



January 6th 2021- In the Words of Our Leaders

Background Information



On January 6th 2021, the United States Capitol Building was attacked. The crowd was an angry group of Trump supporters, encouraged to act on the conspiracy that the 2020 election had been stolen from Donald Trump. The group falsely claimed that the election was fraudulent and the Donald Trump was to remain the President of the United States even if they had to force his win out of the hands of democracy. Weeks before the mob had even convened, Donald Trump filed 62 lawsuits across the country that challenged the results of the 2020 presidential election. 61 out of 62 failed. Even still, Donald Trump doubled down on his claims. The day of January 6th Trump gave a speech to his loyal supporters in Washington DC. After falsely reminding the crowd that the election had been stolen and saying “We’re going to walk down to the Capitol, and we’re going to cheer on our brave senators and congressmen and women, and we’re probably not going to be cheering so much for some of them, because you’ll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength, and you have to be strong” the mob finally took to the streets. The mob stormed the Capitol, many members of Congress were forced to evacuate their offices as the Capitol Police tried to fend off the rioters. Members of the mob broke into the building, some took pictures and trespassed in offices or on the Capitol floor, others stole and broke things. Five people died as a result of the riot. When the riot had ended the FBI began to investigate the rioters arresting 135 rioters in the following weeks. Congress proceeded the night of January 6th to vote on whether to challenge Joe Biden's elected presidency. The majority of Congress opted to certify Joe Biden's win while a handful of Republican Senators led by Ted Cruz and Josh Hawley objected. With the majority on his side, Biden was certified, inaugurated and is now the President of the United States.



While the events of January 6th 2021 horrified and shocked many Americans others argue that it was simply a matter of time before Donald Trump's fan base responded to his explosive rhetoric. After the riots, many of the nations leaders took to the Capitol floor, twitter, and talk shows to express their thoughts on the riot. Some sounded more like Donald Trump than others. As Joe Biden has often reminded us, "the words of a President matter" but it's not just Presidents we look to in times of distress. It's Congress, its national leaders, it's the entire government. Paying attention to what those in power have to say about national events such as this is important to understanding which officials you want as representation. Below are several quotes from national leaders who spoke on the events of January 6th in the following days and weeks alongside one reporter's analysis of their rhetoric and beliefs.

Quotes and Editor's Analysis



Joe Biden

“Let me be very clear. The scenes of chaos at the Capitol do not reflect a true America, do not represent who we are. What we’re seeing are a small number of extremists dedicated to lawlessness. This is not the dissent. It’s disorder. It’s chaos. It borders on sedition, and it must end now. I call this mob to pull back and allow the work of democracy to go forward. You’ve heard me say before in different contexts, the words of a President matter, no matter how good or bad that President is. At their best, the words of a President can inspire. At their worst, they can insight”

In a speech delivered during the chaos at the Capitol Building Joe Biden called on the angry mob to "pull back and allow the work of democracy to go forward." Biden's speech was clear and concise in manner, he not only opposed the actions of the mob but also chastised the sitting President (at the time), Donald Trump. He went on to call on Trump to address the situation and call off the mob, implying that the mob had been driven to action by Donald Trump's words. He made clear that the mob was in fact a group of "extremists" using assertive language to define the attack and separate the riots at the Capitol from Americans ideals and the average American.

Donald Trump

"We don't want anybody hurt. It's a very tough period of time, there's never been a time like this where such a thing happened, where they could take it away from all of us. From me, from you, from our country. This was a fraudulent election, but we can't play into the hands of these people. We have to have peace. So go home, we love you, you're very special. You've seen what happens, you've seen the way others are treated that are so bad and so evil. I know how you feel, but go home and go home in peace."

Shortly before being banned from Twitter for "risk of further incitement of violence", Donald Trump addressed the nation in a tweet. Noticeably late to the condemnation, Trump addressed the nation. Trump called for the violence to end but his call to "go home and go home in peace" was overpowered by his continuous insistence that the election was fraudulent. While Donald Trump did technically tell his supporters to leave the Capitol alone, he also said "there's never been a time like this where such a thing happened, when they could it away from all of us. From me, from. you, from our country. This was a fraudulent election." These words, some would argue, sound eerily similar to the ones he spoke at the "Save American March" right before all of the violence. Others give him the benefit of the doubt opting to believe that maybe he knew that these would be the words that the mob wanted to hear and that this rhetoric would convince them to stop the violence.



Kamala Harris

“We cannot yield to those who would try and make us afraid of who we are. For all of our faults and imperfections we are a nation that was founded on very important principles and guided by extremely important ideals.”

In an interview with NPR Vice President Kamala Harris addressed the controversy of January 6th saying, "We cannot yield to those who would try and make us afraid of who we are." While this quote does not reflect an exact condemnation of the violence (which she did give during the attack). It reflects a belief about America and its strengths and weaknesses. Harris uses inclusive language to invite Americans to consider the "very important principles" and "extremely important ideals" that shape our country while simultaneously separating these ideals from "those who would try and make us afraid of who we are," potentially referring to the rioters. Harris expressed both a pride in her country and an ability to critique it with this statement.



Mike Pence

“We condemn the violence that took place here in the strongest possible terms. We grieve the loss of life in these hallowed halls as well as the injuries suffered by those who defended our Capitol today. And we will always be grateful to the men and women who stayed at their post to defend this historic place. To those who wreaked havoc in our capital today you did not win”

Directly after the attack during a speech on the Capitol floor Mike Pence addressed the nation. Pence's words were deliberate and compared to Trump his condemnation was strong. He condemned the attack "in the strongest possible terms." He also addressed the deaths as a result of the riot saying "We grieve the loss of life in these hallowed halls as well as the injuries suffered by those who defended our Capitol today." He addressed the Capitol police saying that he was grateful to "the men and women who stayed at their post to defend this historic place." His gratitude to the Capitol Police while real and true, was also a possible attempt to connect with the traditional Republican base, who generally believe strongly in authority. Pence drew a clear line in the sand, not once mentioning Donald Trump or the cause of the riots and separating his views from Trump's. Since then he has separated himself from the former President, attending Joe Biden's inauguration even when Trump opted not to. He has attempted to return to his traditional Republican roots. Pence ended his speech with another strong condemnation of the violence and the rioters, telling "those who wreaked havoc" that they "did not win." With this speech and his actions in the following weeks, Pence pushed away from Trump's use of hateful rhetoric and made clear that America will continue to fight this kind of violence.



Barack Obama

“Right now, Republican leaders have a choice made clear in the desecrated chambers of democracy. They can continue down this road and keep stoking the raging fires.Or they can choose reality and take the first steps toward extinguishing the flames.They can choose America”

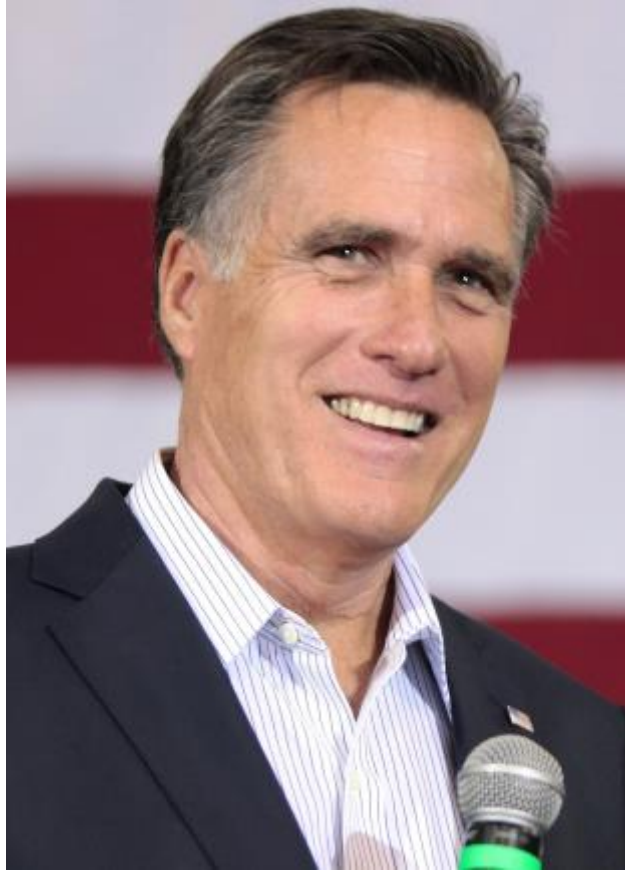
Former President Barack Obama addressed the nation from Twitter. He called out Republican leaders claiming that they "have a choice". Obama didn't sugar coat his thoughts on the riots and their cause. Without naming any names the former president pointed to Republicans who started conspiracies about the 2020 election as the main cause of the riots. He referred to the capital as the "desecrated chamber of democracy", forcing readers to consider whether the trust the American people have in democracy can be rebuilt. He went on to claim that the first step in rebuilding is forcing Republican Congress members who have/ continue to "[stoke] the raging fires" to "take the first step toward extinguishing the flames" and "choose America." Obama separated America from the violence at the end of his tweet in the same way that Biden, Harris, and Pence all did, by saying that America is a totally separate entity from the violence. Still, Obama was slightly more pessimistic than his counter parts, his use of the phrase "desecrated chamber of democracy" while similar to Pence's "hallowed halls" gives a separate feeling. A feeling of intrusion and disruptment that is continuous, one that doesn't stop when the immediate violence ends, one that has been building for ye ars.



Ted Cruz

“We have seen and no doubt will continue to see a great deal of moralizing from both sides of the aisle. But I would urge to both sides perhaps a bit less certitude.”

Ted Cruz, in a speech on the day of the attack, in a quote that preceded several claims of fraud, told the nation that he had seen "a great deal of moralizing from both sides." While he may be right in his immediate statement. He refused to acknowledge that the attack on the Capitol was committed by only one side. The same day as this speech, Cruz voted to object to President Biden's certification, claiming there was fraud. While it may be true that "both sides" need "a little less certitude." Cruz's appeal may have been a little more inclusive had he acknowledged the intense extremists at the Capitol who had acted under the Republican Party name. The combination of Cruz's plea for "both sides" to change and his unwillingness to condemn his own supporters leads some readers to believe that Cruz is unable to acknowledge the faults of his party and his former President even when they cause harm.



Mitt Romney

“We gather today due to a selfish man’s injured pride and the outrage of his supporters whom he has deliberately misinformed for the past two months and stirred to action this very morning,”

Mitt Romney, in a speech given on the Capitol floor the night of January 6th, directly called out the Former President, Donald Trump. With significantly less delicacy around the issue than Obama, Pence, Harris, and Biden, Romney called the riot a result of "a selfish man's injured pride" putting all of the blame directly onto the former President. He claimed that Trump had "deliberately misinformed" his followers and in his speech at the "Save American March" had "stirred [his supporters] to action." Romney, who despite being a member of the Republican Party has been an outspoken critic of Donald Trump. His speech aimed to highlight the cause of the incident rather than the violence itself.

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