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HAD the Trump team been trying to figure out a scenario that would propel their figurehead down the path to second coming, they could hardly have done better than arrange an Easter Week arraignment in enemy territory.

The initial drama will be over by the time you read this, and Donald Trump will probably already have ended his much-anticipated press conference back at Mar-a-Lago, milking the Manhattan court appearance on Tuesday for all it’s worth. At the time of writing it was unclear whether this dedicated sinner would explicitly unleash his messiah complex — but then, he’s not terribly good at disguising it.

There’s no chance of Trump being nailed to the cross, but that minor detail is hardly likely to impede his journey to resurrection. He predictably rejected the opportunity for a quiet arraignment via Zoom and insisted on personally turning up in Manhattan. He would have appreciated a “perp walk” in handcuffs, but the Secret Service shot down that idea.

The first-time indictment of an ex-president puts Trump in a club that has no other members. So, for that matter, did his double impeachment by the House of Representatives. Even without these particular distinctions, he would qualify as different even from his worst White House predecessors. Several were, however, guilty of crimes far more egregious than the ones Trump is expected to be charged with.

Is Trump the only ex-president answerable for his crimes?

The latter relate to a hush payment made to a porn star during the 2016 presidential poll campaign. It’s not the payment itself that’s the issue, apparently, but the devious way in which Trump’s lawyer (now a witness for the prosecution) was compensated for it. It never quite succeeded in hushing up Stormy Daniels. She recounted how “he told me once that I was someone to be reckoned with. Beautiful, smart, just like his daughter”.

That sounds like him, even though Trump has denied any payments, or even sexual encounters. As Mandy Rice-Davies said during the Profumo scandal in Britain 60 years ago, “Well, he would, wouldn’t he?” We can rest assured of one thing, though: Trump won’t exercise his newly acquired right to remain silent. If the news conference scheduled at Mar-a-Lago just hours after the arraignment goes ahead, it’ll just be the preface to yet another sordid chapter in the Book of Donald.

Much of the post-indictment commentary has focused on whether his fact-resistant base will be fired up by his prosecution/persecution. That’s pretty much a slam dunk. It’s harder to say whether the broader electorate will feel the same way next year, if Trump wins the Republican nomination. And that could depend to a considerable extent on whether the Democrats can come up with a better and younger candidate than the incumbent president.

But there are broader questions, not least the far more egregious crimes committed by his presidential predecessors. They stretch back centuries, but even if one were to look no further than the past few decades, and ignore the routine (and arguably ongoing) mass murder in distant lands, the likes of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan got away scot-free for potentially treacherous crimes against American citizens. The Nixon campaign successfully scuttled efforts towards a peace agreement in Vietnam, while a dozen years later, Reagan’s emissaries were scouring the Middle East in a quest for intermediaries who could persuade Iran to delay releasing the Americans taken hostage after the 1979 revolution.

The seemingly successful aim in both cases was to shift the dynamics of the presidential elections of 1968 and 1980, respectively. Trump’s folly lay in trying to change the election result after the event — possible because the idea that Biden could defeat him had never crossed his limited mind. There are potential charges pending in that connection, which would be a rather more meaningful legal test than the current storm (or Stormy) in a teacup. For true believers, though, it may well suffice as additional grounds for deeming him a martyr who is suffering for their sins, and that too during Easter Week. The imagery serves Trump’s campaign interests, even though there’s little likelihood of him being handcuffed or imprisoned, let alone being obliged to dress up in a zip-suit that clashes with the colour of his orange skin.

The American establishment, meanwhile, is on tenterhooks about the prospect of a second Trump presidency, given the proxy war with Russia over Ukraine and the drift towards what would be a mutually disastrous conflict with China.

The idea of no one, not even an ex-president, should be above the law is an attractive myth, but it can hardly be taken seriously when those of his ilk conceivably guilty of crimes against humanity have never had any cause to suspect they would be held responsible.

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