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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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12.01.2021

Fools Rush In: Trump, Pardons and the Tyrant's Cult



Trump insurrectionists laying siege to the Capitol building – January 6, 2021. (Tyler Merbler, [CC BY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/))

There is little doubt among readers of this online magazine that Donald Trump, like all U.S. presidents before him, is a criminal. His grotesqueness and belligerence, however, has elevated Trump to Nixonian heights. With Bugsy Siegel's mob swagger and the ponzi-salesmanship of Bernie Madoff, Trump, the petty grifter, is unlike almost any official we've witnessed in public life.

In his 1979 book, the *Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, social critic and historian Christopher Lasch all but predicted the dawn of Trumpian politics, writing:

"...the prevailing obsession with celebrity and a determination to achieve it even at the cost of rational self-interest and personal safety. The narcissist divides society into two groups: the rich, great, and famous on the one hand, and the common herd on the other ... The narcissist admires and identifies himself with 'winners' out of his fear of being labeled a loser. ... his

admiration often turns to hatred if the object of his attachment does something to remind him of his own insignificance.”

The only point that Lasch perhaps missed in his pioneering work is the cultish atmosphere a specimen like Donald Trump is able to cultivate and exploit for his own personal and political gains. It’s this innate narcissism, emboldened by a coterie of abiding fools circling round him, that led to the invasion of the Capitol. His racist minions, not too unlike the conditioned and dutiful helter-skeltering Manson Girls, were more than willing to sacrifice their personal safety for what they believed was the greater good — in this case, a battle against the “injustice” Trump had faced at the hands of some mysterious electoral fraud. The sinister enemies were everywhere. The media. Mitch McConnell. Nancy Pelosi. The Georgia Secretary of State and even that smarmy Mike Pence. The lone truth-teller was Trump, the great defender of the supremacy of white America, and to his energetic fans, the only man able to save our fragile and dying Republic from the brink of collapse.

Understanding Trump as a cult leader is the only way to truly appreciate the power he wields and the idiocy he manifests. Few others could call upon their legions to storm government buildings with the dashing hope their efforts would make a difference, overturning what they falsely believed was a rigged election. No longer did police lives matter to these twisted Patriots. No longer did America’s legal system matter, which shot down one election lawsuit after another. No longer did common sense matter, if the Capitol stormers had any to begin with. Only their President mattered. Only fulfilling his delusional fantasies mattered, and this was worth risking imprisonment and even death for. While the refrain may have been “Make America Great Again”, the real mantra echoing through Washington last Wednesday was “Keep Trump President.” He had not, after all, lost, according to them. The multiple logics here were murky at best, but the essence of their rhetoric was not.

As an ice-cold Trump stood at his podium, cold air blowing against his puffy, orange cheeks, he bellowed nonsense to the assemblage below, which was largely made up of white men and women clasp ing red Trump flags and banners. Like so many of his election trail spectacles, his speech was long-winded, meandering, and bellicose. The crowd screamed “*Fight for Trump! Fight for Trump! Fight for Trump!*” At the end, he called on the riled-up crowd to parade with him to the Capitol building where Congress was meeting to certify Biden’s electoral victory. They would finally be heard. There would finally be justice.

“...we fight like hell, and if you don’t fight like hell you’re not going to have a country anymore ... So we are going to—we are going to walk down Pennsylvania Avenue, I love Pennsylvania Avenue, and we are going to the Capitol, and we are going to try and give—the Democrats are hopeless, they are never voting for anything, not even one vote but we are going to try—give our Republicans, the weak ones because the strong ones don’t need any of our help, we’re try—going to try and give them the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country. So let’s walk down Pennsylvania Avenue.”

We all know what transpired next. The broken windows. The stolen podium. The “[QAnon Shaman](#)” with his horns and fur hat. A self-proclaimed white nationalist kicking back at Pelosi’s desk. The woman, shot and [killed by police](#) as her fellow rioters violently attempted to break down a barricaded door. One cop was killed. It was chaos as [numerous fascist groups](#) converged for action. Trump, of course, did not march with his cult down Pennsylvania Avenue that afternoon. He never planned to. Instead, he stayed back, stoically [watching the scene unfold](#) on television screens safely under a white tent as Laura Branigan’s “Gloria” blared in the background. Everyone was packed in, smiling. Dancing. Celebrating. Maskless. Drunk on Trump madness.

Had the rioters had black or brown skin, armed or not, they would surely have been shot on the spot as they climbed walls and ransacked the congressional building. Instead, a few of Trump’s intruders were greeted by [gleeful officers](#) while hordes of off-duty [cops hung out in the crowd](#). The breach was easy for the mob, as security forces holding the line futilely fired pepper spray. Their efforts failed miserably. They were outnumbered and ill-prepared. Why weren’t they ready for what so many knew was coming? Because these were wholesome white goons and not black rights activists? During last summer’s BLM protests in DC, there were [far more stormtroopers](#) present, an overwhelming show of force. The lack of police presence on January 6 appeared intentional.

As more photos are corroborated and verified, it’s becoming evident that a group of these fascist thugs, some with military backgrounds, had something even more sinister planned than smearing their feces on the walls of power. They [planted pipe bombs](#) and had a [truck full of weapons](#) at the ready. One instigator, as Ronan Farrow [reported](#) for *The New Yorker*, decked in full military garb and a handful of zip ties, was Air Force Academy graduate and retired Lt. Colonel. Ret. Larry Brock, a decorated combat veteran from Texas. He and his fellow Confederate flag-waving terrorists were out for blood. As the raid transpired, Trump, the pseudo-conductor, gleefully responded that he “loved” them and that they were “very special” but they could go home now. The National Guard, after Trump initially resisted, was finally called in. As of this writing, [only 82](#) have been arrested for breaking into the Capitol. By comparison, DC cops arrested [five times that number](#) during last summer’s BLM protests. There is little doubt, legal or otherwise, that Trump fomented this haphazard insurrection. While some of the planning was orchestrated in the darker corners of the web, Trump’s Twitter account acted as ground zero for the disorder. After months of claiming, falsely and without evidence, that the election was stolen, he tweeted on December 19, “*Big protest in D.C. on January 6th.*” This was one of several tweets he blasted out supporting the action. “*Be there, will be wild!*”

His cult, from the Proud Boys to QAnon, latched on quickly, and Pro-Trump forums across the web were exuberant about their “daddy’s” call (yes, some called him “daddy”) for an uprising against Congress. It was all out in the open. They were planning to be armed. They

were planning to “[arrest](#)” members of Congress. They said Trump’s Tweet was a “[marching order](#)” and prepared themselves to [shoot](#) counter-protestors.

While the FBI ignored the threats, Twitter and other social media giants took note. Following the three-hour takeover, Facebook and Instagram blocked Trump. Twitter placed his account in jail for 12 hours, only to later ban him altogether. By the weekend, Twitter began to scrub those they deemed QAnon or promoters and supporters of Trump’s call for insurrection. The Electronic Frontier Foundation, an advocacy group that works to defend civil liberties in the digital world, was [swift to respond](#):

“The decisions by Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and others to suspend and/or block President Trump’s communications via their platforms is a simple exercise of their rights, under the First Amendment and Section 230, to curate their sites. We support those rights. Nevertheless, we are always concerned when platforms take on the role of censors, which is why we continue to call on them to apply a [human rights framework](#) to those decisions.”

This social media blockade is the first real punishment Trump has faced for his actions since the failed impeachment attempt of last year. Could he receive more? The 25th Amendment is not going to be invoked and impeachment proceedings are facing hurdles. Once Trump vacates the White House he may be facing [numerous charges](#) in New York for financial crimes and even election finance fraud for his various payments to Stormy Daniels. But will he ever be brought to justice for inciting this ugly white nationalist riot? It’s possible. *The New York Times* [reports](#) the DOJ is open to pursuing charges. Others believe the charges could stick. “Based on everything I saw my 30 years as a federal prosecutor, it sure looks like there’s enough to charge him with inciting a riot,” says former Assistant U.S. Attorney Glenn Kirschner.

Of course, any criminal case against Trump would not transpire until he leaves office on January 20. But what of a self-pardon? There’s plenty of talk of Trump not only pardoning those around him who have yet to be accused of a crime (Ivanka, Rudy, Jared, etc.) but of pardoning himself as well. Such a pardon, however, may or may not hold up in court. In a 1974 opinion by the Dept. of Justice, written in response to Nixon’s dealings with Watergate and the potential for his own self-pardon, the DOJ [responded](#) that, “Under the fundamental rule that no one may be a judge in his own case, the President cannot pardon himself.”

For such a self-pardon to be litigated, Trump would first have to be charged. Such an indictment is no guarantee but still possible. On Friday, a DC City official, who was not authorized to speak on the matter, told me the City was discussing a charge against Trump for the mob disorder. On Sunday it was confirmed by Washington DC District Attorney, Michael R. Sherwin, who said he will be going after all those involved, including any elected officials. However, any prosecution in DC falls under federal jurisdiction. So any pardon challenge

would go into effect and likely make its way to the Supreme Court, where Trump-leaning appointees now stack the bench.

Though it may be only a matter of days, we have a long road to traverse before we reach the end of this four-year-long dumpster fire. Already, scores of Trump's acolytes are planning a violent confrontation on Inauguration Day and these fascists are more armed and crazier than ever. As Trump, the pathological narcissist that he is, finally loses grip on power, his significance will wane and breed further resentment in this sick and sinister faction of white America, energized by their vile settler mentality that has existed since these lands were first stolen from indigenous nations. It may take years before this latest chapter of our country's history finally comes to a close, if it ever shuts completely. In the interim, there will be more sporadic madness and more bloodshed, until the day the Trump cult, outnumbered and on the ropes, has nothing tangible to fight for, no leader, no mythical wrong that can be righted. Hopefully, Trump's white nationalist goons will be left with only a faint memory of their childish insurgency, shining dully like the fool's gold they've been sold.

JANUARY 11, 2021

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