

Insurrection Day

4:30 PM

I sit on the couch with my laptop on my lap – the TV has been on with no commercial breaks for over the last two hours, and I feel bound to stand by as witness to the shameful, imaginable-only-in-the-movies scene that is taking place in our nation’s capital, at the Capitol building, where President Trump’s most radical supporters have come to storm the very halls of the Senate and House of Representatives, invading those chambers and even the private offices of some of Congress’ leaders (one broke into House majority leader Nancy Pelosi’s office, leaving a threatening message on her desk and putting his booted feet up on her desk). They came because it was to be the day that the vice president would formally certify the election, via the Electoral College, of Joe Biden as our next president. They came at the invitation and instigation of our current president, who met them, speaking before them in a rally at the “ellipse” – the oval-shaped park between the White House and the National Mall – urging his supporters to march on to Capitol Hill, telling them to “be strong, not weak” for our country.

One reporter inside the Capitol has told CNN that much damage has been done inside the Capitol buildings, with debris from damaged columns and other architectural features of the building, and with trash scattered throughout the halls. Some of these so-called “protesters” (others may call them insurrectionists, or even domestic terrorists – though they fancy themselves “patriots”) have broken windows to get into the building, and it has been reported that one person was shot and taken to the hospital. The Rev. Al Sharpton has suggested that there must have been some Capitol police who were collaborators, or at least who were willing to look aside or do nothing as these invaders broke in to the chambers where lawmakers were trying to conduct the nation’s business.

Why was the federal government not prepared for this invasion? Where are the National Guard? After two hours, we hear that they are “on their way” – but it seems strange that the capital was in such a state of unpreparedness for this event, since the president has been urging his supporters via Twitter to gather in D.C. on this day. Law enforcement officers have treated these folks with kid gloves in a

way that would be unimaginable if they had been confronted with such mobs of Black Americans or of Muslims.

So much for “law and order.” So much for making America “great.”

I am glad that more people have not been hurt or fired upon...but why have these people been allowed to encroach upon our House in this way? This all started around 2 PM. It is almost 5 PM as I type these words. Still no sign of the Guard. The mayor of D.C. has called for a curfew from 6 PM to 6 AM. But as I sit here watching, I see no officers forcing these folks out of the area. Some people are just sitting outside the Capitol building in their lawn chairs as if they are attending a concert or a picnic.

The president has come on TV, broadcasting a message to tell his followers to “go home,” and yet at the same time he reiterates that the recent presidential election was “fraudulent,” and that it was “stolen” from him. It is a half-hearted message: go home, but keep up your belief, keep up your resistance.

Wolf Blitzer just told his audience that “this was the first time that the U.S. Capitol has been breached since 1814 by the British in the war of 1812.” Ever since the beginning of this administration we have heard the word “unprecedented” over and over again.

I am angry. I know many other Americans are angry along with me. How could things have been allowed to get this far? How could politicians from the president’s party have played with fire for so long, to such a degree, with no pangs of conscience for betraying the principals of democracy, for giving credence to claims that they knew were lies? The president has had his due process in court, and his suits have been mostly thrown out for lack of credible evidence. He was not muffled, he had his chance. Now it is time to let our nation proceed with its business.

Just because you do not like the people’s choice via free and fair elections does not give you the right to try to push your own agenda by force. I hear a reporter, as I type, tell us that a mob of these protesters began fist fights with TV journalists and camera people, and later tried to damage their cameras and other gear. Yes, you can say that, in similar manner, the BLM protesters did not have the right to turn over cars or set buildings on fire. In any case, we do need to make a distinction between exercising our First Amendment rights, demanding redress of grievances through lawful means – and this chaos and anarchy.

I know that there are many Jews who have supported the current president. They feel that he has been “good for Israel,” and certainly it is true that Trump has been sympathetic to Israel’s prime minister, Benyamin Netanyahu; additionally, many have felt that moving the US. Embassy to Jerusalem, thereby recognizing it as Israel’s capital, was the right thing to do and long overdue. But what I have been wondering about for the last four years is why such Jewish supporters of our president not more fearful of the anti-Semitism of at least some of these white-nationalist mobs who want to “take back their country”? I don’t know why anti-Semitism seems to always linger in these kinds of populist movements (including on the left), but it seems to always crop up, and simply for the sake of our survival, the Jewish community has always to beware of these torch-and-pitchfork types of mobs.

No, there were no torches or pitchforks (at least, none that I saw); but there *were* Confederate flags. Flags that represent a former enemy of our nation in a war in which more Americans died than in any other. Flags that represent the right to hold human beings in slavery. And yet they invoke “freedom” and “patriotism.” Don’t expect logic.

Of course the power of social media in our society has added fuel to the flames of this fire, with conspiracy theories having become so accepted as truth by so many in our nation that it has become impossible to establish any standard set of facts that are largely accepted by the public as a whole. This has never happened before, that our elected officials and others in power who influence our culture have not accepted the results of our national elections to this degree. Yes, there were murmurings after close and contested elections (Bush v. Gore; Bush v. Kerry) in the recent past, but to both Gore’s and Kerry’s credits, they never fanned these flames once the matter had been decided via official channels. Instead, they stood up for the peaceful transition of power.

Trump came into Washington to “disrupt politics as usual.” Well, he has done that. If you like him, I wonder, do you like this? I do not think that this is a step forward for our country. I feel embarrassed before the people of the nations of the world, who are watching, I’m sure, with shock and amazement.

I wrote last week that things will “get darker before they get lighter.” I take no comfort in prophesying...but I do hope that the second part of this “prophecy” will indeed come true.

As a footnote, for posterity's sake, I want to record that the state of Georgia, in their double senatorial run-off has now elected their first Black senator, the Rev. Raphael Warnock, and also another senator, Jon Osoff. This new Jewish senator is the grandson of immigrants who fled pogroms in Eastern Europe, and he will be the youngest member in the current Senate – thus giving the president-elect Joe Biden the slimmest of Democratic majorities in Congress, which will allow him to actually get something done for those who voted for him, and for the good of the nation as a whole.

It is a strange, historic time. One that is worth recording, testifying to. It might be the beginning of an unprecedented (that word again!) time of leaps forward in terms of justice for many groups who have long been oppressed in this nation, and also for environmental protections. Or it might be a time when a semi-slumbering volcano of racist parochialism, recently emboldened, becomes fully active, spewing burning lava all over our country and culture. Which shall it be? At this moment, I still cling to hope and optimism. Too many of our citizens, of both this generation and from past generations, have given their lives in honor of the ideals of this nation. I pray, dear God, that their sacrifices may not have been made in vain.



*Iwo Jima Memorial at Fall River's Veterans Memorial Bicentennial Park*