Bennett believes morality is more important than prosperity. It just makes it ironic that Bennett was seeking prosperity through gambling, an unmoral virtue, when he has been preaching otherwise. But, I guess his gambling problem is Clinton’s fault too because Clinton was not a better role model.

Does the USA have the best electoral process and leadership money can buy OR are other factors and forces at play that counterbalance the influence of huge funding and the power of moneyed people?

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Campaign fundraising has created a big problem in America. It has resulted in the sale of the democratic process. For someone to get elected, whether it is a congressional or presidential candidate, large sums of money are necessary. This money is needed to hire staff to perform jobs, such as conduct public opinion polling. It is also necessary to have a large amount of money to be able to reply to negative advertisements on television. Regardless of how much Americans say they do not like negative advertisements, they still have a major effect. As a result, candidates will continue to use them. These advertisements are quite expensive, especially as an election draws closer. These high costs force candidates to take money from special interest groups in order to have the funds necessary to respond to their opponent(s) who have taken money from special interest groups as well.

Having to take money from interest groups leaves a candidate indebted to support the interest group, especially if they want to get money from them for their re-election campaign. As a result, candidates are not adequately representing the constituents that elect them, but are more concerned with keeping their fundraisers' happy. This process of taking money from interest groups to run a campaign turns some politicians who are truly interested in positive change and forces their hand to take special interest money because their opponent is taking special interest money. If a candidate does not take this money, it becomes a disadvantage to them because they will lack adequate organization and staff to run their election and spread their message.

There have been several attempts by Congress to make the presidential election more democratic. However, as long as interest groups have a role, that just will not happen. Congress has granted matching funds to candidates to decrease their need for money from special interest groups. However, this matching fund is only available to candidates who agree to spending limits for their campaign. If a candidate does not want to be limited in how much he can spend, he can refuse public funds, as George W. Bush did in 2000. The ability to refuse public funds has diminished the effectiveness of the legislation that was intended to limit the need for interest groups. Therefore, the first step that needs to be done to create a truly democratic electoral system is to pass a constitutional amendment that requires candidates to stay within certain spending limits, accept public funding, and not allow interest groups to donate to a presidential campaign in any manner. Individuals should not be able to donate either. Both candidates should have equal funding so money does not determine the election and so that the better candidate truly wins.





What were the most insightful and inspirational outcomes from the Presidential candidate debates? And from the Vice Presidential debates? What purpose do televised debates serve in a democracy at the current time in American history?