

Trump charged with violating law enacted to combat Ku Klux Klan

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Washington, August 3 (RHC)-- The latest indictment against former President Donald Trump regarding his sweeping campaign to go against the will of the American public and overturn the 2020 election includes one charge under a civil rights law originally enacted to combat the terror and violence perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan.

Special counsel Jack Smith charged Trump with four felony counts on Tuesday, including conspiracy to defraud the United States, obstruction of vote certification proceedings and conspiracy to interrupt such proceedings.

The fourth charge, of conspiracy to violate civil rights, was brought under a statute under the 1871 Ku Klux Klan Act, which was aimed at protecting the public's constitutional rights at a time when the U.S. was seeing a rise in brutal violence against Black people across the U.S.

In facing charges under the Ku Klux Klan Act, Trump is in the company of people like the white nationalists and neo-Nazis who rioted in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017; voter suppression activists like Jacob Wohl and Jack Burkman; and, of course, KKK members themselves who, for many decades, have worked to perpetuate white supremacy and destroy civil rights in the U.S.

Due to a series of rulings by the Supreme Court in the mid-20th century, the legal interpretation of the KKK Act was expanded to cover election fraud conspiracies, especially as they pertain to voting by Black people and other marginalized groups.

White supremacists and the KKK indeed have a long and bloody history of trying to deter Black people from voting. KKK members would drop cards from airplanes in Black neighborhoods to prevent them from voting and — perhaps similarly to Trump militants' actions at the polls in recent years — show up at polling places to intimidate voters.

Observers say that the charge under the KKK Act is a reminder of the racist nature of Trump and his allies' voter suppression efforts during the 2020 election and beyond.

Trump's campaign to have votes overturned in states that went to Biden was similarly racially discriminatory. Lawsuits filed by Trump and his allies in 2020 particularly focused on overturning votes in majority-Black neighborhoods, where President Joe Biden had much higher support. Experts pointed out at the time that this was a blatant move to target Black voters in particular.

The latest charges against Trump, experts say, are extremely damning. The 45-page indictment details how Trump and six unnamed co-conspirators “targeted a bedrock function of the United States Federal government: the nation's process of collecting, counting, and certifying the results of the presidential election” through “pervasive and destabilizing lies about election fraud.”

It describes how, with evidence gathered from sources including notes from former Vice President Mike Pence, Trump and his alleged co-conspirators have had votes against him tossed, recruited fake electors to subvert the process, and then weaponized the Insurrection Act against protesters who rose up against Trump's plot to install himself as president.

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