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Legacy

I used to think during the frightening presidency of Donald Trump that I should buy a gun just in case his anti-Semitic “very fine people” came after me.

After all, I’m Jewish.

Trump, who’s been pissing on us for four years, bequeathed to us the legitimatization of white supremacists, white nationalists, Nazis and other armed posses disguised as protectors of a “free” America. He made it all right to be openly racist because he is.

The torchlight parade of supremacists and anti-Semites chanting “Jews will not replace us” at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville Aug. 14, 2017 sent a chill through me as I realized that fascism can happen here with tyrant Trump as its leader.

This Nazi horror show – the appellation neo-Nazi no longer fits — risen from the ashes of the Holocaust is only one aspect of a warped presidency captained by a madman and abetted and nurtured by the right-wing Republican party for its own sake of securing minority rule.

Trump circumvented and made a mockery of the laws, morals, ethics, principles and traditions that guided a hallowed presidential institution for his own benefit, financial and otherwise. And he inspired the following of a militia to support him, Proud Boys included. Mike Giglio wrote a profile for the November edition of *The Atlantic* of lawyer Stewart Rhodes, 55, founder in 2009 of a militant group called the Oath Keepers. He envisioned the group as a protector of “insurrection” in the country. It has drawn 25,000 people. Fully two-thirds of them are from the military and law enforcement communities, 10 percent of them on active duty, Giglio wrote

The Southern Poverty Law Center gave Giglio the database containing the names and addresses of Oath Keepers members. There’s no army of 25,000 ready to march.

“But the files showed that Rhodes had tapped into a deep current of anxiety, one that could cause a surprisingly large contingent of people with real police and military experience to consider armed political violence,” Giglio wrote.

“In Trump, the Patriot movement believed it had an ally in the White House for the first time,” he wrote. That movement is composed of hundreds of militia groups that formed in the 1990s.

When a Trump supporter was killed in Portland, Ore., last summer, Rhodes tweeted, “Civil war is here, right now.” He was banned from Twitter.

Giglio described a scene in which Rhodes spoke at a VFW hall in Nashville, his comments becoming more inflammatory as he warned about the amorphous antifa and protesters such as those of Black Lives Matter.

“They are insurrectionists, and we have to suppress that insurrection,” Rhodes said. “They’re going to be using IEDs” (improvised explosive devices). “Us old vets and younger ones are going to end up having to kill these young kids. And they’re going to die believing they were fighting Nazis.”

Such is Trump’s Amerika in 2020.

But the problem goes deeper, gets more complicated as Trump keeps avowing, as he did on Twitter, “I WON THE ELECTION” and “RIGGED ELECTION.” He was still at it from the White House Nov. 24.

It’s really so much about what may be purposeful lying, about minority Republican rule. It’s deadly serious stuff, possibly with a clear goal.

Trump’s refusal to concede the election and persistent lying – more than 23,000 lies during his tenure, according to *The Washington Post* – is endemic to totalitarianism.

It’s almost as if he has made a conscious effort, a game plan, not an accident of his miserably twisted personality or rabble rousing at rallies, to create an authoritarian society with him as the cult leader. An overthrow of democracy without a dramatic Third World coup. We do have a powerful military whose leaders don’t seem to appreciate Trump.

“Both George Orwell and Hannah Arendt . . . situated lying squarely at the heart of the totalitarian project,” wrote Sarah Churchwell in the Nov. 21 issue of *The Guardian*. “Not just the Hitlerian big lie of propaganda, but a culture of pervasive lying, what Arendt called ‘lying as a way of life’ and ‘lying on principle,’ systematic dishonesty that destroys the collective space of historical-factual reality.”

“Orwell similarly insisted that lying is ‘integral to totalitarianism:’ indeed, for Orwell, totalitarianism probably ‘demands a disbelief in the very existence of objective truth,’” she wrote.

Example: It may be funny to those of us who know that Joe Biden won the election fair and square despite Trump’s repeated claims of victory. “But it stops being funny,”

Churchwell wrote, “when we acknowledge that millions of people accept this lie as a decree.”

Then she fired an arrow into the Republican party, which, “funded by vastly wealthy donors, has turned itself into America’s ruling class, clinging to fraudulent power by refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy of its opponents, withholding the consent of the loser that is necessary for democracy to function.”

Churchwell, 50, grew up near Chicago, graduated from Vassar, got a master’s and doctorate from Princeton and is a professor of American Literature and Public Understanding of the Humanities at the University of London. She quoted *Irish Times* columnist, drama critic and political commentator Fintan O’Toole, 62, from his recent piece in *The New York Review of Books* in support of her views:

“The logic,” he wrote, “is not that a permanently minority party *may* move toward authoritarianism but that it *must* (emphasis his). Holding power against the wishes of most citizens is an innately despotic act.”

Churchwell did not spare any of us from her critique of Trump and how much she said he reflects so much of American society. It makes me feel ashamed.

Trump’s “divisiveness, rage, dishonesty, greed, double-dealing, dishonor, puerility, truculence, fragility, narcissism and paranoia, all characterize American society today. Trump’s exceptionalism is also American: the rules apply to everyone but him. Trump is all of America’s worst qualities, the nation’s id come roaring to life.”

This is what Biden faces as he tries to unite a terribly divided America. Nearly 74 million people voted for Trump, more than the 63 million votes he received in 2016. Another 80 million voted for Biden. That’s a lot of division.

But we are fortunate indeed that there were enough right-minded Americans who voted for Biden. They spared us from fascism, thus saving our fragile democracy. We need to strengthen our laws to thwart another Trump and to weaken prospects for minority rule.

That gun? I priced a silver revolver at an outdoors sports shop for \$600. I didn’t buy it. What do I know about guns? I bought a fast car instead. It’s more fun than a gun.

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