

THE AGE OF TREASONOUS MORONS



In my novel *The Map of Who We Are*, a Lakota political activist named Walker Thompkins becomes an enormously popular speaker at the national level. When her followers chant “Walker for President,” she replies “I wouldn’t take the demotion.” Thinking about Walker a month ago, I remembered the British institution of the shadow cabinet. (In fact, many countries have something similar.) The opposition party names a shadow minister to each of the ministries and the opposition leader becomes the shadow PM. Each shadow minister presents a policy to counter that of the sitting party, hoping to convince voters that they made the wrong choice. Then I wondered why we Americans couldn’t do that too. Instead of the opposition party naming a shadow President and Cabinet Secretaries, why not appoint people not involved in politics, but highly qualified and experienced? And hopefully sane. I was going to present the idea in this edition of the *Chronicles* and ask readers to suggest nominees—until a couple of weeks ago. After Trump’s firing

of FBI director Comey and the day by day revelations of clearly treasonous actions by occupants of the White House, the above idea (which I still think is a good one) did not seem appropriate to the gravity of the situation. At this point the survival of our democracy is in doubt.

Beyond the horror of what has unfolded in the last few weeks, there is another very troubling phenomenon. Progressive politicians and cable news pundits keep wondering at what point Republicans will “put country before party” and take action against Trump. There is no sign of movement from denial to responsibility as yet. Do not expect it. There is a virtually unbroken history of treasonous (and often hopelessly stupid) behavior by Republicans from 1968 to the present. We need to remember this and get over the idea that the very people who created our current mess will resolve it and save the country.

In 1968, President Lyndon Johnson was trying to broker peace talks between Hanoi and Saigon. Indications are that his work was about to come to fruition. There

was a lot of war fatigue on all sides. But presidential candidate Richard Nixon thought a truce would destroy his chance to win. So he asked Anna Chennault, the Chinese-born widow of the leader of the Flying Tigers in WWII and an important figure among Washington Republicans, to tell the South Vietnamese ambassador: “Hold on, we’re going to win.” That effectively killed the peace talks. American casualties from 1968 to the end of the war were almost 40,000, two thirds of the American casualties for the entire war. Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese died in the same period. Nixon was a private citizen at the time. As a private citizen meddling in the U.S. government’s dealings with a foreign power, especially in the middle of a war, Nixon was guilty of violating the Logan Act and probably high treason. Republicans dismissed the idea of Nixon’s treason for years, until the recent discovery of his aide H. R. Haldeman’s notes that verified Nixon’s actions. It was much worse than Watergate, and that was bad enough, from the bungling of the Watergate burglars to the

idiotic attempts of the Nixon White House to cover everything up. But the question remains, if Nixon was willing to trade tens of thousands of American dead for a seat in the oval office (and Republicans in that era were far more reasonable than the current generation), why are we looking for “country over party” now?

A similar gambit occurred when Reagan first ran for President. There is significant evidence (from people involved in the transactions) that Reagan cut a deal with the Iranians during the 1980 presidential campaign. He wanted them to hold the more than 60 U. S. embassy hostages until after the election, in return for the promise of armaments and a release of frozen Iranian bank assets. Twenty minutes after Reagan finished his inaugural address, the hostages were released. Years later, in Reagan’s second term, he and various members of his administration were desperate to find money to finance the right-wing Contra rebels in Nicaragua. The Contras were fighting to overthrow the Sandinista junta that had taken down dictator Anastasio Somoza. Congress had passed the Boland Amendment, making any American support of the Contras illegal. In mid-October 1986, former National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane and others (in disguise, with fake Irish passports) arrived in Tehran with friendship gifts: a chocolate cake in the shape of a key (the key to Persian hearts?), a matched set of Colt pistols, and a bible inscribed by Ronald Reagan. The deal they made with this bitter enemy (rivaling Russia) included the sale of 1500 TOW anti-tank missiles. A large part of the money received in the deal was secretly diverted

to the Contras in Nicaragua. The Irangate scandal that followed the revelation of this treasonous deal echoed the Watergate scandal. The public was fascinated with a conspiracy that involved both collusion with an enemy and laughable stupidity. In fact, Reagan was excused for not being lucid enough to discover the plot, even though there was abundant evidence that he knew all along. Reagan’s successor, George H. W. Bush, pardoned all of the conspirators on Christmas, 1992.

George W. Bush entered the White House in 2001 because the Supreme Court stopped the recount of the Florida vote (5 to 4, along party lines). After the catastrophe of 9/11, a contingent in the White House, led by Dick Cheney, tried to find a connection between the attack and Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. No one in the intelligence agencies thought there was one, but the White House kept pressing over time, arguing that he was trying to build a nuclear capability. Joseph Wilson, a former ambassador under Bush senior, was sent to Niger to see if the Iraqis had tried to buy weapons grade uranium. When he returned and said there was no evidence for this, he was ignored. In desperation, since he saw this was a pretext for starting a war with Iraq, Wilson wrote an op-ed in the *New York Times* and told his story. Cheney was furious. Knowing that Wilson’s wife was a high-level CIA agent, he decided to punish Wilson and prevent others from speaking out. He directed Scooter Libby, his chief of staff, to out Valerie Plame to Robert Novak, a right-wing newspaper commentator. This led to Plamegate, with the naming of special prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald. Bush senior, a

former director of the CIA, said whoever outed Plame was guilty of treason. He was right. Scooter Libby, Carl Rove, and Dick Cheney were all in the crosshairs of the investigation, but only Libby was indicted, convicted, and sentenced to 30 months in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

It’s hard to know where to start with Trump and company. His people, including the campaign chairman (Paul Manafort) and his son-in-law (Jared Kushner) were in touch with the Russians by Spring 2016, if not before. The Russians not only hacked and exposed the internal emails of the DNC and John Podesta, but late in the campaign they bombarded Facebook with an outrageous disinformation campaign, investing large amounts of money on “fake news” ads attacking Hillary Clinton. Why were they so eager to see Trump in the White House? The revelation that Kushner met with Russian Ambassador Kislyak in December, 2016, in order to open a direct line from the White House to the Kremlin, using the Russian embassy’s coded secure line, is the definition of espionage for an enemy power and high treason. Through all of this, the Republicans have hardly blinked an eye.

It’s odd that the Republicans have always represented themselves as super patriots, and yet they seem to be so comfortable with their own treasonous collusion with foreign enemies. A clue to their willingness to do this again and again might be that the only conspirators who did long jail terms were those connected with the Watergate scandal. Scooter Libby was convicted, but prior to his incarceration, George W. Bush commuted his sentence.

If there is no serious downside to this insanely damaging behavior, why would anyone worry about taking the risk?

Considering the past 40 years of Republican treasonous behavior (and I'm not even including the times they have held the country hostage by threatening to default on the national debt or shut down the government), looking to them to save us in our current national crisis would be foolish. And hoping to be saved by the Constitution Fairy is just as foolish (although in this dark crisis a number of federal judges have provided a ray of sunshine). Trump has violated law and time-honored protocol with impunity. The only immediate Constitutional remedy, impeachment, is extremely

unlikely, for the reasons stated above. Nor do I see much chance of a Unicorn Revolution, where the downtrodden will rise up and everything will be free, as in "Rock Candy Mountain." The hardcore supporters of Trump had plenty of opportunity to see him at his worst before they voted. And they still love him, not in spite of the fact that he is a criminally reckless bigot, but because of it. That group has always existed in our country, in good economic times and in bad. The 2016 election has proved that it is larger than we thought, maybe one third of the electorate. But 33% is not a majority. Only when the Resistance realizes that the sole counter to the Republicans is the Democratic party, and that the

hard job of organizing, raising and spending money, finding high quality candidates for every slot up and down the ticket, and convincing people to vote because elections have consequences, will we have a chance to return some sanity to our country. At that point we will have to begin the long process of rebuilding what Trump and the Republicans have destroyed. Too many people have taken the ballot lightly, thinking that nothing really affects them, or that all politicians are equally worthless: the laziness of cynicism. But, as Joni Mitchell says in "Big Yellow Taxi" ("They Paved Paradise/ Put up a parking lot")—"You don't know what you've got 'til it's gone."

Caliban's Bookshelf is proud to present the second in its series, *A Dangerous Vacation* by Dale Houstman. It is free to our readers in three formats: epub, kindle, and PDF. I have been publishing Dale's work since the days of the old print *Caliban*. His poems continue to astonish me with their mind-stretching originality. Have a good trip!



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