

Attacks on Our Electoral Process Threaten Democracy

I've recently been sorting through my huge stack of news articles accumulated over the years, mostly on matters of political life. I was struck by one that contained this description of a former President by someone who knew him as a younger man: "He showed pathological lying habits and was in denial when challenged on his prejudices and biases. We would even deny saying something he just said 30 seconds ago. . . . When asked to explain a particular comment . . . [he] would respond, 'Oh, I never said that.'"

When asked to explain his position on assisting retirees and other people on fixed incomes, he said, "The government doesn't have to help poor people – because they are lazy."

"We were in a discussion of the New Deal, and he called Franklin Roosevelt's policies 'socialism.' He denounced labor unions, the Securities and Exchange Commission, Medicare, Social Security, you name it. He denounced the civil rights movement as socialism. To him, socialism and communism were the same thing. And when challenged to explain his prejudice, he could not defend his argument, either ideologically, polemically or academically."

Sometimes he "started bad-mouthing those . . . who had challenged him. . . . It was innuendo and lies. So that's how I knew him, behind his smile and his smirk, that he was a very insecure, cunning and vengeful guy. . . . He was just badly brought up, with no discipline, and no compassion."

And then I came upon another article from a different source telling a similar story about this same former President: He "used to blow up frogs with firecrackers and shoot them with BB guns. . . [H]e branded pledges at his fraternity with red-hot wires." Several therapists have commented about his "sadistic tendencies and his lack of empathy." This article also describes him as a failed businessman, comfortable being outside the law, whose conversations are laced with profanity, and who also seems to harbor racist tendencies.

How did such a man get to be President of the United States? One answer is that, while the State of Florida was still conducting a recount, one that could have cost him the election, the Supreme Court of the United States intervened and effectively anointed him the victor. The man in question, of course, is George W. Bush. Until the inauguration of Donald Trump, many of us regarded him as the worst President in U.S. history.

It only goes to show: 1) how soon we forget; 2) Trump's election was no anomaly, but a manifestation of a long-standing degradation of our electoral process; 3) even when you think things cannot possibly get worse, they can.

It may be somewhat consoling, but it is mostly very disturbing, that the political scene today, especially within the party of Trump, is nothing new. Consoling that we seem to have survived so far as a republic, disturbing because that survival has never seemed more in jeopardy.

My stacks of papers contain numerous articles reporting on all sorts of lies, deceptions, and

abuses of power, including active efforts during the Bush-Cheney years to restrict voting and make it more difficult for the poor and people of color. In 2000 and 2004 there were widespread indications that the integrity of the election process was compromised in ways that were, thankfully, not evident in 2020. At other times past Democrats have also been complicit in subverting the will of voters. But current voter suppression efforts and GOP attacks on the integrity of local election officials lay bare the reality that Trumpian loyalists and sycophants care more about attaining and holding power than preserving democracy or doing the work of the people.

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