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On Some Bad House Manager Language



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The House Managers' presentation in the second Senate impeachment trial of the malignant fascist reptile (MFR) Donald Trump has been, to put it mildly, a slam dunk. With great skill and abundant proof, they have demonstrated beyond all reasonable doubt that the orange monstrosity fueled and sparked a mass violent and fascistic assault on the United States Congress last January 6th. The deadly Capital Riot, they have shown, was instigated with the explicit purpose of stopping the certification of the orange monstrosity's clear defeat in the 2020 presidential election and was based on the monstrosity's baseless lie that the election was "stolen." As the House Managers have made clear, no reasonable deliberative body can be true to its claims of faith in democracy and decency and allow the MFR go unpunished and free to hold federal office again.

Indeed

That said, there are four problems with the language the House Managers are using in their expert evisceration of the MFR. First, they have been unwilling to use “the F-word” – fascism – to describe Trump, his most fervent backers, and the January 6th Attack on the Capitol. That’s a shame because the word richly applies.

As Paul Krugman wrote one day after the assault, “Donald Trump...*is indeed a fascist – an authoritarian willing to use violence to achieve his racial nationalist goals.* So are many of his supporters. If you had any doubts,” the January 6th incident “should have ended them.”

Indeed. It is important to identify what one is up against to properly address and fight it. (Not that there should have been any serious doubts before January 6th. Trump was who he said he was from the minute he first declared his 2016 presidential campaign.)

“Our Commander in Chief”

Second, it was disturbing to hear the House Managers repeatedly refer to the President of the United States as “*our commander-in-chief.*” That is inaccurate. The House Managers are not enlisted in the U.S. military and neither is 99.7 percent of the U.S. population. The American president is the commander-in-chief of the U.S. military alone, not the citizenry. The U.S. civilian population is not “commanded” by its top elected official. The POTUS is not their “commander.”

“The Greatest Country on Earth”

Third, the House Managers have made repeated references to the United States as “*the greatest country on Earth*” and other words to that effect. An excellent primer on why that’s wrong is Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson’s magisterial comparative study *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger.* The United States is a savagely inequitable and militantly capitalist, wasteful, eco-cidal, and plutocratic (see below) society that scores very badly in comparison to its fellow rich nations on economic equality, poverty, public health, racial oppression, women’s rights, mass incarceration, violence, civic engagement, literacy, numeracy, workers’ rights, empathy, and more. (Look at its disgraceful performance in response to COVID-19: a nation with less than 5 percent of global population quickly became home to a quarter of the pandemic’s victims.)

The American people are subject to an unelected and interrelated dictatorship of concentrated wealth and global empire – an empire that has murdered millions the world over and that continues to oppress billions. The U.S. global imperialism and the U.S. domestic misery are inseparably linked: half of U.S. federal discretionary spending goes pays for a Pentagon System that accounts for more than 40 percent of global military expenditure and maintains more than 1000 military installations across more than 80 countries. Think of how many children could be lifted out of poverty, how many Green Jobs programs could be undertaken, how many medical outreach operations could be launched with the money Uncle Sam spends on its historically and globally unmatched warfare state, the single leading institutional carbon emitter on the planet.

The United States is NOT “the greatest nation on Earth.” (The MFR is as American as cherry pie.). Much of humanity would say *worst nation on Earth*, or close, with good reason.

“Our Great Democracy”

Fourth, there is the House Managers’ reference to Trump’s (unmentionably fascistic) attack on “*our great democracy*,” supposedly granted to us by our great Founders.

What *great democracy* bequeathed by which great Founders?

By numerous rigorously researched political science accounts[1], the United States is a corporate and financial oligarchy whose “democratic” political and policy contests typically amount to battles between competing authoritarian blocs of capital.

Democracy? The great majority of Americans opposed the Trump tax cut of December 2017. So what? It went through anyway. Seven in ten Americans now back Single Payer health insurance, hardly surprising amidst an epic pandemic. Who cares? As we hold our breath moving from the Trump nightmare through the first 100 days of Wall Street Democrat Joe Biden’s presidency, universal national health insurance isn’t remotely on the policy table. Corporate “No Empathy” Joe suggested as a candidate that he would veto Medicare for All if it came to his desk. This was consistent with his promise to elite financial backers in 2019: “nothing would fundamentally change” – there would be no downward distribution of wealth, income, and power – when he became president.

“Our great democracy”? Really?

Forget for now the Marxist thesis, to which I assent, that bourgeois democracy cloaks the underlying dictatorship of capital – that capitalism and democracy are fundamentally opposed to one another. Quite true, as I have joined many fellow Marxists and other anti-capitalists in demonstrating over and over.

But no, put that aside for a moment and look simply at the ancient charter of ruling class governance that plagues the United States more than 23 decades after it was introduced by slaveowners, merchant capitalists and publicists for whom democracy was the ultimate nightmare. In the third decade of the 21st Century, “the world’s greatest democracy” still doesn’t elect its absurdly powerful chief executive through a nationwide popular vote but rather through a bizarre Electoral College system designed to appease slaveholders in the 18th Century. Under the nation’s deeply conservative 1788 Constitution, the American presidential election system is skewed to overrepresent that most reactionary parts of the country.

Constitutional Simon Says.

It is next to impossible to remove a criminal sitting president prior to one of the nation’s strictly time-staggered quadrennial and undemocratic elections. It takes a two-thirds vote in the U.S. Senate to do so – a very steep barrier overcome just once in American history (the *de facto* impeachment and removal of the deranged racist criminal Richard Nixon).

Even after losing an election he clearly tried to subvert, the MFR was granted seven more weeks to wreak havoc from the seat of the most dangerous office on Earth cuz Constitutional Simon Says.

The nation's system for apportioning representatives to the powerful upper body of its legislature is even more absurdly skewed towards the absurd overrepresentation of its most right-wing regions. It boldly violates the elementary democratic principle of one person, one vote by giving every state just two U.S. Senators regardless of each state's total populations. (This, too, was very much about appeasing slaveowners.)

Eighteenth Century Constitutional Simon Says.

The problem has worsened thanks to a significant shift of population from rural and interior areas to metropolitan and coastal regions over recent decades.

The House of Representatives and most state legislatures are badly skewed to the right by widespread partisan and racial gerrymandering. Constitutional Simon leaves this up to the states for the most part.

The right-wing federal court system, appointed for life, holds authoritarian policy-vetoing power via constitutionally mandated judicial review. It skews well to the right of majority public opinion.

As if all this isn't bad enough, the judicially sanctioned domination of American politics by the superior campaign finance weight of the wealthy Few (under two plutocratic Supreme Court decisions – *Citizens United* [2010] and *Buckley v. Valeo* [1976]) combines with numerous other mechanisms of ruling class domination (please see the chapter titled “How They Rule” in my 2014 book *They Rule: The 1% v. Democracy*) to further ensure that the policy preferences of the nation's working-class majority are regularly trumped by those of the rich and powerful. It's what the current and brilliant top House Manager Jamin Raskin and his onetime fellow constitutional scholar John Bonifaz called in 1993 “the wealth primary” – the requirement that candidates either possess great wealth or have access to others' fortunes to pay for increasingly expensive campaigns.

Shall we talk about the insane Senate Filibuster rule, an arch-authoritarian offensive of a procedure with a long ugly and racist history?

Get Ready

A good plurality of Americans (47%) of the U.S. populace agrees that – as Raskin and his House team have shown with great brilliance – the MFR *should* be convicted after his impeachment trial (40% disagree and 12% aren't sure). But so what? Everybody knows it isn't happening. It's not going down for a simple reason: the U.S. Senate is absurdly tilted far to the right of public opinion by its preposterously un-democratic apportionment rules, inherited from the 18th Century and reflecting the desire of horse and buggy-era southern slaveholders to keep their vile racist chattel system in place. The Senate today is 50-50

Democratic-Republican even though [Democratic Senators represent 41,549,808 more Americans](#) than their Republican counterparts. *Some democracy!*

Think all this is contrary to the supposedly democratic intent of our Great Founders? Think again. Read the *Federalist Papers*. Read the proceedings of the 1787-88 Constitutional Convention. Read my [2015 Telesur English essay](#), “Enough with the Holy Founders.” Democracy, that is, popular sovereignty, was absolutely the last thing the nation’s militantly [propertarian Founders](#) wanted to see break out in their infant republic. They drafted a system brilliantly designed to keep it bay.

I won’t be surprised, but I’ll still have to sit and slow my breath when the MFR is “exonerated” for fueling and sparking a murderous attempted fascist coup on 1/6/2021. As the left historian and journalist Terry Thomas wrote me the other day:

Get ready. ‘Cause it’s coming. Nonetheless, it is necessary for this to take place, if for no other reason than it offers everyone who cares to look *the graphic reality of what this nation is*. And of course that includes the 44 Senators who will say this is all unfortunate but ultimately we’re fine with it. No one can claim ignorance moving forward...Trump claimed he could shoot somebody on 5th Avenue with impunity. People generally dismissed the claim as typical crap from a guy notorious for being full of narcissistic crap. Now Rand Paul, Josh Hawley, Lindsey Graham, Tommy Tuberville, Ted Cruz and the rest are proving him right. Five people died in this coup attempt.

A graphic portrayal of what this nation is, indeed.

FEBRUARY 12, 2021

Endnote

1. Good starter works are Benjamin Page and Martin Gilens, *Democracy in America? What Has Gone Wrong and What We Can Do About It* (University of Chicago Press, 2017); Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer and Turned its Back on the Middle Class* (Simon and Schuster, 2011); Ronald Formisano, *American Oligarchy* (University of Illinois, 2017); Paul Street, *They Rule: The 1% v. Democracy* (Routledge, 2011).

Paul Street’s new book is [The Hollow Resistance: Obama, Trump, and Politics of Appeasement](#).