No Person Above The Law

Because of their location and responsibilities, the Courts of the District of Columbia Circuit have a special role when those entrusted with faithful execution of federal laws are accused of breaking those laws.

The Watergate Burglary

At 2:00 a.m. on June 17, 1972, five men were arrested as they attempted to burglarize the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate complex. The case was heard before District Court Judge John Sirica. The defendants, who were accused of felony burglary and wiretapping, were G. Gordon Liddy and James McCord. The case was continued for an appeal after trial.

The Nixon Tapes

In 1973, the U.S. Senate Watergate Committee revealed that President Nixon had an extensive tape-recording system throughout the White House. After the President refused to turn over the tapes, Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox obtained a subpoena requiring the President to turn over everything except the tapes, including executive privilege. Judge Sirica rejected the claim of privilege, and the President appealed the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Court of Appeals affirmed, and the President did not seek Supreme Court review. Instead, he fired Cox. The new Special Prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, continued Cox’s pursuit of the Nixon tapes.

The Resignation of a President

A new Special Prosecutor was named in April 1974, and continued the investigation. In August 1974, President Nixon resigned from office, and was later pardoned by his successor, President Gerald Ford.