

Trump's Jewish supporters must condemn and disavow him

The former president's dinner with Jew-haters was a blow to efforts to combat antisemitism. His erstwhile allies can't mince words about it.

Jonathan S. Tobin November 28, 2022



Former U.S. President Donald Trump is awarded the Theodor Herzl Gold Medallion at the Zionist Organization of America's 125th anniversary Gala in New York City, Nov. 13, 2022. Credit: ZOA.

If pro-Israel Republicans think former President Donald Trump will apologize or make amends in any way for choosing to have a public dinner at his Mar-a-Lago resort home with two notorious [antisemites](#), they haven't been paying attention to how he has conducted his public career. And if they think they can weather this controversy by trying to divert attention from

what he's done by pointing to the way their Democrat opponents tolerate and even support antisemitism on the left, they're equally delusional.

Trump's dinner date with Kanye West and Nick Fuentes constitutes a turning point for his Jewish supporters and Republicans in general. Or at least it ought to.

Up until now, almost all of the attempts by Democrats to accuse him of antisemitism or of encouraging Jew-hatred have been highly partisan charges that didn't stand up to scrutiny.

After all, Trump didn't actually say the neo-Nazis who marched in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017 were "very fine people" or anything like that. Nor are his complaints about Jewish voters not rewarding him for his historic support for Israel antisemitic, as those who twist his entirely factual comments into a charge of dual loyalty have tried to assert. He not only consistently condemned antisemitism but did far more to combat it on American college campuses than any other president.

Combine all that with his close family ties to Jews, the case for damning Trump as an antisemite or an ally of antisemites simply didn't hold water. And no one who wasn't already convinced that he was the spawn of the devil believed a word of it.

But after the Mar-a-Lago dinner, it's no longer possible to ignore the issue. And it's incumbent on those who have staunchly defended him until now to do the hard thing and concede that he has now done something they wouldn't forgive or forget if it had been a Democratic president or former one who did it.

To their credit, the Zionist Organization of America, which gave Trump its highest award at its New York City dinner earlier this month, did "deplore" his remarks. His former lawyer, David Friedman, who served as U.S. ambassador to Israel from 2017-2021, also tweeted his dismay, and called for his former boss to disavow West and Fuentes.

But the problem here is not just that Trump has granted an unwarranted legitimacy to both West and the even more vile Fuentes. It's that we all know

that Trump will never walk this back or make the sort of apology that could help to ameliorate the harm he's done.

Trump doesn't believe in apologies.

Part of this stems from a savvy appreciation of how to deal with gaffes or kerfuffles that, in most cases, he made deliberately in order to gain attention or simply to generate outrage among media and political-establishment foes. He knows that his opponents will never give him credit for his accomplishments or for doing the right thing with respect to any controversy. He long ago came to the conclusion that the only response to being attacked was to ignore the brickbats and move on to the next dustup for maximum political advantage.

In this case, however, there can be no moving beyond an incident about which he can't pretend he wasn't aware of the consequences. Nor can it be put down as just another instance of liberals trying to enforce political correctness with cancel-culture tactics.

To those who might say the dinner is no big deal, the context here is everything. Trump may know West and had hosted him in the White House. But, as questionable as his outreach to the mentally unstable rapper/fashion mogul who has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder was then, it's indefensible now.

West's [open antisemitism](#) has been a major story in recent weeks, after a series of tweets in which he aired various conspiracy theories and made threats against Jews. That had followed an appearance by him on *Fox News Channel's* "Tucker Carlson" show from which his antisemitic remarks had been edited out. He has subsequently continued to double down on his hate in one bizarre public remark after another, while also claiming to be planning on another absurd run for president.

Trump should thus have steered clear of any public connection with such a toxic and destructive personality under any circumstances. But this isn't a routine month for Trump; he just announced his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination in 2024.

And he has spent a disproportionate amount of time since then seeking to shore up Jewish support, as was indicated by his last-minute decision to make a virtual appearance at the annual Republican Jewish Coalition conference only days before his tete-a-tete with the two antisemites.

It's one thing for him to gripe about Jews who don't prioritize Israel's security voting for Democrats, rather than him or any Republican. It's quite another to do so while associating with a celebrity who is using his influence with the public to mainstream antisemitism.

Nor do Trump's excuses about not knowing who Fuentes was excuse his meeting. As pundit Ben Shapiro tweeted, the best way to avoid a meeting with an antisemite whom you don't know is to avoid contact with one whom you do.

Moreover, it's not as if Trump is unfamiliar with some of the controversies in which Fuentes and his extremist followers (called "Groypers") have been involved. Fuentes was the focus of controversy in 2019, when conservative pundit Michelle Malkin's support for the YouTube personality/Holocaust denier led the Young America Foundation—a group founded by conservative icon William F. Buckley—to cut ties with her.

As I [wrote](#) at the time, it was imperative for conservatives to make sure that Fuentes and his ilk were not given mainstream platforms to spread their hatred. But Trump continued [retweeting Malkin](#), even when almost everyone else on the right began to ignore her.

Nor is it likely that Trump, who never forgets a slight to himself or his family, had forgotten that Fuentes's Groypers [had heckled](#) his son, Donald, Jr. Yet, he reportedly enjoyed Fuentes's fawning over him at the Mar-a-Lago dinner.

The meeting will help Fuentes, a participant in both the 2017 Charlottesville disgrace and "Stop the Steal" rally on Jan. 6, 2021, in his effort to work his way into the mainstream from the fever swamps of the far-right. It will also encourage West to continue with his efforts to speak out on public affairs, rather than seek treatment for his problems.

What this means is that, barring the unlikely event of a full apology and condemnation of West and Fuentes from Trump, no Jewish conservative or Republican can possibly support him again. His accomplishments as president earned him gratitude, but not a lifetime get-out-of-jail-free card with respect to actions that aid antisemites.

Nor should the censure of Trump be diluted by the typical whataboutism of citing the bad behavior of Democrats.

There's plenty to say about that, especially with Secretary of State Antony Blinken's [disgraceful decision](#) to bring a known anti-Semite and BDS supporter like Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) with him as part of his official delegation on his trip to Qatar to attend the soccer World Cup. It's also true that former presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama have met with Louis Farrakhan, the nation's leading hater. Yet none of it mitigates what Trump has done.

What's worse is the likelihood that some of Trump's devoted supporters will now, as they invariably do, not only dismiss the meeting with West and Fuentes as unimportant, but also dispute, as Carlson and pundit Candace Owens have already done with respect to West, the pair's culpability as spreaders of hate.

That is something that will not only add fuel to the fire of the already growing problem of antisemitism. It will also likely become part of the debate about Trump's presidential campaign, as his true believers bash Jews who support his GOP rivals as ingrates and part of an establishment conspiracy that is out to get their hero.

Like it or not, Trump has almost certainly ensured that tolerance for antisemites on the far-right will become an issue in the 2024 Republican primaries, despite the fact that the party he seeks to lead again is mostly composed of lockstep supporters of Israel and philosemites.

What is also clear is that there is no longer a reasonable argument to be made for continued support for Trump based on his stand on Jewish issues. Understanding this is going to be hard for many Jews who have become deeply invested in him and in burnishing his legacy. But unless he miraculously learns how to admit fault, anyone who clings to him can't pretend to be serious about opposing antisemitism.

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