

Bill Kaplan: Trump and Nixon

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Late-night TV host Jimmy Kimmel derided Trump's shocking firing of FBI Director James Comey: "When we said Trump should act more presidential, we probably should have specified - we didn't mean Nixon". Trump's dismissal of Comey was reminiscent of Nixon's "Saturday Night Massacre" - the firing of Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox (Nixon was unlawfully defying a court order to release the White House tapes). An aroused citizenry and Congress made certain the Watergate investigation continued. And, a unanimous Supreme Court forced the White House to surrender the tapes as impeachment proceedings began. The tapes showed Nixon orchestrating a cover-up; he resigned in disgrace.

Trump and Nixon have similarities: "Their thin skin. Their skyscraping paranoia. Their cavernous memory for slights ..." and hatred of the press (New York Times). There's more. Nixon said: "I am not a crook" in defending his actions. Compare to Trump's letter firing Comey: "While I greatly appreciate you (Comey) informing me, on three separate occasions, that I am not under investigation, I nevertheless concur with the judgment of the Department of Justice that you are not able to effectively lead the Bureau." Self-serving lies.

Trump, Vice President Pence, White House press staff and others "initially misrepresented the reason for the firing" ... (Washington Post). It shifted from supposed concern over Comey's public discussions of Hillary Clinton's emails, to character attacks against Comey to Trump sort of fessing up to NBC: "When I (Trump) decided to just do it (fire Comey), I said to myself, I said you know, this Russia thing with Trump and Russia is a made-up story." False.

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When Comey testified before Congress in March he said: The FBI is “investigating the nature of any links between individuals associated with the Trump campaign and the Russian government and whether there was any coordination between the campaign and Russia’s efforts” (to interfere in the 2016 presidential election). Trump became enraged and unhinged. The White House is opposed to a serious investigation. Trump confidante Kellyanne Conway told CNN: “Especially on your network, you always want to talk about Russia, Russia and Russia”.

Then Trump tweeted another bombshell: “James Comey better hope that there are no ‘tapes’ of our conversations before he starts leaking to the press!” A Nixonian threat. It got the attention of Bob Woodward, Washington Post reporter who covered Watergate. But when asked about Trump’s taping, Speaker Paul Ryan said: “I’ve never given any thought to that.” A morally shrinking Ryan. While Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson falsely said that Trump had tweeted: “Comey had better not have recorded him” (Trump). Johnson, a second-rate politician.

Other Republicans have more sense. Wisconsin GOP Representative Mike Gallagher tweeted: “The American people deserve the truth, not politically-driven talking points”. And, Arizona GOP Senator John McCain said: “This scandal is going to go on. I’ve seen it before. This is a centipede. I guarantee you there will be more shoes to drop” Trumpgate moving faster than Watergate. Subpoenas have been issued by a grand jury and the Senate Intelligence Committee.

— Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C. for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.