



P E R S P E C T I V E S

by **Rinaldo S. Brutoco**

Rinaldo S. Brutoco is the Founding President and CEO of the Santa Barbara-based World Business Academy and co-founder of JUST Capital. He's a serial entrepreneur, executive, author, radio host, and futurist who's published on the role of business in relation to pressing moral, environmental, and social concerns for over 35 years.



Going Way Beyond 1973

Washington warned us

1972 was a very bad year for everyone in the USA. Richard Nixon defeated the unshakably honest son of a preacher, Senator George McGovern, who ran, and lost, on a platform of peace, determined to end the Vietnam war. Nixon promised to stay the course. Upon winning, Nixon nevertheless signed the Paris Peace Accords just days after his inauguration, marking the beginning of the end of the war.

The bigger irony is that while McGovern lost the election, Nixon lost his place in history and will forever be remembered as the only US President ever forced to resign due to crimes committed while in office. What a turn of events! What would the US public have done if Nixon had refused to resign? In fact, we have at least a partial answer: the most conservative Republican of his time, Senator Barry Goldwater, took several of his Republican associates to the White House and summarily declared that Nixon would be convicted by Impeachment in the Senate if he didn't resign. Nixon was left no choice.

In 1973 the Congress did its constitutional duty when the Senate created the "Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities," for the sole purpose of looking into the Watergate scandal that stemmed from the Nixon administration's persistent attempts to cover up its involvement in the June 17, 1972 break-in of the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate Office Building.

Following the "Saturday Night Massacre" (where Nixon fired the top Justice Department officials because they refused to cover up his crimes), the House of Representatives began the Impeachment process on October 30, 1973. Those hearings uncovered Nixon's secret White House taping system and a unanimous US Supreme Court ordered him to turn the tapes over to the House. These tapes gave the House (and the Senate who, with Goldwater watching) the "smoking gun" that clearly established Nixon's guilt. At that point, virtually every Republican officeholder put their party affiliation aside to do their sworn constitutional duty. They pushed Nixon from office, sparing the nation an ugly, sordid, protracted Impeachment process. The Republicans of 1972 put patriotism above party.

Unfortunately, the situation we face today is strikingly different. Today, the Republican party officially, and most of its members, are continually enabling former President Trump. On two separate occasions, they have failed to convict him in either of his Impeachment Hearings (another first for Trump: the only President to be Impeached twice.) And now, we're in the midst of the January 6th Hearings to determine what Trump did, how he did it, and over what time he did it. The "it" is: to plan and attempt to execute a coup against the United States of America.

Trump committed crimes far worse than Nixon. Horrifically, despite this, Republicans of 2022 are willing to lose our precious 250-year-old Democratic Republic to an authoritarian, autocratic, narcissistic sociopath who would be king. What on earth have we become? Have we not learned anything from history?

On the 50th anniversary of Watergate, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein brought out a new edition of their epochal book “All the President’s Men.” With a stunning new Foreword, they compare the two most corrupt presidents the country has ever known—Nixon and Trump. “Unlike Nixon,” they write, “Trump accomplished his insurrection largely in public.”

Both Nixon and Trump, they conclude, shared a conspiratorial mindset. Both were motivated by hate, believed the idea that there were enemies lurking everywhere, that they had the right to break the law because they were “the President”, and were driven “to get whatever they wanted at any cost.” The difference between now and then is not found in the two men, even though Trump was clearly far worse.

Woodward and Bernstein observe that the day after Nixon resigned, he got on the helicopter and left town. In contrast, Trump began planning the insurrection as early as June 22, 2020, by subverting the election process with the tweet “MILIONS OF MAIL-IN BALLOTS WILL BE PRINTED BY FOREIGN COUNTRIES, AND OTHERS. IT WILL BE THE SCANDAL OF OUR TIMES!” Ultimately, Trump invited and directed an angry mob to the steps of the Capitol and thrilled when they took up his rant against his own Vice President, Mike Pence, and sought to hang him. All because Pence refused to violate the Constitution and throw the election to Trump on January 6th after Trump had clearly lost the Electoral College (and the popular vote) by a wide margin.

No, the differences between these two criminal presidents does not explain our current moment. The real miscreants in this story are the Republican members of Congress and the Senate who continue to the present-day enabling Trump by refusing to call him out for the “Big Lie”—the fiction that he “won” the election.

As Jonathan Weisman observed in the New York Times on June 17, 2022, “The Republican response to the [January 6th] Hearings...reflects how central the lie of a stolen election has become to the party’s identity...Republicans in Congress have neither broken with Trump nor expended much energy trying to rebut the investigation’s findings and Republican candidates have embraced the fictional conspiracy in their 2022 campaigns...50 years to the day after henchmen of Richard M. Nixon broke into Democratic headquarters in the Watergate Hotel, the hearing sparked by the two scandals are highlighted by just how dramatically the Republican Party has changed.”

The caption that appeared over a companion story in the Times pointed out, “During Watergate Truth Was Never Up for Debate.”

WE are headed into perilous times. The Democratic Republic we have fought and died for is in incredible jeopardy. Knowing the threat that we face is half the battle. Rising to defend against that threat is the responsibility of every person living in this country, citizen or not.

No less a spokesman of our democracy than George Washington precisely warned us to be hyper-vigilant when someone like Trump arises. In his Farewell Address, Washington warned that, “Cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government.”

Trump, he had your number. It is up to us all to call it in.

Published in the 06/23/2022 edition of the Montecito Journal