

Possible Impeachment of President Donald J. Trump

Lesson #2: How did it all start?

What is the controversy surrounding the 2016 election of President Trump, and does it have anything to do with the impeachment hearings?

Donald Trump was considered an unlikely candidate for President, and it was widely assumed that he would not win the election. But he became the Republican nominee, and though he did not actually win the popular vote, his electoral college victory secured the presidency for him. Across the country, people debated how that had happened. (Not how he could win the electoral vote but not the popular vote - others had also done that - but rather how he won the electoral vote, given that he was thought to be such a long shot.)

Even before election day, there had been investigations by the various U.S. intelligence agencies into activities by operatives of the Russian government and associates of Russian president Vladimir Putin to influence the outcome of our election, and into the possibility that people affiliated with the Trump campaign were cooperating with the Russians. There were indications that Putin wanted Donald Trump to be elected, and he specifically did not want Hillary Clinton. The intelligence community was already following various leads about activities that Russian operatives were engaged in to affect our election.

Among the agencies investigating this was the FBI, headed by James Comey. Shortly after President Trump's inauguration, he summoned Comey to the White House and asked for his loyalty, and asked him to get the FBI to drop its investigation into Trump's National Security Advisor, Mike Flynn. Comey wouldn't agree, and not long after that Trump fired him. There is much more to this story, but the bottom line is that Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller (a former FBI Director himself) was hired by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein to take over the FBI's investigation, and now to also investigate the motive behind Comey's firing. Mueller's report was released in March of 2019, and revealed numerous incidents of criminal activity by various individuals affiliated with the Trump campaign. (To date - November 2019 - six former Trump associates have pled to or been found guilty of felony charges stemming from the Mueller investigation.) Mueller did not seek to determine whether or not President Trump had colluded with Russian operatives, indicating that that had not been his charge.

The Mueller Report has served as a guide for ongoing investigations by Congress. There have been calls for Trump's impeachment by some segments of the public, and by a handful of Democratic members of Congress, but House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has held it off, saying that there needs to be more public support for such an action to be taken.

Meanwhile, in late September an anonymous intelligence officer filed a whistleblower complaint, alleging that in a phone conversation with President Zelensky of Ukraine, President Trump threatened to withhold much-needed military aid that had already been authorized by Congress unless Zelensky made a public announcement that he was investigating Joe Biden and his son for corruption relating to the younger Biden's job with a Ukrainian energy company while the senior Biden was Vice President of the United States, in order to damage Joe Biden's chances in the 2020 election. It was this phone call that triggered the official opening of impeachment hearings. While there are suggestions that this phone call is just one piece of a

larger pattern of President Trump's using American foreign policy to promote his own personal interests, and that it supports the accusation that Trump and his campaign colluded with the Russians in 2016, the impeachment hearings are narrowly focused on events surrounding the Ukrainian phone call. Meanwhile, President Trump and congressional Republicans allege that the whole impeachment inquiry is just a partisan witch hunt (looking for wrongdoing that doesn't exist), in order to undo the results of the 2016 election and to damage them in the upcoming 2020 elections.

Look up the following terms and write their definitions:

1. collusion:
2. whistleblower:

READ each of the articles/pages linked below, and answer the questions:

A) About U.S. Intelligence Agencies:

- <https://www.intelligencecareers.gov/icmembers.html>
- <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-17-intelligence-agencies-20170112-story.html>
- <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/intelligence-director-says-agencies-agree-russian-meddling-n785481>

3. How many intelligence agencies are there throughout the U.S. government? ____
4. AFTER you spend a few minutes reading about them, explain why there are so many of them.
5. What did these agencies ultimately find about the question of whether or not there was Russian interference in the 2016 election, and what the aim of that interference was? How much disagreement was there between the various intelligence agencies on this issue?

B) About Opposition Research & the Steele Dossier:

- <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/an-introduction-to-the-dark-arts-of-opposition-research/>
- <https://www.npr.org/2019/06/13/732340501/fact-check-foreign-interference-and-opposition-research-are-not-the-same>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Steele
- <https://www.lawfareblog.com/steele-dossier-retrospective>

6. What is opposition research?

7. Who is Christopher Steele?

8. What is the *Steele Dossier*?

What questions do you have at this point?

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

Resources for those who want to explore further:

This is the declassified version of the full intelligence community briefing report on the Russian interference in the 2016 election. If you want to know the various ways they interfered, here it is!

https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf

And here is a link to a two-part Frontline documentary about the same topic.

- Part 1 is about Putin's rise to power, his rule, and his overall motivations:
<https://www.pbs.org/video/putins-revenge-mzz1lp/>

- Part 2 is about Putin's role in the 2016 presidential election:

If you only have time to look at one resource, this one is highly recommended. Also, it is worthwhile for teachers to show in class, if you have time.

<https://www.pbs.org/video/putins-revenge-part-two-wpsiq2/>

This is an in-depth (and fascinating, but also political) article about Christopher Steele and his dossier.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/03/12/christopher-steele-the-man-behind-the-trump-dossier>