

## **Afterward.**

A man rose to power, the power to run for the presidency of one of the most powerful countries in the world. This man had no previous experience in politics, nor was this man ever educated in politics. His claim to fame was that he promised to be different than his predecessors; he promised not to take money from those who would demand repayment in the form of political favors, and he vowed to get rid of all of those who did not accede to his demands to which were, as he referred to it, to Make America Great Again. These would include lifelong politicians, judges, and law enforcement. He won, which surprised everyone, including the man who ran for president. The win so surprised him that he had not even started preparing the transition team who would help the administration fill the needed positions to run such a large and multi-faceted government. Slowly, positions were filled, people were hired, and his government averted several, usually foreseeable, calamities. The man had no experience in politics, nor did he have experience running any business larger than needed one person to be in charge. This man had an ego that said he knew better than anyone, period.

Time is one thing that never stops, and so time keeps going. As it did, and as his administration needed to exercise more control, it started to become clear to everyone that a big part of his political agenda was to appeal to those who were his most fervent followers. They numbered in the tens of millions. His most ardent followers were now following his lead and becoming mean, hateful, and highly aggressive, especially to anyone who dared to criticize their leader. His exclusively devoted people followed his every word without thinking about it. If he said it, they believed it. Their leader's ability to anticipate their obedience to do and believe whatever he said astonished those on the outside looking in. His most ardent followers seemed to follow him instinctively, and they adapted to his new ways of governing without reflecting, and without

reflecting meant without thinking deeply or carefully. Simply put, they accepted what their leader told them without thought. Anticipatory obedience doesn't have to only come from the mouth of the leader. Anyone the leader gives the power to speak for him allows them to spread the word of the leader or even propagate new thoughts the leader hasn't even said yet. In that way, anticipatory obedience multiplies exponentially, allowing the leader to vacation and play golf while still having his rules and words relayed all the time. Top-of-mind awareness is critical when getting people to follow a ruler, but it is also crucial in keeping them as followers.

An epidemic spread from China and became a pandemic. The new leader and his now fully obedient news outlets told his followers that the virus would end as soon as the election was over, as it was a virus started by his opponents to damage him so he would lose the election. As is customary, when a leader has fervent and ardent followers who follow him with anticipated obedience, they believe and echo his words. After his election, the new leader also went on television and announced that the virus would disappear "as if by magic." His loyal, ardent, and fervent followers also believed and loudly echoed that. Interestingly enough, nobody questioned why the virus hadn't ended after the election.

The new leader disbanded the highly educated and experienced team of doctors doing a daily briefing on the pandemic without giving a reason. Soon, he blamed his highly experienced team of doctors for the pandemic worsening, and several highly trained and formerly highly regarded doctors began receiving insults and death threats from the leader's followers. But there was no way to stop the new leader, especially as so many politicians had aligned themselves with him rather than incur his nasty wrath. The virus didn't disappear after the election of this new leader, nor did it disappear "as if by magic" as he had predicted.

As time continued, this new leader's agenda moved further towards consolidating his most loyal followers through his messaging via news outlets, social media, and political rallies. Several entertainment/news channels supported him without question and rebroadcasted his message constantly. That strategy was like feeding red meat to lions, and his ugly and baseless statements caused division between political parties and races, and he even demeaned people with disabilities. His most loyal and fervent followers loved him, and their hatred and division had not been seen in America in sixty years. His followers also accepted his mean and vicious name-calling without question, even going so far as to mimic his behavior. As obedient followers, name-calling became pervasive because the new leader could anticipate his follower's obedience. He expected they would believe and follow his every word as if every word he spoke was accurate.

The new leader demanded fealty; if allegiance was not forthcoming, he became abusive immediately. Name-calling became so regular that it was normal for others in his cabinet to also name-call others. No one was spared, from the leaders of foreign countries to disabled people to dead people.

He would remove all protections for those who would not swear their loyalty to him. Included in his removal of protection were those who didn't vote for him, and as he promoted anger, meanness, and violence, many of his followers took his words literally.

This now highly influential leader was touting himself as omnipotent. He knew that loyalty could be bought. And so, he used his newfound power to buy some of the people he needed through powerful, high-paying positions within his government. But his arrogance and unchecked insolence allowed him to display a hubris never seen before in a President of the United States. Remember, when the power relationship ceases, the fidelity bond is snapped. This

is no act of disloyalty but rather a belated recognition that the bond was composed only of self-interest. Due to the nature of transactional relationships, they usually only last for short periods. Loyalty, however, is made of sterner stuff. Loyalty is built on sound moral foundations between the members of the tribe or group, but that morality might not extend to others outside of the group. People bound by shared values and moral beliefs are not easily deterred from supporting each other. They are neither discouraged by adversity nor do better offers entice them. People loyal to a dysfunctional leader don't seem to mind working for little to no extrinsic rewards. Years go by, a new election is held, and the incumbent leader loses by a large percentage. He immediately announces he is the victim of an unfair and rigged election. He says this over and over and over; the news channels that he anticipates will repeat his words do so, and he demands loyalty or else. The now soon-to-be-replaced leader cries foul and demands his followers do something to keep him in office.

Slowly but surely, lines form between the loser and the winner's followers. The rhetoric becomes more and more effective at influencing his now fully obedient base of loyal and fervent followers. His followers, especially the loyalists, soon band together and descend as a mob to try and stop what has always been the peaceful transfer of power from the now-past leader to the new leader. Pandemonium erupts, violence follows, many are hurt, and seven people are killed. The demonstration was deemed an attempted insurrection, and some demonstrators beat police officers guarding the proceeding.

At first, there was much confusion, but as the facts appeared, there was surprise at who had taken part. Those taking part ranged from active and retired law enforcement, soldiers, politicians, lawyers, and the leaders of anti-government groups. Some had brought guns; others had brought bombs, which thankfully were never detonated, while others used flag poles to beat the police

who were trying to stop them. The loyalists attempted to blame the opposition for causing the disturbance to discredit the loyalists.

Despite the violence, the transfer of power still happened on the day of the attempted insurrection, just many hours later than anticipated. Yet, the overwhelming theme from those who took part and were questioned about why they took part, which numbered in the thousands, was that they adamantly believed that the outcome of the election, which resulted in their leader losing, was stolen from their leader. The core supporters were willing to break the law and go to prison because they believed their leader without question. Once he said he was the victim of a rigged election, they believed him without considering the truth of his words.

Despite over sixty lawsuits heard by judges, some of whom were appointed by the past leader, no proof was found of any wrongdoing that would have changed the election outcome. No evidence of any wrongdoing was found in any of the audits of the polling machines either. Poll workers were threatened with violence and even death if they didn't change the vote count. Senators and Representatives were also threatened so often that they needed to be protected by security guards. The defeated leader tried to intimidate a Secretary of State to find enough votes for him so his loss in that state could be overturned.

The scenes following the election were horrible for everyone involved. There were threats of violence across the country towards anyone who doubted the former leader and his followers. Soon, the transfer of power was complete, and the newly elected president, being experienced, had a team in place and was functioning as a group on the day of the inauguration. The defeated leader was no longer allowed to peddle his lies and fiction on existing social media, the news outlets quickly stopped covering his every word, and the populace of America began to find a balance of peaceful coexistence. There was still no peaceful, political coexistence as had been

the norm for as long as anyone alive had known. Intense bands of loyalists still believed the election was rigged despite withering evidence. The people loyal to the former leader, who startlingly still believed the now defeated former president's every word, remained as reliable as ever. The word that he was to be reinstated more than a year after his defeat brought crowds of thousands of people to where the announcement would be made. Despite no proof of his being restored, except the conjecture of one online website, and despite very learned people trying to educate those who believed the website by informing them there was no legal way for him to be reinstated, thousands of people attended the rally only to find that no announcement was being made.

The American Civil War of 1861 had been the last and only time the people of the United States had fought each other on a significant scale, and now, in America, people who were loyal to the defeated leader were advocating for another Civil War, to bring down what they claimed was a government elected illegally. Of course, most of those advocating for war had never even been in a fight. If fighting did start, there would be some war veterans taking part, just as there were in the attempted insurrection, and there would be those who would cross the line from being sworn to protect the Constitution to fighting to topple the government they had sworn to protect. Besides those veterans and some police, most would never have sniffed the startlingly obnoxious smell from someone shot in the stomach. A bullet doesn't make a neat hole in the human body, as depicted on television, no matter where or what it hits. The smell and sight of blood, brains, guts, and flesh torn apart are gruesome. The yelling and screaming from someone viciously maimed or dying doesn't stop when they stop. No. Your mind reels from the trauma it hears and records those sounds, only to replay them a million times. Shooting someone, the sounds they make from the pain you inflicted on them, and the smells their ghastly wounds emit are only

Day One. After that begins the putrid rotting of the corpse and corpses; if you have never smelled a rotting corpse, you will be horribly surprised at the stench. Many people get violently sick upon seeing and smelling death for the first several times. If seeing or causing death is easy to accept, why are so many veterans mentally and emotionally imbalanced when they return from battle?

Middle-class mothers and fathers with young families talk of a Civil War as if it's another dinner party they'll attend, but it won't be. Perhaps some are for a Civil War, but they'll let others fight for them. The middle-class moms with their matching refrigerators and stoves, matching washers and dryers, and beautiful marble countertops and tiled floors, who have lived their protected upper-middle-class lives, have rarely if ever, been touched by the reality of violence, let alone war. Their homes and cars are neat and proper, and they don't know what a Civil War would mean. And if they're going to participate in a war, they must know they won't be the only ones fighting and shooting. If they take part in a Civil War, they will be breaking the laws of the country they were born and live in, so people, including law enforcement, will be fighting and shooting back at them, and who will look after their children if one or both get shot or even killed? How will they feel if they hit the parents of children their own children's ages? How will they wash the blood off the arms and faces of one or more injured comrades? How will they wipe away their tears when their hands are covered in blood?

War is atrocious, of course. Probably only a tiny minority under thirty will have personally experienced war. Ask them how fun war is or was. Ask them why their lives are now a mess, why they are alcoholics, or why they're addicted to drugs. Their answers will horrify you, and it should terrify you. Most veterans returning from war will tell you, should you ask, that war is atrocious. After returning from war, their minds and hearts will get quiet only by getting drunk

or high enough. And as soon as the alcohol or drugs wear off, the noises and the flashbacks begin immediately. That is precisely why people become addicts or alcoholics- when they drink enough or use enough drugs, the noise and the pictures playing in their heads stop. For them, the quiet from alcohol and drugs is a utopia compared to the dystopia of their regular days. Soon, suicide becomes viable because the struggle is too intense to fight daily. They grow weary from the constant internal battle that rages inside them. The lucky will find help, but there might be no help during a Civil War. There will be drugs and alcohol, but there will be limited funding for hospitals, and doctors and nurses will be in short supply until the fighting stops.

The population in the United States at the time of the Civil War was approximately 30 million. The present-day population in America is about 338 million people. Many of those people are elderly, many are infirmed, many are living day-to-day, and many are military, sworn to protect the constitution but not a rogue leader and his followers defeated by the majority vote of the population of the United States.

So, while some very naïve people advocate that a Civil War will be righteous, fun, or even exhilarating, it won't be. A Civil War will be hell for everyone in the United States. People will die simply because there is war instead of peace. People will die because of a lack of food.

There will be no one to care for those who need care, and there might not be people to keep the water supplies clean and working correctly. Animals will die, forests will burn out of control, and America could easily resemble the war-torn images of Syria, Iraq, and other countries from which we have seen war footage.

America has problems. America has big problems. But the biggest problem America could ever have, or will ever have, is another Civil War.

England and Ireland got into a civil war over England's annexation of part of Ireland in 1921. Finally, the Irish brought the war to England's largest city, London, in the late 1980s. They bombed trains and buses using bombs packed with nails, ball bearings, glass, and anything that would cause maximum damage to everything near the bomb's blast. The civilian population was horrified, of course. The British government promised retaliation, as did the Irish Republican Army, and the bombings continued. Finally, the two sides met, and while neither side was happy with their agreement for a ceasefire, the civilian population was pleased with the truce. And that is how all disagreements, battles, and wars seem to end. The two sides finally agreed to meet, and they ended their hostilities.

Please read a history book about the last Civil War here in America. Especially the stories that recount the horror of families divided and the tragic stories of families fighting each other. Read the stories of amputees trying to navigate the already harsh environment they lived in. Then extrapolate that data and amplify it eleven plus times so it fits in today's population, and then ask yourself, those on both sides of this radicalized behavior, if you could moderate your behavior just a little so you could stop hating?

Remember that in the First Civil War, fighters on both sides used single-shot muskets and fired cannonballs. Today's soldiers will have rifles that can shoot and are highly accurate, over a mile. Their weapons are semi-automatic and automatic pistols and rifles with clips capable of holding twenty or more bullets. The bullets designed today were designed to cause maximum damage upon impact. The access to weapons and bombs that can cause mass destruction is phenomenal today compared to any other domestic war, and any war would be a tragedy.

Soldiers are trained to obey orders without questioning them. Many women marrying today have the word obey removed from their marriage vows. A Civil War will require the fighters on both sides to obey and follow their commanders. Will that even be possible?

Hate is a learned behavior, so unlearning hate shouldn't be hard. It just takes a little time and patience. It will take courage to tell someone in the throes of hating to change. Hate breeds more negative emotions. Hate affects your personal and professional relationships. Hatred changes the chemistry in your brain. Hate triggers aggression, and feeling hateful leads us to defend or attack others. Hate triggers our "fight or flight" response, and hate increases the levels of two hormones: cortisol and adrenaline. Hate can be as addictive as alcohol and drugs, and hate is one of the worst emotions we should ever condone.

Let us all live in a land where we know and accept that we won't all agree but will all understand and agree beforehand to never go to war over our disagreements. America is too good a country to live in and then destroy. The old saying, "The grass is greener on the other side of the fence," is inaccurate. It was meant to be sarcastic, and it was meant to expose ignorance in a person or persons.

Remember that soldiers fighting the First Civil War used weapons that won't be used this time. This time, the guns and ammunition used have been designed to cause devastating injuries to the human body. The same type of bombs used by the IRA will be deployed against people with an opposing idea. Both sides will use these weapons and bombs against each other simply because they disagree about politics.

This story is almost as old as humanity itself. Other Christians persecuted Christians in the first century due to differences in how each side interpreted a doctrine. One side split from the Church but was declared heretical by the Church's hierarchy. The persecution was horrible and

led to mass migrations because of the slaughter. It doesn't seem like that could happen today, but it does sound eerily familiar.

Ask most people if they care enough about politics to go to war, and most will say no. Common sense needs to be interjected into those banging the drums for a Civil War, but like every other war, elements on both sides say that anything the other side says is a lie. When each side says that everything the other side says is a lie, as is the current case, there is a true stalemate, except for nearly boiling hatred and hostilities.

We all need to pray this is a headline we never read: "The democratically elected government is toppled, there is still bloody fighting raging in the streets and the rural areas, hatred has run amuck, and anarchy rules."

Ask most people if they care enough about politics to go to war, and they'll respond with an emphatic no. Most people do not care enough about politics to go to war over their choices.

People do care about people, though, and thousands of people are busy now trying to interject common sense into the minds of everyone. But some incensed people seem entirely out of control, and reaching them may be out of an average person's ability to influence and change.

After this near decade of hate and intolerance by so many on both sides of the political divide, how will you feel afterward? How would you feel when you chose Civil War or didn't?

How will those of you who took part in a war and wiped away your tears when your hands were covered in your fellow humans' blood feel? How will anyone carry on their everyday life after enduring a war?

Time is one thing that never stops, and as time continues, there becomes an afterward, and we all must live with our choices afterward.

The End.

Written by Peter Skeels © September 5th, 2022