

'The Martha Mitchell Effect' is a Compelling Oscar Runner on the Watergate Scandal

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Los Angeles



The Martha Mitchell Effect is a Netflix original documentary centered around Watergate whistleblower Martha Mitchell, a cabinet wife who was gaslit by the Nixon administration in an attempt to keep her silent.

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The Martha Mitchell Effect is nominated for Best Documentary Short Film at the 95th Academy Awards.

The short documentary, The Martha Mitchell Effect, now running for the Oscars, is a compelling damnation of the Watergate scandal that saw US President Richard Nixon's resignation. In one of the first scenes, he tells interviewer David Frost that "I am convinced if it hadn't been for Martha, there'd have been no Watergate." He was bang on. The Watergate scandal, as we all know, led to the disgrace of the world's most powerful man.

The interview is filled with Nixon's obsession over Martha Mitchell, wife of Attorney General John Mitchell, The second most powerful man in America. Nixon ridicules her, a habit that he had cultivated over the years. It came to a point when generations who came after the scandal broke into animated discussions at the mere mention of Martha.

The short documentary, directed by Anne Alvergue and Debra McClutchy, quotes them as saying, "The more digging we did, the more we realised, oh, there is a reason why we didn't hear about her. She was essentially a victim of a gaslighting campaign from the Nixon administration to silence her and stop shedding the spotlight on the Watergate scandal at the time. We thought, this is truly a hidden figure in history, and there's never been a documentary about her. We were at the time on the heels of Trump and two impeachments and the MeToo movement, and we thought it was a perfect time to exhume her story."

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Martha married John, a hotshot New York lawyer, much before he and the President merged their law firms in 1966. When Nixon took office in 1968, he appointed John as his Attorney-General. The husband and wife shifted to Washington.

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Martha was an epitome of elegance, and played her part "a cabinet wife" with dignity and charm. She was outgoing, and unlike other women of her time, she was brutally frank and never shied away from speaking her mind. "Women who were part of the Washington social scene were hostesses," author and Washington Post columnist Sally Quinn avers in the documentary. "Women went into the other room and had coffee while the men talked about the important things. But Martha Mitchell wasn't playing the Washington game. She wasn't going to be the wife that just sits in the background not saying anything."

"Nixon quips in the documentary: She's always a pain in the ass," an excerpt used in the film. "It scares me. I just can't stand it." She eventually told the Press that she was a captive, but the White House countered it with a story that she was mentally sick and an alcoholic. Something which happens even in this day and age.

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Be that as it may, Martha was in a large way responsible for alerting the media about Watergate. Despite denials by the highest office, history proved that she was right.



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About the Author

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