

Proto-Fascism Unleashed: How the Republican Party Sold its Soul and now Threatens Democracy

BY THOMAS PALLEY | JUNE 2021

1. A Faustian bargain

This essay argues that some forty years ago the Republican Party struck a Faustian bargain whereby it traded integrity and decency for tax cuts and a corporate dominated economy. Now, the party is reaping the consequences of that bargain in the form of its capture by Donald Trump and his followers. However, it also means we are all threatened as the party has unleashed and legitimized neo-fascist tendencies that stand to destroy democracy and tolerance and replace them with authoritarianism and intolerance.

2. Triumph of the Big Lie

Recently (May 12, 2021) the U.S. Republican Congressional delegation expelled Rep. Liz Cheney (R-WY) from her position as their No.3 leader. Cheney is the daughter of former Vice-President Dick Cheney, who was himself a former Republican Wyoming Congressman and was a leader in the Neoconservative takeover of Washington's foreign policy establishment. That speaks to her extraordinary conservative Republican pedigree, yet still she was removed from her position.

Her offenses were twofold. First, denying Donald Trump's dishonest claim to have won the November 2020 election. Second, voting for Trump's impeachment for his role in promoting the insurrection of January 6, 2021.

Cheney's dismissal marks another step for the U.S. down the road to fascism, and the echoes with the Germany's Nazi experience grow louder every day. With her dismissal, the Republican Party has officially accepted Trump as their "Führer" and shown itself to be entirely beholden to him.

The party has also accepted Trump's "Big Lie" and all that it implies for democratic politics. The lie claims the election was stolen, which implies President Biden lacks legitimacy and should be overthrown. In effect, Republicans have tacitly invited further insurrection.

Worse yet, acceptance of the "Big Lie" implicitly signifies the Republican Party's rejection of rule of law and a turn to the politics of will power. Trump's lie has been disproven by numerous election audits and multiple court cases, all of which have dismissed his claim regarding the election being stolen. By rejecting those audit findings and court decisions, the Republican Party has effectively rejected the

rule of law as the basis for settling political disputes. In its place, it has tacitly embraced fascist politics, which views democracy as being for the weak and advocates seizing power by force of will, using whatever means necessary.

3. Triumph of the will

Fascist political thinking emphasizes will power, and that turn to the politics of will power is now evident in the Republican Party's nationwide effort to systematically rig elections via a combination of extreme gerrymandering and voter suppression. The goal is to stack the electoral deck by making it harder for African Americans, minorities, and the poor to vote. Measures include making it more difficult or costly to vote by reducing the number of polling stations, eliminating postal vote drop boxes, reducing polling hours, and lengthening polling station wait times by reducing the number of voting machines. Additionally, Republicans are requiring ID that poorer people are either less likely to have (e.g. a driving license) or is relatively more costly and difficult for poor people to get.

The justification for this suppression of voter turnout is unproven claims of voter fraud. Republicans prefer to exclude millions of legitimate voters in the name of possibly preventing a few illegal votes. In effect, legal voters are being *de facto* deprived of the right to vote by placing hoops they cannot jump.

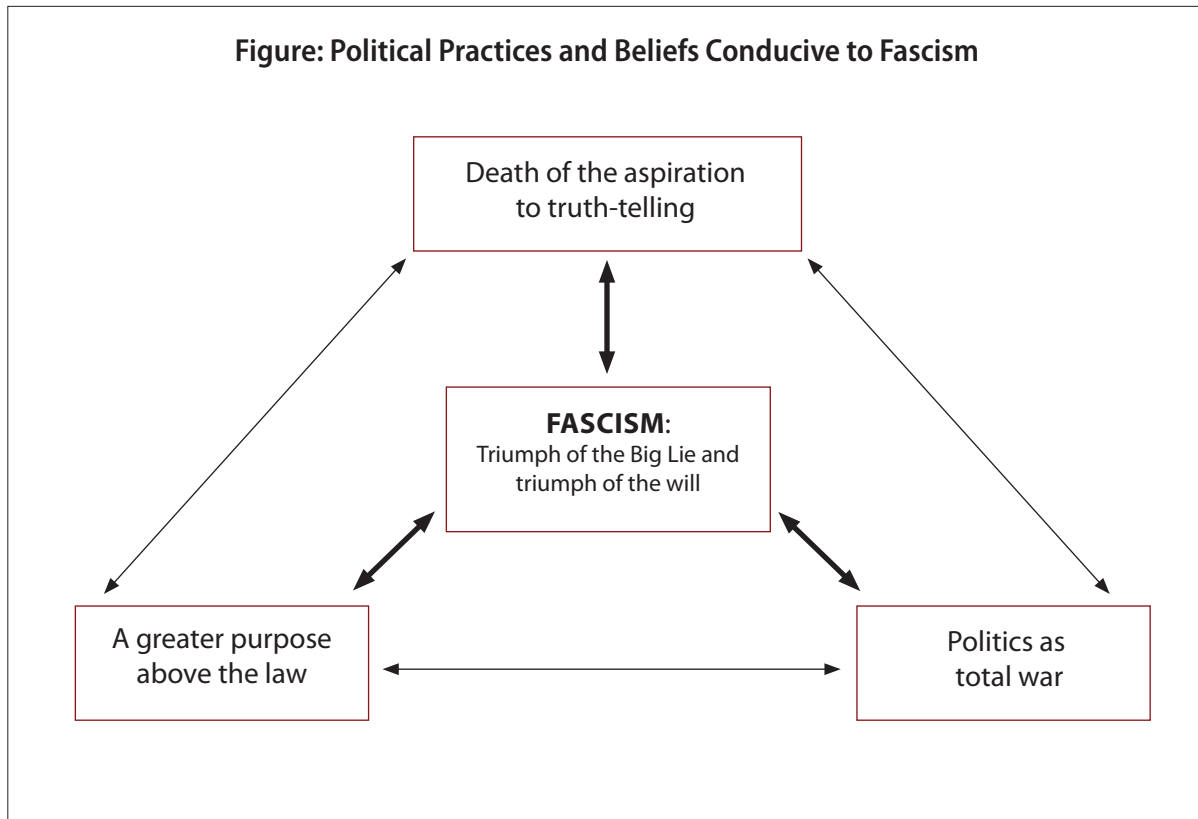
All of this is being done knowing that those groups disproportionately vote Democratic. Moreover, it is all being done within the law as it is done in states where Republicans control the legislature and Governorship. That prevention of voting by use of law is exactly how "Jim Crow" worked in the Southern United States to disenfranchise African Americans, which is why the current Republican effort has been labelled Jim Crow 2.0.

Though little known, takeover from within the law is also how Adolf Hitler gained permanent power in Nazi Germany. Although the largest party in the Reichstag, the Nazis did not have a majority. At Hitler's request, on March 23, 1933, the German Parliament passed the Enabling Act that gave Hitler dictatorial powers. It was supposed to expire in four years, but by then conditions of democracy had been destroyed in Germany. The debate over the act took place under conditions of intimidation. The Nazis had already arrested all Communist and many Social Democratic members of parliament. The Catholic Church (to its lasting shame) endorsed the act in exchange for a promise its liberties and property would be protected. Its political ally, the Center Party, provided the votes needed to pass the act.

That tragic history resonates with the current moment when the Republican Party is stepping up legal means to rig elections by electoral exclusion. The big lesson from the Nazi era is it shows how the worst of dictatorships can emerge from within the law. That is an often forgotten lesson of European history where fascism, for the most part, was voted into office.

The balance of this essay argues that, for forty years, the Republican old guard has fostered political practices and beliefs conducive to fascism. The structure of the argument is illustrated in Figure 1. At the center is fascism which emerges from within the law, is carried across the winner's line by the Big Lie, and rests on a politics that celebrates triumph of the will. The political conditions for this are the death of aspiration to truth-telling, belief that a greater purpose justifies actions which are above the law, and belief that politics should be practiced as total war. Those political conditions are mutually reinforcing, as illustrated by the bi-directional arrows. That reinforcing character adds to momentum. Most dangerous of all is that once these practices and beliefs have taken hold they are extremely difficult to reverse.

Figure: Political Practices and Beliefs Conducive to Fascism



Of course, there is also much more to the rise of fascism. In particular, there is an essential economic dimension, with the rise of fascism always being associated with economic distress or disappointment. That aspect is beyond the scope of the current essay which is focused on political practices and beliefs, particularly how the Republican Party has fostered practices and beliefs conducive to fascism.

4. The germination of the fascist seed in the U.S.

It is comforting and tempting to attribute the current danger to just Donald Trump. If that were true it would alleviate any wider responsibility, and particularly any responsibility on the part of U.S. political culture and the U.S. political system. However, the reality is the fascist seed germinated in U.S. politics long ago, but only now has it become so visible that it is possible to speak of it.

A cruel aspect of history is that the unspeakable only becomes speakable once it has happened. Before then it is dismissed as impossible. For instance, twenty years ago the U.S. responded to the 2001 Twin Towers attack with passage of the Patriot Act (2001), the Homeland Security Act (2002), and an illegal murderous invasion of Iraq (2003). The World War II memorial was inaugurated by President George W. Bush on May 29, 2004. It looks as if it was designed by Albert Speer who designed the Nazi Party rally grounds in Nuremberg. Back then saying the U.S. was walking the road to Weimar was dismissed as ridiculous. That is despite the open use of the term “Homeland” in the Homeland Security Act, which resonates with the fascist language of “Fatherland” and is so alien to U.S. political linguistic culture. At that time, such things could only be said in fiction – and they were said by Philip Roth (2004) in his prescient novel *The Plot Against America*.

The driving force behind the U.S. drift to fascism has been a Faustian bargain made by the old guard Republican elite which is now being dismembered by Trump. That dismemberment is the payback which the old guard thought it would never have to make. The bargain had Republicans pandering to prejudice by pushing “red meat” politics that advocated nationalism, xenophobia, racism, abolition of abortion, and white conservative cultural values. In return, they got votes that enabled them to push their agenda of tax cuts plus a deregulated economy favorable to business and profits.

For almost forty years, beginning with the folksy charm of Ronald Reagan, the old guard persistently fed its political base that diet. And for forty years the formula worked, with Republicans setting the U.S. political agenda as evidenced in bi-partisan support for both the neoliberal economic policy regime and the neocon foreign policy regime.

As with Faust, the bargain eventually came due. Tremors first appeared in the Republican presidential primaries of 2016 which saw Donald Trump crush the old guard’s favored son, Florida Governor Jeb Bush, the son of former President George H. Bush and brother of former President George W. Bush. However, once Trump had won the nomination, the old guard went all in on his election. Likewise, they stayed all in on his presidency, embracing the passage of the 2017 tax cuts and defending Trump in his first impeachment trial for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. Most also stayed with Trump, albeit reluctantly, immediately after the November 2020 election despite his lies about the election being stolen.

The old guard only broke more substantively with Trump after the January 6, 2021 insurrection. However, by then it was too late as the old guard no longer controlled the Republican Party, whose base had been transformed by the forty year “red meat” diet. Instead, the base now swore allegiance to Trump, in whom they see an alter-ego with which they can wholly identify: a rich vulgar billionaire, a transgressor (e.g. pussy grabber and conman) who gets away with it, and a demagogic amoralist who is willing to deliver the punitive intolerant social and cultural agenda they want.

5. Death of the aspiration to truth telling

The emergence of the fascist threat in the U.S. has been a long slow process. That process is marked by three key developments, the first of which is the death of the aspiration to truth telling. The death of that aspiration has destroyed the basis for agreement on what constitutes fact.

Over the last several years there has been much chatter about fake news. The phenomenon of fake news is associated with the internet and new communication and social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. It rose to prominence after the 2016 election when Hillary Clinton and the Democrats tried to deflect blame for their defeat on to Russian internet trolls who had posted fake news stories that had supposedly swung the election. The phenomenon was even larger in the 2020 election, but now the fake news stories were associated with home-grown right-wing extremist groups.

The problem of internet fake news is real. The internet provides a platform for rapid far-reaching dissemination of highly tendentious or outright fake material, which can be plausibly presented in ways that make it difficult to detect. As such, the internet and social media have become the whipping boy for fake news.

However, that storyline is a form of fake news in itself. First, it misses the story of Fox News which is broadcast by the enormously influential “old technology” Fox TV network. Second, it miss-

es the story of why so many Americans have rejected traditional news sources, why they have such an appetite for fake news, and why they are so vulnerable to fake news.

Those questions compel recognition that fake news did not emerge from a vacuum. Instead, it emerged from an environment in which many viewers had been primed to receive partisan one-sided news presentations, and where they had lost both the capacity to check and the desire for checked news.

Fox News is a critical part of that story in two ways. First, it contributed to the prepping and transformation of the Republican base into what it has become. Second, it points to the original sin which birthed the conditions enabling a player like Fox News to become dominant. Metaphorically speaking, Fox News is the bridge that connects where we are now with where we came from, and it also illuminates how we got here.

As regards the prepping and transformation of the Republican base, Fox News has skillfully and entertainingly fostered extremism in the base for over twenty-five years. The founding CEO was Roger Aisles, a former Republican media consultant and CNBC executive. Aisles set the tone and direction of the network which has been built on favorable reporting of conservative causes and the Republican party, combined with persistent denigration of the Democratic Party and liberal causes. It has supported the incremental takeover of the Republican Party by its more extreme elements, while simultaneously encouraging its viewership to become more extreme and hostile to the Democratic Party. Leading Fox News personalities include Lou Dobbs, Sean Hannity, and Tucker Carlson, all of whom are widely recognized to be aligned with what used to be the extreme wing of the Republican Party.

Fox has been enormously successful, ranking as the top-rated cable news network in 2019 and received by 87 million U.S. households (90 percent of television subscribers). Its viewer demographic leans significantly older, and a 2013 Gallup poll reported 94 percent of Fox News viewers either identified with or leaned toward the Republican Party. Academic studies uniformly agree that it has an extreme pro-Republican bias, and exposure to Fox News increases the Republican vote share. Some go so far as to characterize it as an extension of the Republican Party, delivering news that borders on agitprop (agitation propaganda).¹

The bottom line is that Fox News has played a critical role transforming the news and political reporting culture, and prepping Americans to be receptive and welcoming of extremist fake news. In effect, it prepared the ground in which internet based fake news could seed so easily.

But just as fake news did not develop in a vacuum, so too Fox News did not develop in a vacuum. That leads to the other side of the bridge and the original sin that birthed today's conditions. The decisive measure was the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) elimination of the "Fairness Doctrine" in 1987.

The doctrine had been introduced in 1949. It *required* holders of broadcasting licenses to present controversial issues of public importance *and* to do so in a manner that was, honest, equitable, and balanced. In short, it was a restraint on exactly the corrosive type of news and political reporting that Fox News introduced, and which opened the ugly Pandora's box of fake news.

The attack on the Fairness Doctrine was led by conservative libertarian and business interests. Business viewed it as an expense and a restraint on lucrative commercial possibilities offered by the infotainment market, in which news is twisted into entertaining partisan half-truths and opinions are presented as fact. Both business and libertarians sold their attack on First Amendment grounds (i.e. unconstitutional restriction of speech), and on grounds that market developments meant consumers had a multitude of news possibilities against which they could check for truth.

The doctrine's elimination unleashed a demon that has only gotten worse over time. Fox News was the beginning of the journey: fake news was the destination. And the same arguments that justified repeal of the Fairness Doctrine now service the cause of fake news.

“Truth” is impossible. That is because we are always dogged by our own subjectivity, and there are also deep epistemological limits to knowing. However, if truth is impossible, we can still aspire to it via a culture and institutions that promote “truth telling”. The Fairness Doctrine sought to do that in its own imperfect way. It sought to combine freedom with the obligation to restrain subjectivity via equitable balanced reporting.

The Republican Party of Ronald Reagan (i.e. the old guard) tore down that structure, using libertarian myths about what people are capable of and simultaneously denying their limitations. In denying those limitations they have ended up jeopardizing liberty.

The corrosive effect is visible in the practices of Fox News and fake news, but the damage goes far deeper. The Republican old guard loved to bleat about liberal relativism as part of the “red meat” diet it fed its political base. Liberal relativism is a philosophical discourse that recognizes the inescapable presence of subjectivity and limits to knowing. However, liberals then pair it with pluralist practice that uses reason and rules of evidence as a way of restraining the nihilistic aspects of relativism. At the individual level, the liberal also tacitly embraces existentialism, whereby the individual begins by acknowledging she is responsible for her existence (i.e. for her own life). That frame puts the individual at center stage in a context in which freedom can flourish.

Republicans, under the guise of libertarianism, have done the exact opposite. Rather than recognize the reality of relativism, they have pedaled absolutism. The simplicity of absolutism sells well politically, but it does not void the reality of the problems (subjectivity and limits to knowing) identified by relativism. Instead, it covers over the problems and promotes conflict.

With absolutism, each person's truth can claim to be “the truth”, leaving society at loggerheads. The only resolution of that impasse is the force of will, which Nietzsche embodied metaphorically in his construct of the “uberman”. The truth that prevails is whatever the most powerful will asserts it to be. Fake news is truth if it is allowed by the prevailing will, and so too is the Big Lie.

In sum, the Republican Party old guard's vilification of relativism, assertion of absolutism, and destruction of a culture of aspiration to truth telling are the original sin that birthed the order in which fake news and the Big Lie can claim to be truth. That new order betrays the past and threatens the future. Now, it is force of will that will determine whether the Big Lie prevails or a culture of truth telling is restored.

6. A greater purpose above the law

The death of truth telling is the first critical development in the rise of fascism within the U.S. polity. The second critical development is the Republican Party old guard's promotion of the notion of a greater purpose above the law. This may be the worst development of all as it renders democratic politics impossible.

In its current struggle with Trump, the old guard now declares itself on the side of democratic rule of law. However, recent history shows it has been instrumental in fostering a world view whereby almost forty percent of Republicans think political violence is justifiable and could be necessary.²

The decisive event in this development was the Iran-Contra affair of the 1980s led by Colonel Oliver North. That illegal program had rogue elements in the U.S. national security apparatus selling

weapons to Iran in exchange for release of hostages, and in turn using the proceeds to fund the Contra insurgency in Nicaragua which the U.S. Congress had explicitly refused to do.

The program was eventually investigated by the presidentially appointed Tower Commission that issued a report in February 1987. Colonel North was prosecuted and convicted, but that conviction was subsequently vacated on grounds that he was immunized by his 1987 congressional testimony on the Iran-Contra scandal. In 1992, lame duck President George H. Bush – a Grand Wizard of the old guard – pardoned all who had been convicted, including Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger who had not yet been tried. Independent Counsel Lawrence Walsh, who had led the investigation, noted that he had detected a pattern of “deception and obstruction” by President Bush, Defense Secretary Weinberger, and other senior Reagan administration officials.³

The utterly damning aspects of the affair are the old guard’s participation and cover up, plus the Republican Party’s wholesale support of the entire affair. Instead of viewing Colonel North as a criminal and political transgressor, the party celebrated him as a hero. In 1994 North ran unsuccessfully as the Republican Senate candidate for Virginia. From 2001 – 2016 he hosted a war stories program on Fox News, and in 2018 he was elected president of the National Rifle Association.

That record constitutes an extraordinary endorsement of law breaking at the highest level. It shows how the Republican Party old guard are committed to a view whereby Republicans can break the law with impunity any time they think they are serving a greater purpose. That puts them on the same plane as Trump. It is only their definition of higher purpose that differs. For both, the law only matters when it is on their side. That is now the *de facto* position of the party and its base, as confirmed by Republican attitudes to political violence.

The Republican’s “above the law” attitude has a long echo in U.S. history that links to the Klu Klux Klan. The KKK gives to white Americans the right to break the law, including sedition and murder, in the name of a greater purpose. In its current incarnation, that greater purpose is defending white Christian anti-socialist hegemony. It is racist white America’s analogue of murder in the name of “the greater good”, only it is worse because “the greater good” is defined by racism and sectarianism. By treating themselves as above the law on the grounds of serving a greater purpose, the Republican Party old guard tacitly legitimized that vile position. Though they did not intend for it to be taken in the direction which Trump and his followers have done, they established the principle.

7. Politics as total war

The third key development is the shift to a view of politics as total war in which winning is the only thing that matters, regardless of damage done to the spirit of democracy. That view is now visible in the Republican Party’s nationwide effort to gerrymander district voting boundaries and suppress voting by groups which incline Democratic (as described earlier). Though now gaining much attention, the reality is those political practices are not new. Instead, once again, the old guard Republican Party had already put them in play.

The full blown revival of gerrymandering goes back to Rep. Tom DeLay’s interventions in the Texas redistricting of 2003. DeLay was a Congressman from Texas who served as the Republican House Majority Whip. Through his Texans for a Republican Majority political action committee (TRMPAC), DeLay spearheaded the 2003 redistricting of Texas’ congressional districts. In the 2002 election, Democrats had a 17 – 15 majority in Texas’ U.S. House delegation. After the redistricting, the 2004 election resulted

in a 21 -11 Republican majority, which greatly exceeded the Republican share of the overall vote. Subsequently, the Justice Department found that Texas' redistricting plan violated the Voting Rights Act by diluting Hispanic and African-American votes in two districts.⁴

The success of DeLay's scheme served as a green flag for a nationwide Republican revival of the sort of electoral practices now being seen. Politics has always been a dirty business, and gerrymandering has been practiced in the past by both parties. Republicans use that as a shield against criticism. However, the revival of these practices and openly restoring them in mainstream politics represents a turning back of the page, as they were supposed to have been eradicated by the Voting Rights Act (1965).

In the context of the current argument, the important point is these practices were revived by the Republican Party long before Trump was on the scene. They are part of the Faustian bargain the old guard approved.

8. Why the Republican base cannot be stopped

Old guard Republicans (like Rep. Liz Cheney) are now prisoners of the monster they reared. They cannot break with their toxic base. If they do, they risk being primaried and defeated.

Even if they fend off a primary challenge, they are then likely to be defeated in the general election. That is because a significant part of their base is happy to stay way and not vote if it does not like the candidate. Democrats already give the Republican base much of what it wants. The poorer sections of the Republican base actually do far better economically under Democrats. The things they do not get are the legitimization of homophobia and racism, the dismantling of the church – state distinction, and the repeal of a woman's right to abortion. Those are things only Republicans will give. However, they are not “kitchen table” issues, which means their absence can be readily endured – and even savored to the extent that agitating for them energizes and makes Republican voters feel virtuous.

That contrasts with the position of African-Americans, Hispanics, and the working poor who vote Democratic. If they fail to show up and vote they risk the possibility of a Republican administration intent on dismantling Social Security, privatizing Medicare, shredding Medicaid and the social safety net, shrinking discretionary government spending (except for the military), and racking up large budget deficits to pay for tax cuts for the wealthy. That difference explains the powerful leverage of the extreme right Republican base versus the lack of leverage of the working class and minority Democratic base.

9. A saga without heroes

The drama now unfolding in the U.S. is a political saga without heroes. The protagonists are either malevolent or compromised. Trump and his cult are malevolent. So too is the Republican Party old guard which struck a Faustian bargain whereby it pandered to prejudice in return for votes that enabled tax cuts and pro-corporate policies which benefitted its elite wealthy supporters. The bargain has now come back to haunt them in the form of a “red meat” radicalized base. Though the old guard is suddenly being cast in a better light because of its break with Trump, that does not relieve it of culpability for its past actions.

That said, it would be wrong and untruthful to blame just those players for the tragedy that is unfolding. Politics is a contest, and political outcomes are the product of all parties to the contest. That means all parties are implicated by what transpires.

The Democrats are implicated by their comprehensive failure to restrain the old guard Republicans as they pushed the country ever further right and prepped it for a potential turn to fascism. Worse yet,

it can even be argued that many Democrats (especially the elite associated with Wall Street) were significantly complicit. They are the compromised in the saga. Though the details of Democrat's complicity and failure are beyond the scope of this essay, it must be noted that they too bear responsibility.

Lastly, the saga casts shame on U.S. political society as a whole. The country now sits undecided on the brink of a potential turn to an American form of fascism.⁵ Though President Biden's electoral victory constitutes a step back, the turn may still happen if his presidency is unsuccessful.

The country has enjoyed forty years of fairly steady economic growth. It has also been able to use the credit card provided by the dollar's unique international standing as a reserve currency to escape economic constraints that burden other countries. There has been no Great Depression like that of the 1930s, nor has there been a hyper-inflation like that of Germany in the early 1920s. Nor has there been a world war that resulted in huge national suffering (as in France and Italy) or national defeat and humiliation with reparations (as in Germany). Yet, despite the favorable overall economic conditions and absence of true military catastrophe, the country stands on the brink of an authoritarian turn. That does not speak well about the U.S. polity and bears thinking about.

10. Conclusion: reaping what they sowed

To sum up, Donald Trump is clearly capable of putting in place an American fascism, and his political success speaks to the fact that the U.S. is open to going in that direction. Much of the analytical focus has been on Trump's personality: his sociopathic narcissism, his disregard for truth and ethics, his absence of empathy or concern for others. That makes him capable of great evil.

However, to focus on Trump's personality is to miss the far deeper story, which is that Trump is a continuation of political practices of the Republican Party old guard. Trump has certainly ratcheted up those practices, but that is an issue of degree, not kind.

Even the insurrection of January 6, 2001 has precedent in Republican old guard behavior, in the form of the "Brooks Brothers riot" of November 22, 2000. That riot had well-dressed Republican operatives trying to shut down the vote recount in Miami-Dade County. Had Vice-President Al Gore not blinked, it is quite plausible Dick Cheney (father of Rep. Liz Cheney) would have tried to use Republican suasion with the military to seize control on behalf of George W. Bush.⁶

The inescapable conclusion is that Trump is an extension of the Republican Party's recent history, not a break. Long ago the party struck a Faustian bargain, and that bargain has come home to haunt U.S. democracy in the form of Trump and his politics.

Much is being made of the actions of old guard Republicans who are now breaking with Trump. Those actions take courage in the current moment, but they are too little too late. It also ignores the fact that that, for four decades, the old guard fed its base a red meat political diet in return for votes that enabled it to push its plutocratic pro-business economic agenda. Transformed by that diet, the base has now turned on the old guard, but it should be remembered that it is the old guard which birthed the conditions in which Trump could flourish.

It is not just the old guard that is reaping what it sowed. The fascist turn threatens to consume all of us. The U.S. is now fighting a war for its soul. At issue are two core questions. One, will the U.S. remain committed to true democracy? Two, will the U.S. aspire to having a decent society with shared prosperity? The one upside of Trump and his purging of the old guard Republican Party is that he compels clarification of those questions. That clarification is welcome as it means the questions can no longer be evaded by the Democratic Party and the chattering class.

Endnotes

- 1 The Wikipedia entry “Fox News” references extensive documentation supporting these claims. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fox_News#Pro-Republican_and_pro-Trump_bias.
- 2 Survey Center on American Life, American Enterprise Institute, January 2021. <https://www.americansurvey-center.org/research/after-the-ballots-are-counted-conspiracies-political-violence-and-american-exceptionalism/>.
- 3 David Johnson, “The Pardons: Bush Pardons 6 in Iran Affair, Aborting a Weinberger Trial; Prosecutor Assails ‘Cover-Up’”, *New York Times*, December 25, 1992, Section A, page 1. <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/12/25/us/pardons-bush-pardons-6-iran-affair-aborting-weinberger-trial-prosecutor-assails.html>.
- 4 Eggen Dan, “Justice Staff saw Texas Districting as Illegal,” *Washington Post*, December 2, 2005. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/01/AR2005120101927.html>.
- 5 The outline characteristics of that fascism are strongly pro-business; anti-worker; highly militarized; and self-righteous, entitled and dangerously interventionist in its dealing with the rest of the world. All of this is wrapped in the rhetoric of freedom, even as intolerance thrives at the individual level and the corporate - state nexus exerts ever greater monitoring power. The domestic (i.e. police) and national security (i.e. military and spy agencies) apparatus both operate with increasingly less accountability, supported by a reactionary general public that is inclined to side with them on the grounds of “no smoke without fire”.
- 6 The difference between Al Gore’s reaction to the 2000 election and Donald Trump’s reaction to the 2020 election is striking. Al Gore had a strong claim to have won the election. Trump had absolutely none. Yet it is Trump and the Republicans who have contested the election and persuaded many that Trump won. It is telling of the psychological domination established by the Republican Party over the past forty years that they felt entitled to behave in this way. The Democratic Party has much to explain as to how this to happened and their role therein.