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A U.S. tradition: election challenges, political standoffs, and chaos

Steve Bakke  August 2, 2022



The January 6 (J-6) investigation has become more than just background noise. It's now a barrage of reports and hearings intended to make Donald Trump “yesterday's news” in terms of his political intentions. It's time for some historical perspective.

Contentious presidential elections are almost a common occurrence, The first occurring soon after America's Founding. We remember the 2000 Gore/Bush marathon with many Florida recounts and eventually Supreme Court involvement. And we often forget that the 2016 Clinton/Trump election ended after recounts, and ultimately, a challenge by several representatives objecting to Trump electoral votes. Does that sound familiar?

Several of those same Democrat representatives who challenged the electoral count in 2016, objected loudly when Republicans also entered electoral vote challenges in 2020. These are some of those representatives who forgot “what's good for the goose is good for the gander”: Reps. Jamie Raskin, Barbara Lee, Shiela Jackson Lee, and Maxine Waters.

Moving to other political disputes, what could have been uglier or bloodier than the U.S. Civil War. And how about that tragic duel between U.S. Vice President Aaron Burr and iconic Founder and former Secretary of the U.S. Treasury, Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton was killed. And we think we have political “hard-feelings.”

Politics, rather than being “the art of debate and compromise” is too often combative and hypocritical. Sadly, violence and bloodshed often intrude, but election challenges are part of the political reality under our form of government.

Trump came onto the scene in 2015 as a nouveau populist presidential candidate – rude, crude, disagreeable, and too often outrageous. His popular ideas had great appeal, and his followers grew dramatically when, as president, he delivered on many of his promises. Inevitably, his conservative policies often got tangled-up with his controversial style, causing a myriad of negative characterizations and accusations – some false, some speculative, and others well deserved.

Trump's presidency consistently attracted controversy, including: the fraudulent Steele Dossier and related Russian collusion scam, pandemic controversies, and two foolish and unsuccessful impeachment trials. And in 2020 we all experienced George Floyd's murder, months of street violence, attempts to defund police departments, and a divisive and controversial presidential election.

Finally, the chaos of January 6, 2021, took center stage – a terrible end to a dreadful year. A young Abe Lincoln, in his "Lyceum Address," gives us valuable insight - mobs beget mobs, and violence is dangerously contagious. The country's mood eventually led to unrest and conflict from radicals of both political extremes.

The 2020 summer riots lasted 7 months, with approximately two dozen killed. Thousands of properties were destroyed, worth hundreds of billions – governmental, large and small businesses and homes. J-6 was a predictable second act to the violent summer of 2020.

The horrible symbolism of the J-6 event appropriately magnified the importance of those few hours. Nevertheless, damage was limited, and the only direct casualties were Trump supporters - one shot by a panicked Capitol policeman, the other crushed under a pile of demonstrators. Guns were not a huge issue as only a few were confiscated.

Several hundred Trump supporters were involved in the Capitol break-in. Some of Trump's actions at that day's rally were reckless, but I'm betting even he was privately shaken by what developed - but we'll never know. He reacted slowly. The result was disastrous, and he's paying a high price.

Outrage is dangerously contagious. Foolish and radical Trump supporters were swept up in a destructive cycle as the "next act" following the virtually unopposed theater of 2020 summer riots.

Establishing follow-up "January 6 hearings" was the right thing to do. We want to know what happened. Unfortunately, partisan disagreement on rules and membership of the investigative committee has made it a farce. One-upmanship by both parties will end up as a sad chapter in our nation's history of governance.

When will these hearings end? I'm convinced the Democrats want the J-6 hearings to continue as long as possible to weaken any hope Trump has at getting back to the presidency, and to damage Republican chances in the fall election cycle. They have no other goals.

We must return strong leadership to our nation's capital. The existential threats in our world require far more mature governance than we've been witnessing.