



Bust of Nero at the Musei Capitolini, Rome

From Nero to Donald J. Trump

An exploration in Narcissism, Cronyism and Worse

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寧為太平犬，不做亂世人 “*Better to be a dog in times of tranquility than a human in times of chaos*”. This expression originates from volume 3 of the 1627 short story collection by Feng Menglong, *Stories to Awaken the World*. It is the closest to the apocryphal English (not Chinese!) curse: *May You Live in Interesting Times*.

I was thinking of these during a recent search for sleep mid-August 2020.

We do not have a dog -although we love them. We feed (former) feral cats that seem to like the pellets and the dairy we provide, but we cannot touch them; they seem (???) to hunt the rodents in our carriage house.

But that Chinese wisdom suddenly contrasted with the current policies of the Trump administration (and of many other dictators); I thought of one: **Nero**.

Nero (/ˈnɪərəʊ/NEER-oh; Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus; 15 December 37 – 9 June 68 AD) was Roman emperor from 54 to 68, the last ruler of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Born Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, he was the son of Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus and Agrippina the Younger, the sister of Emperor Caligula. Nero's father died in 40, and his uncle was murdered in 41. Nero's great-uncle Claudius then ascended the throne. Agrippina married Claudius, who adopted Nero as his heir. Nero succeeded Claudius upon the latter's death in 54.

Early Reign

Agrippina immediately eliminated the powerful freedman Narcissus, who had always opposed her aims. She hoped to control the government, but Burrus and Nero's old tutor, the Stoic philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca, though they owed their influence to Agrippina, were not content to remain her tools. They encouraged Nero to act independently of her, and a growing coolness resulted in Nero's relations with his mother. In 56, Agrippina was forced into retirement. From that time until 62, Burrus and Seneca were the effective rulers of the empire.

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Nero, portrait bust; in the Roman National Museum, Rome. Anderson Alinari/Art Resource, New York

Brought up in this atmosphere, Nero might well have begun to behave like a monster upon his accession as emperor in 54 but, in fact, behaved quite otherwise. He put an end to the more odious features of the later years of Claudius's reign, including secret trials before the emperor and the dominance of corrupt freedmen, and he accorded more independence to the Senate. The testimony of contemporaries depicts Nero at this time as a handsome young man of fine presence but with soft, weak features and a restless spirit. Up to the year 59, Nero's biographers cite only acts of generosity and clemency on his account. His government forbade contests in the circus involving bloodshed, banned capital punishment, reduced taxes, and accorded permission to slaves to bring civil complaints against unjust masters. Nero himself pardoned writers of epigrams against him and even those who plotted against him, and secret trials were few. The law of treason was dormant: Claudius had put 40 senators to death, but between the murders instigated by Agrippina in 54 and the year 62, there were no like incidents in Nero's reign. Nero also inaugurated competitions in poetry, in the theatre, and in athletics as counterattractions to gladiatorial combats. He saw to it that assistance was provided to cities that had suffered disaster and, at the request of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, gave aid to the Jews.



Artistic Pretensions and Irresponsibility

While directing the government themselves, Burrus and Seneca had largely left Nero uncontrolled to pursue his own tastes and pleasures. Seneca urged Nero to use his autocratic powers conscientiously, but he obviously failed to harness the boy's more generous impulses to his responsibilities. At first Nero hated signing death sentences, and the extortions of Roman tax collectors upon the populace led him in 58 to unrealistically suggest that the customs dues should be abolished. Even later Nero was capable of conceiving grandiose plans for conquests or the creation of public works, but for the most part he used his position simply to gratify his own personal pleasures. His nocturnal rioting in the streets was a scandal as early as 56, but the emergence of real brutality in Nero can be fixed in the 35-month period between the putting to death of his mother at his orders in 59 and his similar treatment of his wife Octavia in June 62. He was led to the murder of Agrippina by her insanity and her fury at seeing her son slip out of her control, to the murder of Octavia by his having fallen in love with Poppaea Sabina, the young wife of the senator (and later emperor) Otho, and by his fear that his repudiated wife was fomenting disaffection at court and among the populace. He married Poppaea in 62, but she died in 65, and he subsequently married the patrician lady Statilia Messalina.

Seeing that he could do what he liked without fear of censure or retribution, Nero began to give rein to inordinate artistic pretensions. He fancied himself not only a poet but also a charioteer and lyre player, and in 59 or 60 he began to give public performances; later he appeared on the stage, and the theatre furnished him with the pretext to assume every kind of role. To the Romans these antics seemed to be scandalous breaches of civic dignity and decorum. Nero even dreamed of abandoning the throne of Rome in order to fulfill his poetical and musical gifts, though he did not act on these puerile ambitions. Beginning about 63, he also developed strange religious enthusiasms and became increasingly attracted to the preachers of novel cults. By now Seneca felt that he had lost all influence over Nero, and he retired after Burrus's death in 62.

The great fire that ravaged Rome in 64 illustrates how low Nero's reputation had sunk by this time. Taking advantage of the fire's destruction, Nero had the city reconstructed in the Greek style and began building a prodigious palace—the Golden House—which, had it been finished, would have covered a third of Rome. During the fire, Nero was at his villa at Antium 35 miles (56 km) from Rome and therefore

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cannot be held responsible for the burning of the city. But the Roman populace mistakenly believed that he himself had started the fire in Rome in order to indulge his aesthetic tastes in the city's subsequent reconstruction. According to the *Annals* of the Roman historian Tacitus and to the *Nero* of the Roman biographer Suetonius, Nero in response tried to shift responsibility for the fire to the Christians, who were popularly thought to engage in many wicked practices. Hitherto the government had not clearly distinguished Christians from Jews. Almost by accident, Nero initiated the later Roman policy of halfhearted persecution of the Christians, in the process earning himself the reputation of Antichrist in the early Christian tradition.



Golden House of Nero. Statue in the Golden House of Nero, Rome. Howard Hudson



The Approaching End

Meanwhile, the imperial government had had some success in the east. The great foreign-policy problem of the time was that of Armenia. Since the reign of Augustus, it had been Roman policy to appoint vassal kings there and so make Armenia a buffer state against Parthia, Rome's implacable foe in the east. But the Armenians had long chafed under Roman rule, and in the emperor Claudius's last years a Parthian prince named Tiridates had made himself king of Armenia with the support of its people. In response, Nero's new government took vigorous action, appointing an able general, Gnaeus Domitius Corbulo, to the command. Prolonged military operations by Corbulo led in 66 to a new settlement; Tiridates was recognized as king, but he was compelled to come to Rome to receive his crown from Nero.

Despite this success, the provinces were increasingly uneasy, for they were oppressed by exactions to cover Nero's extravagant expenditures on his court, new buildings, and gifts to his favorites; the last expenditures alone are said to have amounted to more than two billion sesterces, a sum that was several times the annual cost of the army. A revolt in Britain was headed by Queen Boudicca (Boadicea) in 60 or 61, and an insurrection in Judaea lasted from 66 to 70. Nero had many antagonists by this time. The great conspiracy to make Gaius Calpurnius Piso emperor in 65 reveals the diversity of his enemies—senators, knights, officers, and philosophers. That the conspiracy included military officers was an ominous sign, but Nero did not give way to panic; slaves kept him out of danger by warning him of plots that were hatching among their masters. And he did not altogether abandon his lenient attitude. Out of 41 participants in the Piso conspiracy, only 18 died (including Seneca and the poet Lucan), either by order or from fear; the others were exiled or pardoned.

At the end of the year 66, Nero undertook a long visit to Greece that was to keep him away from Rome for 15 months, and during his absence he entrusted the consulate to one of his freedmen. On this trip Nero engaged in new displays of his artistic prowess, and he walked about garbed as an ascetic, barefoot and with flowing hair. His enthusiasm for Greek culture also prompted him to free a number of Greek cities in honor of their glorious past. In the four months following his return to Rome in February 68, his delirious pretensions as both an artist and a religious worshipper aroused the enmity not only of the Senate and those patricians who had been dispossessed by him but also of the Italian middle class, which had old-fashioned

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moral views and which furnished most of the officers of the army. Even the common soldiers of the legions were scandalized to see the descendant of Caesar publicly perform onstage the parts not only of ancient Greek heroes but of far lower characters. “*I have seen him onstage,*” Gaius Julius Vindex, the legate who rebelled against him, was to say, “*playing pregnant women and slaves about to be executed.*”

At the news of revolts brewing throughout the empire—that of the provincial governor Servius Sulpicius Galba in Spain, that of the provincial governor Gaius Julius Vindex in Lyon, Gaul (France), and of others on the eastern frontier—Nero only laughed and indulged in further megalomaniacal displays instead of taking action. “*I have only to appear and sing to have peace once more in Gaul,*” he is reported to have said. Meanwhile, the revolt spread, and the legions made Galba emperor. The Senate condemned Nero to die a slave’s death: on a cross and under the whip. The Praetorian Guard, his palace guard, abandoned him, and his freedmen left to embark on the ships he kept in readiness at Ostia, the port of Rome. Nero was obliged to flee the city. According to Suetonius, he stabbed himself in the throat with a dagger. According to another version (recounted by Tacitus and almost certainly fiction), he reached the Greek islands, where the following year (69) the governor of Cythnos (modern Kíthnos) recognized him in the guise of a red-haired prophet and leader of the poor, had him arrested, and executed the sentence that had been passed by the Senate.

The Roman populace and the Praetorian Guard later came to regret that they had lost such a liberal patron, but to his subjects in general Nero had been a tyrant, and the revolts his misrule provoked sparked a series of civil wars that for a time threatened the survival of the Roman Empire and caused widespread misery. (*Enc. Britannica*)

Nero's rule is usually associated with tyranny and extravagance. Suetonius tells that many Romans believed that the Great Fire of Rome was instigated by Nero to clear the way for his planned palatial complex, the Domus Aurea. According to Tacitus he was said to have seized Christians as scapegoats for the fire and burned them alive, seemingly motivated not by public justice but by personal cruelty. Some modern historians question the reliability of the ancient sources on Nero's tyrannical acts, however. A few sources paint Nero in a more favorable light. There is evidence of his popularity among the Roman commoners, especially in the eastern provinces of the Empire, where a popular legend arose that Nero had not died and would return. At least three leaders of short-lived, failed rebellions presented themselves as “*Nero reborn*” to enlist popular support. (*Wikipedia*)

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Nero was then 4th (and last) Emperor of the Julio-Claudian dynasty; he was -in theory- subjected to the laws enacted by, and under the control of the Roman legal system.

“The first emperor, Augustus, inherited a Senate whose membership had been increased to 900 Senators by his adoptive father, Julius Caesar. Augustus sought to reduce the size of the Senate and did so through three revisions to the list of Senators. By the time that these revisions had been completed, the Senate had been reduced to 600 members, and after this point, the size of the Senate was never again drastically altered. To reduce the size of the Senate, Augustus expelled Senators who were of low birth, and then he reformed the rules which specified how an individual could become a senator. Under Augustus' reforms, a senator had to be a citizen of free birth, have not been convicted of any crimes under *lex Julia de vi private*, and have property worth at least 1,000,000 sesterces.

“Under the Empire, as was the case during the late Republic, one could become a senator by being elected quaestor. Under the Empire, however, one could only stand for election to the Quaestorship if one was of senatorial rank, and to be of senatorial rank, one had to be the son of a senator. If an individual was not of senatorial rank, there were two ways for that individual to become a senator. Under the first method, the Emperor granted that individual the authority to stand for election to the Quaestorship, while under the second method, the Emperor appointed that individual to the Senate by issuing a decree (the *adlectio*).

“Beginning in 9 BC, with the passage of Augustus' *lex Julia de senatu habendo*, an official list of Senators (the *album senatorium*) was maintained and revised each year. Individuals were added to the list if they had recently satisfied the requirements for entry into the Senate and were removed from the list if they no longer satisfied the requirements necessary to maintain Senate membership. The list named each senator by order of rank. The Emperor always outranked all of his fellow Senators and was followed by "Consuls" (the highest-ranking magistrate) and former Consuls, then by "Praetors" (the next highest-ranking magistrate) and former Praetors, and so on. A senator's tenure in elective office was considered when determining rank, while Senators who had been elected to an office did not necessarily outrank Senators who had been appointed to that same office by the Emperor.

“Members of the senatorial order were distinguished by a broad reddish-purple

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stripe edging their **togas** – the formal dress of all Roman citizens.

“Under the Empire, the power that the Emperor held over the Senate was absolute, which was due, in part, to the fact that the Emperor held office for life. During Senate meetings, the Emperor sat between the two Consuls, and usually acted as the presiding officer. Senators of the early Empire could ask extraneous questions or request that a certain action be taken by the Senate. Higher ranking senators spoke before lower ranking senators, although the Emperor could speak at any time. Besides the Emperor, Consuls, and Praetors could also preside over the Senate.

“The Senate ordinarily met in the *Curia Julia*, usually on either the **Kalends** (the first day of the month), or the **Ides** (around the fifteenth day of the month), although scheduled meetings occurred more frequently in September and October. Other meetings were held on an *ad hoc* basis. Under Augustus, a **quorum** was set at 400 Senators, although eventually excessive absenteeism forced the Senate to lower the number of Senators necessary for a quorum, and, on some matters, to revoke the quorum rules altogether.

“Most of the bills that came before the Senate was presented by the Emperor or his supporters in the body. In the early principate, Augustus and Tiberius made conscious efforts to hide their influence on the body, lobbying in private instead of directly proposing legislation. Since no senator could stand for election to a magisterial office without the Emperor's approval, Senators usually did not vote against bills that had been presented by the Emperor. If a senator disapproved of a bill, he usually showed his disapproval by not attending the Senate meeting on the day that the bill was to be voted on. Each Emperor selected a *quaestor* to compile the proceedings of the Senate into a document (the *acta senatus*.) which included proposed bills, official documents, and a summary of speeches that had been presented before the Senate. The document was archived, while parts of it were published (in a document called the *acta diurnal* or "daily doings") and then distributed to the public.

“According to the *Historia Augusta (Elagabalus 4.2 and 12.3)* emperor Elagabalus had his mother or grandmother take part in Senate proceedings. "*And Elagabalus was the only one of all the emperors under whom a woman attended the senate like a man, just as though she belonged to the senatorial order*" (David Magie's translation). According to the same work, Elagabalus also established a women's senate called the *senaculum*, which enacted rules to be applied to matrons, regarding clothing, chariot riding, the wearing of jewelry etc. (*Elagabalus 4.3 and Aurelian 49.6.*) Before this,

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Agrippina the Younger, mother of Nero, had been listening to Senate proceedings, concealed behind a curtain, according to Tacitus (Annales, 13.5).

“While the Roman assemblies continued to meet after the founding of the Empire, their powers were all transferred to the Senate, and so senatorial decrees (*senatus consulta*) acquired the full force of law. The legislative powers of the Imperial Senate were principal of a financial and an administrative nature, although the senate did retain a range of powers over the provinces. The Senate could also regulate festivals and religious cults, grant special honors, excuse an individual (usually the Emperor) from legal liability, manage temples and public games, and even enact tax laws (but only with the acquiescence of the Emperor). However, it had no real authority over either the state religion or over public lands.

“During the early Roman Empire, all judicial powers that had been held by the Roman assemblies were also transferred to the Senate. For example, the senate now held jurisdiction over criminal trials. In these cases, a *consul* presided, the senators constituted the jury, and the verdict was handed down in the form of a decree (*senatus consultum*), and, while a verdict could not be appealed, the Emperor could pardon a convicted individual through a veto. Each province that was under the jurisdiction of the Senate had its own court, and, upon the recommendation of a consul, decisions of these provincial courts could be appealed to the Senate.

“In theory, the Senate elected new emperors, while in conjunction with the popular assemblies, it would then confer upon the new emperor his command powers (*imperium*). After an emperor had died or abdicated his office, the Senate would often deify him, although sometimes it would pass a decree (*damnatio memoriae* or "damnation from memory") which would attempt to cancel every trace of that emperor from the life of Rome, as if he had never existed. The emperor Tiberius transferred all electoral powers from the assemblies to the Senate, and, while theoretically, the senate elected new magistrates, the approval of the Emperor was always needed before an election could be finalized. Despite this fact, however, elections remained highly contested and vigorously fought. (*Wikipedia*).”

Nero remains a symbol -bordering on legend- with a *bad* reputation carried for centuries by historians -who **ALL** came from the Judeo-Christian schools.

This makes the proper evaluation (or judgment) of historical figures before the *Rinascimento*, or even the *Enlightment* questionable. That also prevented me to talk (positively, negatively or emphatically) and write about past figures. But there are

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other sources that we can embrace with *gusto*: literature, poetry, and most art.

The examples that come to mind (certainly mine) are Shakespeare for English; Miguel de Cervantes for Spanish; Dante Alighieri for Italian; Aeschylus and Sophocles for classic Greek; One Thousand and One Nights for Arabic; possibly Victor Hugo for French; Leon Tolstoy for Russian; Goethe and Schiller for German; Jin Ping Mei (金瓶梅) for classic Chinese; Yasunari Kawabata for Japanese lyrical Japanese prose; S. L. Bhyrappa (ಸಂತೇಶಿವರ ಲಿಂಗಣ್ಣಯ್ಯ ಭೈರಪ್ಪ) for Indian (Kannada) novels.... -but there are many more that you will think of.

If/when we think or models (from the literature or poetry), we find solace and support for respect, morals, education (critical thinking, science), protection of our planet (our pale blue dot as Carl Sagan immortalized it), truth and more that make our life worth living, our children happy, safe and successful, and society a gift -not a frightening, murderous burden.

But the October 2020 issue of Smithsonian Magazine is publishing a timely article:

The New, Nicer Nero - Reassessing history's most maligned ruler, notorious for fiddling while Rome burned by Joshua Levine, with photographs by Gia Squarci. (It is just a click away if you hit the Reference #5 in the Reference list at the end of this Essay.)

Joshua Levine resets the clock for now:

Among history's most durable memes, one ranks particularly high: a fleshy fellow in a toga, laurel wreath encircling his temples, standing among the columns of an ancient portico, while all around him, fire consumes the great city of Rome. He is not alarmed. Quite the contrary. He calmly plucks the strings of a lyre and, yes, even appears to be singing!

*The meme says everything we need to know about this egotistical monster, his wanton indifference to human suffering and his pathetic delusions of artistic grandeur. He is at once childish and murderous. The story has been told and retold for almost 2,000 years, but it is Hollywood, not surprisingly, that has supplied the pictures in our heads. Pride of place must surely go to Mervyn LeRoy's 1951 epic *Quo Vadis*, thanks to Peter Ustinov's deliciously hammy Nero (the actor was nominated for an Oscar). "Look what I have painted!" shrieks Ustinov as he watches the Technicolor flames engulf his city.*

Ustinov calls for his lyre. He commences to pluck. "I am one with the gods immortal. I

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am Nero the artist who creates with fire,” he sings tunelessly. “Burn on, O ancient Rome. Burn on!” A panicky mob converges on the palace. “They want to survive,” explains Nero’s levelheaded counselor Petronius (portrayed by Leo Genn, also nominated for an Oscar). “Who asked them to survive?” shrugs Nero. Great cinema it isn’t, but it is terrific stuff all the same. And this is more or less the consensus Nero of history, set down first by the Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius and etched deeper by the New Testament Book of Revelation and later Christian writings.

The man most responsible for Nero’s modern incarnation is the Polish novelist Henryk Sienkiewicz, whose *Quo Vadis: A Narrative of the Time of Nero*, appeared in 1895 and was the basis for the Mervyn LeRoy film and half a dozen other cinematic versions. The plot centers on the doomed love between a young Christian woman and a Roman patrician, but their pallid romance is not what turned the novel into a worldwide sensation. Sienkiewicz researched Roman history deeply; his Nero and other historical characters hum with authenticity. It was they, more than the book’s fictional protagonists, who vaulted *Quo Vadis* to runaway best-seller status, translated into over 50 languages. Sienkiewicz ended up winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1905.

Sienkiewicz plucks two strings that resonated loudly with his audience and have done so ever since: Nero’s role as the emblematic persecutor of early Christianity (Poland is a deeply Catholic country) and Nero’s political tyranny (to Sienkiewicz, an ardent nationalist, Nero’s Rome stood in for czarist Russia) ...

... A few lonely voices have come to Nero’s defense. In 1562, the Milanese polymath Girolamo Cardano published a treatise, *Neronis Encomium*. He argued that Nero had been slandered by his principal accusers. But Cardano was having his own problems with the Inquisition at the time. Sticking up for a guy who, among other things, supposedly martyred the first Christians for fun was not likely to help his own cause. “You put your life at risk if you said something good about Nero,” says Angelo Paratico, a historian, who translated Cardano’s manifesto into English.

Paratico’s translation, *Nero, An Exemplary Life*, didn’t appear until 2012, by which time historians had started taking another look at the case against Nero. Out of all the modern scholars coming to the emperor’s rescue, the most comprehensive is John Drinkwater, an emeritus professor of Roman history at the University of Nottingham. Drinkwater has spent 12 years poring over the charges against Nero and dismantling them one by one. Scourge of Christianity? Nope. Urban pyromaniac? No again. And on down through matricide, wife-killing and a string of other high crimes and misdemeanors.

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The Nero who appears in Drinkwater's revisionist new account, Nero: Emperor and Court, published last year, is no angel. But one comes away with some sympathy for this needy lightweight who probably never wanted to be emperor in the first place and should never have been allowed to wear the purple toga.

Drinkwater is in line with the emerging trend of modern scholarship here, but he goes much further. Nero allowed a ruling clique to administer the Roman Empire, and it did so effectively, argues Drinkwater. Most of what Nero is accused of doing, he probably didn't do, with a few exceptions that fall well within the grisly standards of ancient Roman political machinations. Drinkwater's Nero bears little personal responsibility, and not much guilt, for much of anything. In the end, says Drinkwater, the "men in suits" got rid of Nero not for what he did, but for what he failed to act on.

The blame for saddling Nero with his unwanted destiny falls squarely on his mother, Agrippina the Younger, great-granddaughter of the emperor Augustus and a woman of boundless ambition. (Nero's father, an odious aristocrat, Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, died two years after Nero was born.) Nero became Agrippina's instrument for conquering the man's world of Rome.

She moved first to disrupt the planned nuptials of the emperor's daughter Octavia, so that Nero could marry her. The emperor at the time was Claudius, easily swayed. Agrippina's improbable little lie—that Octavia's fiancé had committed incest with his sister—proved toxic enough to torpedo the wedding. Readers of Robert Graves' picaresque and hugely popular Claudius novels are unlikely to forget the sexual gymnastics of Messalina, Claudius' notorious wife. In the end, Messalina's antics brought her down, leaving a vacancy in the marriage bed that Agrippina filled in A.D. 49. Shortly thereafter, Claudius adopted Nero as his own son, making Nero a legitimate claimant to the throne, alongside Claudius' natural son Britannicus. And finally, in A.D. 53, Nero married Octavia. The stage was set. Agrippina had managed everything with steely efficiency...

... We know very little about the teenager who found himself absolute ruler of a sprawling, multiethnic empire. He had been educated by the great Stoic philosopher Seneca, but Nero was clearly no stoic. We do know, however, that the Roman people welcomed their new emperor enthusiastically and held high expectations for his reign.

Things started out well, mostly because Nero was more than happy to allow three highly capable people to steer the ship of state: Seneca, Burrus, the levelheaded commander of the Praetorian Guard, and, of course, Agrippina. Behind them stood Drinkwater's "men in suits," the senators, well-trained freedmen and ex-slaves who

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made up a kind of civil service. In Drinkwater's account, the roster of Team Nero shifted around somewhat during the 14 years of his reign, but it oversaw the empire competently.

For his part, Nero gave himself over to the pursuits that mattered most to him—chariot-driving, singing, poetry and playing the cithara, a stringed instrument like a lyre but more complex and much harder to master. Nero was a thoroughgoing philhellene—a lover of Greece and its sophisticated culture. He had little of the Roman appetite for blood and conquest, which makes him look far more appealing to us than to the Romans.

The Nero meme leaves the impression of an effete dilettante, confident in his own genius only because nobody had the guts to tell him otherwise. This is wrong on several counts. Suetonius tells us that Nero worked very hard to get good at singing. "He...conscientiously undertook all the usual exercises for strengthening and developing his voice. He would also lie on his back with a slab of lead on his chest, use enemas and emetics to keep down his weight, and refrain from eating apples and every other food considered deleterious to the vocal cords," Suetonius reports, adding cattily that Nero's voice remained "feeble and husky."

Even the poetry Nero wrote himself was apparently pretty good; the Roman poet Martial tells us so. We have selections of it, and they don't sound anything like the grandiloquent tripe that generally comes out of his mouth in the movies. Nero cannot be dismissed as a mere dabbler: He took his hobbies seriously—too seriously, in fact, for a Roman establishment that liked its emperors to make war, not art.

Nero was an accomplished athlete as well. Suetonius is impressed that Nero can pilot a four-camel rig around the racetrack. In other references, we find Nero at the reins of a ten-horse chariot. That was the ancient Roman equivalent of a Formula One car. Nero won races in it. "If Nero could do that, he is no fool. He is intelligent, he is fit. On his own terms, he is to be taken seriously and he's not to be projected as a clown," Drinkwater concludes.

Those qualities made the young Nero very popular with the common man. He had an exuberant personality and enjoyed being out in public. He was no snob and remembered the names and faces of people up and down the social ladder. All in all, he comes off as a fairly likable young fellow...

... On July 18, A.D. 64, in the tenth year of Nero's largely successful reign, a fire broke out in the Circus Maximus. The fire burned for nine days, destroying the better part of

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the city as it spread.

Nero wasn't at home when the fire ignited. He was vacationing at Antium, today's Anzio and another of his favorite getaways. But when news of the fire reached him, he hurried straight back to Rome and took charge—effectively—of firefighting efforts. He moved quickly to aid the victims. And in the fire's aftermath, he introduced legislation to make Rome less vulnerable in the future...

... Which brings us to the Christians, who added their own grievances to the Nero-bashing narrative. It must be conceded upfront: Nero did kill Christians. Simmering public resentment over the Great Fire put enormous pressure on the government to find a scapegoat. Early accounts make it unclear whether Christians were persecuted for their religious beliefs or simply as an outsider group—Drinkwater says the latter—but they were easily framed for arson. Whatever he was up to, Nero wasn't trying to stamp out the nascent faith, which, at this point, was taking shape more in the Middle East than in Rome.

The Christians whom Nero did kill were never thrown to the lions before a crowd of baying spectators in the Colosseum, as the story goes. For one thing, the Colosseum wasn't even built yet. More to the point, from what we know, Nero had little taste for the kind of blood sport we associate with popular Roman entertainment. As a philhellene, he would much rather watch a good chariot race than see two armed men slice each other up. When protocol demanded that he show up at gladiatorial games, Nero is said to have remained in his box with the curtains drawn. He took some heat for this. It was considered insufficiently Roman of him.

The Christians Nero executed for setting the Great Fire were mostly burned in his own gardens, which conforms to the standard Roman legal practice of fitting the punishment to the crime. And that appears to have been the end of it, at least at the time. The public was appeased, and the Christians of Rome stayed silent. "Persecution isn't mentioned at all in the early Christian sources," says Drinkwater. "That idea comes up only much later, in the third century, and is fully accepted only in the fourth century."

*When the idea finally surfaces in Christian polemics, it appears with a vengeance. The Book of Revelation was interpreted to cast Nero as the Anti-Christ: The numerical equivalents of the Hebrew letters that spell "Neron Caesar" come out to 666—the "number of the beast." Do with that what you will. Lactantius, a tutor of the Christian Emperor Constantine's son, wrote *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* in the early fourth century. He has this to say: "Nero, being the abominable and criminal tyrant that he*

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was, rushed into trying to overturn the heavenly temple and abolish righteousness, and, the first persecutor of the servants of God, he nailed Peter to the cross and killed Paul. For this he did not go unpunished.”

Never mind that Nero has an alibi for Peter’s death: there’s no evidence Peter was ever in Rome. Paul was there, from A.D. 60 to 62, and he may even have been killed there, but that was well before the so-called “Neronian persecution.” But none of that matters much anymore. Early Christians and the Flavians set their stamp on the written record early, and they held a grudge.

Nero’s increasingly beset final years were marked by a few things he should have done and one big thing he shouldn’t have done. Until the latter part of his reign, Nero confined his crooning mostly to a small audience of invited guests. As time wore on, however, Nero grew bolder. His living room no longer provided a big enough stage. He had always craved applause. He was addicted to showbiz.

Early in the year A.D. 64, Nero went to Naples, a city he loved for its Greek roots and theatrical culture and performed in public for the first time. He sang and accompanied himself on the cithara in a kind of Bob Dylanesque, singer-songwriter one-man show. The crowd went wild, and Nero came away exhilarated and wanting more. He repeated the performance, this time in Rome itself.

Given all the horrendous things Nero was accused of doing, it’s bizarre that a little musical comedy ranked so high on his list of crimes. And yet that is the way the Roman upper classes saw things. In A.D. 65, Roman senator Gaius Calpurnius Piso organized a ham-fisted plot to kill Nero. Among the conspirators’ chief complaints were Nero’s acting and singing in public. The plot was easily undone, but before he went to his death, one of the conspirators, a Praetorian guard, Subrius Flavus, told Nero to his face why his “devotion turned to hatred.” Nero was a matricide and an incendiary, said Flavus, but he was also...an actor....

... Nero’s end crept up on him slowly and from afar. There was no immediate crisis of state that required his ouster. Some historians argue that Nero had depleted Rome’s treasury and that the empire was desperately short of cash. Drinkwater disagrees. The empire’s frontiers were mostly quiet: An uprising in Britain had been put down. Titus, the future emperor, was in the process of extinguishing a rebellion in Judaea. The crisis that did arise should have been merely a tempest in a teapot. A firmer, less diffident emperor than Nero might have flicked it away. Nero watched as it slowly gathered momentum, and he sat there, paralyzed, as it rolled over him.

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In the spring of A.D. 68, a Gallic official, Julius Vindex, rose up not against Rome, he said, “but against Nero.” The reasons were vague, the usual grab bag of crimes—matricide, acting, that sort of thing. Vindex could never hope to sit on the throne himself—he was a Romanized Gaul, for one thing—so he enlisted someone who could, a middling Roman patrician named Galba...

... Militarily, Vindex never posed a real threat to Nero or to Rome. Few of the important commanders in Gaul, Germania and the East supported Vindex. But Nero temporized, effectively signing his own death warrant. By the time Vindex was routed at the Battle of Vesontio, the whole empire was somehow in play. “Nero had done nothing. The establishment had seen the future, hadn’t they?” says Drinkwater. “It’s not the army that turns against him, it’s the men in gray suits.”

Nero fled Rome for the villa of his friend Phaon, four miles from Rome. Here, on the 8th of June in the year 68, Nero read the news that the Senate had declared him hostis—an enemy of the state. Suetonius has him wavering irresolutely before hearing the approach of cavalry and plunging a dagger into his throat.

It is Suetonius, too, who has given us Nero’s infamous last words: qualis artifex pereo—“what an artist perishes in me!” Historians still debate exactly what Nero meant by this, but it is often taken as a final expression of Nero’s self-deluded conceit. As such, it is the kind of operatic finale that richly satisfies all the haters.

But there’s a different way of looking at it. Not that he was a great artist, perhaps, but that he was undoubtedly a committed one, and it is the artist, not the half-hearted emperor of Rome, who perishes here. “The one major figure who we certainly know was never allowed a fair trial under Nero was Nero himself,” Drinkwater concludes.

Two thousand years later, Nero is finally getting his day in court.

The Western (i.e. Roman) Empire collapsed in 476 CE. Afterwards Europe entered a series of periods with major changes and upheavals, and the “*rule of law*” with checks and balance was not implemented before the Rinascimento and spread slowly under the influence of politicians-thinkers, like Montesquieu.

Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu, generally referred to as simply Montesquieu, was a French judge, man of letters, and political philosopher. He is the principal source of the theory of separation of powers, which is implemented in many constitutions throughout the world. He is also known for

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doing more than any other author to secure the place of the word "despotism" in the political lexicon. His anonymously-published *The Spirit of Law* in 1748, which was received well in both Great Britain and the American colonies, influenced the Founding Fathers in drafting the United States Constitution. His concept and description in detail of the separation of powers, and the critical role of the rule of law changed our thinking of what we now call Democracy. It was not a brutal change and it is not over, but the detailed principles patiently described in *The Spirit of Law* remain fundamental.

The United States Constitution has served as the supreme law of the United States since taking effect in 1789. The document was written at the 1787 Philadelphia Convention and was ratified through a series of state conventions held in 1787 and 1788. Since 1789, the Constitution has been amended twenty-seven times.



Page one of the original copy of the United States Constitution

Particularly important amendments include the ten amendments of the United States Bill of Rights and the three Reconstruction Amendments.

The Constitution grew out of efforts to reform the Articles of Confederation, an earlier constitution which provided for a loose alliance of states with a weak central government. From May 1787 through September 1787, delegates from twelve of the thirteen states convened in Philadelphia, where they wrote a new constitution. Two

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alternative plans were developed at the convention. The nationalist majority, soon to be called "*Federalists*," put forth the Virginia Plan, a consolidated government based on proportional representation among the states by population. The "*old patriots*," later called "*Anti-Federalists*," advocated the New Jersey Plan, a purely federal proposal, based on providing each state with equal representation. The Connecticut Compromise allowed for both plans to work together. Other controversies developed regarding slavery and a Bill of Rights in the original document.

The drafted Constitution was submitted to the Congress of the Confederation in September 1787; that same month it approved the forwarding of the Constitution as drafted to the states, each of which would hold a ratification convention. *The Federalist Papers*, published while the states were debating ratification, provided background and justification for the Constitution. Some states agreed to ratify the Constitution only if the amendments that were to become the Bill of Rights would be taken up immediately by the new government. In September 1788, the Congress of the Confederation certified that eleven states had ratified the new Constitution, and directed that elections be held. The new government began on March 4, 1789, assembled in New York City, and the government authorized by the Articles of Confederation dissolved itself.

In 1791, the states ratified the Bill of Rights, which established protections for various civil liberties. The Bill of Rights initially only applied to the federal government but following a process of incorporation most protections of the Bill of Rights now apply to state governments. Further amendments to the Constitution have addressed federal relationships, election procedures, terms of office, expanding the electorate, financing the federal government, consumption of alcohol, and congressional pay. Between 1865 and 1870, the states ratified the Reconstruction Amendments, which abolished slavery, guaranteed equal protection of the law, and implemented prohibitions on the restriction of voter rights. The meaning of the Constitution is interpreted by judicial review in the federal courts. The original parchment copies are on display at the National Archives Building.

The delegates at the Philadelphia convention were all **men, property owners** (including, for most, **slaves**), **Protestants** and **Conservatives**; they were not going to *rock the boat*. The country was ridiculously smaller than it is today: no Texas, no Florida, no California, no Alaska ... And the population was European (after the colonists killed or expelled all the "*Natives*"). This is not the population of today -

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including the millions of *illegals* or *undocumented*.

Hence the reverence for a text historically dated 1797-1791. It is another *sacred cow*, that should not be taken *verbatim*, but completely revised and rewritten. But its history, and the Founders background will not allow this dated document to be overthrown! And the Supreme Court is stuffed with very conservative judges.

During the French student revolt of May 1968, one slogan was ubiquitous: *Élections, piège à cons* (“politely” translated as *Elections, idiot trap*). You will find, further in this essay, evidence for this slogan here, in the United States, and now (soon!) in 2020. Time will tell, but I am not optimistic...

And the Constitution was and still is *proslavery*:

“Not only is the Constitution “*pro-slavery*”, it presupposes the existence of slavery as a legitimate institution. Many mainstream liberal and conservative pundits/scholars alike try to get around this by claiming that the Constitution is somehow an abolitionist document because they don’t like the political and cultural implications of acknowledging otherwise.

“In order to be consistent, anti-Confederate monument/flag folks would need to oppose the Constitution, American flag, and monuments to (slaveholding) American founders as well, not to mention Columbus Day/monuments. For that matter, the Bible is pro-slavery and presupposes the existence and legitimacy of slavery as well, including both the Jewish Tanakh and the Christian New Testament, as does the Koran, and as do the writings of Aristotle. Of course, many on the far left recognize this and do indeed hold such positions, even if attacking all of these things would be strategically foolish.

“The battle against the police state, the state generally, capitalism (yes, ancaps, you’re tribe is welcome to the fight), not to mention the Empire needs to be an “All-Tribes” fight, including Christians, Jews, Muslims, Aristotelian classicists, American history fetishists, Europhiles, rednecks, inner-city blacks (many of whom are Christian or Muslim), rural white Southerners, etc. just as much as it needs to include anarchists, Marxists, LGBTQIAs, SJWs, feminists, anti-fatphobes, anti-lookists, anti-speciesists, etc.”

And the overbearing role of the Electoral College makes the presidential elections in the US iniquitous. Most “*democratic*” countries have subjected their founding texts to frequent revisions, to adjust for tectonic changes, and use as principle “*one citizen, one vote*”; not the United States.

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But in many countries -where elections take place- crime is very much involved in the electoral process. We read and hear about criminal events, or practices constantly.

In the US where **MONEY** reigns, I heard several times people involved in election say: *"I can get a senator of your choice elected for (e.g. 5,000) dollars"*.

Thank to Yves P. Huin, I looked into a quasi-mythical figure of crime in the late 1920s-early 1930s: **Al Capone**.



Public domain Wikipedia

Alphonse Gabriel Capone (/kə'poun/; January 17, 1899 – January 25, 1947), sometimes known by the nickname "*Scarface*", was an American gangster and businessman who attained notoriety during the Prohibition era as the co-founder and boss of the Chicago Outfit. His seven-year reign as a crime boss ended when he went to prison at the age of 33.

Capone was born in New York City in 1899 to Italian immigrant parents. He joined the Five Points Gang as a teenager and became a bouncer in organized crime premises such as brothels. In his early twenties, he moved to Chicago and became a bodyguard and trusted factotum for Johnny Torrio, head of a criminal syndicate that

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illegally supplied alcohol—the forerunner of the Outfit—and was politically protected through the “Unione Siciliana.” A conflict with the North Side Gang was instrumental in Capone's rise and fall. Torrio went into retirement after North Side gunmen almost killed him, handing control to Capone. Capone expanded the bootlegging business through increasingly violent means, but his mutually profitable relationships with mayor William Hale Thompson and the city's police meant he seemed safe from law enforcement.

The protagonists of Chicago's politics had long been associated with questionable methods, and even newspaper circulation “wars”, but the need for bootleggers to have protection in city hall introduced a far more serious level of violence and graft. Capone is generally seen as having an appreciable effect in bringing about the victories of Republican William Hale Thompson, especially in the 1927 mayoral race when Thompson campaigned for a wide-open town, at one time hinting that he'd reopen illegal saloons. Such a proclamation helped his campaign gain the support of Capone, and he allegedly accepted a contribution of \$250,000 from the gangster. In the 1927 mayoral race, Thompson beat William Emmett Dever by a relatively slim margin. Thompson's powerful Cook County political machine had drawn on the often-parochial Italian community, but this was in tension with his highly successful courting of African Americans.

Capone continued to back Thompson. Voting booths were targeted by Capone's bomber James Belcastro in the wards where Thompson's opponents were thought to have support, on the polling day of April 10, 1928, in the so-called Pineapple Primary, causing the deaths of at least 15 people. Belcastro was accused of the murder of lawyer Octavius Granady, an African American who challenged Thompson's candidate for the African American vote and was chased through the streets on polling day by cars of gunmen before being shot dead. Four policemen were among those charged along with Belcastro, but all charges were dropped after key witnesses recanted their statements. An indication of the attitude of local law enforcement to Capone's organization came in 1931 when Belcastro was wounded in a shooting; police suggested to skeptical journalists that Belcastro was an independent operator.

The 1929 Saint Valentine's Day Massacre led to public disquiet about Thompson's alliance with Capone and was a factor in Anton J. Cermak winning the mayoral election on April 6, 1931.

Capone apparently reveled in attention, such as the cheers from spectators when he

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appeared at ball games. He made donations to various charities and was viewed by many as "*modern-day Robin Hood*". However, the Saint Valentine's Day Massacre, in which seven gang rivals were murdered in broad daylight, damaged the public image of Chicago and Capone, leading influential citizens to demand government action and newspapers to dub Capone "*Public Enemy No.1*".

The federal authorities became intent on jailing Capone and charged him with 22 counts of tax evasion. He was convicted of five counts in 1931. During a highly publicized case, the judge admitted as evidence Capone's admissions of his income and unpaid taxes, made during prior (and ultimately abortive) negotiations to pay the government taxes he owed. He was convicted and sentenced to 11 years in federal prison. After conviction, he replaced his defense team with experts in tax law, and his grounds for appeal were strengthened by a Supreme Court ruling, but his appeal ultimately failed. Capone showed signs of neurosyphilis early in his sentence and became increasingly debilitated before being released after almost eight years of incarceration. On January 25, 1947, he died of cardiac arrest after suffering a stroke.

Which brings me to the current occupier of the White House, in Washington, DC: Donald J. Trump.

In February 2020, Felicity Lawrence wrote in *Nature* a scathing rebuke to the current strategy of lies, false information and promotion of dirty industries laudative literature; she reviews the book *The Triumph of Doubt*, written by David Michaels, a scientist:

"In 2017, US presidential strategist Kellyanne Conway coined the phrase "*alternative facts*" to defend false claims about the size of the crowd at Donald Trump's inauguration. Numerous commentators lamented that we were entering a new era of Orwellian doublethink. These are indeed upside-down times, as epidemiologist and former safety regulator David Michaels demonstrates in his excoriating account of the corporate denial industry, *The Triumph of Doubt*. Unwelcome news is automatically rebranded fake news. Inconvenient evidence from independent sources — say, about climate breakdown and fossil fuels, or air pollution and diesel emissions — is labelled junk science and countered with rigged studies claiming to be sound.

"But it would be wrong to see truth decay solely as the preserve of today's populist



politicians. Normalizing the production of alternative facts is a project long in the making. Consultancy firms that specialize in defending products from tobacco to industrial chemicals that harm the public and the environment have made a profession of undermining truth for decades. They hire mercenary scientists to fulfil a crucial role as accessories to their misrepresentations.

Denial machine

“Michaels was among the first scientists to identify this denial machine, in his 2008 book *“Doubt is Their Product.”* His latest work combines an authoritative synthesis of research on the denial machine published since then with his own new insights gleaned from battles to control the toxic effects of a range of substances. He takes on per- and poly- fluoroalkyls, widely used in non-stick coatings, textiles and firefighting foams; the harmful effects of alcohol and sugar; the disputed role of the ubiquitous glyphosate-based pesticides in cancer; and the deadly epidemic of addiction to prescribed opioid painkillers. In each case, Michaels records how the relevant industry has used a toolbox of methods to downplay the risks of its products, spreading disinformation here, hiding evidence of harm there, undermining authorities — all tactics from the tobacco industry’s playbook.

“The doubt in the title of both Michaels’s books derives from a now-notorious memo written in 1969 by an unnamed executive at a subsidiary of British American Tobacco. It outlined a strategy for maintaining cigarette sales: *“Doubt is our product since it is the best means of competing with the ‘body of fact’ that exists in the minds of the general public. It is also the means of establishing a controversy.”* By creating scientific disinformation about links between tobacco and disease, this malign strategy delayed regulation by decades and protected corporate profits.

“Michaels’s insider perspective on the doubt machine dates back to 1998, when he became chief safety officer for nuclear-weapons facilities at the US Department of Energy during the administration of US president Bill Clinton. Here, he had a ringside view of the tricks used by vested interests to dispute established science, intimidate the authorities and scupper regulation. In his first book, he described how the *‘product defense industry’* applied the tobacco template to asbestos, lead, plastics and toxic materials such as beryllium used in nuclear applications.

“From 2009 to 2017, Michaels served as a senior regulator, appointed by president



Barack Obama, in the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Here, he gathered even more material to show how deceptions have infected the body politic.

Subverting the method

“The principles of scientific inquiry involve testing a hypothesis by exploring uncertainty around it until there is a sufficient weight of evidence to reach a reasonable conclusion. Proof can be much longer in coming, and consensus still longer. The product-defense industry subverts these principles, weaponizing the uncertainty inherent in the process. Its tricks include stressing dissent where little remains, cherry-picking data, reanalyzing results to reach different conclusions and hiring people prepared to rig methodologies to produce funders’ desired results.

“Michaels acknowledges other doubt scholarship. This includes that of science historians Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway in *Merchants of Doubt* (2010); nutritional scientist Marion Nestle’s numerous books on the food industry, such as *Soda Politics* (2015) and *Unsavory Truth* (2018); and journalist Jane Mayer’s 2016 *Dark Money*. That last book traced the funding that links climate-change denial to the libertarian right’s ideological drive to shrink the state and deregulate industry.

“Michaels names names fearlessly, pointing the finger at product-defense practitioners and the front groups and think tanks that masquerade as independent while taking industry’s shilling. Those wanting to check his allegations can find many previously unavailable source documents archived at the Triumph of Doubt Special Collection at <https://toxicdocs.org>.



Emissions cheats

“So much of his material outrages, but two episodes stand out. One is the German car manufacturer Volkswagen’s brazen malfeasance regarding its diesel engines. The company developed secret software so these engines could cheat emissions tests, allowing its vehicles to fraudulently pass stringent US checks on the disease-causing particulates in diesel exhaust. This was unintentionally uncovered in 2014 by students working on behalf of the campaign group International Council on Clean Transportation in Washington DC and confirmed the following year by the US Environmental Protection Agency. Michaels’s account of the scientists prepared to launder their data to abet this criminal activity is forensic.

“The second standout is his description of his years-long battle at the OSHA to reduce workers’ exposure to silica particles from sand used in dozens of industries, from construction to steel manufacture and fracking. He and at least 50 staff members worked to collate evidence and counter a barrage of pseudoscientific objections and litigation.

“Michaels, no longer required to be a non-partisan government official, reserves special criticism for the Republican Party. He argues that corporate polluters and manufacturers of dangerous products have long depended on the party to neuter public-health and regulatory agencies with phony rhetoric about liberty and free-market enterprise. He wants stronger regulation, not because he does not care about freedom, he says, but because we cannot be free without the state’s protection from harm.

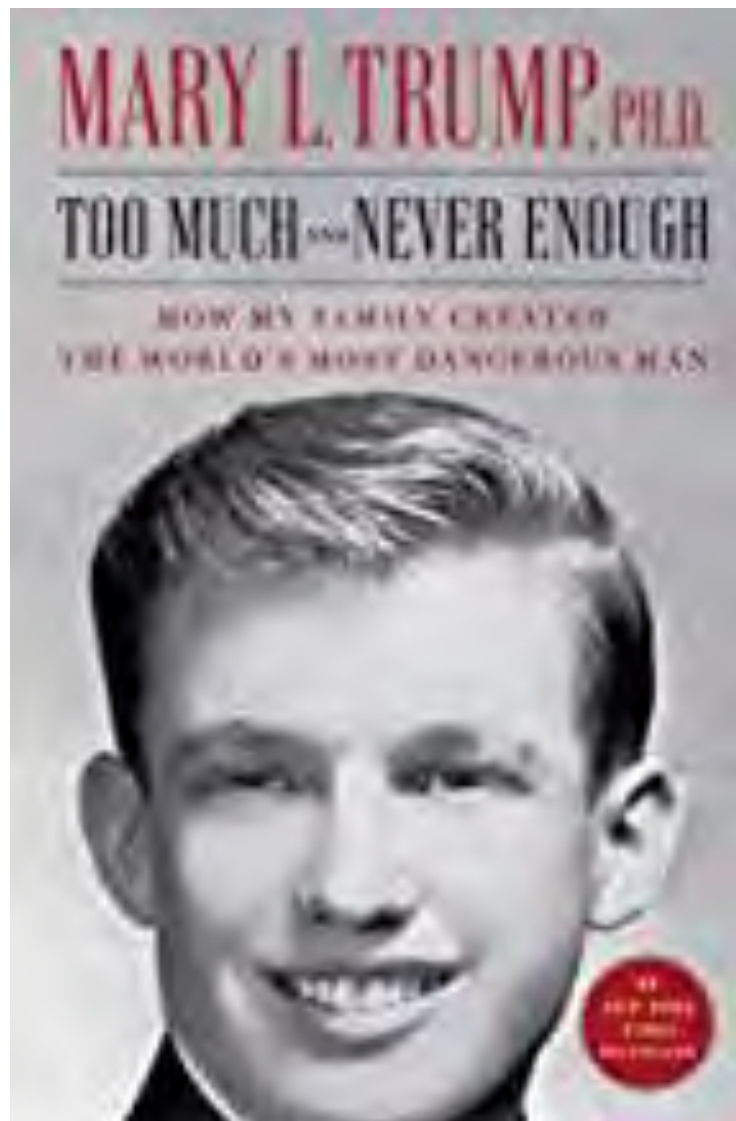
“*The Triumph of Doubt* is at times dense with technical detail, of necessity as Michaels prosecutes his case against companies known to be litigious. It is a brave and important book, raising the alarm about the systemic corruption of science.

These companies -the ones that corrupt *absolutely* science are the ones that cherish, support and benefit from the presence (and the associated flurry of insanely destructive rules/regulations) of Donald Trump as President of the USA.”



Donald J. Trump

To better understand the personality of the 45th President of the United States, his behavior, goals, and psychology, read the book of Mary L. Trump:



(If you want a PDF copy of this book, just send me a request at drgeorges@gmail.com and I'll be happy to oblige.)

Mary L. Trump's PhD is in Clinical Psychology, and she dissects the multiple lives of her infamous cousin. The reading requires breaks to digest calmly the litany of barely believable revelations. *(FYI, I drank almost a bottle of Michel Oliver's 2010 Cuvée*

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Georges Halpern to maintain my sanity; it DID help!).

The Wikipedia entry on Donald Trump is...HUGE, as its Table of Contents below can attest.

(Note: I wrote this essay with the Wikipedia entry last edited on September 5th, 2020)



Donald Trump

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“Donald John Trump (born June 14, 1946) is the 45th and current President of the United States. Before entering politics, he was a businessman and television personality.

“Trump was born and raised in Queens, a borough of New York City, attended Fordham University for two years and received a bachelor's degree in economics from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. He became president of his father's real-estate business in 1971, renamed it The Trump Organization, and expanded its operations from Queens and Brooklyn into Manhattan. The company built or renovated skyscrapers, hotels, casinos, and golf courses. Trump later started various side ventures, mostly by licensing his name. He bought the Miss Universe brand of beauty pageants in 1996 and sold it in 2015. Trump and his businesses have been involved in more than 4,000 state and federal legal actions, including six bankruptcies. He produced and hosted *The Apprentice*, a reality television series, from 2003 to 2015. As of 2020, *Forbes* estimated his net worth to be \$2.1 billion.

“Trump's political positions have been described as populist, protectionist, and nationalist. He entered the 2016 presidential race as a Republican and was elected in a surprise victory over Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, although he lost the popular vote. He became the oldest first-term U.S. president, and the first without prior military or government service. His election and policies have sparked numerous protests. Trump has made many (>20,000!) false or misleading statements during his campaign and presidency. The statements have been documented by fact-checkers, and the media have widely described the phenomenon as unprecedented in American politics. Many of his comments and actions have been characterized as racially charged or racist.



“During his presidency, Trump ordered a travel ban on citizens from several Muslim-majority countries, citing security concerns; after legal challenges, the Supreme Court upheld the policy's third revision. He enacted a tax-cut package for individuals and businesses, rescinding the individual health insurance mandate penalty. He appointed Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. In foreign policy, Trump has pursued an America First agenda, withdrawing the U.S. from the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade negotiations, the Paris Agreement on climate change, and the Iran nuclear deal. He imposed import tariffs which triggered a trade war with China, recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and withdrew U.S. troops from northern Syria. Trump met thrice with North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un but talks on denuclearization broke down in 2019.

“A special counsel investigation led by Robert Mueller found that Trump and his campaign welcomed and encouraged Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election under the belief that it would be politically advantageous but did not find sufficient evidence to press charges of criminal conspiracy or coordination with Russia. Mueller also investigated Trump for obstruction of justice, and his report neither indicted nor exonerated Trump on that offense. After Trump solicited the investigation by Ukraine of a political rival (Joe Biden, who later became his Democratic opponent in the 2020 presidential election), the House of Representatives impeached him in December 2019 for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. The Senate acquitted him of both charges in February 2020.”

“Fish Rots from the Head Down”

Although not certain, the origination of this proverb may be associated with Sir James Porter's work that was published in 1768, called '*Observations on the religion, law, government, and manners of the Turks*'. It is more popularly used nowadays for big organizations rather than for individuals, ... which in any case would not be wrong!

Indeed. Besides the book by Mary Trump (mentioned earlier, referenced, *and available upon request*), a report on *BBC News* on Sunday 23, August 2020 says more: “US President Donald Trump's eldest sister, a former federal judge, has said her brother is a liar who “*has no principles*”, secret recordings reveal.”

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The critical remarks by Maryanne Trump Barry were recorded by her niece, Mary Trump, who last month published the book excoriating the president.

"His goddamned tweet and lying, oh my God," Ms. Barry is heard saying: "it's the phoniness and his cruelty."

Mary Trump said she had taped her aunt to protect herself from litigation. Mr. Trump responded to the latest revelations in a statement issued by the White House, saying: *"Every day it's something else, who cares."* The recordings were first reported by *The Washington Post*, after which the Associated Press obtained them.

In the secret recordings, Ms. Barry criticizes the Trump administration's immigration policy, which has led to children being held at migrant detention centers at the border.

"All he wants to do is appeal to his base," she said.

One of the claims made in Mary Trump's memoir - *Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man* - is that her uncle paid a friend to take an SAT test for him - a standardized exam which is used in university placement.

Ms. Barry refers to this in the recording, even suggesting that she remembers the name of the friend involved (FYI, his name is Joe Shapiro). *"He got into University of Pennsylvania because he had somebody take the exams," she said.*

Ms. Barry has been supportive of her brother Donald and has previously said the two were close. She once told the story of how he had visited her every day she was in hospital following an operation.

"Once would have been enough - the duty call. That's how love shows, when you go that extra yard." She also said she "knew better even as a child than to even attempt to compete with Donald".

But one of the most trusted (and thrown under the bus -and jailed for his support) person is Michael Cohen (from the Associated Press on February 27, 2019):

"President Donald Trump's former lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen testified before the House Oversight Committee on Wednesday — and the rhetorical fireworks were instant and nonstop. *"I am ashamed because I know what Mr. Trump is. He is a racist. He is a con man. He is a cheat."* Cohen said in his opening statement. The rhetorical fireworks were instant, and nonstop: *"In some ways, I knew him better than even his family did because I bore witness to the real man, in strip clubs, shady business*

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meetings, and in the unguarded moments when he revealed who he really was: a cheat, a liar, a fraud, a bully, a racist, a predator, a con man” he continued.

One my favorite daily writers on politics -at large, is Umair Haque whose editorial/column is published in *Eudaimonia and Co.*

On April 10, 2020 here is his article titled: “*This is How an Economy Dies*”.



“See that chart above? It’s every bit as shocking as it looks. Let me explain.

“Not so long ago, watching the way America’s government and leadership class failed to respond to Coronavirus, I wrote a little essay called America is Committing Economic Suicide. It’s just a few days later, and already, my friends, you can see vivid proof of what I was talking about.

“Another week — and by now, 17 million people or so in total have filed unemployment claims. How big is that number? The US labor force is about 165 million people. So about 10% of the labor force has filed for unemployment. Ten percent.

“Worse, all that has happened in just three weeks. That’s a rate of about 3.3 percent per week. At that rate, a quarter of the economy is unemployed in another three and a half weeks or so. What happens when a society reaches about 25% unemployment? Usually, it tips into chaos and upheaval. 40%? It implodes into autocracy.

“That’s stark proof of a simple, grim fact. Coronavirus is a shock the likes of which

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modern economies have never seen. Never is a big word — but in this case, it's true. Even wars and earthquakes don't crater a whole labor force in weeks. We have no experience of such an event, really, in modern history.

“And so — crucially — the old rulebook isn't and wasn't going to work, either. We are way outside the boundaries of yesterday's placid normal now — and so playing by yesterday's rules is a recipe for adding disaster to catastrophe. And yet...that's exactly what the American government did.

“The stimulus that was passed supported businesses and households for just one week. Furthermore, it was badly designed: so opaque, nobody really knew how to get their hands on what meagre funds were offered, full of conditions, which made getting funds hard. It should have been easy to be supported, instead it was hard, it should have been simple, instead it was complicated, it should have been straightforward for everyone — instead, everybody was left in a haze of confusion. The result of all that?

“A massive loss of confidence — yet confidence is the key to staving off a depression, as Keynes discovered nearly a century ago. Hence, uncertain, unsure, afraid, businesses are laying off employees *en masse*. A tidal wave of people therefore filed for unemployment. And we are barely seeing the tip of this tidal wave. Why?

“Because Coronavirus hasn't even peaked yet. And already 10% of the labor force has filed for unemployment. What's the final tally likely to be? 20%? 30% Those numbers are now well within the realm of possibility.

“What do they really mean? As people lose their incomes, so they have to dip into their savings to survive. But the vast majority of Americans have no effective savings. So then people are forced to sell assets. The net result of a tidal wave of unemployment is that people are going to lose their incomes, then savings, then homes. Americans — many of them — will be left not just temporarily broke, but genuinely destitute over the long- term. What assets they've worked hard to build up will vanish seemingly overnight. (Knowing American capitalism, predatory lenders will probably swoop in, and offer them a lifeline in disguise — more of a noose, which is endless unpayable, debt at a crippling price.)

“As people become permanently poorer, of course, they have less to spend, and a vicious cycle of contraction kicks off — bang! Depression. Until, perhaps, a new equilibrium is reached — one where there's less work, fewer jobs, lower incomes, less opportunities, and massive reduction in human potential.

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“And that is what an economy is really about: not stocks, bonds, or corporate profits — but human potential. If you really want to think well about Coronavirus — or any other shock — that is how to do it. So, let’s discuss it for a second.

“Bang! Coronavirus will finish a job that began in earnest about two decades ago: the death of the American middle class. It began shrinking as a result of bad economic choices — and around the 2010s, for the first time in history, the American middle class became a minority. The likely long-term effect of Coronavirus is going to be to wipe out America’s middle class. Why?

“Not just because people will lose their incomes, then, savings, then assets. But because a lot of the jobs that are being destroyed right now are probably not going to come back.

“There’s a fantasy that American economists have, which is that once this is over, business will suddenly bounce back. Having no real-world experience of how mega-capitalism’s boardrooms operate, they’re sorely mistaken.

“Many of the small and medium sized businesses that are shuttering their doors right about now are probably gone for good. Their owners are going to have declare bankruptcy. Do you think they’re suddenly going to be able to start new businesses, the moment all this chaos ends? Of course not. Not only will they be trapped, liquidating assets, for months or years, struggling to make ends meet — a lot of them will simply throw in the towel, and decide that the risk of entrepreneurship is too great to take.

“At the same time, mega-corporations will have a field day once all this is over. They’ve got plenty of cash stockpiled — so much they don’t know what to do with. Here’s a golden opportunity for them to buy assets on the cheap. Whether they’re shops or plants or machinery and so on. Take, for example, the grim and weird trend of America’s housing market being controlled more and more every year by gigantic real-estate companies, who buy up homes during bad times, and lease them right back to the people who used to own them. How much better off are they going to be at the end of all this?

“You can already see Coronavirus boosting mega-capitalism’s fortunes, in fact. Amazon and Google don’t need bailouts — they’re going to rake it in. Healthcare stocks are booming — and so are financial ones. Why is that? All these corporations have effectively privatized public goods — and so in times of crisis, they make huge amounts of money, charging Americans through the nose for things that should be

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public. Amazon, for example, is effectively subsidized by the postal service — which, meanwhile, is “*going broke*.”

“The trend of mega capitalists building huge, economy-controlling monopolies is likely to be sped along greatly by Coronavirus — as a huge wave of small and medium sized businesses go extinct. Think about it simply. Today, you’re probably spending the bulk of your household income at Amazon — a trend that was increasing, but then went thermonuclear. Meanwhile, because of Coronavirus, your local butcher, baker, and brewer are going bankrupt. See those two lines converging?

“In the end, what will be left in the wreckage of such an economy is just a handful of mega corporations controlling most of the economy. That’s already true in America, yes. But it will be even truer tomorrow.

“Such an economy isn’t really a functional one — it’s a Soviet one. Why? Just as in the Soviet Union, huge monopolies have no real incentive to provide goods or services of any real quality — or even at all. As a result, Americans, like Soviets before them, face persistent, chronic shortages: of medicine, of healthcare, of decent food, of money itself, even of drinkable water now in many places. That trend will accelerate too, as a result of Coronavirus — the economy will go from broken, to completely dysfunctional.

“What kinds of jobs do today’s mega corporations offer? Yesterday, they offered the ones the American middle class was famous for (at least for a certain kind of white person with the right pedigree, I suppose.) Ones of lifelong stability, with generous benefits, and expansive guarantees. Today, that’s a cruel joke. Americans work like neoserfs — and that trend, too, is accelerating. Jobs — if you’re lucky enough to even have one — come with no real benefits, healthcare that barely works, incomes that never really grow much, a retirement package on which you can never retire. But even those McJobs have been becoming, over the last decade or so, something even more dystopian: gigs.

“So now legions of Americans who used to be something approaching middle class are effectively glorified servants to the rich: they deliver their food and care for their pets and clean their homes and drive them from the sleek office to the glamorous club. And they earn a pittance for doing so. This is the face of a downwardly mobile society — a once prosperous middle class, a once healthy working class, now reduced to being serfs to their techno-capitalist overlords, doing their menial and household labor, their everyday chores.

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“Think of how Coronavirus is likely to accelerate that trend. There’s the guy who was brave enough to try and do something interesting and worthy with his life — maybe he went into steep debt, to open a little microbrewery. He was beginning to do OK, just — then the virus hit. The economy went into freefall. His order books dried up, as his customers — restaurants, bars, pubs — all closed. The government offered him barely any support, as a business owner, or as father and husband. In desperation, he began to deliver packages for Amazon and Instacart during the day, and Uber at night. Someone had to pay off all that debt, after all. He’d put a lot of it on his own credit cards — foolish, but such is the price of being an entrepreneur, sometimes.

“It’s three months later. The virus has finally passed. But he’s still working gigs, to pay off that debt. His microbrewery went bankrupt — because a lot of his customers simply didn’t exist anymore. He tried to keep it going — but the debt became insurmountable. It felt like it was driving him to despair. He couldn’t sleep, eat, think. He panicked all the time. So, he decided enough was enough. There he is now — once a proud entrepreneur, a creative person, a life fulfilling its potential. Today...he’s delivering stuff for Amazon and Instacart and chauffeuring for Uber. He doesn’t have a “*job*” — or a business — anymore, and probably never will.

“See all that human potential going to waste? Now multiply it by all the lives which will be affected. Think of how much we will all lose. Whether it’s art or literature or science or just the simple creativity of my example above. Think of how many lives will be reduced to penury, unable to fulfill themselves and reach for their dreams now — forced by the coming depression into doing what they must to survive now, which, in this dystopian economy of rich and poor, of predator and prey, means something very much like algorithmic neo-serfdom — being essentially a servant to the super rich. Think of what that makes of a once healthy middle class and working class. What do we call whole social classes...of glorified servants? What do we all lose when they’re busy cleaning and driving and delivering — instead of perhaps discovering cures for the very diseases which afflict us?

“Human possibility. Poof. Up in smoke. That is what has really happened now, as a result of the American government’s stunning failure to support its people or economy well enough — at all, really — during a global pandemic.

“It’s a sad tale I’ve told. And yet it will be played out by the millions in the coming weeks. As average Americans who worked hard all their lives to just have the tiniest glimmer at their dreams find their lives suddenly wrecked and shattered. But it’s not their fault. It’s the fault of their government and leadership class. Who did far too

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little to help them — offering them just one week of support, during a crisis which lasted months?

“What happens, by the way, when people find their hopes dashed, and their dreams shattered? When they live lives of fresh — but seemingly now poverty? They turn to demagogues and strongmen, in rage, frustration, despair, anger, pain. The demagogues point their fingers at the powerless — and blame all the problems of an economy and a society on them. “*They are the reason you’re poor!*”, shout the strongmen. In America, “*they*” are Mexicans and Latinos and Jews, in Britain, Europeans, in India, Muslims, and so on across the world.

“When societies go through shocks which are allowed, through negligence and folly and failure, to leave entire classes of people suddenly, permanently poorer — then democracy tends to die, too. Think of the Weimar Republic. Think of Soviet Russia becoming Putinist Russia. Think of...modern day America. Trumpism was a direct, predictable consequence of the implosion of the American middle class. Coronavirus is likely to accelerate America’s implosion into autocracy.

“This is how an economy dies, my friends. And when an economy dies, a healthy, sane, civilized society tends to go with it. Is that America’s future? Is that already America’s present? I’ll leave that part to you to judge”.

Jeremy Stahl, in *Slate* (August 14, 2020) wrote an article titled “*The 10 Scariest Election Scenarios, Ranked.*” He asked 10 experts for their worst election nightmares—and how to prevent them from happening.

“As the election nears, anxieties are growing over the possibility that President Donald Trump will try to cling to power if he loses to former Vice President Joe Biden. Trump, for his part, is strongly hinting he will not accept any loss as a legitimate result. On Thursday, the president said that he’s deliberately blocking funding to the United States Postal Service in order to prevent people from voting by mail in the midst of the pandemic, which he claims, without evidence, will result in mass fraud. In the past week alone, he has also accused Democrats of trying to “*steal an election*” by supporting mail-in balloting, claimed that “*China and Russia*” are going to “*be grabbing plenty of*” fraudulent mail-in ballots, and that we’ll “*never know who won the election*” if courts don’t step in to stop people from voting by mail. On Friday, it was reported that the U.S. Postal Service is informing leaders in key states of a “*significant*”



risk” that some ballots “*will not be returned by mail in time to be counted.*” In the past, Trump has refused to say that he would accept an election loss, and his Attorney General William Barr has testified that he might use the Department of Justice to stop ballots from being counted if requested to do so by the president.

“All this has led many Americans to wonder: What can proponents of democracy do to prevent a stolen election?

“I asked 10 legal experts and former civil rights officials to share what contested election scenario keeps them up at night—and what countermeasures could be taken if the president chooses to manipulate the election. I’ve ranked each nightmare scenario from least to most likely below.

10. Elector Apportionment Switcheroo

“Sanford Levinson, professor of government at the University of Texas–Austin School of Law, lays out a scenario where a *“Republican state legislature exercises its undoubted constitutional prerogative in the next few weeks to switch from the winner-take-all format to district-by-district allocation of the vote, as is currently the case in Maine and Nebraska.”*

For example, if enough Democrats turn out to vote in Texas’ urban centers, they might turn the state blue—unless the GOP-controlled state government decides to split their delegates by congressional districts, which are dominated by Republicans: *“Why wouldn’t the GOP-controlled Texas state government take a sure number of votes rather than rolling the dice? That might, of course, be taken to be a sign of desperation, but... each side has an incentive to prevail by any means necessary. Florida, incidentally, is another state that could lock in a bunch of Trump votes if they decided to go district by district this year, and it is also completely controlled by the GOP.”*

“Countermeasures: If Republican-governed states alone take this step, it would be very unlikely to change the outcome of the election. Democratic governors can hold the line in the most crucial swing states. Levinson writes that this option *“would presumably guarantee Trump some healthy number of electoral votes in Wisconsin and North Carolina,”* both key contested states, but acknowledges that *“both of those states now have Democratic governors, and that might be enough to prevent that option.”*

“Likelihood: Barring the use of some bizarre loopholes, this scenario is practically impossible. It would require the right state legislatures predicting in advance how the entire election is going to go and shifting their elector apportionment accordingly



and in the face of heavy opposition and possible veto points from Democratic officials.

9. Pence vs. Pelosi

“Yale Law professor Bruce Ackerman proposes a situation where an election that’s too close to call ultimately comes down to a dispute between the vice president and the speaker of the House: *“Mike Pence, as president of the Senate, will chair the joint session of Congress that decides who won the election. Before the session begins, Trump announces that Pence will disqualify close Biden victories as plainly fraudulent, while upholding close Republican victories as entirely legitimate making it mathematically impossible for Congress to select Biden. The president’s lawyers claim that precedents from the founding era authoritatively establish Pence’s unilateral authority on such matters. To counter this threat, Nancy Pelosi refuses to allow the joint session to take place and asserts that the plain language of the President Succession Act makes her, as speaker, ‘acting president’ on Jan. 20. This conflict on Capitol Hill provokes an escalating wave of street protests across America, and violent police measures, as Inauguration Day approaches.”*

“Countermeasures: Ackerman writes: *“Congress should pass by veto-proof majorities a statute creating a special electoral commission consisting of five Supreme Court justices— two liberals and two conservatives, chaired by Chief Justice Roberts. The commission should investigate challenges in any contested election and determine whether disqualifications are appropriate. Pence should publicly commit to following the Roberts Commission’s recommendations, and Pelosi should allow the joint session to proceed.”*

“Likelihood: A lot of the below and worse would have to go wrong for us to get to this point. In a very close election where both sides have a plausible claim to victory, it becomes likelier. And as Ackerman notes, basic elements of this scenario have actually happened in American history once before.

8. No Certification for You

“Daniel Carpenter, director of social sciences at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, is concerned about a scenario in which a Republican state legislature in a potentially decisive Electoral College state—such as Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, or Wisconsin—simply refuses to certify a Biden victory due to claims of fraud by Trump. *“If state politicians act as authoritarians, they might respond to close election results by short-circuiting*



the vote count and bypassing popular majorities,” Carpenter writes in an email. “They might either withhold Electoral College slates (‘underpopulate’ the Electoral College and throw the election to the House) or install their own slates (‘falsely [populate]’).”

“Countermeasures: Carpenter writes: “Most of the states that I’m thinking of have Republican legislatures but either Democratic governors (Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin) or Democratic secretaries of state (Arizona). Let’s imagine a scenario where Biden wins a genuine majority in one of these states but that Republican politicians try to install their own EC slate. Then Democratic governors or executive officials can draw upon federal law ... to report the Electoral College slates.”

“Likelihood: This scenario is very unlikely, but still plausible. “State legislatures might try to declare their own slates of electors,” Carpenter writes, “but they have to undo their own statutes to do so, so that is both difficult and brazen, for one, and second could be vetoed by governors.” At the same time—as with all of these scenarios—it could depend on the closeness of a given contest and how the “the voice of former Presidents Republican and Democratic, military leaders and corporate leaders” affect public perception of the election.

7. Foreign Attack on the Grid

“Given the Russian attack on the 2016 election and the already-reported election interference by Russia in this election, University of California–Irvine School of Law professor Richard Hasen warns of an even greater election attack in 2020. “One of the nightmare scenarios I spin out in Election Meltdown is a Russian election day cyberattack on the power grid in a Democratic city in a swing state, like Detroit, Michigan,” Hasen writes. “The Russians already have experience knocking out power (they did it in the Ukraine), and Wall Street Journal reporting shows they’ve made inroads into the American power system.”

“Countermeasures: “If voting takes place on election day, but the cyberattack stops tens of thousands of Detroit voters from voting, we don’t know what the remedy would be,” Hasen writes. “Would courts order a revote? Would this be stopped by the Supreme Court? Will the Michigan Legislature seek to reclaim the right to choose presidential electors on this basis? There’s not much we could do to prevent cyberattacks, but states and Congress should pass laws to deal with unexpected and sudden natural disasters or terrorist attacks that interfere with our voting rights.”

“Likelihood: This is a terrifying possibility—particularly given how much damage it would do—but it still seems unlikely given all of the state and federal resources that



already go into protecting our electric infrastructure from attack.

6. Phony Foreign Interference

“Joshua A. Geltzer, former Obama National Security Council deputy legal adviser and founding executive director of the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection, is concerned that, if an attack like the one Hasen imagines does not come to pass, Trump could fake one. Geltzer writes: *“Imagine, late on Election Day, hearing that President Trump will be holding a press conference the next morning. ... Rather than conceding, he announces he’s been informed of classified intelligence indicating widespread election interference by a foreign power whose name he must keep secret, and therefore he isn’t prepared to accept any election outcome until he, as President, can work with America’s intelligence community and law enforcement to determine the validity of the vote tally.”*

“Countermeasures: Such an announcement would not hold any legal weight, Geltzer says, but it could still sow disinformation and chaos, particularly among his supporters. *“In these circumstances, Congress must act, and quickly,”* Geltzer writes. *“The House (and ideally also Senate) Intelligence and Judiciary Committees—with oversight over the intelligence community and federal law enforcement, respectively—must swiftly schedule public hearings and demand the testimony of senior civil servant analysts, rather than the political appointees Trump has installed. And then they must insist on answers, at an unclassified level, that make clear whether Trump’s statement reflects real intelligence and information or whether it is—as so often proves the case with Trump—sheer invention.”*

“Likelihood: We can probably expect, at this point, that Trump will claim the election was stolen if he loses, and he could certainly try to blame foreign interference. (Geltzer noted Trump did make such a claim in the last election.) But it is less likely he will be able to use that claim as part of an effort to retain power in the face of an obvious election loss—Trump has low credibility, even among his own supporters, and a blatant effort to lie about this would be quickly disproved. Instead, he might use it as an excuse to explain away said loss to his supporters.

5. Weaponizing COVID-19

“Vanita Gupta, former head of the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division and current president of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights offers the prospect that the pandemic will be used as an excuse to suddenly block voters from going to the polls. Gupta imagines an Election Day where Trump or state officials



offer “a pretextual use of COVID to issue stay-at-home orders in targeted cities based on false information when it’s already too late for voters to request absentee ballots.”

“She continues, “Imagine if Nov. 1 there’s a false claim—whether it’s by Trump or [other] candidates—weaponizing COVID and using it pretextually to issue stay-at-home orders in Milwaukee and Detroit and it’s too late in those cities for voters to apply for absentee ballots.” That would mean people who had planned to go to the polls might be too afraid to go, or will be barred from going, in person. Further, there is the prospect that “all of these false statements about COVID in these cities is amplified on social media and the misinformation spreads and causes people to basically sit it out.”

“Countermeasures: State and local officials have veto points here in terms of controlling potential local stay-at-home orders, but if Trump threatens to enforce a federal order in a given jurisdiction with federal action, that would be harder to counter. Gupta says: “A lot of the countermeasures involve work that is happening or needs to happen right now. One of them is to have social media companies like Facebook, Twitter, Google be able to and be better about fact-checking politicians’ misinformation and disinformation and taking it down. ... It requires public health officials and people with authority—public health authority—to be ready to push back on any effort to weaponize COVID and misstate the facts about COVID. It requires having poll workers that are getting accurate information, the recruitment of younger poll workers ... because if poll workers then refuse to show up because of misinformation it [could result in] poll closures resulting in either massively long lines or the disenfranchisement of thousands and thousands of voters in key cities.”

“Likelihood: It’s not hard to imagine Trump making a fake announcement about lockdowns. But long lines and lack of poll worker resources—and the very real threat of more aggressive COVID-19 outbreaks in the fall—pose an enormous risk whether or not Trump uses a fake announcement.

4. Federal Vote Theft

“Chiraag Bains, a former attorney in the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice and current director of legal strategies for Demos, worries that “Trump will instigate intimidation and violence—possibly even using the military or federal agents—to suppress the vote in Black and brown communities. The Republican National Committee was recently released from a 35-year consent decree preventing it from running so-called ballot security operations to intimidate voters in communities of color. It is now recruiting 50,000 volunteers in 15 states to watch the polls and challenge voters they believe are suspicious. True the Vote, a group that seeks to make



voting 'like driving and seeing the police following you,' is recruiting police officers and ex-military [officials] to patrol precincts in 'inner city' and Native American precincts." Bains also notes that the president could claim authority under the Insurrection Act to interfere with voting: "He might allege unsubstantiated voter fraud by undocumented immigrants, foreign governments, antifa, or even Democrats as an act of 'rebellion.' He could invoke another part of the act that allows the use of the military to stop a 'conspiracy' that deprives people of their constitutional rights. The argument would be that voter fraud cancels out the votes of qualified voters. In this way, Trump might perversely claim federal troops are needed at the polls or during the canvassing of mail ballots to protect voting rights. ... There are still more cynical tactics within reach. Last month, Trump sent federal agents to Portland, ostensibly to protect federal property amid ongoing racial justice protests. ... What if he sends agents to Atlanta, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia on the same pretense, just in time for the election?"

"Countermeasures: "Voting rights organizations like Demos can file lawsuits under Section 11(b) of the Voting Rights Act, which prohibits voter intimidation. State attorneys general and local prosecutors can enforce state laws against interference at the polls. States have rules about who can challenge a voter's eligibility or whether a mail ballot should count. And the use of the Insurrection Act described here might well be unconstitutional. All of these strategies, however, rely on the courts. At the federal level, 1 of every 4 appellate judges are Trump appointees, and the Supreme Court has repeatedly sided against voting rights plaintiffs. Moreover, lawsuits take time, even successful litigation would not undo the harms of voter intimidation and violence, and courts are loath to alter the results of the election. If Trump stirs up violence or deploys the military, it will take massive grassroots resistance to prevent him from hijacking our democracy. It will take all of us."

"Likelihood: As Bains notes: "If that sounds far-fetched, recall that this administration's stated rationale for adding the citizenship question to the census was to enforce the Voting Rights Act."

3. Fox News Calls It for Trump

"Susan Hyde, a political science professor at University of California–Berkeley, writes: "A common thread in my worst-case visions for the upcoming U.S. elections in November is that American consumption of media in the U.S. has changed so drastically that there may be no source of political information that will be trusted to evaluate the veracity of claims of election fraud and foreign interference, as well as whether claims



of victory by Biden or Trump are valid. ... We also may face a scenario in which both candidates claim victory. ... Examples include scenarios in which foreign interference swings the election outcome, Trump loses but refuses to concede, delays in official election results undermine everyone's confidence in the process, a virtual tie between Trump and Biden, or Biden wins but Trump supporters refuse to accept the results, perhaps even using the event to instigate widespread violence against their political opponents."

"Countermeasures: Hyde suggests we need independent foreign observers to police our election. She writes: "The U.S. will again have international election observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in November. It is not widely known that U.S. elections have been internationally observed since 2002, though it is not clear that their assessment will be widely trusted, but it should be."

"She continues: "A grand coalition of defenders of U.S. democracy, ideally involving leaders from across the political spectrum, and potentially including representatives from business, religious communities, or professional associations, could be formed now with the intention of becoming vocal in the days and weeks after the election on these critical questions ... and in cases in which an election was stolen, massive protest and the mobilization of pressure in favor of 'small d' democracy by powerful interests in the U.S. may be necessary to defend democracy."

"Likelihood: "I worry that it is very plausible," Hyde writes. Given everything we know about Fox News, that sounds right to me.

2. Blue Shift

"Mark Tushnet, professor of Law at Harvard Law School, warns that results on election night may be misleading due to a close race and the slow counting of mail-in ballots. In 2018, late-counted mail-in ballots after Election Day caused a "blue shift" that understated the depth of the Democratic victory on election night. Trump could take advantage of this delay, aided by overeager—or friendly—media outlets. Tushnet writes: "'Close' and 'slow' are concepts that will be developed on the fly, and with an eye to electoral advantage, but my current version is that margins of around 10,000 votes or fewer will be [construed] to be close. And what counts as slow will depend in part upon whether states provide interim updates from election-night reported outcomes."

"Countermeasures: "Immediate popular mobilizations in the form of street



demonstrations near but not in the venues where mail-in ballots are being counted (so not the ‘Brooks Brothers’ Republican riot from 2000), with the theme ‘Count every vote.’”

“Likelihood: This scenario depends on the race tightening in the weeks ahead, the difficulty of counting mail-in ballots, and willingness of the GOP to weaponize an indecisive election night outcome against democracy. Which is to say, it is highly plausible.

1. USPS Sabotage

“Jessica Marsden and Larry Schwartztol of Protect Democracy write: “Due to the COVID- 19 pandemic, the number of voters requesting absentee and mail-in ballots this fall reaches historic levels. Lack of funding and ongoing changes to U.S. Postal Service practices mean that in September and October, undelivered mail piles up in the nation’s post offices. In those piles are millions of blank absentee and mail-in ballots being sent to voters, and completed ballots being returned to voting officials. Days before November 3rd, millions of voters in states across the country report that they never received the ballots they requested, and election officials report that an unusually small percentage of ballots have been returned by mail. The potential consequences of this situation would be catastrophic: Millions of voters disenfranchised because they receive their ballots too late to return by the deadline, or never receive them at all; surges of unexpected traffic at in-person polling places, creating punishingly long lines and significant strain on efforts at maintaining social distance; and increased risk of COVID spread at polling places across the country.”

“Countermeasures: Marsden and Schwartztol emphasize the importance of oversight and transparency, noting that Congress should investigate, and that their organization has also filed a lawsuit to force USPS to disclose its preparations for the election. If the mail jam that is clearly already underway extends into the election, they say, officials will need to extend the receipt date for absentee ballots. *“Wherever possible, governors or other state officials should exercise emergency powers provided by state law to extend that deadline,”* they write. *“Where state law does not provide that authority—or where state officials refuse to act—the courts have a role to play.”*

Further, state bureaucrats should be *“creating broad access to drop boxes, so that voters who receive ballots with insufficient time to have them returned by mail have a safe and reliable alternative. Breakdowns in mail delivery will also increase the pressure on in-person voting. That means that election officials will need to double down on ensuring that safe options exist for a higher proportion of in-person voters*



than many states may be planning for.”

Emergency litigation against the USPS could also help. *“To the extent that slowdowns or other failures are a result of the Postmaster General’s recently announced changes in mail delivery practices—and assuming those changes remain in place in the fall—the negative impact on election mail would likely represent a violation of the federal statutes governing the postal service as well as the U.S. Constitution’s protection for the right to vote,”* they write. *“While time would be agonizingly short for litigation to play out if this situation materializes, negatively impacted voters as well as candidates and others who may be harmed should ask a court to impose emergency measures to ensure that the USPS operates at full capacity throughout the election period.”*

“Likelihood: As Marsden and Schwartztol write, *“Unfortunately, extremely plausible.”* The truth is, this final scenario has already begun.

In fact, Umair Haque wrote on August 15, 2020:

Americans are Sleepwalking into a Stolen Election

The Election isn’t Going to be Stolen.
It’s Already Being Stolen.

“There are 80 days to go. And right about now, America’s sleepwalking into a stolen election. Why do I say that?

“Consider the following set of facts. The mailed in vote is expected to rise to 51% of the total for Democrats in this election, thanks to the Covid pandemic being allowed to explode. But the Postal Service has warned mailed in votes might not arrive in time to be counted in 46 states out of 50 states.

The President, meanwhile, has openly admitted to crippling the Postal Service, in order to...stop mailed in votes from being counted. Obama has come out and said that Trump is trying to *“actively kneecap”* the Postal Service. There is an obvious, transparent plan to steal the election. Why on earth do Americans still want to debate this? Why, every time I write about this, does Steve or Tucker want to tell me that my *“theory lacks evidence”*? Trump has admitted it! It’s not the stuff of conspiracy theory

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— it's come from the President's very own lips. That's not the bad news. The bad news is that it's working.

"Let me say it again. Postal votes are going to rise to 50% of the total for the opposition, but the USPS has warned that it won't be able to deliver votes in time in nearly every one of 50 states.

"How did that come to be? Just a few weeks ago, a Trump ally was appointed to head the US Postal Service, who promptly purged it, and changed the centuries old practice and ethos of delivering letters "*rain or shine,*" to something more like, "*we'll deliver it if we want to.*" Hence, mail is now already backed up or going missing in state after state. Then there's the fact that thanks to Trump's crony heading the USPS, 500 mail sorting machines have been "*taken out of service.*" That might not sound like a lot, but it's 15% of the total — easily enough to swing an election. And then there's the sudden tripling of the price states pay to mail in votes.

"That is not a recipe for any sort of regular election which is the stuff of a robust democracy. It is the stuff, to put it bluntly, of a stolen election. Americans aren't nearly concerned enough. They are sleepwalking into a stolen election.

"What's the endgame of this plan? It couldn't be more obvious, and you probably already know it. Mailed in votes arrive "*too late.*" They're "*damaged*" and therefore "*uncountable.*" Many mysteriously go missing. Nobody can quite track them down. Those that do manage to arrive are the subject of intense, prolonged legal challenges. These legal challenges play out at a painfully microscopic level — county by county, city by city, town by town, a la "*hanging chads*". They center on minutia. Are these votes really still countable? What exact time were they posted? Are they damaged on this side or that side? Do the signatures match? Were they handled properly? The judiciary has already been captured. "*My judges,*" as Trump's bragged, are hardly impartial. They're incompetents and fools for a reason — appointed by Trump, they know where their bread is buttered. In municipality after municipality, the captured judiciary pays off: it decides the election, bit by bit, for the extremists.

"Meanwhile, as all this plays out, for the nation, the results of the election are drawn out — into a vague, unforeseeable future. Where there should be the certainty of democracy, there's only the haze of uncertainty. Nobody quite knows what to do. There are no good rules for this kind of situation — at least that's what the Trumpists cry. Off they march to the Supreme Court. Maybe they ask for a delay, maybe a postponement of the results, or maybe to cancel sets of votes altogether. The Supreme Court handily decides it for the Republicans — how many times have they



done that by now, since the Supreme Court is stacked for them?

“Bang! There’s your stolen election.

“It’s easy enough to see, and you’ve already contemplated it. You know what’s coming — you’d be a fool not to. I’m only here to tell you one thing, really. Your gut is precisely right. This is exactly how it happens. I say that as someone who’s survived authoritarian collapses, and studied it, too. If there was a textbook for how democracies die, this would be one of its final chapters.

“A President announcing he’s crippled the vote? A newly captured government agency warning it can’t deliver votes in time in nearly every state? Sorting machines mysteriously being decommissioned just before an election? A captured judiciary ready to decide in favor of the extremists? If this were any other country, Americans would just shake their heads, because, well, like I said, we all know that this is exactly how it happens.

“The difference, though, is that this time it’s happening in America. And Americans — at least many of them, too many of them — seem to be relying on that old exceptionalism to get them through it. It can’t happen here! My friend, it is.

“Make no mistake. The naysayers are wrong. The election really is being stolen in open view, for anyone who cares to look. Government agencies and branches captured by authoritarians working in tandem to form a kind of pincer movement. This, too, is how authoritarians work. They flaunt it, precisely to rub your face in it, so that a society comes to feel demoralized, dispirited, broken from the get-go. Imagine, for a moment, what happens if the vote isn’t delivered in time to be counted in nearly every state — just as a captured Postal Service warns. Trump either coasts to an easy victory, or his margin of defeat is made to be tiny, because it’s Democrats who plan to vote postally disproportionately. Then the legal challenges begin.

“And now there’s a kind of war of attrition. Democracy is attacked with a thousand cuts — little slashes which cut away a vein here, a vein there. This challenge in that municipality, that attack in this one. It lasts months and seems to go on forever. The game is to slowly drain the last lifeblood from democracy’s body. And with every passing day, democracy seems weaker, more frail, feebler. Soon, it’s bent over, then its knees buckle, and then it struggles for breath.

“This is how it happens. America’s sleepwalking into a stolen election. So, what can Americans do about it? There are three things — but they’ve rejected two of them, culturally and socially, so that only leaves one. The first thing they could have done

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is to demand Trump's resignation now, before the election can be stolen. That's what a people more experienced with authoritarianism would have done, but Americans are apathetic at the best of times, so no such mass movement has emerged.

"The second thing Americans could have done was to build a truly transformational opposition — not so much a Biden and Harris, but leaders who left no doubt that they were capable of mobilizing voting in record numbers. But because the center and left fought one another, instead of uniting, now the opposition is, to it kindly, less than inspirational to either. That leaves just one thing Americans can do now. Vote. **VOTE.** *En masse.* Vote like they've never voted before. Especially in constituencies that traditionally don't, like young people and minorities. And not postally, either, since the Postal Service has been captured at the very top.

"That's it. Vote. Americans have denied themselves any other options — and now time is running dangerously, crucially short. This is America's last chance to keep its democracy. And watching Americans sleepwalking into a stolen election — I can't say I'm confident about it all."

And on August 20, 2020 Umair Haque publishes (in the same *Eudaimonia and Co.*) another call to *America's Last Chance to Stay a Democracy*:

"Last night, Barack Obama gave a dire, chilling warning:



"This administration has shown it will tear our democracy down if that's what it takes to win... We can't let that happen. Do not let them take away your power. Don't let them take away your democracy... Because that's what at stake right now. Our democracy."

"These words feel extra resonant coming from Obama. He's the ultimate believer in

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American democracy. He seemed almost shocked to see it failing, under attack, self-destructing.

“You might think Obama’s overstating it. But if anything, he’s understating the case. Let me speak to you as both a survivor of authoritarianism, and someone who’s studied how modern societies rise and fall.

“Americans badly overestimate the strength of their democracy. America’s ranked as a *“flawed democracy,”* according to the Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index. That means that democracy still functions, but in a kind of stumbling, faltering, haphazard manner — because institutions are broken, civil liberties are regularly infringed, the opposition is feeble, norms are weak, and, crucially, levels of political participation are low. All those are eminently true in America.

“Things are so bad, in fact, that many American states aren’t ranked by political scientists as functioning democracies at all anymore. About 12 or so at last count, which means that about a quarter of America has already stopped working as a democracy.

That level of dysfunction has led to a vicious cycle. Americans don’t trust their failing institutions, so they don’t vote, so their institutions break even further, easily captured by extremists. That cycle deepened to a point where, after a few decades, finally, an extremist captured the ultimate prize, the White House itself.

“That cycle is what has to be broken — or else.

“Let me put that to you in less abstract, more factual terms. America has the developed world’s lowest rate of civic participation. Voter turnout is abysmally low. In Sweden and Denmark, it’s about 80%, in France and Germany, about 70%, in South Korea and New Zealand, above 75%.

“In America? Voter turnout is just 55% of the voting age population.

“And even that number’s an overestimate compared to other rich countries, because America has, thanks to voter suppression, absurdly stringent requirements to be counted in the *“voting population”* in the first place.

“That level of turnout is key to America being ranked a flawed democracy. In a full democracy — a robust, healthy one — we wouldn’t see such low turnout. It’s like blood turning viscous, not flowing easily through the veins of the body politic. Such a low turnout tells us that people are either a) idiots, b) have lost faith in their systems, c) can’t afford the time or energy to vote or, d) all of the above. All of those

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are deeper failures — of education, of social contracts, of cohesion, of safety nets and supports. Hence, the vicious cycle.

“Such a shockingly low level of civic participation creates what’s become the strange paradox of American democracy which baffles the world. 70% of Americans, if you ask them, don’t want to live in a failing society where the only values are money, power, and greed, and the only aspirations cruelty, selfishness, brutality, stupidity, and violence. Instead, they say they want public healthcare, education, retirement, childcare, broader social goals like equality, dignity, meaning, worth.

“In short, Americans don’t want to live in a broken predatory capitalist society — they want to live in a European or Canadian style social democracy.

“So why does it never happen?

“Because they don’t vote for it.

“Think about the numbers above. 70% of Americans say they don’t want to live in the kind of society where kids are shot at schools, where sick people beg strangers online to pay for healthcare, where having a kid costs as much as a luxury car and educating that kid costs more than a house. They want to live in a modern, civilized society.

“But only about 50% of Americans vote. And most of the Americans who don’t vote are the ones who want America to become a modern, civilized society: young people, minorities, and so forth.

“That means that the remaining 30% of Americans, the ones who don’t want America to become a modern, civilized society, who want it to regress all the way back to medieval slavery, have been free to capture America politically.

“That’s exactly what they did — capture America — beginning around the 1980s. And they never stopped. Hence, by the 2010s, America was a destroyed society — the only place in the world with a shrinking middle class, falling incomes, and cratering life expectancy.

“That’s what happens when the fanatics of regress take a society over: it self-destructs. Or, more accurately, it’s what happens when the fanatics of regress are allowed to take over.

“That gap means that America’s extremists have been free to capture its institutions, from top to bottom, and break them. What do extremists do? First, they seize institutions, then they stop them from working, by de-staffing and purging them —

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think Trump’s “acting directors” — and then they pervert and weaponize them. What should be a mechanism of democracy becomes one of authoritarian intimidation and power instead. Think Trump’s stormtroopers beating moms on the streets — or the Postal Service shutting down voting machines in secret.

“That brings me to the point. America has just one working — barely working — democratic institution left.

“Just one.

“Have you guessed what it is? Correct. It’s election.

“I say barely working because America’s extremists have captured more or less all the other institutions of democracy. Think I overstate the case? Good, think about it with me. Congress? Blocked by a Senate of sycophants, fools, and fanatics. State Department? Busy alienating allies. “*Homeland Security*”? Stormtroopers. Judiciary? Stacked for decades — to decide contested elections. I could go on forever — the point is that America’s extremists have broken all its democratic institutions or stopped it from developing them (like an American Healthcare System.) All those broken institutions are why American life is so dystopian that it makes global headlines over and over again for it’s bizarre cruelty and despair — nobody much else is forced, really, to watch their kids be massacred at school, or choose between their life savings and basic healthcare, or now that the Postal Service is under threat, to watch that life-saving medicine not be delivered in time.

“Let’s connect all those dots now.

“America has just one functioning democratic institution left. Election. That’s exactly why America’s authoritarians and fascists and fanatics — its Trumpist Bloc — is working so hard, so furiously, to try to break that one, too: it’s the last domino of them all.

“Are they likely to succeed? They’ve already made plans to suppress the vote. Worse, stories are emerging of voting machines simply quietly being shut down in state after state. Turns out that Democrats threatening to hold hearings aren’t going to stop authoritarians. Color me shocked.

“America has just one functioning institution — which was already close to breaking point — and yet, even more problematically, that was the very institution which Americans didn’t avail themselves of nearly enough. It’s all the easier for authoritarians to break an institution when people themselves, leaving it untended, unused, leave it weak and feeble.

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“Remember how 70% of Americans say they want a European or Canadian style society — but only 55% of Americans actually vote, so American life only gets worse, because that means that the remaining 30% of regressive fanatics wield outsized power (and that’s before you get to the electoral college).

“So, let me say it again again, this time as simply as I can. America has just one barely functioning democratic institution left, and it’s the very one that Americans don’t use, tend to, or engage with nearly enough. Election.

“That’s troubling for those who desire democracy — and it’s like hitting the jackpot for the authoritarians. All they have to do is get sane Americans to do what they’ve already been doing a little bit more — voting less and less — and hey presto. Voila! Their job is done for them. Maybe it takes a little bit of voter suppression here, some propaganda there, some voting machines being shut down here and there. Bang! That’s it. Game over.

“Democracy’s finished.

“Let me put that in even starker terms. Look at this chart, from this article. What does it tell you? Voter turnout in America’s declined over the truly long-term. It’s gone down over the last hundred years from around 80%, to today’s 55% or so.

“What happens to a society where less and less people vote? What happens when a society dips below a turnout of 50%? Can that threshold be said to be point to a democracy anymore at all? Such a society is becoming authoritarian, in the longest historical view. And that’s America: it’s a society where voter turnout has been in decline over a century or so. Until it’s barely north of 50% — which is the point at which you can’t really say you have a democracy anymore.

“If you understood all that, you might have seen Trumpism coming a long way off.

“Obama’s right. Democracy really is under existential threat. He could have made that clear in even starker terms to Americans. See Russia’s opposition leader being mysteriously poisoned? Gee, I wonder who did that. That’s what America risks becoming after another four years of Trump, which won’t just be four years, because after that, there won’t be another election. Not a real one, anyways. Abuses of power will become everyday events, as will secret polices, beatings, political trials, disappearances, and so forth.

“Yes, really. You didn’t think Trump could do all this — culminating in 170,000 dead — after just four years. So, trust us survivors of authoritarianism: all that and worse is what happens when democracy dies. Life gets far more brutal than you think



possible, faster than you think it can happen.

“Obama’s prescription was right, too. Vote. Vote like your life depends on it. Make your friends and family vote. I’m not telling you who to vote for, by the way. The numbers above are very simple, and point to a stark conclusion. If America gets off its backside and votes, then Americans have a shot at having the country that 70% of them want. If, on the other, turnout stays between 50 to 55%, since most the non-voters are the ones who want a better country, the fanatics will win again.

“Vote. It’s the only way left out of this mess. Not just because the math says so. But also, because America has just one functioning institution left.

“Obama was righter on the prescription than I suspect even he knew. Again — what do you call a country where turnouts declined so that more than 50% of people vote? It’s barely a democracy at all anymore. It’s reached a threshold where it’s almost inevitable that authoritarians will seize power, finally — precisely because democracy has become a feeble, weak, impotent thing.

“You’re used to hearing princes of darkness like me speak about democracy dying, about society collapsing, about authoritarianism rising. Not figures of hope and optimism, like Obama, who’ve long had a kind of easy faith that the forces of light will prevail. When we finally agree, my friends? You should know, without a shadow of a doubt, just how grave and urgent your plight really is.

“One functioning institution left. The very one that’s been left untended, unused. Already under attack, being sabotaged, torn apart.

“75 days.

“This is your last chance, America.”



“... I'll Deploy 'Law Enforcement' as Poll Watchers on Election Day”

Jack Holmes is the Politics Editor at *Esquire*, where he writes daily and edits the Politics Blog with Charles P. Pierce. On August 21, 2020 he published an article titled:

“Trump Just Out and Said He'll Deploy 'Law Enforcement' as Poll Watchers on Election Day”

Might it target the same places, like the crucial swing-state cities of Philadelphia, Milwaukee, and Cleveland, where his Postmaster General has already been busy? It's a critical piece of information ([link to the article in the References section.](#)) Here is his conclusion:

“Bludgeon your followers with the same delusional lies, over and over again, until it becomes God's own truth. Bludgeon your enemies with slanders big and small, intimidating them with the sheer audacity and force of your speech. It's not about persuading them, it's about making them submit. And when rhetoric fails, it seems, he will be willing to turn to more direct force. This is a rejection of the Enlightenment, and the principles that undergird democracy and made it possible. It is a return to the darkness, where those in power feel no need to justify their choices to those they govern. Power becomes its own justification. This election presents a stark choice indeed. Vote early.”

You've got the message...

I must also mention Eric Lach's Campaign Chronicle, published in The New Yorker on August 21, 2020: *What Happens if Donald Trump Fights the Election Results. Stealing a Presidential election in America is difficult, but it has been done before.*

You (everyone) should read the article in full ([link to the 12 pages article in the References section.](#)) Hereunder is its conclusion:

“American elections are always messy. The Constitution does not guarantee candidates or voters the right to perfect electoral outcomes. But even a President cannot overturn an election on his own. An 1876-like scenario relies on lawmakers at the state level being willing to potentially buck the will of the voters. In this way, the days after November 3rd may offer an early clue about whether Trumpism will endure in the Republican Party. How far will state lawmakers be willing to go to keep



him in office, or to back him up if he declares victory based on the vote totals before the absentees are counted, or disputes the total counts after they are? And if partisans at the state level kick the dispute up to Congress, as happened in 1876, would congressional Republicans, led by Mitch McConnell, follow their lead? *“That’s the key question,”* William Kristol, the former editor of *The Weekly Standard* and a prominent Never Trump Republican, said. (Kristol played Trump in two of the Transition Integrity Project’s games.) Even if Trump can’t successfully fight an election outcome, Kristol said, if the Republican Party goes along with his protests, they’d potentially be associating themselves with *“a false and dangerous stabbed-in-the-back narrative”* that could undermine the Party for years to come.

“There are other nightmare scenarios. Foley, in particular, fears that counting delays will lead to states missing the December deadlines by which elections need to be certified to Congress. There are those who fear that Trump will exploit COVID-19 to mandate emergency stay-at-home orders in Democratic-leaning cities in the final days or weeks of the campaign. There are others who point to a recently lapsed judicial-consent decree that, for decades, prevented the Republican Party from sending *“poll watchers”* out to intimidate voters in nonwhite neighborhoods. (*“There is this real concern that officials who have been engaged in voter suppression as an electoral tactic can now weaponize to push that further,”* Vanita Gupta, the former head of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division, who participated in the Transition Integrity Project, said. *“Frankly, it’s all of a piece.”*) And there are fears about the Portland or Lafayette Square-style deployment of federal agents across the country. Lawrence Wilkerson, a retired Army colonel and former chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, who sat in on two of the Transition Integrity Project’s games, told me that he couldn’t rule out Trump trying to drag the military into a postelection dispute. *“That’s what worries me about this,”* he said, *“that anybody who told Trump that some action they were going to take was conducive to his retention of office would be told immediately, ‘Go do it.’”*

“As he has in other areas of American self-government, Trump has revealed how much of our democracy rests on norms rather than enforceable laws. Ultimately, the one norm that has been crucial to the resolution of past disputes is the one that Trump is perhaps least likely to observe: conceding defeat. In 1876, Tilden, from the start of the crisis, was privately prepared to concede and ultimately did so. And while the Supreme Court is popularly remembered as the decisive actor that handed the 2000 election to George W. Bush, it was Al Gore’s decision to concede, and to not pursue additional legal options, that really ended matters. In November, if Trump

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loses and refuses to concede, he may live up to one of his favorite boasts. No one will have ever seen anything like it. When I asked the Trump campaign what preparations it was making for the possibility of counts coming in slowly, or being too close to call, on and after Election Day, Tim Murtaugh, Trump's campaign communications director, told me in an e-mailed statement, "*We don't know what kind of shenanigans Democrats will try leading up to November. If someone had asked George W. Bush and Al Gore this same question in 2000, would they have been able to foresee the drawn-out fight over Florida? The central point remains clear: in a free and fair election, President Trump will win.*"

And -finally, because the publications on this theme keep coming, and look like memes- David Litt, on August 25, 2020, in the series *Ideas* of *The Atlantic* has an article titled *The U.S. Is Facing the Possibility of a Truly Illegitimate Election* ([link to the article in the References section.](#)) Please **read** it!

This is late September 2020, and in Northern California, we are confined into our homes: the unhealthy, visible, toxic smoke is blanketing our area, without any breeze in the forecast for the next few days. These are tough times for "*essential (poor) workers*" who are making California the 5th largest economy in the world, and No. 1 in agricultural sales; many of the workers whose hard, back-breaking work feeds the World are undocumented -and will be jailed or deported if Trump wins; and I cannot (even) imagine a young and fit US citizen taking the job...

We (six of us) will vote by mail, and early. And we are ready for President Joe Biden and a new Administration.

But our hope may well be shattered. Emiko (my wife) and our family (not to mention our parents) have escaped intolerable regimes before.

HELLO CANADA????

Portola Valley, CA

End of September 2020



Acknowledgements

Yves P. Huin has been the support, the editor, the critic, the contributor, the formatter of this Essay. He must be recognized and thanked!

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