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America in a rut: crimes without punishment

By Steve Bakke  June 5, 2024



Mobs beget mobs. That was a very young Abraham Lincoln's advice when addressing violence arising among the U.S. citizens. He warned that there will always be reasons for unrest, and violence is dangerously contagious. These comments comprised the theme in his well-known "Lyceum Address."

The last decade provided a perfect storm of politics, events, personalities, and unresolved frustration that has dramatically changed America. It was 2015 when a new kind of populist candidate came on the scene. Donald Trump was very bold, often rude or disagreeable, always unpredictable, and infinitely energetic. Voters loved the fact that he didn't follow conventional political rules.

Trump's popularity rose as his rebellious style appealed to many Americans who believed our government hadn't been listening to them. He made popular promises that led to victory in the 2016 presidential election. He became a consequential president by delivering on many of those promises.

Trump's election stunned many progressive Americans and for days after the election there were destructive riots in the District of Columbia and across America. We were left with high national tension waiting for an excuse to break loose.

Soon the infamous "year 2000" was upon us – another election year. American's tempers were short and impatience high. Trump faced a sham impeachment trial, and an international pandemic battered the world, physically and economically. Schools and businesses were quarantined or closed. The world was shut down.

George Floyd's murder was the fuse that ignited a societal explosion. 2020's summer riots lasted months. Dozens died. Uncontrolled chaos led to the destruction of historical monuments, police stations, government buildings, small businesses and homes. At least 150 federal properties were damaged or destroyed.

Rioters burned things down indiscriminately. Damages amounted to billions of dollars, with minority businesses and homeowners suffering disproportionately. Burning and destruction lasted months, with little resistance and few arrests ordered by governors and mayors.

Chaos seemed to gain approval and was "tolerated." Many progressive politicians encouraged the rioters, including the future Vice-president Harris who set up bail funding sources for jailed rioters. A large dose of selective moral outrage seemed to be ruling the day.

In spite of the lawlessness, “defund the police” was a popular progressive idea. Trump was defeated for president, ensuring further weakening of law and order.

Then came the riots and January 6, 2021 break-in at the U.S. Capitol. Unlike much of the lawlessness over the months leading up to that fateful day, the J-6 event has been prosecuted vigorously. The selective moral outrage reflected by the aggressive pursuit of these protesters, compared to those in 2020, is a topic I’ll deal with on another day.

It’s now 2024 – another presidential election year. The crusaders of chaos once again got restless. We’ve experienced many college campus protests, riots, and occupation of land and buildings across the country. Students had been organized in opposition to Israel’s military action in reaction to the Hamas massacre of some 1,200 Israeli citizens – an act of war.

“Crime without punishment” is a significant attribute of the protests and violence I’ve been discussing. Who could have imagined Americans would be arguing about enforcing law and order? There’s been a reluctance among many progressive communities and institutions to responsibly enforce the law.

A decade of riots, destruction of properties, and loss of life has evolved into a pattern of permissive “criminal justice reform” that is trying the patience of many Americans. As I’ve pointed out numerous times, destruction and thievery are often tolerated.

2024 has been no different. There has been a reluctance on the part of college administrations to take decisive actions during the protests. In the case of George Washington University, the D.C. Mayor actually refused the University’s request for police assistance.

The following quote is representative of what America has been facing: “...America is burning, but that’s how forests grow...riots are an integral part of the country’s march toward progress; ashes are symbolic...of pain unheard; destroying property is not violence.” That was a 2020 statement by the progressive Massachusetts Attorney General.

Selective outrage is dangerously contagious. We’re currently swept up in a destructive cycle significantly intensified by the 2020 riots, and we aren’t adequately creating legal consequences for illegal behavior. We’re mismanaging the public’s anger for which we’ll pay a steep price as law and order deteriorates further.