Clinton Essay, Research Paper

Winters

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English 112

20 July 2000

?The Clinton Impeachment Trial?

President William Jefferson Clinton is the third president in our nation?s history to face the Constitutional threat of impeachment and only the second president to ever be impeached by the United States House of Representatives. The House of Representatives impeached Andrew Johnson in 1868 for violating the Tenure of Office Act of 1867, when he tried to oust the Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton (Short History). Richard M. Nixon resigned from the Presidency before he was charged with criminal conspiracy in the Watergate Scandal (Short History).

Article II, Section 4 of the Constitution sets the grounds for impeachment. The Constitution states, ?The President, Vice President, and all other Civil Officers of the United States, shall be removed from the office on Impeachment for, and conviction of, Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors? (Renstrom 458). The Clinton impeachment trial is unlike the Johnson and Nixon cases because he did not touch off intra-governmental conflicts as did Johnson, nor did he take part in a criminal conspiracy as Nixon did. Some Democrats question if the Clinton Articles of Impeachment were valid according to the Constitution.

William Clinton began his early political career as many politicians do. He was a bright student throughout his years in high school, college, and finally law school. A Rhodes scholar and Yale Law School graduate; Clinton seemed to be on the right road to success. He served as Arkansas? Attorney General, and he also served as Governor of that state for 5 terms. Clinton revived the Democratic Party and led it to two terms of White House control by winning the presidency.

Clinton?s rise to power took a wrong turn when he was accused of sexually harassing a former Arkansas state employee named Paula Jones (L.A. Times). Jones first spoke out against Clinton in 1994, but it was not until January of 1998 that the President would have to answer questions in his defense against Jones. It was also at this time that the independent council, Kenneth Starr, who had been investigating Clinton for the Whitewater Real Estate affair, now claimed to be expanding his investigation. Starr alleged that a 24-year old White House intern named Monica Lewinsky had been asked to lie, in the harassment case involving Jones. In the accusation, it also said she was asked by Vernon Jordan, a close friend of the president, and Mr. Clinton himself (L.A. Times). Starr began to investigate deeper until he had enough evidence against the President. On September 9th, 1998, Kenneth Starr delivered an explicit, 453-paged report to the House of Representatives (Short History)

For a president to be impeached there must first be a formal accusation brought up by the House of Represtatives. Article I, Section 2 or the Constitution states that, ?The House of Representatives shall have the sole Power of Impeachment? (Renstrom 452). By December 12th, 1998, the House Judiciary Committee had approved four impeachment articles that would go to the floor of the House for a vote. The charges were as follows: Perjury before a Grand Jury, Perjury in the Paula Jones case, Obstruction of Justice, and an Abuse of Power (U.S. News 23).

Even though the president?s lawyers had done a reasonable job at defending him in front of the House Judiciary Committee, the articles passed because the majority of committee members were Republicans, Predominant Congressional Democratic leaders like Senate Majority leader, Tom Daschle and House Minority leader Richard Gephardt sought a Congressional censure for President Clinton instead of a full impeachment. However, the Democrats did obtain a censure resolution for Clinton before the vote took place in the House of Representatives (U.S. News 21).

For any of the articles to pass, a majority of the House was necessary. House of Representatives Resolution 611, the impeachment of William Jefferson Clinton for high Crimes and Misdemeanors, took place on December 19th. The 435-member House of Representatives voted for two of the four impeachment articles; Obstruction of Justice, and Perjury before the Grand Jury (U.S. News 22). The perjury charge against Clinton passed 228-206, and the obstruction of justice charge passed 221-212 (Houston Chronicle).

Although the House Republicans had won a victory by having two Articles of Impeachment approved, the Senate would hear the remainder of the case against President Clinton. As stated in Article I, Section 3 of the Constitution, ?The Senate shall have the sole power to try all Impeachments. This section of the Constitution also sets up some guidelines that the Senate must follow. The Senate must act as the jury and ?Be on oath, or affirmation.? Also, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is instructed to preside over the trial. ??No person shall be convicted without the concurrence of two thirds of the members present? pertains to the number it takes to reach a conviction (Renstrom 452).

On January 7th, Republicans discussed how the trial would proceed, which lasted for a week. On January 14th, the 13 prosecutors of the case, called impeachment trial managers, started their opening comments. The trial managers were Republican Representatives that served on the House Judiciary Committee. Committee Chairman, Henry Hyde, was also the head trail manager. Along with Mr. Hyde were Representatives Bob Barr from Georgia, Charles Canandy from Florida, Lindsey Graham from South Carolina, Asa Hutchinson from Arkansas, James Sensenbrenner from Wisconsin, Steve Buyer from Indiana, George Gekas from Pennsylvania, Ed Bryant from Tennessee, Bill McCollum from Florida, Steve Chabot from Ohio, Christopher Cannon from Utah, and James Rogan from California. This all-male, all Republican team argued that removing the President was necessary to protect the rule of law and safeguard the ?covenant of trust? between the President and the Country (Clinton Under Fire).

The lawyers that defended Clinton were Chief White House Counsel Charles Ruff, David Kendall, Cheryl Mills, Nicole Seigelman, and former Senator Dale Bumpers. Chief Justice Rehnquist officiated the trial as instructed by the Constitution. Previously, Rehnquist had written an account of the Andrew Johnson impeachment trail called ?Grand Inquests? (Clinton Under Fire).

The principal conflict between Republicans and Democrats in this trial revolved around witnesses. Originally, the House managers sought for Monica Lewinsky to testify, along with Vernon Jordan, and Sidney Blumenthal. Jordan was brought in because he had supposedly asked Lewinsky to lie under during the Paula Jones case, denying that she had any sexual relations with President Clinton. The trial managers felt that by having Sidney Blumenthal as a witness would help the case against Clinton?s obstruction of justice charge (Clinton Under Fire).

For nearly a month, Republicans and Democrats pitched their strategies for winning. On February 12th, after three days of deliberating, the Senate reached a verdict. President Clinton was acquitted on all charges. It is common belief that the Republicans preformed poorly in this trial. They controlled the Senate by 10 seats and did not get a majority on either charge. The charge of perjury was a 50-50 split vote. The obstruction of justice charge was 45 for conviction, and 55 against conviction (Houston Chronicle).

Whether or not President Clinton acted in an immoral fashion towards Monica Lewinsky did not appear to be as important as the fact that he had misinformed the American people. Was he truly guilty of the impeachment charges brought against him? Clinton emerged from the trial with a reputation for telling lies and now his presidency will remain tarnished until he leaves office. Unfortunately, Bill Clinton underestimated and misused the trust of the American people. As Representative Henry Hyde asked, ? If you cannot believe the President, who can you believe?? (Clinton Under Fire).

For some reason, Clinton maintained a fair approval rating among the people of this nation. His approval rating during the trial was largely due to the fact that the economy had remained better than it had been in years. So what are Americans thinking about politicians? It is to permit the president to be untruthful and act inappropriately, and Congress to spend billions of dollars on a pointless trial? Although the trial and other aspects of Clinton?s private life are unremarkable, the fact that all three branches of our federal government came together at one time for such a purpose is!

658

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