

America Is Built to Feed Us Poison

Delusional mobs storming the Capitol are just a byproduct of the American way.

[HAMILTON NOLAN](#) JANUARY 7, 2021



At the U.S. Capitol, January 6, 2021. PHOTO: BUCKY TURCO

Let's speak precisely about how America is sick. The problem is not that people rushed into the United States Capitol building. The people that did so thought that inside of that building, the presidential election was being stolen. They thought that they were doing what the situation called for. If the presidency of America ever really is blatantly stolen with corrupt election fraud, I hope that people rush into the United States Capitol again.

It is not that the storming of the United States Capitol sullied our hallowed democracy. That building has witnessed more than its fair share of atrocities before yesterday, and all of them were committed by the members of Congress conducting the official business of the United States — wars, oligarchy, imperialism and the like. The napalmed children of Vietnam and the bombed children of Iraq and the homeless mothers who work for \$7.25 per hour and sleep in their car because the federal minimum wage has not been raised in a decade would not weep for the sanctity of that building, and neither should we. Draping the naked greed and hypocrisy of Congress in holy language to insulate it from judgment is convenient for members of Congress, yes. But let's make them earn it with their behavior.

It is not that angry protesters fought the police; the police must be fought sometimes, if you ever want to change anything about anything. And it is not that a shirtless guy dressed as a viking took over the highest chair in the Senate; on a human level divorced from politics, that is kind of cool, and the news anchors sputtering about the outrage of it sound uncannily like the stuffy dean in a movie about college fraternity hijinks.

Inside a Congressional office, January 6, 2021 PHOTO: BUCKY TURCO

It is not the simple fact that what happened yesterday happened. It is the fact that it happened for a *completely bullshit reason*. We saw a marauding mob motivated by something that is not just politically distasteful, but empirically false. They were there to prevent a stolen election that was not happening. They were there to rage over voter fraud that never occurred. They were there to defend an idea of America that never existed, and certainly does not exist today.

And what is the root cause of this sad, delusional explosion? It is the same thing that caused a narcissist like Donald Trump to run for president in the first place. It is the same thing that caused him to lie and lie and lie without compunction. It is the same thing that led the entire hierarchy of the Republican Party, composed of so many well-respected business leaders and civic officials, to fall in line behind such an obviously dangerous and disgraceful maniac. It is the same thing that allowed him to govern for four years with utter contempt for anything except his own glory, and that tempted a good part of his allies in Congress and the media to wink and smile and participate in the stupid and transparent charade of voter fraud, and that set up the entire raving conspiracy-addled scene in Congress yesterday of grasping careerists hinting darkly at cabals that they knew full well do not exist. It is the same thing that has been the base, driving principle of the Republican Party for decades. It is, as a matter of fact, the same thing that drives many in the Democratic Party as well. It is the cause of the failures of America's great, self-congratulatory society, which is always destined to melt down if you give it enough time and space.

Inside the Capitol rotunda, January 6, 2021 PHOTO: BUCKY TURCO

It is the belief that the purpose of life is to gain the maximum amount of benefit for yourself. I say this not to advance some Hallmark Card alternative, but to point out that this is the organizing principle of our society, and the atrocities we perpetrate and experience are ultimately traceable back to this. Donald Trump may clearly be a half-insane racist lunatic, but his life embodies this organizing principle, and for that reason he has had great success. Ted Cruz may look like he is always drinking a cup of urine, but he acts in accordance with this principle, and now he is a powerful man. Our most respected heroes, to whom we grant the greatest deference and prestige, are people who hoard coffers of wealth that they could never spend in ten lifetimes, and people who arrange things so that they can do so. To set out to do nothing but help yourself is the American dream, and we love those who achieve it so much that we elect them president even if we, personally, are sick, poor and ignored. Capitalism is the theory that everyone acting for their own naked good will produce social benefit in the aggregate. America in 2021 is a counterexample.

This orientation, sunk deep into our collective bones, naturally produces a legal, political, and social structure to support itself. That structure looks like what we have now. It makes it permissible to lie about climate change in order to make money, to lie about government health care in order to make money, to lie about scary hordes of immigrants in order to make money, to lie about progressive taxation in order to make money, to lie about public education in order to make money, to lie about anything to make money, or to build a career as a functionary who smooths the way for all of these lies. It is what determined that slavery is good, because it makes money, and then built an entire racial mythology to justify that position that was so powerful it still afflicts us to this day. It is what has determined that moral bankruptcy is okay as long as it wears a nice suit. And what does that crowd of brain-fried “patriots” storming the Capitol have to do with any of this? They are the detritus of this system, the weird mutant fish swimming in a lake polluted with industrial runoff so that the factory owner can live on a nice hill far away. Our toxic system has toxic byproducts, which poison many people. But never the winners. There are other ways to organize society, you know. We have never tried them. Maybe we will one day. Or maybe we’ll just keep on passing out from that poison periodically, until the time comes when we can’t recover.

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