

- 1. Mark your confusion.**
- 2. Show evidence of a close reading.**
- 3. Write a 1+ page reflection.**

Guilty: Trump Becomes First Former President to Be Convicted of Felony Crimes

Source: Michael R. Sisak, Jennifer Peltz, Eric Tucker, Michelle L. Price and Jill Colvin,
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Donald Trump became the first former American president to be convicted of felony crimes Thursday as a New York jury found him guilty of all 34 charges in a scheme to illegally influence the 2016 election through a hush money payment to a porn actor who said the two had sex.

Trump sat stone-faced while the verdict was read as cheering from the street below could be heard in the hallway on the courthouse's 15th floor where the decision was revealed after more than nine hours of deliberations.

"This was a rigged, disgraceful trial," an angry Trump told reporters after leaving the courtroom. "The real verdict is going to be Nov. 5 by the people. They know what happened, and everyone knows what happened here."

Judge Juan Merchan set sentencing for July 11, just days before the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, where GOP leaders, who remained resolute in their support in the aftermath of the verdict, are expected to formally make him their nominee.

The verdict is a stunning legal reckoning for Trump and exposes him to potential prison time in the city where his manipulations of the tabloid press helped catapult him from a real estate tycoon to reality television star and ultimately president. As he seeks to reclaim the White House in this year's election, the judgment presents voters with another test of their willingness to accept Trump's boundary-breaking behavior.

The falsifying business records charges carry up to four years behind bars, though Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg would not say Thursday if prosecutors intend to seek imprisonment, and it is not clear whether the judge — who earlier in the trial warned of jail time for gag order violations — would impose that punishment even if asked.

The conviction, and even imprisonment, will not bar Trump from continuing his White House pursuit.

Trump faces three other felony indictments, but the New York case may be the only one to reach a conclusion before the November election, adding to the significance of the outcome. Though the legal and historical implications of the verdict are readily apparent, the political consequences are less so given its potential to reinforce rather than reshape already hardened opinions about Trump.

Ahead of the verdict, Trump's campaign had argued that, no matter the jury's decision, the outcome was unlikely to sway voters and that the election would be decided by issues such as inflation.

Even so, the verdict is likely to give President Joe Biden and fellow Democrats space to sharpen arguments that Trump is unfit for office, though for now the White House offered only a muted statement that it respected the rule of law. Conversely, the decision will provide fodder for the presumptive Republican nominee to advance his unsupported claims that he is victimized by a criminal justice system he insists is politically motivated against him.

Trump maintained throughout the trial that he had done nothing wrong and that the case should never have been brought, railing against the proceedings from inside the courthouse — where he was joined by a parade of high-profile Republican allies — and racking up fines for violating a gag order with inflammatory out-of-court comments about witnesses.

Republicans showed no sign of loosening their embrace of the party leader, with House Speaker Mike Johnson lamenting what he called "a shameful day in American history." He called the case "a purely political exercise, not a legal one."

The first criminal trial of a former American president always presented a unique test of the court system, not only because of Trump's prominence but also because of his relentless broadsides on the foundation of the case and its participants. But the verdict from the 12-person jury marked a repudiation of Trump's efforts to undermine confidence in the proceedings or to potentially impress the panel with a show of GOP support.

“While this defendant may be unlike any other in American history, we arrived at this trial and ultimately today in this verdict in the same manner as every other case that comes through the courtroom doors, by following the facts and the law and doing so without fear or favor,” Bragg said after the verdict.

The trial involved charges that Trump falsified business records to cover up a hush money payment to Stormy Daniels, the porn actor who said she had sex with the married Trump in 2006.

The \$130,000 payment came from Trump’s former lawyer and personal fixer Michael Cohen to buy Daniels’ silence during the final weeks of the 2016 race in what prosecutors allege was an effort to interfere in the election. When Cohen was reimbursed, the payments were recorded as legal expenses, which prosecutors said was an unlawful attempt to mask the true purpose of the transaction.

Trump’s lawyers contend they were legitimate payments for legal services. He denied the sexual encounter, and his lawyers argued at trial that his celebrity status made him an extortion target.

Defense lawyers also said hush money deals to bury negative stories about Trump were motivated by personal considerations such as the impact on his family and brand as a businessman, not political ones. They also sought to undermine the credibility of Cohen, the star prosecution witness who pleaded guilty in 2018 to federal charges related to the payments, by suggesting he was driven by personal animus toward Trump and fame and money.

The trial featured weeks of occasionally riveting testimony that revisited an already well-documented chapter from Trump’s past, when his 2016 campaign was threatened by the disclosure of an “Access Hollywood” recording that captured him talking about grabbing women sexually without their permission and the prospect of other stories about Trump and sex surfacing that would be harmful to his candidacy.

Trump did not testify, but jurors heard his voice through a secret recording of a conversation with Cohen in which he and the lawyer discussed a \$150,000 hush money deal involving a Playboy model, Karen McDougal, who has said she had an affair with Trump. Trump denies that affair.

Daniels herself testified, offering a vivid recounting of the sexual encounter she says they had in a Lake Tahoe hotel suite. The former publisher of the National Enquirer, David Pecker, testified about how he worked to keep stories harmful to the Trump campaign from becoming public at all, including by having his company buy McDougal’s story.

Jurors also heard from Keith Davidson, the lawyer who negotiated the hush money payments on behalf of Daniels and McDougal. He detailed the tense negotiations to get both women compensated for their silence but also faced aggressive questioning from a Trump attorney who noted Davidson had helped broker similar hush money deals in cases involving other prominent figures.

The most pivotal witness, by far, was Cohen, who during days of testimony gave jurors an insider’s view of the hush money scheme and what he said was Trump’s detailed knowledge of it.

“Just take care of it,” he quoted Trump as saying at one point.

He offered jurors the most direct link between Trump and the heart of the charges, recounting a meeting in which a plan to have Cohen reimbursed in monthly installments for legal services was discussed.

And he emotionally described his dramatic break with Trump in 2018, when he decided to cooperate with prosecutors after a decade-long career as the then-president’s personal fixer.

“To keep the loyalty and to do the things that he had asked me to do, I violated my moral compass, and I suffered the penalty, as has my family,” Cohen said.

The case, though criticized by some legal experts who called it the weakest of the prosecutions against Trump, took on added importance not only because it proceeded to trial first but also because it could be the only one to reach a jury before the election.

The other three — local and federal cases in Atlanta and Washington alleging that he conspired to undo the 2020 election, as well as a federal indictment in Florida charging him with illegally hoarding top-secret records — are bogged down by delays or appeals.

Possible Response Questions

- What are your thoughts about the outcome of this trial? Explain.
- Did something in the article surprise you? Discuss.
- Pick a word/line/passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a “move” made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.