

History: When Lies Kill
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There was a country-wide, palpable sigh of relief when President Biden took his oath of office on January 20th. Two weeks earlier, there was an unprecedented assault on our election process when a violent Trump-supporter mob stormed the Capitol with an agenda of murdering elected officials and preventing the legal ballot count. Had that mob been successful, the death toll would have been much more than five, and we would have had a defeated president become our country's first dictator. Democracy is more fragile than we had imagined.

The rampaging mob had been fed a lie, actually one that had been announced by Donald Trump immediately after his 2016 election. He had told rallies that if he lost that election, it would be only because the election was fake. Winning, he said, guaranteed that the election was legitimate. His win, however, was under a cloud that the Russians had helped him clandestinely, an issue being investigated by the FBI, an investigation that infuriated Trump, and one that he made every effort to halt.

During the 2020 election, Trump again announced that if he lost, it would be proof that thousands of fraudulent votes had been cast, and that only if he won would the election be genuine. His claims and countless law suits were dismissed by every court that heard them, and by every election official and secretary of state nationwide. Many of these judges and officials were Republican, so that claims that the Democrats had orchestrated this fraud was nonsense.

To the very eve of the ballot count and confirmation, Trump frantically tried to strongarm governors, secretaries of state, and even the Supreme Court to dismiss the validated election results. He even tried to lie about the voting machines, that somehow accepted all votes for Republicans but not for Trump votes. This technological impossibility was ludicrous. He then incited mob action, and they came.

The real issue here was how much democracy depends upon the good character of its officials. Judges, governors, and secretaries of state told the truth, and the mainstream press published it. But Trump persisted in lying, and his followers had been groomed to believe only him and his propaganda organs (Fox News and Conspiracy Websites). When he invited his followers to come to Washington on January 6 to "take back their election," they came, in the hundreds, armed and ready to "fight like hell." They were lied to, and now rounded up by the FBI, claimed they were only doing what "their president" asked.

Truth has become an elusive issue for many lesser-educated Americans, and unfortunately, for many in the Republican Party who were well educated but with ambitions (and fears) that led them to further the President's lies. Trump's 30,000 lies trumpeted throughout his political career had been instrumental in making his followers distrust the press, the courts, the medical authorities, and everyone else with authority and expertise. Democracy requires truth, thought, and acceptance of centuries-old decencies. Trump trashed these values.

Lies can kill, and have done so countless times in human history. At the start of the Bubonic Plague and first Crusade in Germany (1098 AD), a lying monk went up and down the Rhine Valley preaching that Jews were causing the plague. His followers then went village by village and threw thousands of Jews into wells. Of course, this action did not stop the plague.

Ignorant people want glib answers to their miseries: "someone to blame." Dictators know this and are quick to lie to save themselves. Russia tried this with a big lie about a secret society that controlled the world's money (The Protocols of the Elders of Zion), but it did not save Russia from its revolution. Hitler did the same, basing his dictatorship on the same big lies. He died in disgrace.

Today, some very unhappy Trump followers see that they were deceived. Donald Trump's attempt to cancel a legitimate election failed. His violent followers face years in prison. But when people get sucked into a worshipful cult, it takes patience and time to deprogram them. Conspiracy theories are not truth. Lies can and do kill.

686 words

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