



The Useful Idiot: Why We're Not Done With Trump Yet

America, we got lucky. On the laundry list of things Donald Trump has been terrible at, transforming our country into a fascist autocracy was only the latest.

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The following is excerpted from [“The Useful Idiot: How Donald Trump Killed the Republican Party with Racism, the Rest of Us with Coronavirus, And Why We Aren’t Done With Him Yet,”](#) by S.V. Dáte.

The president of the United States tried to stage a coup to remain in power.

Yes, seeing that in print is a bit jarring, to say the least. Yet that is, in fact, precisely what happened.

The president of the United States, after losing reelection by 7 million votes, riled up his cult-like followers for months with lies about massive voter fraud, culminating with a “Stop the Steal” rally near the White House urging them to march on the Capitol just as Congress set about to formally certify Joe Biden as the winner.



vice president into violating the Constitution and rejecting tens of millions of legitimate votes in states Biden had won, preventing him from reaching the required 270 electoral votes and throwing the election to the House of Representatives, where Donald Trump would win under the one-vote-per-state rule.

That Trump had placed the life of endlessly loyal Mike Pence in grave danger, along with hundreds of members of Congress and their staffs, remains an underappreciated element of the day. For weeks, Pence had been telling Trump that he had no role in the Jan. 6 ceremony beyond announcing the certified winner in each state. That he had no authority to declare that Arizona's or Georgia's or Pennsylvania's votes were invalid. And, more to the point, that he had no intention of doing so. Their last such conversation was by phone, just minutes before Trump took the stage at the rally he had been promoting for weeks.

Yet within minutes of starting his remarks shortly before noon, Trump was yet again urging Pence to be strong and courageous and to reject Biden's states — as if Pence were still mulling that possibility. “Because if Mike Pence does the right thing, we win the election,” Trump told his crowd.

So it was that when Pence, an hour later, released via Twitter the letter he had sent to lawmakers stating his intentions just as he took the dais in the House chamber, Trump's followers, many of them marching on the Capitol or already there, were enraged and ready to mete out justice as befitting a traitor to their hero.

And as the mayhem and violence of Trump's supporters bursting through police lines and into the building played out on the television screens at the White House, Trump was still pouring on the gasoline, telling his followers in a tweet that Pence “didn't have the courage to do what should have been done.” While Trump took it all in with glee, his followers chanted “Hang Mike Pence!” as they roamed through the Capitol searching for him.

Getting lost in the photos and videos of the carnage that afternoon is a clear-eyed reckoning of what, precisely, Trump and his enablers in Congress, along with the Republican Party and the significant segment of voters who backed Trump's post-election efforts to delegitimize his clear loss, would have brought us had they somehow succeeded.

If Trump had managed to coerce Pence and Congress into giving him another four years, does anyone truly believe that that would have been the end of it? After seeing how easy it was to scare the “pro-democracy establishment” with his terrorist mob, why would he not repeat it in 2024? Or just dispense with elections altogether, given how prone they are to being “rigged”?

Americans need to be honest about what nearly happened and why. Trump has never in his life cared about democracy, as was pretty clear when he first started running for the



that, and would to this day prefer a Trump autocracy to a constitutional republic, is more than a little worrisome.

If a small number of people in key positions had not made the decisions they did for the good of the country, we could easily be living with Trump still in the White House as ... not as president, because people who lose elections are not called that, but ... something else. The American experiment would be over.

He is gone. At least for now.

In the six months since I completed the first edition of this work, Trump took everything he had been doing over the first three and a half years of his presidency and ramped it all the way up. The corruption became more brazen, the irresponsibility even more breathtaking, and the lying simply went off the charts.

The coronavirus pandemic he had botched and then tried to wish away continued apace, while Trump and his staff essentially pretended that it was, in fact, already gone. He resumed staging campaign rallies at a breakneck pace, encouraging his followers to ignore coronavirus protocols by attending.

It was little surprise to anyone when, eventually, Trump himself got sick, likely at an indoor reception he held at the White House for his third Supreme Court justice, Amy Coney Barrett, in late September. As he recovered from the illness at Walter Reed hospital, getting the best, most expensive medical care on the planet, one big question was whether he would learn from the experience and start showing some empathy toward the hundreds of thousands of Americans who had lost a family member to the disease or the many millions who were fearful of contracting it.

In retrospect, of course, that was a silly thing to think. As anyone paying the least bit of attention could have predicted, Trump reacted in precisely the opposite manner. Instead of generating some measure of empathy, his illness brought out his sense of superiority: I got it and recovered from it. Why can't you?

Concerns about the virus went out the window entirely at his ever-more-frequent campaign events, and his words seemed to goad his supporters into pretending that there really wasn't any pandemic at all as a way to reaffirm their personal loyalty to him.

Trump's illness also did nothing to moderate his various antisocial behaviors upon his recovery. He continued acting like a hybrid between a petulant child and a small-time mob boss, with zero evident concern for anyone other than himself.

A perfect example came just two days before the election, when a caravan of Trump supporters, mainly in big pickup trucks and SUVs, accosted a Biden campaign bus on a busy interstate in Texas. They surrounded the coach and an accompanying car and then