

January 25, 2021

What Were They Thinking?

Between Election Day and Inauguration Day, as President Trump and his supporters took their belief that Trump won the presidential election to multiple courts and state legislatures and Congress ending in a violent attempt to take over Congress, my enduring question is: what were they thinking?

When Trump's lawyers went to court with allegations of voting irregularities with no evidence, what did they think would happen? Did they think the various judges would rule in their favor because Trump and his supporters really really wanted it or because they had a belief? When the various state legislatures, some controlled by Republicans, certified the election results, on what ground did they think the legislatures would say: "never mind"?

When Trump called the Secretary of State of Georgia, Brad Raffensperger, asking that he "find" 11,780 votes, what was he thinking? Where did he think the secretary would "find" more than 11 thousand votes? Before his supporters stormed into the Capitol building January 6, Trump talked about signature matching on mail-in votes. He wanted the secretary to toss more votes than he would need to win Georgia. What did he think the secretary would say?

"Yes, Mr. President. No problem."

If the secretary had tossed thousands of votes, did Trump think there would not have been an outcry from the other side? Did he think thousands of voters who voted for Joe Biden would have simply said: "OK"? Did he think that such an action would not prompt court cases? Raffensperger was thinking about his own reputation and about facts. He even said on the call that the difference between Trump's numbers and his would probably only be resolved by a court.

Trump wanted access to records that were illegal for the secretary of state to share. What was he thinking? Did he think that Secretary Raffensperger was going to break the law on his behalf?

Now, there are news reports that say Trump thought about firing the acting attorney general and replacing him with a man who would pressure the Georgia state legislature to refuse to accept its presidential election results. William Barr, who had already resigned as attorney general, had already told Trump that there was no evidence of widespread fraud, not enough to overturn the election. What was Trump thinking?

It is easier to guess what senators Josh Hawley and Ted Cruz were thinking.

In their public statements, they both claimed to be taking a stand for the integrity of our elections. Hawley claimed that by objecting to the Electoral College votes from other states that

he was standing up for the integrity of our elections. Cruz and about 10 other Republican senators called for an election commission to investigate claims of electoral fraud. Never mind the various courts and state legislatures who had already made a determination regarding charges of fraud. Cruz simply presupposed, without evidence, that fraud had occurred. What were they thinking? Both men knew they had little chance to prevail. There would be no election commission, but Cruz and Hawley would be seen by people who believed that the vote was rigged as standing up for them. Both men were attempting to walk on a river of lies. There was no fraud. They failed to understand that to sow lies is to reap violence because lies are a kind of violation.

When Mitt Romney spoke on the Senate floor against the objections, we know what he was thinking. He saw his role as an elder statesman to speak the truth. "Please! No Congressional led audit will ever convince those voters, particularly when the President will continue to claim that the election was stolen. The best way we can show respect for the voters who were upset is by telling them the truth. That is the burden, and the duty, of leadership. The truth is that President-elect Biden won this election. President Trump lost."

Romney was right, because at the Save America rally Trump continued to insist that the election was fraudulent. What was Trump thinking when he told the crowd "They're ruthless, and it's time somebody did something about it."? He said: "Fraud breaks up everything. When you catch somebody in a fraud, you're allowed to go by very different rules."

What different rules?

What did the crowd think would happen when they went to the Capitol? Did they think that the Democratic majority in the House of Representatives, almost the entire Senate, and Vice-president Pence would simply refuse the Electoral College vote count because they had arrived? Did the man sitting in Nancy Pelosi's office with his foot on the desk think that his presence there would cause her to suddenly agree that Donald Trump ought to be declared the winner of the election?

Republican leader Mitch McConnell and a majority of Republicans in the Senate would never allow that to happen. In his speech before the mob breached the Capitol building, McConnell said, "If this election were overturned by mere allegations from the losing side, our democracy would enter a death spiral. We'd never see the whole nation accept an election again. Every four years would be a scramble for power at any cost."

McConnell understands political power. He is Machiavellian in his amoral use of power. In *The Prince*, Niccolo Machiavelli writes: ". . . this is to be asserted in general of men that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous, and as long as you succeed they are yours entirely;"

McConnell understands that a large portion of the American electorate does not choose their representatives based on moral values. If they did, Trump would never have been elected in the

first instance. They choose their leaders based on whether or not the leader is successful in giving them what they want, even if that thing is as counterfeit as an artificial sense of self-worth. McConnell understands that power derives from the state, from the political stability of the state.

The people who stormed the Capitol did it because they thought there would be no real negative consequences for themselves. They thought that Trump had authority over Congress, failing to grasp the concept of Congress as a separate co-equal branch of government. They clearly thought they would go there, post their actions on social media and go home. This will be the case for many of them. However, people died, and some who participated will be charged with a crime. Some have already lost their jobs. Few businesses want their brands associated with insurrection. Businesses cannot thrive in political chaos.

So, it is clear that Trump and his supporters did not think through the consequences of their actions. Now the question becomes: why did they not think longer, harder and through to the end?

The good news is that the majority of the American electorate did not vote for Donald Trump or for Republicans. McConnell is no longer the majority leader in the Senate, even though the margin is one vote, the vice-president's vote. Joe Biden and Kamala Harris were inaugurated president and vice-president on January 20, 2021. A new administration has begun, and it is clear that if we want moral, competent, thoughtful leadership we have to elect moral, competent, thoughtful people. The nation and the world can no longer afford Machiavellian leaders. The moral evolution of humanity calls us to a better more ethical more responsible politics.

As Amanda Gorman challenged us in her inaugural poem, "The Hill We Climb":

"The new dawn blooms as we free it. For there is always light. If only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it."