

It appears that our country is now well on its way to becoming a lawless, rogue nation where the populace is capable of horrific deeds that are actually approved by a sizable portion of the inhabitants. It doesn't have to be that way, and it is simplistic to lay the blame entirely on Donald Trump. In a way, he is a result of the problem, not the source.

That doesn't excuse him in the least. He is a deranged demagogue who should never have been allowed to take the reins of the United States government. That action lies fully at the feet of the present Republican Party, a political group that was willing to sell itself to the worst possible element of its supporters, even if it resulted in the end of democracy as we have known it.

But, Trump didn't start this, even if his followers were primed to replace the flag of the United States with a Trump banner while also carrying Confederate flags through the Capitol building.

I am no political analyst, but I am an historian, even though it has been a long time since I spent years in universities studying the origins and development of our country. And, feeding cattle and cleaning barn and chasing calves gives me time every day for reflection and thought. I may be far from the center of power in this nation, but I think there are discernible strands of cause that should and must be examined and evaluated. And then, steps must be taken to confront these issues.

First, and perhaps most surely, racism in the United States must be met head on with policies and education to eliminate it from the general populace. It was obvious in this past week's mayhem in Washington, D.C. that this overwhelmingly white mob, accompanied by their Confederate flags and Trump banners and MAGA hats, was a manifestation of white supremacy and white nationalism that has been fueled by Trump throughout his Presidency. And reports of police officers from various parts of the country being present and taking part in this action is an indication, to me, at least, that this minority element in law enforcement must be rooted out and removed from the police departments and sheriffs' offices throughout the country.

I don't know what steps are necessary to eliminate racist attitudes among the general population. But, I do believe that there is a great fear among the older white, privileged members of our society that they are losing power to rule. And they are, and it is a good thing. The voting rights endeavor—shown so powerfully by Stacy Abrams and her work in Georgia—is a clear indication that the right to cast a ballot without fear is one of the very best and most powerful ways we have to combat racism in this country. And, it is obviously one of the rights feared most by those who want the United States to remain the bailiwick of the powerful, white, privileged elements of the population. That is why, I believe, that “rigged elections” and “fraud” allegations speak so loudly to those who are unwilling to see their power shared by others.

And, oddly enough, many of the people they have recruited to fulfill their aims are folks for whom they have nothing but disdain. Does anyone really think that Donald Trump cares anything about the people who send him money and attend his rallies? It is surprising that anyone can be that naive.

Another element in our present society with which humans all over the world have been unable to contend with is the explosion of technology. The expansion of information since the development of the internet and world wide web has been unprecedented and continues to grow exponentially. This can be very helpful and positive and lead to solutions to enormous problems in the lives of all of us, but it has also proved to be uncontrollable. And we human beings do not have the skills to deal either with the amount of information with which we are bombarded or with the veracity of what we see and read. So, conspiracies flourish. A few years ago, Kurt Andersen's book *Fantasyland*, looked deeply into the history of this country by examining the fantasies, conspiracies, religions, medical fictions, and other obsessions with the unreal that have occupied the minds of so many Americans from the very beginning of settlement in North America. And these days, whether it is the QAnon believers or the antivaxxers, or both, for conspiracy theories often overlap in a way that would be comical if it were not so devastating, conspiracists flourish on the internet. And, we have not become sophisticated enough or advanced enough to understand that just because "I saw it on the internet," it doesn't mean it is true or real. This inability to distinguish between real and fantasy is a significant problem in this country. The same people that still believe that Barack Obama was not born in the United States are also likely to hold as true the assertion by some that JFK junior is still alive and standing behind Trump at his rallies. Ideas like these should truly be laughable, and yet, there are people in this country who believe them.

Then, who comes along but Donald Trump. At last—the racists, the impressionable and unsuspectingly naive devotees of the belief that if it is on the internet (or Fox News) it is true, the misinterpreters of the Constitution (particularly the Second Amendment), and the criminally ignorant—all have found their messiah. He began by undermining the United States' standing in the world by denigrating alliances, taking us out of agreements such as the Paris climate treaty and the international cooperative work to restrict Iran's nuclear development while trashing our allies and praising dictatorships. Trump's disregard for the limits of his office, for the separation of the branches of government, and for any semblance of responsible execution of the duties of his position made him the perfect instrument to carry out the destruction of this nation's rule of law and democratic principles. And, for many in his following and in the Republican party, even this attack on the nation's Capitol building did not blunt their fervor. Trump's own loyal Vice-President was in mortal danger as the President himself stoked the fires by rhetoric.

Trump needs to leave office. He needs to be held accountable for his actions. He needs to be prosecuted. And a good many of his followers in the Senate and House of Representatives need to be removed from office by their own constituencies. There needs to be a wholesale housecleaning in this country, and we are all responsible for doing our part. At the very least, we can speak out to our neighbors and friends who persist in believing the fantasies that have been perpetrated by this Administration. Get rid of the rot at the top, and then, we need to begin to address the underlying conditions

that brought us to this point.