

Donald Trump, Felon

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In a humble courtroom in Lower Manhattan on Thursday, a former president and current Republican standard-bearer was convicted of 34 felony counts of falsifying business records. The jury's decision, and the facts presented at the trial, offer yet another reminder — perhaps the starkest to date — of the many reasons Donald Trump is unfit for office.

5 The guilty verdict in the former president's hush-money case was reached by a unanimous jury of 12 randomly selected New Yorkers, who found that Mr. Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee for president, was guilty of falsifying business records to prevent voters from learning about a sexual encounter that he believed would have been politically damaging.

10 Americans may wonder about the significance of this moment. The Constitution does not prohibit those with a criminal conviction from being elected or serving as commander in chief, even if they are behind bars. The nation's founders left that decision in the hands of voters. Many experts have also expressed skepticism about the significance of this case and its legal underpinnings, which employed an unusual legal theory to seek a felony charge for what is more commonly a misdemeanor, and Mr. Trump will undoubtedly seek an appeal.

15 Yet the greatest good to come out of this sordid case is the proof that the rule of law binds everyone, even former presidents. Under extraordinary circumstances, the trial was conducted much as any other criminal trial in the city is. That 12 Americans could sit in judgment of the former and potentially future president is a remarkable display of the democratic principles that Americans prize at work.

20 Justice Juan Merchan, the jury and the New York State legal system delivered speedy justice, providing Americans with vital information about a presidential candidate before voting begins.

The verdict itself establishes that Mr. Trump committed crimes in hiding pertinent information about himself from the American people for the purpose of influencing the 2016 presidential election. It revealed even more evidence of what Mr. Trump is willing to do, including breaking the law and pushing others to break the law, for political gain. That chronic impulse — to override democratic norms and the law to his own ends — is at the heart of two other criminal cases against Mr. Trump, for the
25 much more serious charges of spreading lies and participating in a criminal conspiracy to overturn the 2020 election.

The former president has never shown much moral rectitude, but the facts presented at the New York trial revealed more information. Prosecutors laid out the details of the payoff in careful detail: Shortly
30 after the release of the "Access Hollywood" tape and less than two weeks before the 2016 election, Michael Cohen, who was then Mr. Trump's lawyer and fixer, paid Stormy Daniels, a porn star, \$130,000 to keep quiet about the 2006 sexual encounter she said she had with Mr. Trump. A payoff like this is not illegal by itself. What makes it illegal is doctoring business records to mask its true purpose, which prosecutors said was to hide the story from the American people to help Mr. Trump get elected.

35 Justice Merchan was scrupulous in ensuring that Mr. Trump received a fair trial. In the end, the jury heard the evidence, deliberated for more than nine hours and came to a decision, which is how the system is designed to work. In the same way, elections allow voters to consider the choices before them with full information, then freely cast their ballots. Mr. Trump tried to sabotage elections and the criminal justice system — both of which are fundamental to American democracy — when he thought
40 they might not produce the outcome he wanted. So far, they have proved resilient enough to withstand his attacks. The jurors have delivered their verdict, as the voters will in November. If the Republic is to survive, all of us — including Mr. Trump — should abide by both, regardless of the outcome.