

Comments separated by both time and distance seem, sometimes, to come together when we need them. This has happened to me during the past few days. Our thoughts and conversations during this strange period in world history are centered around the similarities between the U.S. of 2025 and Germany of the pre-World War II Hitler era.

This convergence didn't happen over night. Back in the Tea Party days of the earlier years of this 21st century, a friend from Sweden made a comment about the mood of America that we hadn't really noticed. He had been an exchange student here years before and had made many lifelong friends. He had visited several times in the intervening years. But, this time, he said, something was different. "People don't seem happy anymore," he said. "It feels as if there is a meanness in the country."

A decade or so later, we know what he meant. We were slow to react to the growing sentiments that culminated in the election twice of Donald Trump. All kinds of explanations are put forth for the phenomenon of an unqualified, unlikable, dishonest person being elected to the highest office in the land. It seems to us, though, that it has defied logic. Instead, it feels as if many of us recognized the cloud on the horizon but somehow, didn't think it would become a destructive storm.

Now, though, stories I have read or heard about the 1930s in Germany have shed just a little light on what is taking place, and what will continue to happen if we do not put a halt to it by a united protest movement.

A college friend whose parents grew up in 1930s Germany told it this way: Her folks had met here in the United States, but they went back to Germany after they were married. They intended to stay in their homeland. But, when Hitler came to power, they became nervous and afraid of the direction the country was heading, and they returned to the United States. Why they had this insight that others lacked is not clear. What makes some of us more aware of coming danger?

Then, recently, we were reading a book by a Norwegian Lutheran pastor who made a long sabbatical European trip in 1938. Germany was the last country he visited. He recalled how the mood of the country had changed since he had last visited in the 1920s. In spite of hardships following World War I, the mood of the people had been, according to him, positive. By 1938, everything had

changed. When he conversed with Germans on the trains as he traveled, they shared their fears with him about the troubles they were sure were coming. But, he noted, when others were present in the vicinity, people switched to English so that what they said would not be understood by people they did not know. They were afraid.

Something similar is happening in our country these days. Some people are wary of using Trump's name in negative emails or texts. A pseudonym takes the place of his name, or perhaps, just an initial. Many Americans are afraid. And why should they not be? The President of the United States has threatened "retribution." We are seeing it play out with immigrants, law firms, universities, and people who had denied Trump's assertion of an unfair election in 2020.

Determination and unity are better choices than fear. And, it IS a choice.