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## America's Instinctive Fascism Creeps On



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

Recently Norman Ornstein told *Salon's* Chauncy de Vega that the United States is mired in a crisis of democracy that shows parallels with Germany's descent into Nazism during the 1930s. Ornstein is right to worry about the nation's ongoing lethal rightward drift beyond "normal" bourgeois democracy. That is how the United States' political life is shaping up. The signs are ominous indeed. As de Vega writes, "the coup attempt of January is only a prelude to similar events in the future, when Republicans and their allies fully intend to overthrow any election they lose, and therefore deem illegitimate." De

Vega quotes a gloomy passage from a widely read *Washington Post* essay written by the right-wing commentator Robert Kagan:

*‘The United States is heading into its greatest political and constitutional crisis since the Civil War, with a reasonable chance over the next three to four years of incidents of mass violence, a breakdown of federal authority, and the division of the country into warring red and blue enclaves...We are already in a constitutional crisis. The destruction of democracy might not come until November 2024, but critical steps in that direction are happening now. In a little more than a year, it may become impossible to pass legislation to protect the electoral process in 2024. Now it is impossible only because anti-Trump Republicans, and even some Democrats, refuse to tinker with the filibuster. It is impossible because, despite all that has happened, some people still wish to be good Republicans even as they oppose Trump. These decisions will not wear well as the nation tumbles into full-blown crisis.’”*

Millions of racist, sexist, and nativist white Americans, many if not most of them armed, are angrily panting for the Amerikaner Party of Trump’s (APoT’s) return to full national power and revenge. The storming of the US Capitol last January 6<sup>th</sup> is for them just a test run for further and more serious efforts to “take our country back.” The second American civil war they want is already being waged in numerous ways, including the right’s interrelated assaults on minority voting rights, gun control, election integrity, women’s reproductive rights, racially honest school curriculum, and basic public health measures to defeat COVID-19.

Two in every three Republicans still absurdly believe the 2020 election was stolen from its supposed rightful winner, the Confederacy fan Donald Trump.

Come out to a red state (I’m writing from Iowa, trying to get used to people not wearing masks in grocery stores after a month in heavily masked Chicago) to catch a whiff of what’s afoot. Half of Trump Party (the GOP) voters would support seceding from the union. More than three-fourths of the nation’s Republikans absurdly think that Democrats are “socialists” (which is of course the worst thing someone can be as far as fascists are concerned.)

Donald Trump’s hate rally and de facto 2024 presidential campaign announcement in Des Moines last weekend was a soul-numbing example of how virulent the Republifascist menace remains ten months out from the Capitol Riot. Thousands of deluded white Amerikaners arrived keen to hear Hitlerian lies from the mouth of their Dear Leader. The orange beast delivered. “As we gather here tonight,” Trump told the fascist revival

meeting, “we realize that Joe Biden and the Radical Left have brought our nation to the brink of ruin. There’s never been anything like what has happened.” The Orwellian vomit spewed from the malignant tyrant’s lower cranial orifice for more than an hour, with white-nationalist Trumpenvolk eagerly inhaling the rancid racist and sexist fumes and proclaiming “Smells like Freedom!”

But perhaps the most significant thing about this dark gathering at the Iowa State Fair Grounds was the full-on embrace of the Despicable One by the GOP establishment. This was signaled by the presence of Iowa governor Kim Reynolds and senior Republican US Senator Charles Grassley at what amounted to an early 2024 presidential campaign announcement in the pivotal Caucus state of Iowa. As Politico’s Meredith McGraw reported:

*DES MOINES, Iowa — Nine months ago, Republicans were questioning Donald Trump’s place as the lead fixture of their party. Saturday night provided the clearest evidence yet that they want him right there...Not one year removed from surviving a second impeachment, the former president rallied before thousands of his most loyal supporters across the Iowa State Fairgrounds on a balmy Midwestern evening...The bulk of Trump’s speech was devoted to his baseless claim that the 2020 election was stolen — a false belief that was supported by the crowd, who broke out into chants of “Trump won! Trump won! Trump won!” But the notable elements were not what was said by Trump, but who was there with him. Appearing alongside the former president was a who’s who of influential Republicans in the Hawkeye state, including Sen. Chuck Grassley and Gov. Kim Reynolds, Iowa Reps. Mariannette Miller-Meeks and Ashley Hinson, former acting Attorney General Matt Whitaker and Iowa GOP Chair Jeff Kaufmann.*

*Trump has held rallies since leaving the White House. But never have elected Republicans of such tenure and stature appeared with him. And the presence of Grassley in particular signified that whatever qualms the GOP may have had with Trump are now faded memories; whatever questions they had about the direction of the party have been resolved. Trump himself seemed to recognize as much, as he focused intently on relitigating the results of the 2020 elections even while admitting his own party members wished he would just move on.*

*...It was not that long ago when there was more uncertainty about Trump’s future within the party. Back in January, Grassley offered a stinging condemnation of Trump’s behavior in the aftermath of the 2020 election — the type of statement that, at its heart, suggested a desire to rid himself of the messiness.... But Grassley is in a different place now. He*

*recently announced, at age 88, that he is running for an eighth term. And with it, Trump has gone from nuisance to needed. This week, Grassley and Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee released a report that claimed Trump's reported pressure on the Department of Justice to change election results was not just overblown but consistent with the commitments of the office of the president to uphold the Constitution.*

Fascist consolidation within the GOP/APoT is complete. As the smart *Salon* writer and *Counterpuncher* David Masciotra writes, "Liz Cheney, Adam Kinzinger, et. al. have no influence, whatsoever, in their party."

So what if Trump tried to overthrow a presidential election through five basic publicly exposed strategies: pressuring Secretaries of State not to certify votes; pressuring state legislatures to reverse the outcome; trying to get the courts and the Justice Department to overturn the results; trying to get Vice President Mike Pence to reject the results and throw the election into the House of Representatives (which would have given him a second term under the one vote per state rules of the Twelfth Amendment); unleashing a mad fascist mob to overturn the election? Big deal! It's all good in the GOP/APoT. It's like Mike Pence says: "why should we get our undies all in a bunch over one day in January" (and besides, everyone knows it was "Antifa" that really led the January 6 riot).

Surprised? Why? The party went basically fascist when it congealed around its tangerine-tinted cult leader in 2016. It's party platform in 2020 was Trump's "America First agenda," no policy planks required. The overwhelming majority of its Congressional delegation voted against certifying Biden's clear win within hours of the fascist Attack on the Capitol. Former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (Rf-CA) went from screaming at Trump from within the besieged Capitol (begging the maniacal President UnElect to call off his neo-Confederate raiders on January 6) to running down to Mar-a-Lago to kiss Darth Trumper's ring within a matter of weeks.

The Republifascist Party is now hard at work making sure that the right people are in place in state governments and Congress to pull off a successful "constitutional coup" should Joe Biden or whoever the "Radical Left" (um, corporate, neoliberal, and imperialist) Democrats run (Kamala Harris would be a sacrificial lamb) run seem to be winning the 2024 election. Along with their success in blocking the Build Back Better bill and nudging down Biden's popularity by slowing economic recovery and fueling death with pandemicist resistance to vaccines and mandates, their ongoing plans for voter suppression, gerrymandering, and (above all) election nullification make the white

power APoT's return to full power across all three branches of the federal government seem like a distinct possibility.

The Inauthentic Opposition Party, the Democrats, have little on offer and little to stop this horrid trajectory beyond their usual *Hollow Resistance*.

The orange fiend's psychologist liberal niece Mary Trump initially doubted that Trump would run again, citing his fear of being labeled a "loser" twice. But the calculations have changed. Thanks to the voter suppression and election nullification measures being undertaken in the states, Ms. Trump concluded last summer, her "instinctive fascist" (her actual description) uncle is likely to run again. And that was before Biden's approval numbers took a major hit from his botched Afghanistan withdrawal.

Offering yet more proof of his virulent white supremacism, a critical component of his "instinctive" fascism, Trump said that the United States would have registered a "complete and total victory" in Afghanistan had its troops been led by General Robert E. Lee. Never mind that Trump himself advocated total withdrawal from Afghanistan and that Lee *lost in a treasonous war against the United States fought to preserve Black chattel slavery*.

Anyone on the left still stupid enough even now to dismiss the fascistic nature of the APoT menace should be forced to wear a dunce cap and lick a jackboot in public for at least one hour per day. As if trying to stomp the point into Trumpenleft fascism-deniers' deadened, mostly white male brains, the Donald recently sent a message to the family of the January 6th marauder Ashli Babbitt honoring her birthday and promising an investigation of her death. Babbitt, who Trump treats as a heroic martyr on the model of the Nazi Party's glorification of Horst Wessel, (a Nazi streetfighter supposedly killed by communists in 1930) was tragically but properly killed by a Capitol police officer as she tried to violently interrupt the constitutional order and block the certification of an election. She a was a military veteran in the lethal vanguard of a ferocious fascist mob seeking to murder and maim elected officials and keep their demented cult object in power.

Poor people of color break into a convenience store to "loot" some food? That's when "the [legitimate police] shooting starts," says Trump. A white Air Force veteran and crazed MAGA putschist and QAnon conspiracist veteran gets killed by a responsible law enforcement agent while trying to assault elected Congresspersons and overthrow an election? Trumps calls it Bloody murder by "the Radical Left" and promises an enquiry. As the Yale philosopher Jason Staley has noted, lawlessness in the name of law and order is one of fascism's calling cards.

Expect Trump to start speaking up loudly in defense of the white heartland teenybopper fascist Kyle Rittenhouse, a cop- worshipping MAGA who killed two Black Lives Matter protesters with an illegally brandished assault weapon in Kenosha, Wisconsin, in August of 2020. Horst Rittenhouse's trial starts in seventeen days.

Kenosha was one of Trump's last campaign stops the night before Election Day last November. Kyle can expect a position in the second Trump administration. Maybe he can carry the nuclear football by his master's side.

**Paul Street's** new book is *The Hollow Resistance: Obama, Trump, and Politics of Appeasement*.

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