



DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY

Thirty Years of Service to America's Diverse Communities

Newsletter, January 2021 Upheaval in Washington

Not a few reflections on the topic of the week, most with reference to the disturbance downtown the other day, exhibit the response of the larger number of our concitizens as one of intense chagrin: a word defined by us to be a stack of sentiments, most notably a visceral horror and at once sorrow for the things of value, immediate and remote, that were impaired or lost. On the horror side, each day's new harvest of videos displays some further brutality or acts of gratuitous destruction. The persons making the incursions into the official building on Capitol Hill were of varied types: the persons who had attended the rally down the hill in a purposeful spirit, those among them who had brought along tools with which to breach the doors back up the hill: those who without doubt can be said to have contemplated a strenuous adventure. And those, quite different, who were along for the lark.

As for the blame following the destruction accomplished by the assault on must the Capitol, there have been fairly specific planning beforehand, at least among the more fanatical persons in the crowd, surely in communication although coming from all parts of the country. The rankling question is now how far the planning went — were the law enforcement agencies in touch. And was the President, and were various associates, aware of the preparations, not yet certainly to be carried out? The notable fact preceding the riot was the hour's oration of the President containing highly inflammatory phrasing, ostensibly recommending fights, and following shortly thereafter, the coalescing of a swarm of folk moving on the Capitol, a procession of hostile temper, going to the site of the enemy. But a conclusion that the train of causation, asserted to lie in the currents within the mob, but with essential origins in the President, does not immediately hold if the President's quite singular oratorical technique is considered (that is to say, the public utterances, not only on this occasion but through a long history, are very often, not to say always, replete with folk slang for aggressive movements, menacing gestures recalling blows and fists, hyperbolic references to the claimed force at the disposal of his audiences, and some form of identification of the social perils to themselves at the hands of often ill-described enemies). Allowing a bit of extra energy in the oratorical blitz in view of the emotion doubtless straining his nerves by reason of the general political state of affairs, although such surplus force arguably is not the fault of the speaker but may be taken as a potent extra measure for his hearers).

It would be hard to show that the riot and its attendant destruction were the intention of the President and in fact the result of the oration unless there was specific knowledge of the threat, as noted above, but particularly if there were involvement of the President in the planning — which we may be justified in counting probable. Attention is paid to the schedule of potential troublesome events by police forces of all kinds. There are insistent reports of a variety of warnings, from before the events of 1.6.21, by assorted police sources, of a serious prospect of violence, some of the warnings said to have been imparted at the WH in the presence of the President [remains doubtful]. This reflects blame on the President even short of actual communications between the President and the ringleaders of the destruction. The whiff of a coup was perceived in the air by some commentators. That is a strange notion in the U.S. environment (see below). The nearest any specific goes is that an incident in which officials were assassinated would precipitate a declaration of speculation martial law, with the

schedule of civil events deferred indefinitely and the present administration confirmed as the custodial force to an imperiled population.

The histories of the U.S. and of most other places on the globe are similar in that they all exhibit outbreaks of shameful actions. In the U.S. case recall the witchcraft trials in New England; the long-fused Extermination of the native Americas, the Indians, over more than a century apparently with little complaint from a busy public; the Tulsa riot, 1921, in which perhaps a thousand African Americans were killed and their houses and shops leveled so that the territory of the ghetto (equivalent to a huge square equivalent to six city blocks on a side) was laid waste; the plague of lynchings that, well into the 1940s, disfigured the south and sporadically other section of the country; imprisonment in 1918 of Eugene V. Debs (the repeated soc. candidate for President) for speaking against the Great War in Europe and U.S. involvement in it; the rebuffing the attempt to dock of the liner St. Louis in 1939, carrying over 900 Jewish refugees, who were thus shunted back to Europe — while two thirds were landed in western European states, a third were dispatched by the National Socialist government in Germany. Outside the U.S. the histories of Russia with its string of Pogroms. France with its Reign of Terror in the early 1790s, and the myriad other places in a dismal procession, should sufficiently persuade the reader of the liability of polities to use their own public powers, from time to time, or even as the regular order of business, in the infliction of disabilities and downright brutality to the human creatures in their way.

On the U.S. scene, for all that, the trains ran, the realm of commerce whirred, the world of sports completed its regular rounds. Essentially the multicentered society, the vast network of compelling institutions, and a structure of social and economic ties, strengthened by a uniquely elaborate texture of cross-ties, socially and in the affairs of individuals, could scarcely be known, let alone managed, by the machinations of a junta in the capital city.

The moral is that blips in the even-keeled operations of the state have, in the American experience, been absorbed by the larger engines of the society — the commercial, the sporting, and the endless dedication to novel tropes and delights of recreation. And indeed the grandees of politics and society, for all their posturing and bluster, have, as often as not, come to be amusing, if droll, figures of the national history as legend and moral tale. The reader of history would be hard put to descry a peripety that did not at length come to be embedded among the ornaments of the prodigious national legend, some treasured, some, on the other hand, venomous and to be deprecated