



Supporters of then-President Donald Trump clash with Capitol police in Washington Jan. 6, 2021. (CNS/Reuters/Shannon Stapleton)



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Watching Trumpism the past eight years as it debased everything it touched, you would think the cult of the Donald would have lost the ability to shock. The reaction to the [indictment](#) of Donald Trump and 18 others by a Georgia grand jury, however, is shocking.

We were shocked when Trump vulgarly [dismissed](#) the heroism demonstrated by Sen. John McCain when he was a prisoner of war in Vietnam. "He's not a war hero," Trump, who has never worn his country's uniform, said in 2015. "He was a war hero because he was captured. I like people who weren't captured." The other prisoners of war love McCain, remembering that he [refused an early release](#) unless all the prisoners were released. They recall the torture to which he was subjected because of that refusal.

We were shocked when the ["Access Hollywood" tape](#) was released. On that tape, Trump's vulgarity was directed at women generally, and one woman specifically, a married woman, whom he had aggressively hit on. During the debate, he said it was "locker room talk" and then pivoted by [attacking Bill Clinton](#) and his ugly history with women. Trump wasn't running against Bill Clinton, one more insult to women.

We were shocked by Trump's followers who did not abandon their candidate when he said these horrible things. The campaign was only an appetizer.

After he lost his reelection bid, Trump's behavior and that of his supporters became not just shocking but potentially criminal, not just morally abhorrent but allegedly treasonous.

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No candidate or president is responsible for all the actions their followers take. Trump's habit of winking at racism — think of his comments after the [neo-Nazi protests in Charlottesville, Virginia](#), that resulted in a young woman's death. There were "very fine people on both sides," he [said](#).

His comment does not make him directly responsible for the behavior of some of his supporters in North Carolina when they [shouted racial epithets](#), but he bears a moral responsibility. The name of that responsibility is leadership.

Trump did many things as president but demonstrating moral leadership was not one of them.

After he lost his reelection bid, however, Trump's behavior and that of his supporters became not just shocking but potentially criminal, not just morally abhorrent but allegedly treasonous. We remember the [phone call to Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger](#), in which the president tried to get Raffensperger to violate his oath and "find" votes that did not exist. That conversation is a part of the current indictment.

We remember, too, that Trump's followers [threatened two Georgia election workers](#), Wandra "Shaye" Moss and mother Ruby Freeman, after Trump's acolytes falsely accused the two of committing election fraud.

We remember then-President Trump speaking on the Ellipse between the White House and the Washington Monument. "We fight like hell. And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore," Trump [told the crowd](#).

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We know, too, according to sworn testimony from former Trump aide Cassidy Hutchinson, that Trump at least suspected some of the people in the crowd were armed because he wanted the Secret Service not to screen for weapons with magnetometers. According to her [testimony before the January 6 Select Committee](#), Trump said, "I don't f---ing care that they have weapons. They're not here to hurt me. Take the f---ing mags away."

We remember how some of his followers [responded](#): Turning our national Capitol into a crime scene, beating police over the head with flagpoles, desecrating the chambers of the House and Senate, uttering vile comments and illegal threats about the Speaker of the House.

Now, Trump has taken to social media to attack the justice system, attacking Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis and U.S. District Court Judge Tanya Chutkan. Both women have received death threats. The names and purported addresses of the grand jurors in the Fulton County case were [posted online](#), with anonymous social media users calling for violence against them, too.

"These threats look more like those in gang cases or organized criminal cases," Rachel Kleinfeld of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace [told Time magazine](#). "In organized criminal conspiracy, the person at the top rarely is a trigger-puller. ... It seems to me that what's going on here is [Trump] calling on a much larger network that perpetrates violence, and our justice system isn't very well equipped to handle it."

This is shocking, and from the leaders of the Republican Party, nothing but crickets.

It is always a challenge for a liberal democracy to preserve its character when faced with existential threat. Freedom of the press is strictly curtailed during military operations. Our greatest president, Abraham Lincoln, suspended habeas corpus.

It is time for the chief justice to sit down with the leaders of the political branches and demand that they denounce these attacks on judges and ordinary citizens without whom the administration of justice is impossible. No society descending into political violence knows where the tipping points are. No one knows when it will be too late.