

Afterwards

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 from 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, as he referred to it, Make America Great Again. These would include lifelong politicians, judges, and law enforcement. He won in what seemed like a surprise to everyone, including the man who ran for president. The win was so surprising to him that he had not even started preparing the transition team who would help him fill the needed positions to run such a large and multi-faceted government. Slowly, certain positions were filled, people were hired, and his government averted several foreseeable calamities. The man not only had no experience in politics or running any business more significant than it would take one person to be in charge, but 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. His most fervent followers numbered in the tens of millions. His most ardent followers were now becoming mean, hateful, and highly aggressive, especially to anyone who dared to criticize their leader. His exclusively devoted people were seemingly following 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 was astonishing to 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. To put that in its simplest of terms means accepting what their leader was saying without thought. But anticipatory obedience doesn't have to only come from the mouth of the leader. Anyone the leader gives the power to speak for him will also allow them to spread the word of the leader or even propagate thoughts that 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 rule 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.

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

As time continued, this new leader's agenda moved further towards consolidating his most loyal followers through his messaging via news outlets, Twitter, and political rallies. Several entertainment/news channels supported him completely and recast sent his message on a constant, daily basis. That strategy would trickle his messages down to his fervent followers, and the division that his messaging caused had not been seen in America in sixty years. His followers also accepted his mean and vicious name-calling. As their obedient followers, name-calling was now permitted because remember, 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, and if allegiance was not immediately 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. For those who would not swear their loyalty to this influential leader, and this powerful leader demanded loyalty, he would remove any protections. 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.

The new leader knew that fealty 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, combined with his 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 are they enticed by better offers. People loyal to a dysfunctional leader don't 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, the ratchet tightens. 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 the 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. The transfer of power still happened on the day of the attempted insurrection despite the violence. 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 loyalist supporters were willing to break the law and go to prison because they believed their leader instinctively. Once he said he was the victim of a rigged election, they believed him without giving his words another thought. Despite over sixty lawsuits heard by judges, some of whom were appointed by the past leader, no proof was found of any wrongdoing by anyone. 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 leader who lost tried to intimidate a Secretary of State to find enough votes for him to win.

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. Still, by then, the transfer of power was complete, and the new President was very experienced, so a team was in place and 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 political, peaceful 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 disproving their beliefs. The people loyal to the former leader, who startlingly 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 there being no proof of his being restored, except by the mere conjecture of an 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. Still, 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. There would be some veterans of war 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 records those sounds, and then plays them back 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 death or causing death is so easy to accept, why are so many veterans so mentally and emotionally imbalanced when they return from battle?

Middle-class mothers and fathers with young families talk of Civil War as if it's another dinner party they'll be attending, but it won't be. Perhaps they're for a Civil War, but they will let others fight for them? The middle-class moms with their matching refrigerators and stove, matching washers and dryers, beautiful countertops and floors, who have lived their protected upper-middle-class lives, have rarely, if ever, been touched by the reality of 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 remember they won't be the only ones fighting and shooting. If they take part in a Civil War, they will be breaking the law and 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 hurt or shot? How will they feel if they hit the parents of children their own children's ages? How will they feel washing the blood off the arms and faces of one or more of their 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. Ask them why their lives are now a mess, why they are alcoholics, or why they're addicted to drugs. Their answer will horrify you, and it should terrify you. Most veterans returning from war will tell you, if you ask, that war is atrocious! After returning from war, their minds and hearts will be quiet only by getting drunk enough 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. The quiet for them is a utopia compared to the dystopia of their regular days. Soon, suicide becomes a viable option 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 and 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 a war instead of peace. People will die because of a lack of food, because there is no one to care for them, or because there are no people to keep the water supplies clean and to work 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 aghast, 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 agree to meet, and they end 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, 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 were using single-shot muskets and firing cannonballs. Today's soldiers will have rifles that can shoot and are highly accurate, over a mile. Their weapons are semi-automatic and automatic guns 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 won't be that 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 beforehand that we won't all agree but will all understand and agree ahead to never go to war over our disagreements. America is too friendly of 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 single-shot muskets and cannonballs. Those won't be used this time. This time the weapons 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 alternate idea. Remember, 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 then 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 just like every other war that ever happened, there are elements on both sides that say that nothing the other side says is true. When each side says that everything the other side says is a lie, as is the current case, there is a true stalemate.

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 genuinely 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 of the incensed people seem literally 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? Afterwards, when you either chose Civil War or you didn’t, how will you feel?

How will those of you who took part in a war, and wiped away your tears when your hands were covered in the blood of fellow humans, 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