

SURE IT COULD HAPPEN HERE!



Americans have a history of looking at autocracies around the world, sympathizing with the oppressed people suffering in those places, but saying: “It could never happen here.” An impartial observer of the current political crisis in the U.S. would have to concede that such an outcome is absolutely possible. We now find ourselves, in fact, in the midst of a slow motion coup. All of the institutions necessary for the preservation of the republic are under attack. Donald Trump seems to see the office of the president as something like that of a king or emperor. (The name “Donald” in Gaelic means “ruler of the world.” Maybe he, like Macbeth, believes this is his destiny. Maybe that’s why he used to tell people to call him “the Donald.”) How did we get here? No, it wasn’t “economic anxiety.” It was that old, old demon of American history—racism. In this case, it is a racism that goes far beyond simple discrimination.

The director Werner Herzog recently said: “You are waking up, as Germany once did, to the awareness that 1/3 of your people would kill another 1/3, while 1/3 watches.” The Muslim ban, “shithole countries,” “Haitians all have AIDS,” reviewing the status of naturalized citizens who

are black, brown, or beige, allowing 3000 Puerto Ricans (American citizens) to die in the aftermath of hurricane Maria because they weren’t white: this is ugly stuff. This is ethnic cleansing. It reminds me of Japanese-American citizens being rounded up in 1942 and subsequently locked up in concentration camps. (Please do not call them relocation centers.) If an American Eichmann had risen during that period, who would have stopped him from killing everyone in those remote locations? The separation of Central American asylum seekers from their children, without any plans to reunite them: this “deterrent” is horrendous, but it is by no means unprecedented. Consider President Jackson’s death march of the “Five Civilized Tribes” from the Southeast to the upper Midwest and finally to the Oklahoma Territory, also known as the Trail of Tears. A third of the thousands of people who started out—men, woman, and children—died before they reached their destination.

Trump is certainly a racist, but it is toxic narcissism, greed, and megalomania that drive him. He is clearly not intelligent, but he is smart enough to know that throughout history demagogues and autocrats have seized and maintained

power through ethnic and racial scapegoating.

As easy as it is to focus strictly on Trump, his presidency (legitimate or not) is much more about who we are as a country than anything else. For more than two centuries Americans have promoted variations of a utopian myth: the New Jerusalem, the Shining City on the Hill, the Last Best Hope of Earth... As those myths were created, we were in the process of exterminating a very large indigenous population and promoting (or accepting) slavery—a scourge that the Emancipation Proclamation ended in name only. Then there was the “driving out” of Chinese in the West, after they had single-handedly constructed the Transcontinental Railroad through the Sierras, an almost impossible task. Those Chinese railroad men were not even represented at the driving of the Golden Spike in Utah (or at its centennial celebration in 1969). The driving out included group lynchings and the burning of Chinatowns in the West.

I consider myself a hard-headed realist, but I never imagined that a solid third of the country was so deeply racist, so unwilling to accept the natural demographic changes we are experiencing in the U.S.

population. After all, the Puritan vision of a White Christian (read Protestant) nation is a questionable concept. If we consider the fifty states as they stand now, when did that white Protestant majority come into being? There were always huge numbers of indigenous people, Black slaves, and Mexicans. And that doesn't even take into consideration the unacknowledged ethnic mixing that has occurred throughout our history, as the currently popular DNA tests are demonstrating. We have always been a mixed country, ethnically and culturally. So the assertion that we are a white Christian country only works if you ignore all the people who fall into other categories, either by pretending they don't exist or by dehumanizing them, declaring them savages or animals. That game worked for a long time, but it has become more difficult in recent years. The reaction by many to the "browning of America" has ranged from anxiety to terror. So began the rise of a neo-fascist demagogue who loved to stoke fantasies of white grievance and resentment, and became the idol of many, including some who had voted for Obama in previous elections.

The comedian and civil rights activist Dick Gregory had an astute observation on the different regional styles of racism in the United States: "In the South, they don't care how close you get, as long as you don't get

too big. In the North they don't care how big you get, as long as you don't get too close." The Neo-Confederates (who were always there, even if they had stayed mostly out of sight) saw that "they" were getting far too big. Hence the Trump rallies that looked and sounded more like KKK cross burning ceremonies than stump speeches. It is not hard to understand the enthusiasm of Trump's core 1/3, but I wonder about the other 2/3, who either held their noses and voted for Trump, or stood with their hands in their pockets and declared how crazy everything had become.

Beyond thinking about the 2018 midterms, we have to understand that the impeachment and conviction of Donald Trump will not solve all our problems. He is a monstrous, pus-filled cyst that has grown out of the body of the race-baiting Republican party, a minority group that wants to stay in power by any means necessary. When he says "Make America Great Again," he really means "Make America White Again." (I've seen people at his rallies wearing t-shirts with that slogan.) But if the country, all of us, cannot move beyond the pernicious disease of racism, we are doomed.

When Xi Jin Ping got the Chinese constitution changed to consolidate power, Trump was in admiration. Addressing a group of donors, he said: "He's now president for life. President

for life. No, he's great. And look, he was able to do that. I think it's great. Maybe we'll have to give that a shot some day." If you think that is a joke, just consider all his Mussolini aping, with folded arms and thrust out chin.

Yes, the Trump nightmare will not end if the Democrats take back the House in November. However, if there is no blue wave, the current battle to preserve our democratic institutions may be lost. I always say to people, "Be sure you vote this November, or this may be the last time you'll get the chance to do that." So give as much money as you can spare to Democratic campaigns, in your own congressional district and in key races around the country. Sign up for call banks, or get out and canvas neighborhoods, or do clerical work. People are always surprised at how good it makes them feel. Participation in campaigns, including the energetic and committed people you meet in the process, is an amazing high. It gives you hope.

And finally, NO PROTEST VOTES. With the Russian hacking still going full tilt, a few votes could make the difference. Votes for the Green Party, the Libertarian Party, or any other splinter party are votes for the end of American democracy as we know it. Your personal politics will not be advanced by voting your "ideological purity."

Our third ebook in the Caliban's Bookshelf series is a reprint of Garfield Linton's marvelous book of short stories entitled [*Voodooimation: the Book of Foretelling*](#). This is a must read for everyone.

His prose style is amazing and unlike any other. The blurb I wrote for the book in 2000: "With the force and dazzle of the voodoo god Damballah, patron of arts and creativity, these stories snake into our minds, our deepest consciousness. No barriers can withstand the assault of Linton's conjuring language. Even as we put this book down, the chanting goes on, illuminating the world through which we walk in unexpected ways."

