

'White privilege on display': police hypocrisy condemned after pro-Trump insurgence

Social media users lambaste president and compare police treatment of racial justice protesters with response to mob

Lauren Aratani

Thu 7 Jan 2021



'Appears the "looting/shooting" rule does not apply to everyone,' wrote Adam Serwer. Photograph: Alex Edelman/AFP/Getty Images

Many Americans and people around the world watched in horror as a mob of Donald Trump supporters rushed the US Capitol in Washington DC on Wednesday afternoon, wreaking fear and chaos with seemingly little resistance from police on Capitol Hill.

The events inside the building quickly unfolded on social media as tweets poured out from concerned members of Congress and images of the insurgents inside the Capitol went viral.

While fury over the mob was directed at various Republican lawmakers on social media, Trump bore the brunt of the blame from his most stringent critics. Multiple people, including George Conway, husband of Trump's former adviser Kellyanne Conway, and the US representative Rashida Tlaib called for Trump's immediate impeachment.

While images and videos of Capitol police pointing their guns and running around the building were shared, many more images of the Trump-supporting mob successfully overtaking the building, including sitting at the front of the Senate and walking away with a podium, spread on Twitter.

People were quick to point out the hypocrisy of law enforcement letting the mob, which was overwhelmingly White, take over the Capitol building with little hindrance.

“Always interesting to see how white protestors can encounter so little resistance and breach the capitol with the vice-president there, while black protestors would be lying dead in front of the capitol building right now,” wrote the writer Roxane Gay.

“White privilege is on display like never before in the US Capitol,” tweeted the author and scholar Ibram X Kendi.

Others pointed to the stark contrast between law enforcement’s response to the mob at the Capitol versus their treatment of protesters against police brutality.

“Peaceful protestors got pepper sprayed so Trump could hold a Bible up for a photo in front of a church,” tweeted Shannon Sharpe, a former American football player, referring to an incident that took place over the summer in the midst of protests following the police killing of George Floyd.

“Thinking about all the protestors who got their eyes shot out by rubber bullets this summer for doing things like ‘walking’,” said the journalist Libby Watson. Dozens of people who were peacefully protesting for racial justice, along with some journalists who were covering the events, have sustained serious injuries from rubber bullets and teargas that were used by police to disperse crowds.

“Appears the ‘looting/shooting’ rule does not apply to everyone,” wrote the Atlantic writer Adam Serwer in reply to a picture of an insurgent walking away with a podium, referring to Trump’s tweet in May telling racial justice protesters that “when the looting starts, the shooting starts”.

The New Yorker writer Jelani Cobb said the aggressiveness of the police in Ferguson, Missouri, following the police killing of Michael Brown compared with officers’ response to the mob at the Capitol was “effing astounding”.

Previous crackdowns by Capitol police against peaceful protesters were also shared on Twitter.

Photos and videos were shared of protesters from Adapt, an advocacy group for people who are disabled, being picked up and dragged by Capitol police during a protest for healthcare in 2017.

Another photo showed a dozen police arresting the actor Jane Fonda for protesting against climate change.

Political scientists pointed out that the day’s events would change the way the world views the US. “No one in the world is likely to see, respect, fear, or depend on us in the same way again,” tweeted Richard Haas, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, a US-based thinktank.

Ian Bremmer, president of Eurasia Group, wrote on Twitter: “It is unimaginable that today’s political disaster could happen in Canada, Japan, France or the UK,” saying that the US “is the most politically dysfunctional and divided of advanced industrial democracies”.

World leaders also condemned the insurrection, expressing alarm about what it meant for US democracy.

“Shocking scenes in Washington DC. The outcome of this democratic election must be respected,” tweeted Jens Stoltenberg, secretary general of Nato.

The British prime minister, Boris Johnson, wrote: “Disgraceful scenes in US Congress. The United States stands for democracy around the world and it is now vital that there should be a peaceful and orderly transfer of power.”