



# Lessons from history

## Listening to several fascinating podcasts

recently has taken me back to 1973, the year I graduated from high school and the year the Watergate scandal fractured the Nixon presidency. By the time I left for Madrid that summer to spend the next year studying abroad, Nixon's secret tapes were making headline news, and people were starting to understand the scope of the attempted cover-up of the Watergate burglary, but I didn't pay much attention. In Spain, I worried about making it through another day trying to learn the language and maneuver through a huge city. I don't remember Watergate ever coming up. If it did, I didn't understand the conversation.

I missed the resignation of Vice President Spiro Agnew in October of 1973, remembering vaguely that he was forced out for tax evasion, so I was stunned to learn of his old-fashioned thuggish crime of soliciting and accepting envelopes stuffed with cash as described in Rachel Maddow's podcast, "Bag Man." The podcast includes newscasts from the era, with voices of

network anchors betraying their own incredulity about the daily news coming out of Washington.

By the time I returned to California in the summer of 1974, the country was obsessed with Watergate, and the highlights of congressional hearings were must-watch television every night. The days leading up to impeachment felt like a real-life, real-time soap opera, especially when the "smoking gun" tape revealed Nixon was deeply involved with the cover-up and had obstructed justice with a vengeance. Even my Republican father was disgusted with Nixon and his misdeeds and his audacity and stupidity in audiotaping his crimes.

Slate's podcast, "Slow Burn," documents Nixon's final months with precision, using snippets from the tapes, interspersed with interviews of congressional investigators and newscasts bringing those July days into high relief for baby boomers like me who were transitioning to young adulthood in 1974. By the time Nixon resigned in August, it

felt like we'd collectively been through a national calamity—and survived it.

It's been 45 years now but the lessons of the forced resignations of a corrupt vice-president and a crooked president are very relevant to the national conversation about our current president and his band of merry sycophants.

When I read Yoni Appelbaum's case for Trump's impeachment in the Atlantic last week and watched his video editorial, the podcasts were fresh in my mind, and I found his argument that Congress should open a formal impeachment inquiry convincing. He notes we've been through presidential impeachment three times—Nixon in 1974, Clinton in 1998, and Andrew Johnson way back in 1868. He argues the Johnson impeachment offers the most historical resonance to today's situation, as Johnson was "autocratic and egotistic to the point of mental disease."

Appelbaum is clearly right when he says Trump has failed to keep his oath of office and "demanded that public officials

put their loyalty to him ahead of their duty to the public," "evinced little respect for the rule of law," and has "repeatedly trampled upon" the Constitution. He reminds us that impeachment is sometimes "a process, not an outcome."

Before you dismiss impeachment as impossible or too divisive for the country, recall the tumult of 1973-74 and the cleansing breath the nation took post-Nixon/Agnew. Then read Applebaum's essay. He concludes:

"Today, the United States once more confronts a president who seems to care for only some of the people he represents, who promises his supporters that he can roll back the tide of diversity, who challenges the rule of law, and who regards constitutional rights and liberties as disposable. Congress must again decide whether the greater risk lies in executing the Constitution as it was written, or in deferring to voters to do what it cannot muster the courage to do itself." □

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