

*CBS Mornings*

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7:20:25 a.m. [TEASE]

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[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Coming Up; Trump's Controversial Dinner]

TONY DOKOUPIL: Ahead in just a moment, Republicans are reacting to former President Trump's dinner with white nationalist Nick Fuentes and rapper Kanye West, now known as Ye, of course. John Dickerson's going to be here to talk about the fallout from that meeting between the candidate and two quite public anti-Semites.

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7:30:24 a.m.

5 minutes and 51 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Trump Dinner Backlash; Republicans Denounce Trump for Hosting Antisemites Ye & Nick Fuentes]

DOKOUPIL: And former President Donald Trump is defending himself against a Republican backlash over his recent dinner with two known anti-Semites. As you may know by now, Trump hosted white nationalist and Holocaust denier Nick Fuentes at Mar-a-Lago last week along with the rapper Ye, formerly known as Kanye West. And then yesterday, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell publicly condemned the meeting.

HOUSE MINORITY LEADER KEVIN MCCARTHY (R-CA): I don't think anybody should be spending any time with Nick Fuentes. He has no place in this Republican Party.

SENATE MINORITY LEADER MITCH MCCONNELL (R-KY): There is no room in the Republican Party for anti-Semitism or white supremacy. And anyone meeting with people advocating that point of view, in my judgment, are highly unlikely to ever be elected president of the United States.

DOKOUPIL: CBS News chief political analyst John Dickerson is here. John, exactly the person to talk to on a morning like this. You know, Mitch McConnell did not say Donald Trump's name

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JOHN DICKERSON: Yeah.

DOKOUPIL: — which is noteworthy. What else stands out to you in what might have been a familiar kind of episode from the realm of Donald Trump in the last five years?

DICKERSON: Well, that's what stands out is how familiar it is. That even when you come up against anti-Semitism, there is this collective silence at first about taking him on, either because

Republicans are afraid of taking on Donald Trump because he has littered the roadside with Republicans who have tried to take him on moral issues, and he's won. There are no moral slam dunks with Donald Trump and his party in part because of his supporters who defend him. And because we're in a time where Republicans, the worst sin is giving aid and comfort to the other party. So, if by criticizing Donald Trump on no matter what the issue, it looks like you're giving aid and comfort to Democrats or the media, then they — then they rally around him. And there's no one Republican whose responsibility it is to uphold these standards. You might say, well, on anti-Semitism or racism it's everybody's job, but that's not the political world we're in right now in the Republican party.

GAYLE KING: But can we just look at the history for a second of Donald Trump? He won for president, he — he won the presidency by saying racist things. That didn't seem to stop anybody. What does it say about us?

DICKERSON: Well, that's — that's why I said to Tony it's — this seems very familiar. I mean, think about it. Donald Trump ran for president saying that Obama was not born in America.

KING: Yes.

DICKERSON: So, that's just a straight-up racist play.

KING: Yes.

DICKERSON: Then, as a candidate before he was elected, he said a judge of Mexican heritage couldn't judge him fairly which Paul Ryan at the time said was a textbook statement of racism. Then Mitch McConnell said that — that Donald Trump was ambivalent about the KKK and David Duke and that that was reprehensible. All of those things were said and he was still elected. After Charlottesville, this was — he also — the President said — Lindsey Graham said you are making it morally equivalent between people carrying Nazi flags —

KING: Yes.

DICKERSON: — and people protesting the flags. None of that hurt Donald Trump.

KING: So, is the thinking for the Republicans, “well, I'm going to say anything because if you do you say it at your own peril?”

DICKERSON: You say it at your own peril and also what they know is when they criticize Donald Trump, he doesn't say — doesn't do what previous politicians would have done —

NATE BURLESON: Yeah.

DICKERSON: — in an instance like this which is recognize, “ooo, I did something bad. I'm going to shrink away.”

KING: I'm sorry. I'm wrong.

DICKERSON: Right. Donald Trump runs in the middle, grabs the — the lightning rod, and stays there. No Republican wants Donald Trump in the middle of the conversation who worries about the national reputation of the party. And they saw the downside of that in the 2022 elections where Donald Trump's candidates and his persona hurt the Republican Party.

BURLESON: Look —

KING: I worry about this behavior, though, John, being normalized. That after a while, we'll think, well, it isn't that big a deal —

BURLESON: — right.

KING: — when it still is a big deal —

BURLESON: For sure.

KING: — and it's still really is [sic] wrong.

DOKOUPIL: Well, what the former President is saying is, oh, I didn't know, which is another familiar kind of talking point —

BURLESON: Of course.

DOKOUPIL: — when he has been accused of playing footsie with — with white nationalists before. This is Thanksgiving dinner with a white nationalist.

BURELSON: Yeah.

DOKOUPIL: But he says, "oh, I didn't know the guy."

BURLESON: This isn't a full-throated condemnation of anti-Semitism —

DICKERSON: Oh my — no.

BURLESON: — or racism.

DICKERSON: It's hard for Donald Trump to say he's the smartest person in the world and he doesn't know. So, that's the start. The second thing is Donald Trump has a quick trigger finger when it comes to criticizing people or speaking about outrages.

BURLESON: That's true.

DICKERSON: I mean, think about how many times he — he tweeted about NFL players taking a

knee.

KING: Yeah.

BURLESON: For sure.

DICKERSON: Something like 30 times, right?

BURLESON: Yeah.

DICKERSON: I mean, he's on it like that. But when it comes to racism and anti-Semitism, he starts mumbling. He's hard to read. He doesn't know. When it came to Charlottesville, he never condemned — on Twitter, he issued six tweets about it.

BURLESON: Yeah.

DICKERSON: Never condemned white supremacy, never condemned the Nazis or anything. So, for a person who is an expert at calling out people —

BURLESON: Yeah.

DICKERSON: — and showing outrage, he seems to have very little of it for things —

KING: What does this mean?

DICKERSON: — that are the most outrageous.

KING: What does this mean? That's — I mean, we keep pulling this record over and over again. What does it mean?

BURLESON: Especially for a presidential run —

KING: What, if anything should be done?

BURLESON: — potential presidential run in 2024.

DICKERSON: Well, we'll see what it means for his run. When you talk about normalizing things, Gayle, when — you know, when the Republican Party, we just saw the head of the Oath Keepers get convicted.

KING: Yeah.

BURLESON: Right.

DICKERSON: That's something that the Republican Party, January 6th they said was legitimate

political discourse. When it comes to Donald Trump, there has been this thing where he crosses a line and his supporters basically lower the line or change the line. They've changed the standard which is what normalizing is. So, does this get normalized or do Republicans say because Donald Trump seemed to have been somewhat toxic in the last election, this is — it's kind of a combination, it's a moral failing on Donald Trump's part but also because he's no longer a winner, then they can speak out and it's more powerful for them to do so? Or it's like every other instance in which there's a lot of chatter and then it goes away —

BURLESON: Yeah.

DICKERSON: — and he retains the — the supremacy in the middle of the Republican Party.

BURLESON: John, you're the best. We appreciate you. You can make the most complicated topics —

KING: Yes.

BURLESON: — digestible for us and the viewers.

KING: He does.

DICKERSON: Thank you, Nate.

KING: Always. Yeah.