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## Good Guys/Bad Guys

There is one common reason for the collapse of democracy: capitalist society has outlived its strength. The national and international antagonisms which break out in it destroy the democratic structure just as world antagonisms are destroying the democratic structure of the League of Nations. Where the progressive class shows itself unable to seize power so as to reconstruct society on the basis of socialism, capitalism in its agony can only preserve its existence by using the most brutal, anti-cultural methods, the extreme expression of which is Fascism. That historic fact appears in Hitler's victory

– Leon Trotsky, March 1933, written on the occasion of Hitler's victory

We are in an intensely good guys/bad guys cultural mindset. I describe it as a cultural imaginary because how we see our enemies is more of how we imagine them than how we've experienced them. We don't hang with those living differently than we do so we have little firsthand knowledge. But we read, listen and see representations of what we do not have firsthand knowledge. But it's a passionate seeing and hearing in that we are already responding within a space in which everything is already tagged. There's no neutral position outside anything because we are always already positioned in mind and heart someplace.

Right now, there's a contesting of narratives going on at an intense level but one that has sidelined the classic Capital vs. Labor struggle, as well as another chapter of the Civil Rights movement that was heating up after George Floyd, as well as the Reaganomics of the Chicago school of economics, as well, and the neo-liberal regime change policies of the G. W. Bush circle. These have all been overwritten and vacated by our pro and con Donald J. Trump cultural imaginary.

Whether you choose to be somewhere else, if you are in the U.S. right now, you are in a place Trump is creating for you. By a flurry of executive orders, he is upending the world you knew.

Those who believe that ask how has a personality ascended to the U.S. presidency twice without offering any credentials beyond destructive and vindictive intentions? He hasn't written a *Mein Kampf*, or opposed Marx with National Socialism. There's no "Quotations from Chairman Mao." No Little Red Book. MAGA is a campaign slogan, like Obama's "Yes, we can," neither a political ideology. But he is effectively trying to replace a Constitutional balance of powers with himself. Autocracy, not electoral democracy.

Those who hold that Trump is turning the world right side up after the ruinous Biden presidency as he did after the ruinous Obama presidency, do not cherish a balance of powers or the Constitution that grounds such. It's all led to a "woke" and DEI desecration of traditional American social and moral values. Trump is the strong man who can act decisively and quickly to destroy degenerate values and bring back the greatness of America. Savior, not megalomaniac.

The results of this Presidential election reveal that more voters frame Trump as their champion than as an emissary from Hell. But his victory goes deeper. It signifies that a way of knowing and a way of being in the world have become rigidly dualistic. In a way this fits the zero sum game of capitalism, as well as the antagonism of moral categories. On the level of political strategy, you can observe that Trump has adhered to a time honored strategy to reach enough voters to win an election. Remember, the clash of opposing narratives is a clash of opposing ways in which the world appears. To change your opponent's mind is to change the world as they know it and live in it.

Here Trump has won and every stripe of Democrat has lost. Good guys and bad guys.

The clash going on follows what film critics called "the classic realist" formula: John Wayne is the good guy and the bad guy is the guy he beats up. Wayne wants to do something good for the folks, maybe save them; the bad guys aren't Christians or honest but degenerate. When evil is knocking righteousness, and Wayne, out the door, and it seems as if everything is so corrupt that all hope is gone, the good guy returns, takes over and crushes his enemies. Obama, Trump declared, "has been the most ignorant president in our history. . . the world is a mess." Note that "the good guy" ready to save the day dog whistles the racism that he judges appealing. Obama has put us on the tracks, a perilous moment. Barak HOSSAIN Obama. Donald J. to the rescue. Out of the same play book in the 2024 election. Here, the bad guy, "Sleepy Joe," led us to inflation and illegal alien peril, along with his administration

of stupid people. Kamala Harris “cackled while the economy burned.” Another low tag: women cackle.

The most successful proven way of narrating, of passionate acceptance by the greatest number of folks of what is represented follows this formula. Trump is not the first politico to brand who the good and bad guys are but his is an all rules and protocols barred play, one in which he pitches low and dirty but finds welcoming targets. If Trump pitched what we weren't already in a place to receive, he wouldn't be president. There was nothing in him that wasn't reflected in us. Something Americans have to reckon with after Trump is gone.

What we have is Tammany Hall low ball but not in the back room. What's startling about Trump, among a lot, is how open he is to exposing his Id to us. AI: “Id: a part of the mind that is unconscious and impulsive, and is driven by the need for immediate gratification.” Freud tells us life is a long struggle to keep the Id in check. Trump doesn't or can't or won't. Ditto Musk. But once again, Americans know the Id. We can't play the ingenue. Trump arrived and succeeded with his mean, low ball because the country was already positioned to welcome him.

When you get away from the naïve realist formula of setting up good and bad and intimate that neither what is good or evil/true or false is not transparently clear but seen “through a glass darkly,” you lose the majority. When you go even further and cast doubts by undermining our narrating ways, then you are denying the autonomy of the individual to shape an airtight story of what is and what is going on for themselves. If you, however, can stick a “fake news narrative” on your opponents while sanctifying your own narrative, then you've gotten the “naïve realism” formula to work for you. You've unsettled any sure sense of what truth is, which Trump needs to do to dismiss rational grounded indictments against him, but you've immediately allayed that trepidation with the presence of yourself, Truth as Trump. Trump has done that.

In Hitler's rise to power, he had to tarnish his chief antagonists, the Communists, who were tarnishing him. It was a fight Hitler won by convincing enough Germans that the Communists would make them puppets of the Soviet Union. One political ideology clashed with another. The clash now between Liberals and MAGAS, or the Radical Left vs. the Voice of the People, or, the will of President Trump vs. all who oppose him is a clash of passions, not ideologies. “The Enemy Within” is within the “Deep State.” The Enemy within that Deep State is a radical, progressive, liberal, “woke,” DEI propagandistic Democratic Party.

That's a mouthful. But it's the successfully imprinted villain/bad guy/enemy in which Democrats are keeping President Trump from making America great again. Greater again.

And the Democrats here are no Trotskys able to interpret the rise of Trump. That failure, after 16 years of Democratic presidencies, is clearly the case for the reasons Trotsky gave in 1933: “Where the progressive class shows itself unable to seize power so as to reconstruct society on the basis of socialism, capitalism in its agony can only preserve its existence by using the most brutal, anti-cultural methods, the extreme expression of which is Fascism.”

Passionate attacks on “woke,” DEI, critical race theory, LGBTQIA2S+ and so on feed at the trough the imaginary passion creates. They burn out or as expressed in *Ecclesiastes* and so are fated as a “striving after wind.” The offense against Democrats fades with Trump’s demise but the lack of offense on the Democrat’s part holds them in the place they are now, namely, a place where they cannot escape the role of the “Enemy Within” that Trump has tarred them with.

Rather than move toward a socialism, the Social Democrat Bernie kind for a start, in order to nip the anti-democratic splurge Trump has triggered for megalomaniacal “reasons,” some Democrats, hopefully not a majority, are strategizing on how to salvage “woke” and DEI and so on. This is a party that has leaned into an oligarchy creating capitalism, substituted agendas which do not affect root causes of oligarchic wealth divide, and, what most affects the 2026 Congressional elections, is imprinted as “the bad guy” within the imaginaries of those who will soon discover that no relief is to be found in Market Rule of Trump Rule. A truly sad situation.

National socialism, the political ideology of Nazism, pops up now and then, as in the U.S. now, but both fascism and Nazism include a strong central government as well as a strong central leader. What we have going on with Trump/Musk is a hollowing out of the Federal government so that, in Trump’s case, he can do whatever he wants without facing power to stop him. He wants to replace a strong central government with himself. How what’s left of government can serve its constituency and keep him from facing Stalin’s end is not a consequence total self-absorption can consider.

Musk simply and criminally wants to cut off the heads of anything in government that can interfere with his multi-billionaire making ways. He too may face an angry mob. Trump relies upon his own megalomaniacal illusions to inspire his MAGA cult. He sees himself as invincible. Perhaps immortal. Musk’s Plutus image, Greek god of wealth, armors him from the hard struggles of ordinary life. His power wielding presence in a democracy under attack is also truly sad.

When a man, whose mission is solely to rule like an autocrat and to enjoy making opponents suffer and others kiss his ring, dies, that mission dies with him. If along the way he

immiserates the lives of about half of those who voted for him, and they realize the villain is not the “woke” crowd, will the liberal, left wing Democrats become their new heroes? Are the Democrats to engineer the escape from Trump? Or will some new rough beast slouch toward Bethlehem to be born? “I would conjecture that it will take a long time and a firm stance away from and not leaning into Market Rule before Democrats wash out what Trump has brushed them with.

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**Joseph Phillip Natoli's** The New Utrecht Avenue novel trilogy is on sale at Amazon. Time is the Fire ended what began with Get Ready to Run and Between Dog & Wolf. Humour noire with counterpunches. .