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## Mobs beget mobs

By Steve Bakke  January 12, 2021



As Americans peered over the edge of their emotional hiding places, something considered impossible came into view – a violent and life-threatening break-in by rioters at the U.S. Capitol. Every citizen should focus on this violent attack, as should organizations, institutions, and political parties. This didn't happen just because of one individual, event, or issue.

Trump came onto the scene as a nouveau populist candidate in 2015 – rude and disagreeable. Never-the-less, his visibility and popularity rose. He appealed to many Americans who believed our government wasn't listening. Given the governing agendas of recent decades, they had a basis for those feelings. He made promises that were popular, leading to victory in 2016.

Trump became a consequential president by delivering on many of his promises. Through it all he piled up new supporters and opponents alike. Those opponents ultimately became bitter enemies. His popular conservative policies frequently collided with his controversial style. His presidency suffered from constant references including misogynist, racist, profane, liar, bully, narcissistic, and so on. Some are false, some speculative, and others earned. Some of us have never concluded whether he's a breath of fresh air, or a puff of bad breath.

This week I reviewed my many published commentaries during Trump's five-year political career. I've commented often on things that piled up and erupted in recent days. A perfect storm of politics, events, and personalities developed during Trump's term.

The last four years, including the 2020 campaign, was like a clumsy parlor game with foolish and futile attempts to remove Trump from office while Trump rallied enthusiastic support from millions of Americans. He eventually attracted what would have been a record number of presidential votes, except for Biden who exceeded Trump's impressive totals. This crazy game was a lot like the frenzy of musical chairs, with the President ending up without the security of that "final chair."

The President's actions at the January 6<sup>th</sup> rally were reckless, and simply blaming his style isn't a valid excuse. I'm betting even he was shaken by what happened. Nevertheless, the result was disastrous, and he's paying a price. Many different storm clouds gathered, leading

to this tragic and embarrassing event. Understanding how this can happen helps prevent repeating mistakes. Our 16<sup>th</sup> president offered advice.

Mobs beget mobs. That was Abe Lincoln's message when he spoke of violence arising among the citizens no matter their status, location, or whether "slave-holder or non-slave-holder." He made these statements as a young man in his "Lyceum Address." Abe warned that there will always be reasons for unrest, and violence is dangerously contagious.

Most of Trump's opponents ignored the violence in 2020. During the spring and summer, we experienced destruction of historical monuments, police stations, government buildings, small businesses and homes. Much of the destruction amounted to simply burning things down – because they could. Sadly, the big losers were minority businesses and homeowners.

Legal and mostly peaceful demonstrations of outrage over the death of a black man were soon hijacked by thugs and anarchists. Burning and destruction lasted months, with little resistance and few arrests ordered by numerous governors and mayors. President-elect Biden was virtually silent. Some prominent democrats, including Vice-President elect Harris, established funds to bail out violent anarchists. Does violence gain approval merely because it supports a narrative? A large dose of selective moral outrage now seems to be ruling the day.

Trump supporters were involved in the Capitol break-in and should answer to the full extent of our laws. Virtually all Americans, including Trump supporters, immediately condemned the violence on January 6<sup>th</sup>. The summer riots lasted 7 months, over two dozen were killed, and over 150 federal properties were damaged or destroyed. Most democrats were silent, some encouraged the rioters.

Suppression of freedom and liberty would be the worst possible result from this experience, and we are seeing hints of that. Many desire retributions against all who supported Trump. I sense some politicians and organizations would, if they could, taint all 75 million voters who supported him. It recalls Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter," with all Trump supporters required to wear a scarlet "T." Public shaming has started.

Mobs beget mobs. Selective outrage is dangerously contagious. We're currently swept up in a destructive cycle encouraged by the summer riots and recklessly followed up in January. We must not underestimate the potential danger of mismanaging the public's anger and carelessly placing blame. Let's back up and unite on something. How about the Bill of Rights? E Pluribus Unum.