



Former President Donald Trump motions as he departs 40 Wall Street in New York City after a news conference on March 25. Judge Juan Merchan had earlier ruled that Trump's hush money case trial would begin April 15. (AP/Yuki Iwamura)



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Former President Donald Trump spoke to reporters after a judge ruled March 25 that his trial in the New York hush money case would [begin on April 15](#). His remarks were frightening.

Trump was correct when he said, "It's never been done before in the history of this country." Indeed.

The rest was not really a rant. Rants can have coherence. When Trump launches into a rant at a campaign rally, the former president usually finds a cadence, and does some call and response with the crowd. The list of complaints might be false and odd, but it is presented in a manner that is at least somewhat clear and linear. This was different, more like a badly edited top 20 personal complaints, intermingled with alt-right grievances, and all of it compressed into rapid-fire nonsense and non sequiturs.

Trump complained, falsely, that the authorities had undervalued Mar-a-Lago at \$18 million and contended that it was really worth "at least \$50 [million] to maybe a hundred times more. Think of that."

He complained, falsely, that all the judges involved in his many cases were corrupt and working at the behest of President Joe Biden "and his thugs."

He complained, falsely, that no one would be able to do business in New York City if the trial proceeded.

This vindictive, unstable man ought not be invested with civil authority ever again.

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He complained, falsely, that all the charges against him were ridiculous, the result of weaponization of the Department of Justice.

He complained, falsely, that "they raided my house in violation of a thing called the Fourth Amendment." The agents had legal warrants signed by a judge. The search was part of a different investigation, and unrelated set of charges, against the former president from those he faced on March 25.

He repeated, falsely, his allegation that millions of people are coming into the country "from prisons and mental institutions."

He promised to close the border, "drill, baby, drill" and, as if they were somehow related, that he would post the now reduced bond in yet another unrelated court case.

He said he was sure he was going to win reelection and that Nov. 5 would be "the most important day in the history of our country." He might be right about that last point.

It was like watching a train wreck in a movie. You can't take your eyes away from it even though you know that what you are watching is, in some sense, degrading to your belief in human dignity.

In 2020, the documentary "[Unfit](#)" examined Trump's psychological unfitness for office. The filmmakers interviewed psychologists and people who worked closely with Trump and concluded he was a "malignant narcissist." Narcissists are a dime a dozen in our society, but Trump is in a different category altogether and that narcissism was on full display during this bizarre press conference.

More was at issue than narcissism, however. You do not need to be a psychologist to recognize the president's affinity for conspiracy theories, the idea that all the judges and all the district attorneys were in cahoots to rob him of his political future, part of an establishment that is fighting, and fighting unfairly, to protect its corrupt hold on government.

Trump displayed his sense that he is being uniquely persecuted, that there was no evidence to support the charges brought against him, that these several court cases

were all "election interference." Admittedly, one is tempted to defer to his expertise on the subject of election interference. The thought occurred that perhaps that section of the press conference should have had closed captioning in Russian.

Most frighteningly, there was the fascistic ease with which Trump asserted that his enemies were enemies of the country. Historians have explained how President Richard Nixon, in his dark moments, would conflate his political enemies with those of the country, but those moments were intermittent and private. When he got caught lying publicly, Nixon resigned, and he never had to fork over a \$175 million bond during an appeal.

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It is not clear that the trials are hurting Trump. "You're going to create the greatest victimhood of 2024, and you're going to elect Donald Trump," Republican pollster Frank Luntz [recently said on CNN](#). "If they take his stuff, he's going to say that this is proof that the federal government and the establishment and the swamp in Washington and all the politicians across the country and the attorneys generals and all of this, that this is a conspiracy to deny him the presidency."

We can hope Luntz is wrong, but who can know for sure?

There are Trump supporters who, for a variety of reasons, some of them legitimate, fear for the future of the country and mistakenly see Trump as an answer to those fears. They may fall for his victimhood routine because fighting the establishment and dissenting from authority are as American as fried chicken, from the first Puritan to Edward Snowden. None of us, including President Biden, can give up on these misguided people who are our fellow citizens.

Those of us who discern in Donald Trump a clear and present danger to American democracy must be clear that we do not place that indictment on all Trump supporters. We do indict him and his acolytes, from the talking heads who shill for him on Fox, to the GOP politicians who put loyalty to Trump ahead of devotion to the Constitution. No one could watch that press conference and think this man should be allowed to return to power.

In moments of crisis, humans look for points of reassurance. We think we have seen all there is to see about Trump's unfitness for office. Then you see a performance

like the one he delivered March 25 and it freaks you out. Being freaked out is a sign of sanity, not contagion. It must point us to action. This vindictive, unstable man ought not be invested with civil authority ever again.