

Investigations

The man who showed Donald Trump how to exploit power and instill fear

By [Robert O'Harrow Jr.](#) and [Shawn Boburg](#) June 17, 2016 □



Donald Trump, left, Mayor Ed Koch, center, and Roy Cohn in 1983 at the Trump Tower opening in New York. (Sonia Moskowitz/Getty Images)

Donald Trump was a brash scion of a real estate empire, a young developer anxious to leave his mark on New York. Roy Cohn was a legendary New York fixer, a ruthless lawyer in the hunt for new clients.

They came together by chance one night at Le Club, a hangout for Manhattan's rich and famous. [Trump](#) introduced himself to Cohn, who was sitting at a nearby table, and sought advice: How should he and his father respond to [Justice Department allegations](#) that their company had systematically discriminated against black people seeking housing?

“My view is tell them to go to hell,” Cohn said, “and fight the thing in court.”

It was October 1973 and the start of one of the most influential relationships of Trump's career. Cohn soon represented Trump in legal battles, counseled him about his marriage and introduced Trump to New York power brokers, money men and socialites.

Cohn also showed Trump how to exploit power and instill fear through a simple formula: attack, counterattack and never apologize.

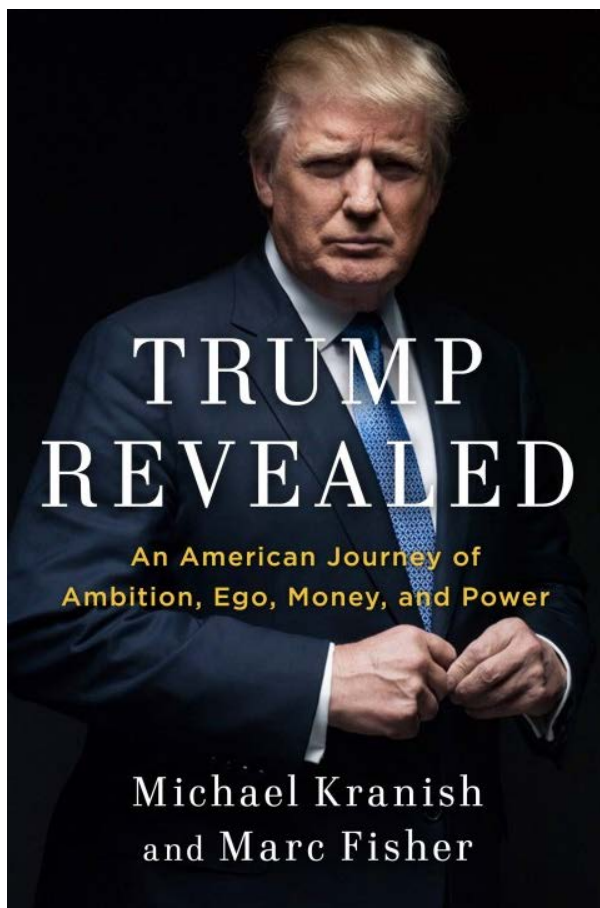
Since he announced his run for the White House a year ago, Trump has used such tactics more aggressively than any other candidate in recent memory, demeaning opponents, insulting minorities and women, and whipping up anger among his supporters.

Cohn gained notoriety in the 1950s as Sen. Joseph McCarthy's chief counsel and the brains behind his hunt for communist infiltrators. By the 1970s, Cohn maintained a powerful network in New York City, using his connections in the courts and City Hall to reward friends and punish those who crossed him.

He routinely pulled strings in government for clients, funneled cash to politicians and cultivated relationships with influential figures, including FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, mafia boss Anthony “Fat Tony” Salerno and a succession of city leaders.

In the 1990s, a tragic character based on Cohn had a central place in Tony Kushner's Pulitzer prize-winning play, "Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes."

Trump prized Cohn's reputation for aggression. According to a New York Times profile a quarter-century ago, when frustrated by an adversary, Trump would pull out a photograph of Cohn and ask, "Would you rather deal with him?" Trump remained friends with him even after the lawyer was disbarred in New York for ethical lapses. Cohn died in 1986.



About "Trump Revealed"

This story is based on reporting for "Trump Revealed," a broad, comprehensive examination of the life of the presumptive Republican nominee for president. The biography, written by Post reporters Michael Kranish and Marc Fisher in a collaboration with more than two dozen Post reporters, researchers and editors, is scheduled to be published by Scribner on Aug. 23.

“Roy had a whole crazy deal going, but Roy was a really smart guy who liked me and did a great job for me on different things,” Trump recently told The Washington Post. “And he was a tough lawyer, and that’s what I wanted. Roy was a very tough guy.”

[\[Inside the government’s racial-bias case against Donald Trump’s company\]](#)

To examine the relationship between Trump and Cohn, The Post reviewed court records, books about the men and newspaper and magazine stories from the era, along with documents about Cohn obtained from the FBI through a Freedom of Information Act request. The Post interviewed Trump and others who knew both men.

When they met, Trump, 27, tall and handsome, was at the start of his career and living off money he was earning in the family business. Cohn, 46, short and off-putting, was near the peak of his power and considered by some to be among the most reviled Americans in the 20th century.

Cohn could be charismatic and witty, and he hosted lavish parties that included politicians, celebrities and journalists. A wall at the Upper East Side townhouse where he lived and worked was filled with signed photographs of luminaries such as Hoover and Richard Nixon.

Alan Dershowitz, a professor emeritus at Harvard Law School and a renowned constitutional scholar, said he was surprised when he finally got to know Cohn. “I expected to hate him, but I did not,” Dershowitz told The Post. “I found him charming.”

There were legions of Cohn detractors. “He was a source of great evil in this society,” Victor A. Kovner, a Democratic activist in New York City and First Amendment lawyer, told The Post. “He was a vicious, Red-baiting source of sweeping wrongdoing.”

In interviews with *The Post*, Trump maintained that Cohn was merely his attorney, stressing that he was only one of many of Cohn's clients in New York. Trump also played down the influence of Cohn on his aggressive tactics and rhetoric, saying: "I don't think I got that from Roy at all. I think I've had a natural instinct for that."

Trump said he goes on the offensive only to defend himself.

"I don't feel I insult people. I don't feel I insult people. I try and get to the facts and I don't feel I insult people," he said. "Now, if I'm insulted I will counterattack, or if something is unfair I will counterattack, but I don't feel like I insult people. I don't want to do that. But if I'm attacked, I will counterattack."

Journalists and contemporaries of both men, including a close political ally of Trump, said there was more to the relationship than Trump now acknowledges. Cohn himself once said he was "not only Donald's lawyer but also one of his close friends." Roger Stone, a political operative who met Trump through Cohn, said their association was grounded in business, but he also described the lawyer as "like a cultural guide to Manhattan" for Trump into the worlds of celebrity and power. "Roy was more than his personal lawyer," Stone told *The Post*. "And, of course, Trump was a trophy client for Roy."

Investigative reporter Wayne Barrett, who spent dozens of hours interviewing Cohn and Trump beginning in the 1970s, once wrote in "[Trump: The Deals and the Downfall](#)" that Cohn began to "assume a role in Donald's life far transcending that of a lawyer. He became Donald's mentor, his constant adviser."

Barrett now says Cohn's stamp on Trump is obvious. "I just look at him and see Roy," Barrett said in an interview. "Both of them are

attack dogs.”



Sen. Joseph McCarthy (R-Wis.), left, is confronted by Sen. Ralph Flanders (R-Vt.), right, during hearings in 1954. Roy Cohn, chief counsel to McCarthy's investigative subcommittee, is at center. (AP)

Cohn and McCarthy

Roy Cohn was born in New York City in 1927, into an affluent Jewish family. His father, Albert C. Cohn, was a longtime member of New York's Democratic machine and a State Supreme Court and appellate division judge. Roy Cohn attended elite prep schools and graduated

from Columbia Law School at age 20.

Through his father's connections, Cohn landed a job with the U.S. Attorney's Office in Manhattan. In the spring of 1949, Cohn was asked to write a memo about a man named Alger Hiss, a State Department official suspected of spying for the Soviet Union. Cohn soon came to believe that the Soviets had many spies inside the U.S. government.

In 1950, Cohn at age 23 was the lead prosecutor in what became known as the Atom Spy Case. A Jewish couple named Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were accused of conspiracy to commit espionage for the Soviet Union. After the two were convicted of passing atomic secrets to the Soviets, the judge left the courtroom and called Cohn from a phone booth on Park Avenue. As Cohn later wrote, the judge wanted "to ask my advice on whether he ought to give the death penalty to Ethel Rosenberg."

"The way I see it is that she's worse than Julius," Cohn told the judge, according to his autobiography. Both Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed in an electric chair.

In 1953, Cohn joined Sen. Joseph McCarthy (R-Wis.) as chief counsel to the Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. McCarthy had exploded into public view three years earlier when he claimed that he had a list of 205 State Department employees who were members of the Communist Party.

McCarthy launched a series of sensational hearings about the communist threat in the United States, calling on scores of professors, Hollywood writers, government employees and others to answer questions about their alleged ties to the party. Blacklists were created and careers ruined.

In early 1954, the permanent subcommittee held the Army-McCarthy hearings, in part to determine whether Cohn sought special treatment for an enlisted friend. McCarthy objected to tough questioning of Cohn and attacked the reputation of a young associate in the firm of the Army's lawyer. That spurred the lawyer to ask the now-famous question that underscored growing doubts about McCarthy's ethics: "Have you no sense of decency, sir?"

Cohn left Washington in 1954 as McCarthy's efforts lost momentum. He professed admiration for McCarthy to the end of his life. "I never worked for a better man or a greater cause," he wrote in his autobiography.

Settling back in New York, Cohn tapped his connections as he began building a private legal practice, documents show. Cohn often operated in the gray areas of the law. In the 1960s and early 1970s, he fought off four federal or state indictments for alleged extortion, bribery, conspiracy, perjury and banking violations. At the same time, he avoided paying state and federal income taxes and engaged in a variety of schemes to take advantage of wealthy clients, court records show.

Cohn's brazenness seemed limitless. In 1969, while facing his third federal indictment, he wrote a confidential letter to Hoover, the FBI director. Cohn included affidavits, legal motions, news articles and other material outlining his defense.

"When I started fighting Communism as a young voice in the wilderness of the Justice Department, I suppose I realized that those who did not like what I was doing would be after me for a long time," Cohn wrote on Sept. 8, 1969, according to documents obtained by The

Post. “You are such a great institution up and down this nation, that I hate to see you diverted or annoyed for even a minute — thus my sense of deep regret.”

Hoover wrote back eight days later: “Your generous comments regarding me are indeed gratifying.”

In October 1973, when Trump and Cohn first met at Le Club, the lawyer was instantly recognizable, with piercing blue eyes, heavy eyelids and a perpetual tan. James D. Zirin, a New York lawyer who later wrote about Cohn, recalled him as “the strangest-looking man I ever met,” with a face “contorted in a perpetual ugly sneer that seemed to project an air of unbridled malevolence.” Trump, not yet a household name, knew about Cohn’s reputation as a legal knife fighter.

At the time, Trump and his father, Fred, were facing Justice Department allegations that they had systematically discriminated against black people at their family-owned or -managed apartment complexes across New York City. Cohn agreed to represent the Trumps — his way. That meant hitting back hard while shaping public opinion. On Dec. 12, 1973, Donald Trump, his father and Cohn called a news conference at the New York Hilton hotel. They said they were suing the government for \$100 million in damages relating to the Justice Department’s “irresponsible and baseless” allegations.

Cohn went further in an affidavit, saying the government was really trying to force “subservience to the Welfare Department,” according to court records.

A federal judge dismissed the countersuit. And two years later, after a string of theatrics and unfounded allegations by Cohn — including the claim that a Jewish prosecutor had used Nazi Gestapo tactics —

Donald and Fred Trump settled the case without admitting guilt.

They signed a consent decree prohibiting them from “discriminating against any person in the terms, conditions, or privileges of sale or rental of a dwelling.”

Following Cohn’s lead, Donald Trump declared victory.

Trump’s counsel

Cohn began advising Trump on major real estate deals and other matters. Trump once said that Cohn represented him in two libel cases against journalists. Although Trump said the legal work cost \$100,000, he said it was worth the money because “I’ve broken one writer,” according to a statement he once gave to Barrett, who was a veteran investigative reporter for the Village Voice. Trump did not name the writer.

Trump told The Post he did not recall making the statement. Though he said he has not read it, he described Barrett’s book as “total fiction.”

Cohn often provided counsel for free, collecting money when he needed it. That included help on Trump’s personal matters, such as his marriage to Ivana Zelnickova in 1977. She was a model in Canada who claimed to be a former member of the Czech national ski team. After they had dated for months, Trump rented a two-bedroom apartment on Fifth Avenue and began making arrangements for their wedding. Cohn urged Trump to create a prenuptial agreement.

Ivana balked when she learned what Cohn included in the document. His proposal called on her to return any gifts from Trump in the event of a divorce. In response to her fury, Cohn added language that

allowed her to keep her own clothing and any gifts. With Trump's consent, he also included a "rainy day" certificate of deposit worth \$100,000. She would be allowed to begin tapping that fund one month after the wedding, according to Barrett's book. During one of the negotiating sessions, held at Cohn's townhouse office, the lawyer wore a bathrobe.

The townhouse, in a tony neighborhood on East 68th Street, was central to Cohn's operations. It was his in every way except on paper. It was held in the name of his law firm, Saxe Bacon & Bolan. He maintained an office and personal quarters and routinely hosted caviar-and-champagne parties there.

Even though he lived a lavish life, Cohn claimed he had little taxable income or assets. Over the years, he routinely vacationed with clients on the Greek island of Mykonos or in the south of France on the yacht of a British investor. He said his extravagant expenses were work-related. That included A-list parties he threw at his home.

Cohn was open about his loathing of the Internal Revenue Service. "The firm pays the expenses I incur in developing and seeing through law business. My arrangement leaves enough income for me to take care of personal living expenses and current taxes," he wrote in 1981 in "[How to Stand Up for Your Rights and Win!](#)," adding that he bought a house in Connecticut because "I got tired of supporting our welfare and food stamp programs" in New York.

As Cohn helped arrange Trump's marital circumstances, he also helped the 30-year-old would-be tycoon gain access to Manhattan's drug-fueled disco scene. Trump maintained a reputation as a strait-laced teetotaler, but he loved to be in the mix late at night, especially among beautiful women, according to his own accounts.

In April 1977, Trump and Ivana went to the opening night of a club called Studio 54. The owners were impresarios named Steve Rubell and Ian Schrager, and their lawyer was Roy Cohn.

The city had never seen anything quite like Studio 54, a freewheeling club that offered up celebrity, glitter and debauchery. It attracted city leaders, Hollywood stars and a technicolor cross section of other straight, gay and bisexual partyers.

Trump was a regular at the club. “I’d go there a lot with dates and with friends, and with lots of people,” Trump said in an interview. “Roy would always make it very comfortable.”

Cohn was not only the club’s lawyer but also the gatekeeper for rich and famous out-of-towners who wanted in. Sometimes he simply partied, surrounded by groups of young men.

Cohn maintained a public veneer that he was heterosexual. His friends knew better. Sidney Zion, a journalist who helped Cohn write his autobiography, described him as “the Babe Ruth of the Gay World.” But when gay rights activists once asked him to represent a teacher fired for being homosexual, Cohn refused. He told the activists: “I believe homosexual teachers are a grave threat to our children, they have no business polluting the schools of America,” Cohn and Zion wrote in [“The Autobiography of Roy Cohn.”](#)

Cohn also lobbied against gay rights legislation in New York City. He once called a law’s sponsor on the City Council and offered a profane warning: “You’ve got to get off this fag stuff, it’s very harmful to the city and it’s going to hurt you,” Cohn said in a phone call that Zion overheard. “These f----ing fags are no good, forget about them.”

Studio 54 changed hands in 1980 after Rubell and Schrager pleaded

in 1989, and Schrager became a well-known entrepreneur and hotelier in New York, Miami Beach, London and elsewhere.

“What went on in Studio 54 will never, ever happen again,” Trump told writer Timothy O’Brien. “First of all, you didn’t have AIDS. You didn’t have the problems you do have now. I saw things happening there that to this day I have never seen again. I would watch supermodels getting screwed, well-known supermodels getting screwed on a bench in the middle of the room. There were seven of them and each one was getting screwed by a different guy. This was in the middle of the room. Stuff that couldn’t happen today because of problems of death.”



Studio 54 owners Ian Schrager, left, and Steve Rubell, right, with their attorney, Roy Cohn, at a "going away" party at the disco in 1980. The next day Schrager and

Rubell would begin serving prison sentences for tax evasion. (Bettmann Archive)

Connections

Cohn kept company with a remarkable array of people. Stone, the political adviser for Trump and others, tells vivid stories, sometimes with varying details, about the first time he met Cohn. It was 1979, and Stone was calling on Cohn for political support and contributions on behalf of Ronald Reagan, then ramping up a presidential campaign.

Stone stood for some time in the townhouse's waiting room. When Stone was finally admitted, Cohn was sitting at a dining-room table, in a silk bathrobe, Stone told *The Post*. On the table were three strips of bacon and a square of cream cheese. Cohn ate the food with his fingers.

Sitting at the table was a heavysset man.

"Mr. Stone, I want you to meet Tony Salerno," Cohn said.

There Stone was, standing before the future boss of the Genovese crime family.

"So Roy says we're going with Reagan this time," Salerno said.

Cohn and Salerno listened to Stone's pitch. Then Cohn recommended that Stone reach out to Trump.

"You need to meet Donald and his father," Cohn said, as Stone recalls it now. "They'd be perfect for this. Let me set you up a meeting."

After his election, Reagan wrote Cohn, a registered Democrat, a warm note of thanks for his support. The two men became close, Trump said.

Cohn tapped into the Reagan administration network on Trump's behalf a short time later, according to a New York Times account. At Trump's request, Cohn lobbied Edwin Meese III, a senior White House aide, to secure an appointment for Trump's sister Maryanne Barry, an experienced federal prosecutor in New Jersey, to the U.S. District Court.

Trump declined to discuss the matter.

"I'm proud of my sister. She's done a great job," Trump said in an interview. "I just don't comment on that."

Trump marveled at Cohn's connections and the parties he hosted, including a birthday party for himself each year. "Now Roy would have parties and, I'll tell you what, some of the most important people in New York would go to those parties," Trump told The Post.

Over the years, the list of his friends and guests included Norman Mailer, Bianca Jagger, Barbara Walters, William F. Buckley Jr., George Steinbrenner, former New York mayor Abraham D. Beame and many others, some of them Cohn clients.

"Every famous client made him famous and none more so than Donald Trump," wrote Nicholas von Hoffman in "Citizen Cohn: The Life and Times of Roy Cohn." "The Trump-Roy relationship was that mixture of business and social which Roy sought."

Cohn and some of his party guests always seemed to be under indictment at the time of the parties, according to Edward Kosner, former editor and publisher of New York magazine. Kosner told The Post that Borscht Belt comedian Joey Adams once elicited laughter with the quip, "If you're indicted, you're invited."

Dershowitz, of Harvard Law School, said Cohn was an unavoidable

force. “When Roy Cohn was at the height of his power,” Dershowitz said, “nobody did anything in New York politics, in New York real estate, without going through Roy Cohn.”



Roy Cohn, left, publisher Ed Kosner, center, and Donald Trump in an undated photo. (Sonia Moskowitz/Getty Images)

Money, business, politics

One of Trump’s early ambitious real estate ventures was Trump Tower, a concrete-and-glass skyscraper on Fifth Avenue. Starting in 1978, Trump began moving to acquire the site between East 56th and East 57th streets and, with Cohn’s help, strengthening his ties to the city leaders and others who would decide the project’s fate. Their

efforts included a stream of campaign contributions by both men to public officials.

Cohn had no scruples about such giving. He felt campaign finance restrictions were unnecessary and claimed that, in a New York hotel room, he once gave Nixon an envelope containing \$5,000 cash to support a run for the White House. “I’m hardly one of those Boy Scouts who run around promoting phony ethics laws and rules regarding money and politics,” Cohn wrote in his autobiography.

Trump became a generous campaign contributor himself. He eventually gave \$150,000 in just one year to local candidates in New York. State officials later said Trump had “circumvented” state limits on individual and corporate contributions by spreading out payments through Trump subsidiaries, but they did not formally accuse Trump of wrongdoing.

Testifying under oath about his giving, Trump said, “Well, my attorneys basically said that this was a proper way of doing it.”

A state organization formed to investigate New York City’s construction industry concluded that “developers and contractors cultivate and seek favors from public officials at all levels.” The report cited Trump and his large campaign contributions.

To thrive in this milieu, Trump also had to work with unions and companies known to be controlled by New York’s ruling mafia families, which had infiltrated the construction industry, according to court records, federal task force reports and newspaper accounts.

Cohn represented some of the mafia figures who had sway over Trump projects. S&A Concrete, which supplied building material for the Trump Plaza on Manhattan’s East Side, was owned in part by Salerno, the Genovese family mobster and Cohn client, court records show.

Mob-friendly labor leaders dominated local construction unions. At the head of Teamsters Local 282 was John Cody. A House of Representatives investigation found he “was universally acknowledged to be the most significant labor racketeer preying on the construction industry in New York.” Without Cody’s support, projects were liable to stall.

Cody claimed Cohn as a friend. Cody also said he worked with Trump — with Cohn serving as intermediary. “I knew Trump quite well,” Cody told Barrett. “Donald liked to deal with me through Roy Cohn.”

In 1980, the federal Organized Crime Strike Force subpoenaed Trump to discuss whether Cody had offered Trump labor peace in exchange for an apartment in Trump Tower, according to Barrett’s “Trump: The Deals and the Downfall.”

Trump denied the allegation, telling The Post it was “ridiculous.”

“Cody was a bad guy, and I didn’t deal with him almost at all because I knew the kind of guy he was,” Trump said. “He was a very bad cookie.”

In the early 1980s, the FBI and New York authorities carried out a sweeping investigation of the five New York crime families.

Investigators relied on informants, court-authorized wiretaps and eavesdropping gear. They gathered hundreds of hours of conversations proving the mob’s reach into the construction industry. Cohn’s office fell under surveillance. Trump was not implicated.

In early 1985, Cohn wrote to FBI Director William H. Webster, irate at a newspaper report suggesting that investigators in the case had been surveilling his office.

“Since 1950 — the year I prosecuted the Rosenberg atom-spy trial at age 23 with the magnificent investigative help of the Bureau, up to the present, 34 years later, I have had a first-rate relationship with and respect for the Bureau,” Cohn wrote on March 11, 1985, according to documents obtained by The Post.

A confidential internal FBI memo the next month offered more detail: Field agents had conducted surveillance of Cohn’s office, with the aim of “installing a monitoring device to intercept the conversations of Genovese Boss Anthony Salerno,” who apparently was using Cohn’s office for his own business.

The next year, Salerno and 14 others were indicted on an array of criminal charges, including conspiracy, extortion and “infiltration of ostensibly legitimate businesses involved in selling ready-mix concrete in New York City,” the federal indictment said. One of Trump’s projects was mentioned in the indictment. Salerno and others eventually went to prison on federal charges including racketeering and bid-rigging.

‘He could be a nasty guy’

Cohn was fond of saying that winning was not sufficient. People had to know about it. That included when he barely avoided disaster, which he managed to do for most of his adult life. Starting as far back as 1963, Cohn was indicted and acquitted three times of federal charges of bribery, perjury and conspiracy. He was also charged with violating banking laws in Illinois, but the charges were later dropped.

Cohn also fended off repeated allegations of ethical lapses as a lawyer and was a constant target of the IRS, which eventually determined he owed the government some \$7 million.

Cohn turned his troubles into news. He loved the attention the tabloids and magazines gave him, and he socialized with some of their owners, including Rupert Murdoch. Cohn catered to certain reporters and gossip columnists, sharing scoops and rumors.

“Roy understood the value of the tabloids,” Stone said in an interview. “He did business at this dining-room table in the dining room at his brownstone. He would call reporters and dictate their copy with you sitting there. He would just dictate it.”

Esquire magazine once dubbed Cohn “the legal executioner.” Though the story presented a catalogue of nasty allegations against him, Cohn bought a bundle of the magazines to hand out to friends and clients. “All this has done me a lot of good,” Cohn said, according to writer Ken Auletta. “I’d be a liar if I denied it. It has given me a reputation for being tough, a reputation for being a winner.”

Cohn had his setbacks. Zion wrote that Cohn had personally chartered a 747 for a group of male friends to travel to Europe. The group trashed the plane, and Cohn never paid the charter bill. The airline sued Cohn successfully but could not get any money from him. An executive aware of the close ties between Trump and Cohn called Trump to see whether he would pay. Trump declined.

“I felt for the poor bastard because Roy just wiped out that plane,” Trump told Zion about the episode. “But what was I supposed to do? Hey, it was Roy — what’s anybody supposed to do?”

Trump knew Cohn had a shady side, saying “he could be a nasty guy.”

“I don’t kid myself about Roy. He was no Boy Scout,” Trump wrote in [“Trump: The Art of the Deal.”](#) “He once told me that he’d spent more than two thirds of his adult life under indictment for one charge or another. That amazed me. I said to him, ‘Roy, just tell me one thing.

Did you really do all that stuff?’ He looked at me and smiled. ‘What the hell do you think?’ he said. I never really knew.”

In the fall of 1984, Cohn became ill. A year later, he started treatment at the Clinical Center at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md. He maintained that he had liver cancer. But he was suffering from the effects of the HIV virus. As he struggled to stay alive, Trump pulled back from his friend for a spell. Cohn was thrown off balance by this apparent betrayal. “I can’t believe he’s doing this to me,” Cohn said, according to Barrett’s account. “Donald pisses ice water.”

Cohn’s behavior as a lawyer caught up to him now. The appellate division of New York’s Supreme Court moved on long-standing charges of misconduct. “Simply stated the four charges involved alleged dishonesty, fraud, deceit and misrepresentation,” the court said.

Those allegations involved a series of incidents that began years before Cohn met Trump and continued throughout the time of their relationship. In one case, a client of Cohn’s was in the hospital after suffering a debilitating stroke. Cohn visited the man, who was barely conscious. Cohn later claimed his client, during that visit, made him a trustee to his will. The man could not move. A nurse witnessed Cohn guiding his hand to complete the man’s signature on a legal document. A judge later refused to honor the document.

Before the appellate division made its ruling in 1986, a host of prominent people testified to Cohn’s good character. Among them was Trump, who had resumed his visits to Cohn and that spring had invited him to his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida.

Cohn questioned the fairness and competence of those who accused him of misconduct, telling reporters the bar’s disciplinary panel was “a

bunch of yo-yos . . . just out to smear me up.”

On June 23, 1986, Cohn was disbarred. “For an attorney practicing for nearly 40 years in this State, such misconduct is inexcusable, notwithstanding an impressive array of character witnesses who testified in mitigation,” the court said.

Trump told The Post that if Cohn had not been so weakened, he “would have been able to fight that off.”

Cohn died six weeks later, on Aug. 2, 1986. He was 59.

His friends held a memorial service for him. Trump stood silently in the back.

Zion, the journalist, wrote that Cohn was misunderstood by his critics: “What curdled their blood with Cohn was his headline-hunting, his gunslinger style, his contempt for the niceties, his contempt for them.”

One year after his death, Trump professed admiration for Cohn.

“Tough as he was, Roy had a lot of friends,” Trump wrote in “The Art of the Deal,” “and I’m not embarrassed to say I was one.”

Trump remains fond of Cohn today.

“I actually got a kick out of him,” Trump recalled in his recent interview with The Post. “Some people didn’t like him, and some people were offended by him. I mean, they would literally leave a dinner. I had one evening where three or four people got up from a table and left the table because they couldn’t stand the mention of his name.”

“But with all of that being said, he did a very good job for me as a lawyer,” Trump said. “I get a kick out of winning, and Roy would win.”

About this story

This article is based on reporting for “[Trump Revealed](#),” a broad, comprehensive examination of the life of the presumptive Republican nominee for president. The biography, written by Washington Post reporters Michael Kranish and Marc Fisher in collaboration with more than two dozen Post writers, researchers and editors, is scheduled to be published by Scribner on Aug. 23.

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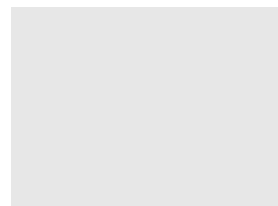


Robert O'Harrow Jr. is a reporter on the investigative unit of The Washington Post. He

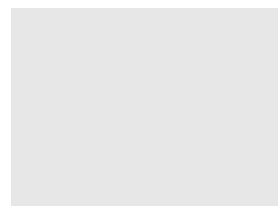
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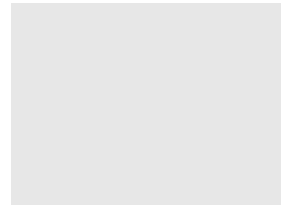


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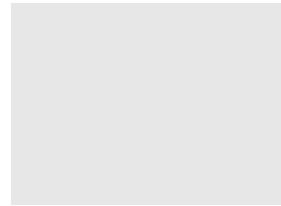


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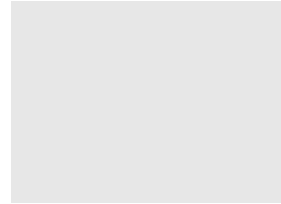
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