

A Nation Imploding: Digital Tyranny, Insurrection and Martial Law

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"In this difficult day, in this difficult time for the United States, it is perhaps well to ask what kind of a nation we are and what direction we want to move in. [Y]ou can be filled with bitterness, with hatred, and a desire for revenge. We can move in that direction as a country, in great polarization...filled with hatred toward one another. Or we can make an effort ... to understand and to comprehend, and to replace that violence, that stain of bloodshed that has spread across our land, with an effort to understand with compassion and love... [What we need in the United States is not division](#); what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence or lawlessness; but love and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or they be black."—Robert F. Kennedy on the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

This is what we have been reduced to: A violent mob. A nation on the brink of martial law. A populace under house arrest. A techno-corporate state wielding its power to immobilize huge swaths of the country. And a Constitution in tatters.

We are imploding on multiple fronts, all at once.

This is what happens when ego, greed and power are allowed to take precedence over liberty, equality and justice.

Just to be clear, however: this is not a revolution.

This is a ticking time bomb.

There is absolutely no excuse for the violence that took place at the Capitol on January 6, 2021.

Yet no matter which way you look at it, the fallout from this attempted coup could make this worrisome state of affairs even worse.

First, you've got the president, who has been accused of inciting a riot and now faces a second impeachment and a scandal that could permanently mar his legacy. While the impeachment process itself is a political beast, the question of whether President Trump incited his followers to riot is one that has even the best legal experts debating. Yet as First Amendment scholar David Hudson Jr. [explains](#), for Trump's rhetoric to be stripped of its free speech protections, "The speaker must intend to and actually use words that rally people to take illegal action. The danger must be imminent—not in the indefinite future. And the words must be uttered in a situation in which violence is likely to happen."

At a minimum, Trump's actions and words—unstatesmanlike and reckless, by any standards—over the course of his presidency and on Jan. 6 helped cause a simmering pot to boil over.

Second, there were the so-called “patriots” who took to the streets because the jailer of their choice didn't get chosen to knock heads for another four years. Those “Stop the Steal” protesters may have deluded themselves (or been deluded) into believing they were standing for freedom when they [stormed the Capitol](#). However, all they really did was give the Deep State and its corporate partners a chance to pull back the curtain and reveal how little freedom we really have. There is nothing that can be said to justify the actions of those who, [armed with metal pipes, chemical irritants, stun guns, and other types of weapons](#), assaulted and stampeded those in their path.

There are limits to what can be done in the so-called name of liberty, and this level of violence—no matter who wields it or what brand of politics or zealotry motivate them—crossed the line.

Third, you've got the tech giants, who meted out their own version of social justice by way of digital tyranny and corporate censorship. Yet there can be no freedom of speech if social media giants can muzzle whomever they want, whenever they want, on whatever pretext they want in the absence of any real due process, review or appeal. As Edward Snowden warned, whether it was warranted or not, the social media ban on President Trump signaled a [turning point in the battle for control over digital speech](#). And that is exactly what is playing out as users, including those who have no ties to the Capitol riots, begin to experience [lock outs, suspensions and even deletions of their social media accounts](#).

Remember, the First Amendment is a steam valve. It allows people to peacefully air viewpoints, vent frustrations, debate and disagree, and generally work through the problems of self-governance. Without that safety mechanism in place, [self-censorship increases](#), discontent festers, foment brews, and violence becomes the default response for resolving disputes, whether with the government or each other. At a minimum, we need more robust protections in place to protect digital expression and a formalized process for challenging digital censorship.

Unfortunately, digital censorship is just the beginning. Once you start using social media scores coupled with surveillance capitalism to determine who is worthy enough to be part of society, [anything goes](#). In China, which has been traveling this road for years now, millions of individuals and businesses, blacklisted as “unworthy” based on social media credit scores that grade them based on whether they are “good” citizens, have been [banned from accessing financial markets, buying real estate or travelling by air or train](#).

Fourth, you've got the police, who normally exceed the constitutional limits restraining them from brutality, surveillance and other excesses. Only this time, [despite intelligence indicating that some of the rioters were planning for mayhem](#), police were outnumbered and ill prepared to deal with the incursion. Investigations underway suggest that some [police may even have colluded with the rioters](#).

Certainly, the lack of protocols adopted by the Capitol Police bear an unnerving resemblance to the lack of protocols in Charlottesville, Va., in 2017, when police who were supposed to uphold the law and prevent violence failed to do either. In fact, as the *Washington Post*

reports, police “seemed to watch as groups beat each other with sticks and bludgeoned one another with shields... At one point, [police appeared to retreat and then watch the beatings](#) before eventually moving in to end the free-for-all, make arrests and tend to the injured.” Incredibly, when the first signs of open violence broke out, it was reported that the police chief allegedly instructed his staff to “[let them fight, it will make it easier to declare an unlawful assembly.](#)”

There’s a pattern emerging if you pay close enough attention: Instead of restoring order, local police stand down. Without fail, what should be an exercise in how to peacefully disagree turns ugly the moment [looting, vandalism, violence, intimidation tactics and rioting](#) are introduced into the equation. Tensions rise, violence escalates, and federal armies move in.

All that was missing on Jan. 6 was a declaration of martial law.

Which brings us to the *fifth point*, martial law. Given that the nation has been dancing around the fringes of martial law with each national crisis, it won’t take much more to push the country over the edge to a declaration and military lockdown. The [rumblings of armed protests at all 50 state capitals and in Washington, D.C.](#), will only serve to heighten tensions, double down on the government’s military response, and light a match to a powder keg state of affairs. With [tens of thousands of National Guard troops](#) and federal law enforcement personnel mobilized to lock down Washington, DC, in the wake of the Jan. 6 riots and in advance of the Jan. 20 inauguration, this could be the largest military show-of-force in recent years.

So where do we go from here?

That all of these events are coming to a head around Martin Luther King Jr. Day is telling.

More than 50 years after King was assassinated, America has become a ticking time bomb of racial unrest and injustice, police militarization, surveillance, government corruption and ineptitude, the blowback from a battlefield mindset and endless wars abroad, and a growing economic inequality between the haves and have nots

Making matters worse, modern America has compounded the evils of racism, materialism and militarism with ignorance, intolerance and fear.

Callousness, cruelty, meanness, immorality, ignorance, hatred, intolerance and injustice have become hallmarks of our modern age, magnified by an echo chamber of nasty tweets and government-sanctioned brutality.

“Despite efforts to curb hate speech, eradicate bullying and extend tolerance, [a culture of nastiness has metastasized in which meanness is routinely rewarded, and common decency and civility are brushed aside,](#)” observed Teddy Wayne in a *New York Times* piece on “The Culture of Nastiness.”

Every time I read a news headline or flip on the television or open up an email or glance at social media, I run headlong into people consumed with back-biting, partisan politics, sniping, toxic hate, meanness and materialism. Donald Trump is, in many ways, the embodiment of this culture of meanness. Yet as Wayne points out, “[Trump is less enabler in chief than a symptom of a free-for-all environment that prizes cutting smears...](#) Social media has normalized casual cruelty.”

Whether it's unfriending or blocking someone on Facebook, tweeting taunts and barbs on Twitter, or [merely using cyberspace to bully someone or peddle in gossip](#), we have become masters in the art of meanness.

This culture of meanness has come to characterize many aspects of the nation's governmental and social policies. "Meanness today is a state of mind," writes professor Nicolaus Mills in his book *The Triumph of Meanness*, "the product of a culture of spite and cruelty that has had an enormous impact on us."

This casual cruelty is made possible by a growing polarization within the populace that emphasizes what divides us—race, religion, economic status, sexuality, ancestry, politics, etc.—rather than what unites us: we are all human.

This is what writer Anna Quindlen refers to as "the politics of exclusion, what might be thought of as the [cult of otherness](#)... It divides the country as surely as the Mason-Dixon line once did. And it makes for mean-spirited and punitive politics and social policy."

This is more than meanness, however.

This is the psychopathic mindset adopted by the architects of the Deep State, and it applies equally whether you're talking about Democrats or Republicans.

Beware, because this kind of psychopathology can [spread like a virus](#) among the populace.

As an academic study into pathocracy [concluded](#), "[T]yranny does not flourish because perpetrators are helpless and ignorant of their actions. It flourishes because they actively identify with those who promote vicious acts as virtuous."

People don't simply line up and salute. It is through one's own personal identification with a given leader, party or social order that they become agents of good or evil. To this end, "we the people" have become "we the police state."

By failing to actively take a stand for good, we become agents of evil. It's not the person in charge who is solely to blame for the carnage. It's the populace that looks away from the injustice, that empowers the totalitarian regime, that welcomes the building blocks of tyranny.

This realization hit me full-force a few years ago. I had stopped into a bookstore and was struck by all of the books on Hitler, everywhere I turned. Yet had there been no Hitler, there still would have been a Nazi regime. There still would have been gas chambers and concentration camps and a Holocaust.

Hitler wasn't the architect of the Holocaust. He was merely the figurehead. Same goes for the American police state: had there been no Trump or Obama or Bush, there still would have been a police state. There still would have been police shootings and private prisons and endless wars and government pathocracy.

Why? Because "we the people" have paved the way for this tyranny to prevail.

By turning Hitler into a super-villain who singlehandedly terrorized the world—not so different from how Trump is often depicted—historians have given Hitler's accomplices (the German government, the citizens that opted for security and order over liberty, the religious

institutions that failed to speak out against evil, the individuals who followed orders even when it meant a death sentence for their fellow citizens) a free pass.

This is how tyranny rises and freedom falls.

None of us who remain silent and impassive in the face of evil, racism, extreme materialism, meanness, intolerance, cruelty, injustice and ignorance get a free pass.

Those among us who follow figureheads without question, who turn a blind eye to injustice and turn their backs on need, who march in lockstep with tyrants and bigots, who allow politics to trump principle, who give in to meanness and greed, and who fail to be outraged by the many wrongs being perpetrated in our midst, it is these individuals who must shoulder the blame when the darkness wins.

[“Darkness cannot drive out darkness](#); only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that,” Martin Luther King Jr. sermonized.

The darkness is winning

It’s not just on the world stage we must worry about the darkness winning

The darkness is winning in our communities. It’s winning in our homes, our neighborhoods, our churches and synagogues, and our government bodies. It’s winning in the hearts of men and women the world over who are embracing hatred over love. It’s winning in every new generation that is being raised to care only for themselves, without any sense of moral or civic duty to stand for freedom.

John F. Kennedy, killed by an assassin’s bullet five years before King would be similarly executed, [spoke of a torch that had been “passed to a new generation of Americans](#)—born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage—and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.

Once again, a torch is being passed to a new generation, but this torch is setting the world on fire, burning down the foundations put in place by our ancestors, and igniting all of the ugliest sentiments in our hearts.

This fire is not liberating; it is destroying.

We are teaching our children all the wrong things: we are teaching them to hate, teaching them to worship false idols (materialism, celebrity, technology, politics), teaching them to prize vain pursuits and superficial ideals over kindness, goodness and depth.

We are on the wrong side of the revolution.

“If we are to get on to the right side of the world revolution,” advised King, “we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. [We must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society.](#)”

Freedom demands responsibility.

Freedom demands that we stop thinking as Democrats and Republicans and start thinking like human beings, or at the very least, Americans.

Martin Luther King Jr. dared to dream of a world in which all Americans “[would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.](#)”

He didn’t live to see that dream become a reality. It’s still not a reality. We haven’t dared to dream that dream in such a long time.

But imagine...

Imagine what this country would be like if Americans put aside their differences and dared to stand up—united—for freedom...

Imagine what this country would be like if Americans put aside their differences and dared to speak out—with one voice—against injustice...

Imagine what this country would be like if Americans put aside their differences and dared to push back—with the full force of our collective numbers—against the evils of government despotism.

As I make clear in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#), tyranny wouldn’t stand a chance.

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