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Not Our President

By Stanley L. Cohen
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To hear the simplistic denial of those who scream out with naiveté “give Trump a chance” as they condemn others engaged in selfless protest against a certain political and social tsunami in the making, is to ignore his life-time public embrace of policies that tens of millions reject as not just destructive, but evil per se. They are not mistaken.

Those in streets that fill with each passing day are not there to simply make halfhearted statements in opposition to an unpopular political thought that rubs up against isolated narrow ideals or goals. To the contrary, in dozens of cities across this nation women and men of conscience, of all races, ages, religions, cultures and beliefs, understand all too well that Trump represents the greatest political and social threat that our Republic of diversity has encountered since the civil war... a battle which left one out of every thirty Americans dead or wounded and cities in ruins as millions fought for the heart and soul of this country.

Do I expect armed insurrection or even Harper’s Ferry Two? No. But the palpable divide that we now see in this country is not just acute and dangerous, but driven by a primitive nativist philosophy of the man just chosen President of this country by a minority of its voters.

Donald Trump is not a mystery. He’s very much a known, abusive commodity. To those of us in New York who have heard him spew his hate- fueled ignorance for decades, there is simply no secret at all about his ugly, core beliefs. Nor is there any reason to hope, let alone expect, that at

this late date it will suddenly mature or change merely because this 70 year old demagogue has now captured a bigger share of a larger, simple-minded TV audience to bemuse with his lack of knowledge and experience.

Make no mistake about it, Trump has reached the pinnacle of political power in this country through an accomplished effort to exploit the fear of millions of largely alienated white voters inspired by his utter disdain for the diverse and vulnerable among us.

Trump's contempt for people of color, Latinos, young women, Muslims, immigrants, the handicapped, union members and activists... to name but a few... is of such well known and unique character that, were this the halls of "justice", the court would require no witness to prove the point but simply take judicial notice of the well settled fact.

For over 50 years, Trump's pursuit of personal wealth and power has been his sole drive. Greed has been the cornerstone of his life's work. Throughout this time, he has displayed not a single sign of interest in the "common" man or woman, let alone support for any public service or good-will directed towards those in need. Indeed, his avarice and chase of pure self-interest has been very public with no attempt at disguise. Obscene bravado and the empty air of pomp and circumstance are the stuff of his legendary arrogance. He thrives on it.

This is a man who regales in the shallow glitter of the mausoleums for the living dead that he has built all over the world and which are gaudily named after him. With a perverse sense of pride and accomplishment, Trump has found willful pleasure in the pain and fear of those he has demeaned; from African Americans denied his rental apartments for color alone to women he's molested as he tried to purchase their dignity to immigrants guilty as charged, indicted for nothing more than the ring of their last names or the accent of their speech. The list of his enemies is literally endless. No one who is not rich, successful, male and white, Christian or Jew has ever pierced the wall of garish gold that he calls home, or ever will.

Trump is a man of rare, dangerous consistency who has always looked down upon those who are different as inferior... those who were born elsewhere, who pray to a different god, with skins that shine of another tone, who speak languages born of other lands. To him, a woman's right to choose, to make fundamental decisions about her own body and future, are not personal choices but rather cheap political fuel to curry favor among anxious voters driven by timeless supremacist notions based upon gender, race, or religion.

For Trump, the diversity that is America's vigor and hope is something to fear, not to proclaim with pride and dignity. His is a view of strength carved not by moral integrity, equality or justice but by torment directed at those among us most... and longest... vulnerable to the changing, and now growing, sweep of political odium.

Indeed, from coast to coast in small rural hamlets to large urban cities the hatred that is Donald Trump has reared its menacing head in ways remarkable not for the speed of its arrival but rather the boldness and cruelty of its message.

Hundreds of incidents nationwide speak to the dark violent base first galvanized by Trump's message and now empowered through his election. Can it be that "populist" is now just another name for those who terrorize people among us who seek nothing but to live lives of diversity and freedom where they need not mute their voice, hide their presence or change their appearance?

These are dangerous hate driven times fueled by a belief that the president-elect has given a call to arms to target and attack those he sees as undesirable or "un-American." Apparently, all across the country his base has answered his call.

Beginning almost immediately after Trump's election, an explosion of attacks was visited upon people of all ages in this country on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual identity. It continues unabated today.

Indeed the Southern Poverty Law Center has documented hundreds of instances of "hateful intimidation and harassment" in the days following the election of a man who called for an outright ban of all Muslims from entering this country with the same ease that he described Mexican immigrants as rapists, belittled a disabled journalist, and mocked women for their physical appearance. Is it any wonder that physical and verbal assaults upon those who Trump targeted throughout his campaign not only abound, but do so in his name?

Thus, a young woman at San Diego State University reported that two men robbed her after they made comments about Trump and Muslims. Another woman reported that a Trump supporter pulled a knife on her friend while she was on a bus near the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Another Muslim in Albuquerque, New Mexico said a man made comments about Trump as he tried to rip her hijab from her head. In Ann Arbor, Michigan police have been investigating reports that a man approached a Muslim student and threatened to set her on fire with a lighter unless she removed her hijab. In Portland Oregon an anti-Trump protestor was shot, another was knocked to the ground while giving a speech at the Ohio Union.

In the shadow of Trump's election, reported incidents of religious or race based attacks have not been limited to physical assaults alone but include a wide range of verbal or written threats of intimidation. For example, on the night of his victory, a crowd in New York City could be heard screaming out "death to Muslims... death to niggers." In South Philadelphia the words "Sieg Heil 2016" and "Trump"... with a swastika substituted for the T in Trump... were spray-painted on the glass window of a building. At the Tandon School of Engineering at New York University, students arrived at a Muslim prayer room to discover Trump's name written on its door. At Maple Grove Senior High School in Minnesota students found "Go back to Africa" "Make America great again", "Trump", "Whites only" and "White America" written on the door and walls of a bathroom.

A day after the election, a number of students at Michigan's Royal Oak Middle School started chanting in the cafeteria: "Build the wall! Build the wall!" A student at Shasta High School in Redding, California posted a video on Twitter of himself handing out letters with the word "deportation" written across the top to a half dozen Latino students.

In North Carolina a day after Trump's victory someone painted racist messages, concerning the election, on a wall in Durham saying "Black lives don't matter and neither does your votes." At Canisius College, in upstate New York, students posted photos on social media of a black doll hanging from a dormitory curtain rod. At the University of Pennsylvania, a number of black freshmen reported that after the election they were added to a social media account that included racial slurs and a "daily lynching" calendar. Others received screen shots of pages from GroupMe, which included a photo of people hanging from a tree. On Twitter, high school students described incidents that ranged from African Americans being called cotton pickers to Latinos being told to leave the country to a public display of Hitler salutes.

Trans Lifeline, a national hotline for transgender people in crisis, told the Guardian it saw its normal call volume triple on election night into the next morning. According to the Tennessean, a transgender woman reported on Friday that her truck was set on fire in her driveway, and the word "Trump" spray-painted on its scorched back.

These are but a narrow cross section of numerous terrifying incidents exalting racial, religious and other class based supremacy that have swept across the country in an unprecedented expression of deep seated intolerance and hatred that was exploited by president-elect Trump throughout his campaign... indeed his life.

Having prevailed, one would hope that Trump would now temper his myopic view of a country in which tens of millions, indeed a majority of those who voted, rejected his belligerent message of narrow-minded bigotry. It's just not possible.

After all, this a man who has promised to appoint Supreme Court Justices that support his personal view of the Republic and his own idea as to the appropriate reach of our collective fundamental rights and freedoms. To Trump, notions of separation of powers... like a woman's right to privacy, long settled under Roe v. Wade and its progeny,... are outdated legal fictions waiting to be ignored or undone by his administration.

Lest there be any question about whether we will soon see a new, softer version of Donald Trump in victory, yesterday's appointment of the former head of Breitbart News, Stephen K. Bannon, as his chief strategist at the White House proves the president-elect will continue to find comfort in the counsel of proponents of racist, anti-Semitic and misogynist views.

As noted by out-going Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid: "President-elect Trump's choice of Steve Bannon as his top aide signals that White Supremacists will be represented at the highest level in Trump's White House... It is easy to see why the KKK views Trump as their champion when Trump appoints one of their foremost peddlers of White Supremacist themes and rhetoric as his top aide."

Lest Reid's description of Bannon be seen as simply Monday morning bickering by a defeated political opponent, it's shared by the highly respected and independent Southern Poverty Law Center which, in describing Bannon, took note that he was the "main driver behind Breitbart becoming a white ethno-nationalist propaganda mill."

Bannon himself cannot honestly take issue with these descriptions of his views and character. Indeed, during his tenure running Breitbart, its website published such odious headlines as:

“Bill Kristol, renegade Jew”: [Breitbart- 5.15.16].

“Birth Control Makes Women Unattractive and Crazy” [Breitbart-12.08.15].

“The Solution to Online Harassment Is Simple: Women Should Just Log Off.” [Breitbart-7.05.15].

This man who oozes hatred with extremist pleasure is now the top aide to President-elect Trump. Fear not, however, he will not be alone... nor will his elitist, despicable views be isolated. Indeed, they will apparently find comfort in people like Bolton, Gingrich, Palin, Giuliani, Christie, Wolfowitz and others who have long walked the same dark, belligerent path. To be sure, this will be an inner circle that will certainly go down as among the most hateful, racist and warring in White House history.

The message of Donald Trump today is no different than the arrogant, abusive one that he has adhered to and proudly proclaimed... indeed lived his life by...for more than fifty years.

Although, for some, hope may yet spring eternal, one does not spend a life-time of devotion to vile supremacist notions to suddenly awaken born again in the egalitarian wisdom of equality and justice as if they are mere tattoos to cover up scars of hatred that, in Trump, have run long and deep.

For those who say Trump deserves a clean slate, a new chance to prove that he has the interest, let alone capacity, to be a president for all... to help heal wounds which he himself willfully inflicted... it conjures up only one of two reasonable possibilities: the president elect is either an abject, serial liar who has misled everyone over his beliefs, including his base, and those who have known his views for decades or... what you see is what you get.

It is clear that the election of Donald Trump has unleashed a nationwide assault upon values, if not long practiced then certainly enshrined, in a history of women and men who have fought long and hard to seek strength in diversity both in people and in thought. To suggest that ours is a history without long periods of institutional hatred and violence is to do violence to truth itself.

Slavery, the destruction of Indian nations, disenfranchisement of women, Jim Crowe... to name but a few... are stains upon our collective history; one in which today tens of millions still struggle to taste an ideal that has long escaped personal reality.

But if we are to survive as a diverse people of hope with opportunity and justice, if not for ourselves, then our children, we cannot go silently unto the night or surrender to forces that have declared war against the strength, indeed the majesty, which is our racial, cultural, religious and sexual diversity and identity.

Over the years millions have paid the ultimate price in this country to build a land that could be home to the best and the brightest the world has to offer. We are a nation of immigrants and refugees... all of us... whether descendents of those kidnapped by slavers and forced to build the cities and farms that dot the South, heirs of indentured Chinese who built the railroads that criss-cross our country, or the children or grand children of Europeans who fled tyranny or privation abroad to find a new start in our Eastern cities whether 20 or 150 years ago.

Since the days of our revolution, the US has been home to Muslims, Jews and star gazers alike. We've always been a land of diversity, of people of different politics, visions, and appearance who came to these shores, often by any way they could... whether "legal" or not... to build a home, start a family, and find peace along the way.

Today, that diversity, that calm, that ideal is under attack... and not just in the streets of rural America but the roadway leading to the Oval Office itself. "Make America Great Again" has a grand, simple electoral ring to it. But it's just so much idle bankrupt banter if built upon the back of the greed, hatred and violence that is Trump and his minions. Greatness is measured not by the false security of bombast but the comfort of those who dare to speak their mind... to pursue their dreams... to walk our streets unafraid of the consequences of looking as they wish or praying as they must.

The inauguration is but 66 days away. There is no need to wait for the coronation of our latest and most dangerous demagogue of all to speak truth to power from coast to coast.

Ours is a collective history of resistance built on principle, struggle and sacrifice that has often cost us dearly through the loss of life or liberty but resist we have... resist we must. When Jim Crowe dared to say who was welcome, and who was not, we broke the back of segregation through resistance that ranged from peaceful to militant. When war in Vietnam ran into decades millions of us took to the streets and said no more. It ended. "Occupy" seized blocks throughout this Nation to give notice that economic disparity would no longer rule the day. Today at Standing Rock, thousands refuse to remain idle to the economic greed that seeks to further wage war on Indian Nations and Indian rights. All across America, Black Lives Matter and resisters of all age and color confront systemic police violence as we mourn for those murdered by it.

In 66 days Donald Trump takes office surrounded by a circle of dark repressive support that will feed upon our freedoms, attack our diversity, and wage war at home and abroad against all that seek nothing more than self determination.

66 days is a long time for millions of us to proclaim, in creative and diverse ways, loud and clear... "Not Our President."