

1-23-1998

Trends. From Pumpkin Papers to Pumpkin Capers: Washington Scandals

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Recommended Citation

Editor (1998) "Trends. From Pumpkin Papers to Pumpkin Capers: Washington Scandals," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 3 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol4/iss3/5>

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International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Trends. From Pumpkin Papers to Pumpkin Capers: Washington Scandals

Author: Editor

Volume: 4

Issue: 3

Date: 1998-01-23

Keywords: United States, Washington, Scandals, President Clinton

In the late 1940s and into the 1950s--an era of both Communist hysteria and significant Communist threat within the United States (US)--pumpkin connoted scandal, as in the infamous pumpkin papers. Many US citizens of that era may retain an image of Citizen Nixon posing--as if examining incriminating information discovered in a hollowed-out pumpkin that helped sear into the public consciousness an image of a significant public official, Alger Hiss, as a "fellow traveler," Communist agent, and perjurer. The pumpkin and its contents significantly aided the careers of Mr. Nixon, Senator Joseph McCarthy, and Federal Bureau of Investigation Director J. Edgar Hoover among others.

Nowadays within the US, Communists--real and alleged--are not as easily available or attractive to kick around by mass media representatives and others. But scandal lovers need not fear. A pumpkin comes to the rescue again. This time it's a pumpkin-like distinguishing mark allegedly on the penis of the President Clinton, the scandal is sex-related, one accuser, Paula Jones, probably not a seeker of high office, but of an apology and \$2 million as recompense for allegedly being propositioned for oral sex and suffering negative job consequences for rejecting this proposition. Another accuser, Linda Tripp, alleges a sexual relationship between Monica Lewinsky and President Clinton and a Presidential cover-up of the relationship possibly including suborning perjury and obstruction of justice. In this latter case, technical intelligence means apparently have captured allegedly incriminating conversations, but not the tell-tale, pumpkin-like mark. Ms. Tripp's motives may include revenge for not being believed about her past sexual allegations about President Clinton and his predecessor, George Bush.

The pumpkin linkage is not the only similarity between the Hiss and Clinton scandals. Most informed observers believe that there are significant data that Hiss was guilty of being a spy for the Soviets. Most informed observers believe that there are significant data that Clinton has been guilty of past sexual improprieties and of lying about them through commission and omission. Both Hiss and Clinton may be characterized as men of enormous political talent, accomplishments, and other positive features who each possessed a significant character flaw--as did the protagonists of the tragedies of Sophocles and Shakespeare. And both Hiss and Clinton have been successfully impugned by detractors who have agendas other than the needs of the US.

A big difference between the Hiss and Clinton scandals is that the former can much more easily be conceived as involving misbehavior that was part of a dire threat to the US. The latter misbehavior--real and alleged--cannot reasonably be so characterized. Instead it is a dire threat to the fantasies and wishes that many people would like to believe and cherish about their leaders--to the conscious and, more importantly, unconscious idealization that serves as a defense mechanism in handling one's own less appealing characteristics. In essence, Clinton's past and alleged current misbehavior not only hurts him politically, but hurts others psychologically as well.

The Hiss and Clinton scandals typify the structure, function, and process of scandal, much as the writing of Crane Brinton typify that of revolution. Meanwhile, for the truth about scandal, one merely needs to follow the pumpkin trail. Where will it lead next? (See Brinton, C. (1965). *The anatomy of revolution*. NY: Vintage; Clines, F.X., & Gerth, J. (January 22, 1998). *Subpoenas sent as Clinton denies reports of an affair*

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