

Watergate's real hero was Frank Wills

written by Stephen Millies
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Frank Wills

Ex-CIA agent James McCord didn't think he would be stopped from installing wiretaps at Democratic National Committee headquarters by an \$80-per-week

security guard. Neither did fellow Watergate burglar Bernard Barker, a former member of CIA-backed Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista's secret police.

On June 17, 1972, Frank Wills, a Black worker, was making his rounds on the midnight shift at the Watergate complex when he sounded the alarm about the break-in.

"I put my life on the line. I went out of my way," Wills told a Boston Globe reporter on the 25th anniversary of Watergate. "If it wasn't for me, Woodward and Bernstein would not have known anything about Watergate."

Journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein got \$5 million from the University of Texas in 2003 for their Watergate notebooks and files. Frank Wills didn't even get a pension.

He died penniless in an Augusta, Georgia, hospital of a brain tumor on Sept. 27, 2000.

Wills couldn't afford to bury his mother. He lived in a house without lights because he wasn't able to pay the electric bill.

Wills found it hard to get a job after Watergate. One Washington area university told Wills they were afraid to hire him for fear their federal funds might be cut.

Frank Wills moved back to his home state of Georgia after his mother suffered a stroke. They lived together on her \$450 monthly Social Security check.

Richard Nixon's face was put on a postage stamp. He and his fellow war criminal Henry Kissinger made millions of dollars off their memoirs.

President Nixon's partner in crime, Vice President Spiro Agnew, got three years' probation for evading taxes on bribes filched from highway contractors. Frank Wills

was sentenced to a year in jail in 1983 for allegedly trying to shoplift a \$12 pair of sneakers.

A victim of racial profiling, Wills wasn't arrested while leaving the store. He was nabbed just for putting the shoes in his bag. He'd wanted to surprise a friend with his gift at the check-out counter.

Never forgot Stephen Johns

Another hero was the Black security guard Stephen Johns. He was killed on June 10, 2009, by the neo-Nazi James von Brunn.

Johns and other security guards were protecting visitors going to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Dozens of visitors, including elderly Jewish people and schoolchildren, could have been slaughtered by Van Brunn.

The attack occurred 10 days after the murder of Dr. George Tiller, an abortion provider, in Kansas. His assassination was incited by Fox News host and sexual predator Bill O'Reilly, who called him "Tiller the killer."

Von Brunn had taken a sawed-off shotgun to the headquarters of the Federal Reserve Bank on Dec. 7, 1981, and attempted to kidnap board members. He spent six-and-a-half years in jail for that act, which could have turned out to be as bloody as the attack on the Holocaust Museum.

Compare this with what happened to Leandro Andrade under California's "three strikes" law. He was sentenced to two consecutive prison terms of 25 years to life. His alleged crime was shoplifting nine videotapes.

Von Brunn was a notorious figure. How was he able to stage his attack on the Holocaust Museum, just a mile from FBI headquarters?

One of Von Brunn's friends was the retired U.S. Navy Rear Admiral John G. Crommelin. He praised Von Brunn's armed attack on the Fed as deserving "the gratitude and assistance of every White Christian citizen."

Crommelin, who died in 1996, was a member of the violent National States Rights Party and was its vice-presidential candidate in 1960. The leader of the NSRP, J.B. Stoner, called Hitler "too moderate." Stoner was found guilty of the June 1958 bombing of Bethel Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.

Another five NSRP members were convicted in the bombing in October of that same year of an Atlanta synagogue with 50 sticks of dynamite. ("The Temple Bombing" by Melissa Fay Greene)

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover didn't do anything when another NSRP member, Joseph Milteer, told FBI informant Willie Somersett on Nov. 9, 1963, that President John F. Kennedy was going to be shot in Dallas.

Security guards need union protection

Frank Wills and Stephen Johns show the plight of hundreds of thousands of low-paid security guards today, many of whom are Black. Increased employment in this field has gone hand in hand with the growing army of janitors. Growth of both jobs is a result of the office building construction boom.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) has been organizing security guards across the country. Frank Wills' miserable \$2-an-hour wage was worth \$14.02 in May, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' [inflation calculator](#).

In May, 2021, the median wage of the 1,057,100 security guards in the U.S. was \$15.13 per hour. One out of four earned a [median hourly wage](#) of just \$13.89.

In 2004, SEIU Local 1877 led a drive to organize 10,000 guards in Los Angeles.

Union supporters staged a sit-in at the Wells Fargo Tower in September 2004.

Several months later, with the support of Dr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the union marched through downtown Los Angeles.

This important struggle came out of the union's "Justice for Janitors" campaign. At one of the early actions by this campaign, on June 15, 1990, Los Angeles cops viciously attacked Service Employees members demanding a union contract at the Century City office complex. At least 148 workers were injured, including a pregnant woman who miscarried.

Despite this police riot, janitors at Century City have a union today. These overwhelming Latinx janitors, 98% of whom are immigrants, were in solidarity with efforts by security guards, many of whom are Black, to be unionized too.

