

A Heart's Beat Away is ever so much more distant from the true story and the real meaning of the Agnew resignation.

I finished reading the condensation in the Post this morning. It is a professionally attractive condensation of a probably professionally attractive book that reports little not already reported, nothing of real significance, and manages to avoid the exceptional convenience of Agnew's troubles as relief for Nixon from his own and greater troubles.

Except for the concern over precedent (makes it easier the second time) in impeachment, there is no content on the relationship between having first no and then a hand-picked Vice President for any president facing impeachment.

The inferences that Agnew's troubles and subsequent resignation were helpful to Nixon are included. Any real explanation is not.

Did Agnew's resignation help Nixon avoid and delay any proceedings against him? The question isn't even asked. Ditto for could it have.

Whether or not an attractive one, Agnew was a personality. He had a following of his own, whether or not it was of real influence. This is not compared with the situation of a Gerald Ford, who had no national constituency, no matter how small.

With the entire country from which to select and his selection almost certain of prompt confirmation, why Nixon would pick a man with no redeeming qualities, no personal record of achievement, no demonstrated leadership qualities of any kind and no preparation for filling the void left by the end of the heartbeats is a relevancy not touched upon.

Was it only by accident that Nixon, who helped force Agnew out (in this account, which is not to say no more), replaced him by a nothingness when he, Nixon, was facing ousting? Would anyone in his right mind consider Ford more competent to be President?

Or, did his selection deter the effort to kick Nixon out? No question in the book.

It manages to avoid all but the readable reporting of that which perhaps without any real exception is not new.

This may mean commercial success but it does not mean public service.

Does Beall have personal political ambition? Not suggested. He comes from a political family and until Watergate was mentioned as GOP senatorial candidate against Mathias. His brother is a Senator, as was his father.

Beall succeeds a competent Democrat. Why did he wait to begin his investigation of the hardly secret, actually traditional, Maryland political corruption until after the statute of limitations had run on all Republicans from the previous Republican state administration? Beyond the concern of the authors and the readers.

The fact is that this is precisely what he did.

My recollection is that the graft scandals on Montgomery County rezoning had not exceeded the statutory limitation on prosecution. It was a Republican-dominated council that had come in by some of the dirtier fraud. His jurisdiction but neither investigation nor changes. Only Baltimore County, close to Baltimore, populous and Democratic.

This whole business was a big boost for Nixon. The book does not say so.