

Possible Impeachment of President Donald J. Trump

Lesson #3: The FBI & the Mueller Report

What started the FBI's investigation?

After the hacking of the DNC (Democratic National Committee) email servers, in the summer of 2016, the FBI launched an investigation into Russian attempts to influence the 2016 presidential election, and the possibility that individuals associated with the Trump campaign might be involved. That investigation focused specifically on Carter Page, Paul Manafort, Michael Flynn, George Papadopoulos, Jeff Sessions, Donald Trump, Jr., Roger Stone, Julian Assange, Michael Cohen, Jared Kushner – all with ties to the Trump campaign.

President Trump had appointed Michael Flynn as his National Security Advisor, but Flynn was forced to resign less than a month into his term, after the press revealed that he had lied about contacts he had with Russian officials. A day after the resignation, President Trump called the FBI Director, James Comey, to the White House for a meeting. At that meeting, he asked Comey for his loyalty, and to drop the FBI investigation into Flynn. In May 2017, after his repeated attempts to get Comey to shut down the investigation—or to at least publicly clear him regarding the investigation—failed, Trump fired Comey. This created a new controversy, as FBI Directors are supposed to serve independent 10-year terms unless there are specific circumstances to justify their firing, and the firing of Comey suggested an attempt to obstruct justice.

What was the Mueller investigation?

*In response to the controversy surrounding the firing of the FBI Director, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein (who was responsible for overseeing the investigation, since Attorney General Jeff Sessions had **recused** himself) appointed a former FBI Director, Robert Mueller, to be Special Counsel and take over the FBI's investigation, running it as an independent effort. Mueller's team conducted its investigation from May 2017 until March 2019, when the Mueller Report was issued. In the meantime, Attorney General Jeff Sessions resigned on November 7, 2018, the day after the midterm elections, under intense pressure from President Trump because of his decision to **recuse** himself from the investigation, and his refusal to shut it down entirely. Trump appointed William Barr to succeed Sessions, so when the Mueller Report was issued, it was submitted to him. Rather than releasing the report to Congress or the public, Barr released a four-page "summary" of its findings. When the full report was finally released, it became clear that he had misrepresented those findings. **Look up & discuss the meaning of "recused."***

What happened after the Mueller report was released?

Following the release of the Mueller Report, criminal trials were carried out against multiple Trump associates. And both houses of Congress continued the investigations they started even before the firing of James Comey.

Besides the concern that foreign governments were trying to manipulate our election, there is a grave concern that those governments might use their influence with individuals inside our

government to bend U.S. foreign policy or even simply public opinion (which might also influence our elections and foreign policies) in their favor. This is why, since 1938, people hired by foreign governments to promote their political interests from within the U.S. are required to register as foreign agents. One focus of the Mueller Report, and the ongoing congressional investigations, is the extent to which people operating as foreign agents have been involved in all of this.

Some resources for more in-depth knowledge:

A) About the Trump - Russia Connections:

- If you'd like to see a timeline of the major developments in the investigation, you will find a good one here:

<https://www.factcheck.org/2017/06/timeline-russia-investigation/>

- The following individuals (and one bank) were all associated with the Trump 2016 campaign, and were under investigation for their ties to Russia or other foreign governments:

Carter Page	Paul Manafort	George Papadopoulos
Michael Flynn	Jeff Sessions	Donald Trump, Jr.
Roger Stone	Julian Assange	Michael Cohen
Jared Kushner	Deutsche Bank	

For the person/entity you are assigned, do some research to complete the chart.

Name	
ties to foreign entities, if any (why might the FBI think they would be influenced by a foreign interest?) - and any activities they engaged in that are under scrutiny	
role in the Trump campaign, if any	
role in the Trump administration, if any	
key developments regarding this individual's role or status, including court trials	
something noteworthy you'd like to share, or a question you have	

B) About the Comey Firing:

- The short version: <https://apnews.com/4ff1ecb621884a728b25e62661257ef0>
- An interview with James Comey about his firing (note: this was after William Barr's summary of the Mueller Report, but before the actual report was released): <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/03/27/james-comey-views-his-firing-as-potentially-obstruction-of-justice.html>
- How Comey found out he was fired: <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/comey-opens-shocking-found-fired-trump/story?id=54486383>
- A longer timeline about Comey, Hillary's emails, the Russia investigation, and his firing: <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/comey-opens-shocking-found-fired-trump/story?id=54486383>

Write down any FIVE things you think are noteworthy from these sources, including one quote from James Comey.

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C) About the Mueller Report:

- An overview. Yes, it's wikipedia, but it is accurate. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Counsel_investigation_\(2017%E2%80%932019\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Counsel_investigation_(2017%E2%80%932019))
- Attorney General Barr's Summary of the Mueller Report: <https://www.lawfareblog.com/document-attorney-general-barr-letter-mueller-report>
- Robert Mueller's letter criticizing Barr's summary: <https://www.vox.com/2019/5/1/18525296/mueller-report-letter-william-barr-testimony>
- The *Washington Post's* analysis of the full (**redacted**) Mueller Report: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/04/18>
- *Frontline* video: "The Mueller Investigation" (54 minutes; 3/25/19 - after Barr's summary; before the full report was released) <https://www.pbs.org/video/mueller-investigation-mw2cf1/>

Write down any FIVE things you think are noteworthy from these sources, including *one quote* from Robert Mueller. Also, write the definition of “redacted.”

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For those who would like to see it, here is a link to the full (redacted) *Mueller Report*. (It is also available in bookstores and libraries.)

<https://www.justice.gov/storage/report.pdf>

And here, if you scroll to the bottom of the page, is an illustrated and annotated version:

[https://www.washingtonpost.com > graphics > politics > read-the-mueller-rep...](https://www.washingtonpost.com>graphics>politics>read-the-mueller-rep...)

D) About Attorney General William Barr:

- Very matter-of-fact background on Bill Barr:

[https://ballotpedia.org/William Barr](https://ballotpedia.org/William_Barr)

- What Barr’s past performance as Attorney General under Bush, Sr. might have to do with Trump’s decision to nominate him:

<https://www.npr.org/2019/01/14/684553791/william-barr-supported-pardons-in-an-earlier-d-c-witch-hunt-iran-contra>

What was the vote breakdown for William Barr’s confirmation as President Trump’s Attorney General?

U.S. Senate vote	Yes	No
Republicans		
Democrats		
Independents		
Total Vote (simple majority needed to confirm)		

Was this essentially a party-line vote, or a bipartisan vote?

E) Why didn't the Mueller Report result in impeachment?

When Robert Mueller submitted his report, he submitted it to the Attorney General, whose job it was to accept the report and decide how to follow up. The Attorney General decided that there was nothing to prosecute. Congress demanded a copy, but did not receive one until April 18. Eventually, Robert Mueller was called in to testify before the House Intelligence and Judiciary Committees, in July 2019.

- Read about his testimony here:

<https://time.com/5629528/robert-mueller-testimony-live-updates/>

If you don't read the full article, be sure to scroll down to these sections and briefly note their main points:

"Trump wanted staff to falsify records, Mueller says"

"Why Mueller's report didn't directly address impeachment"

"Special counsel report does not exonerate Trump, Mueller says."

- Here is a July 2019 article that does an excellent job of explaining why the hearings held in the House of Representatives following the release of the Mueller Report did not result in the beginning of the impeachment process:

<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/7/28/8933709/mueller-testimony-polls-democrats-republicans-americans-impeachment-russia-trump-impeachment>

Take a few notes on the public's reaction to the Mueller Report and the congressional hearings:

Who is Nancy Pelosi, and what does the article say about her position regarding impeachment? (Keep in mind that this article is from July, before the whistleblower complaint that launched formal impeachment hearings.)

What is one question or reflection you have based on this article?

What questions do you have at this point?

Please write any additional questions you currently have, and submit them to your teacher so that they may be considered for inclusion in an upcoming lesson.