

Bring the Insurrectionists to Justice

The politicians who egged them on should also be made to pay a heavy price.

WSJ



By Peggy Noonan

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A rioter carries a House podium at the U.S. Capitol, Jan. 6.

PHOTO: WIN MCNAMEE/GETTY IMAGES

How do we deal with all that has happened?

We remember who we are. We are a great nation and a strong one; we have, since our beginning, been a miracle in the political history of man. We have brought much good. We are also in trouble, no point not admitting it.

We regain our confidence. We've got through trouble before. We love this place and will keep it. We have a Constitution that's gotten us this far and will get us further.

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We lower the boom. No civilized country can accept or allow what we saw Wednesday with the violent assault on the U.S. Capitol. This was an attack on democracy itself. That is not just a phrase. Rule by the people relies on adherence to law and process. The assault and siege was an attempt to stop the work of democracy by halting the peaceful transfer of presidential power, our crowning glory for more than two centuries.

This was a sin against history.

When something like this happens it tends to be repeated. It is our job to make sure it is not.

And so we should come down like a hammer on all those responsible, moving with brute dispatch against members of the mob and their instigators.

On the rioters: Find them, drag them out of their basements, and bring them to justice. Use all resources, whatever it takes, with focus and speed. We have pictures of half of them; they like to pose. They larked about taking selfies and smiling unashamed smiles as one strolled out with a House podium. They were so arrogant they were quoted by name in news reports. It is our good luck they are idiots. Capitalize on that luck.

Throw the book at them. Make it a book of commentaries on the Constitution. Throw it hard.

They have shamed and embarrassed their country in the eyes of the world, which is not only a painful fact but a dangerous one. The world, and the young—all of us—need to see them pay the price.

Now to the devil and his apprentices.

As for the chief instigator, the president of the United States, he should be removed from office by the 25th Amendment or impeachment, whichever is faster. This, with only a week and a half to go, would be a most extraordinary action, but this has been an extraordinary time. Mike Pence is a normal American political figure; he will not have to mount a new government; he appears to be sane; he will in this brief, strange interlude do fine.

The president should be removed for reasons of justice—he urged a crowd to march on Congress, and, when it turned violent, had to be dragged into telling them, equivocally, to go home—and prudence. Mitt Romney had it exactly right: “What happened here . . . was an insurrection, incited by the president of the United States.” As for prudence, Mr. Trump is a sick, bad man and therefore, as president, a dangerous one. He has grown casually bloody-minded, nattering on about force and denouncing even his own vice president as a coward for not supporting unconstitutional measures. No one seems to be certain how Mr. Trump spends

his days. He doesn't bother to do his job. The White House is in meltdown. The only thing that captures his interest is the fact that he lost, which fills him with thoughts of vengeance.

Removing him would go some distance to restoring our reputation, reinforcing our standards, and clarifying constitutional boundaries for future presidents who might need it.

As for his appointees and staff, the garbage they talk to rationalize their staying is no longer acceptable to anyone. "But my career." Your career, in the great scheme of things, is nothing. "But my future in politics." Your future, even if your wildest schemes are fulfilled, is a footnote to a footnote. There are ways to be a footnote honorably. "But my kids." When they are 20 they will read the history. You want them proud of your role, not petitioning the court for a name change.

It was honorable to arrive with high hopes and idealistic commitments. It is not honorable to stay.

As for the other instigators, a side note.

True conservatives tend to have a particular understanding of the fragility of things. They understand that every human institution is, in its way, built on sand. It's all so frail. They see how thin the veil is between civilization and chaos, and understand that we have to go through every day, each in our way, trying to make the veil thicker. And so we value the things in the phrase that others use to disparage us, "law and order." Yes, always, the rule of law, and order so that the people of a great nation can move freely on the streets and do their work and pursue their lives.

To the devil's apprentices, Sens. Josh Hawley and Ted Cruz. They are clever men, highly educated, well-credentialed, endlessly articulate. They see themselves as leading conservative lights, but in this drama they have proved themselves punks practicing punk politics. They are like people who know the value of nothing, who see no frailty around them, who inherited a great deal—an estate built by the work and wealth of others—and feel no responsibility for maintaining the foundation because pop gave them a strong house, right? They are careless inheritors of a nation, an institution, a party that previous generations built at some cost.

They backed a lie and held out the chimera of some possible Trump victory that couldn't happen, and hid behind the pretense that they were just trying to be fair to all parties and investigate any suspicions of vote fraud, when what they were really doing was playing—coolly, with lawyerly sophistication—not to the base but to the sickness within the base. They should have stood up and told the truth, that democracy moves forward, that the election was imperfect as all elections are, and more so because of the pandemic rules, which need to be changed, but the fact is the voters of America chose Biden-Harris, not Trump-Pence.

Here's to you, boys. Did you see the broken glass, the crowd roaming the halls like vandals in late Rome, the staff cowering in locked closets and barricading offices? Look on your mighty works and despair.

The price they will pay is up to their states. But the reputational cost should be harsh and high.

Again, on the president: There have been leaders before who, facing imminent downfall, decide to tear everything down with them. They want to go out surrounded by flames. Hitler, at the end, wanted to blow up Germany, its buildings and bridges. His people had let him down. Now he hated them. They must suffer.

I have resisted Nazi comparisons for five years, for the most part easily. But that is like what is happening here, the same kind of spirit, as the president departs, as he angrily channel-surfs in his bunker.

He is a bad man and not a stable one and he is dangerous. America is not safe in his hands.

It is not too late. Removal of the president would be the prudent move, not the wild one. Get rid of him. Now.



WSJ Opinion: Trump Erases His Legacy

Potomac Watch: A politician has to work hard to destroy a legacy and a future in a single day.
President Donald J. Trump managed it. Image: John Minchillo/Associated Press

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