



Frank Rizzo

Police Commissioner, Mayor and Mayoral Candidate in Philadelphia
between 1967 & 1991

His statue in front of city hall

Removed by Philadelphia's city government, June 2, 2020

REMEMBER

REPAIR

REUNITE

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WE ARE NONE OF US ALONE: We are Black and White – or are we Purple?

REPAIR: “People want better” [Michelle Obama]

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“It has to stop “Mr. President, you have not condemned these actions or this language. This is elections. This is the backbone of democracy, and all of you who have not said a damn word are complicit in this.”



Gabriel Sterling, (right) a Georgia Elections official and the sign language interpreter who spoke the very same words with such intensity and feeling.

INTRODUCTION: “It has to stop”

Mr. Sterling’s passionate outbreak, widely reported on December 1, 2020, included vivid descriptions of the terror to which elections employees across the state of Georgia were being subjected. He himself had experienced “multiple attempted hacks of my emails, police protection around my home, the threats.” One young elections employee found a noose on his front lawn. Sterling is a Republican, so is the Secretary of State, so is the Governor of Georgia.

A few days later another Republican, Ken Paxton, Attorney General of Texas, himself under criminal indictment as a result of an FBI investigation, filed an “emergency” law suit directly with the US Supreme Court to have the certifications of elections in Georgia and three other states disallowed. Georgia Republican candidate for the US Senate, Kelly Loeffler, in a debate prior to her Georgia Senate seat runoff election, kept repeating the phrase: “The president has every right to every legal recourse.” For the most part, the press used the same kinds of terms. Legal recourse, lawsuit etc.

These maneuvers were not “legal recourse.” Some, including television host Seth Myers said it right: Trump was using courts and legislatures to stage a COUP. Trump is a coward and has alienated the military so he needed help from the government to take over the government. Which is ironic.

But that’s not the biggest thing on my mind. The biggest thing on my mind is Sterling and others talking as though such actions were something new. As an American but an immigrant I take their willful ignorance hard and personally, perhaps too much so for some.

With a mere 50 years in the USA behind me, it is never a challenge to call to mind a steady stream of similar times. A criminally inclined President in the White House? Nixon and Agnew in 1973 and 1974 of course. Blatant violations of the US Constitution? Lynch mobs morphing into more subtle but explicit, massive projects since the 1990s to disenfranchise Black voters. Police violence against protestors? A steady drumbeat: Vietnam to Rodney King, to George Floyd. Police violence against black communities? Philadelphia under Police Chief Frank Rizzo remains so very vivid. Publicized and personal threats against people who work for public institutions? Far too many mean and aggressive attacks against colleagues and students at The Evergreen State College, whenever some outsider decided we had overstepped this country’s implicit limits on public racial justice and anti-war work.

What has to stop is wishful thinking that this is new.

In 1789 thirteen states, six representing slavery and seven “free,” decided that it was worth trying to coexist. Repeatedly that cooperation has been called into question and the balance has not deeply changed. One way to see this country is as split more or less in half, into two quite different ways of trying to live. Attempted divorce in the 1860s was catastrophic. Let’s stop being surprised that living together is hard and can be dangerous.

It is also true our divisions are less perilous if our remembering selves can remember that, as a nation, we are more purple than contrasts of red and blue. Let’s get to work, recognizing that almost everyone is partly right – not equally right but partly right.

IN REAL LIFE THERE IS NO INTERMISSION: Living in Northern States - an autobiography
What follows is one person's journey through 50+ years of US history.

I came to the USA first as a tourist, a student on her summer vacation at the end of her first year at Oxford. It was the summer of 1967. By the time I left I knew I wanted to come back. Brightly colored canyons in the Southwest; New York City skyscrapers; the prospect of doing graduate work in media at Penn. It was genuinely alluring. Sure there had been "riots" in a number of cities but I didn't understand them then, and actually they seem hard to characterize even now. Recent upheavals in this country often have names: Bussing, Voting Rights, Fishing Rights. Rodney King. 1967? That year's events still just seem to be called the "Riots."

I now believe that the names given to each of the other dramatic times on my list are explicit accusations. Officially our government exists to enable voting rights, to comply with Treaties granting fishing rights etc. In reality when groups demand that the US live up to its obligations, it is the groups making the demands and not the US failure to carry out our obligations that get blamed for having "caused" the upheavals. In today's election upheavals, Republicans are trying to overturn the votes of millions of people, but their nefarious law suits, beginning in Milwaukee and Detroit, are clearly indirect accusations that Black people have caused this election's ills.

My personal encounter with the "blame Black people" saga begins with the Confederacy, a defeated, racist power which managed to permeate my consciousness decades ago during my childhood in Britain. Somehow I learned then that Carpet Baggers were "bad" and that Reconstruction was a "bad idea." Another proof that the white Confederacy remains persuasive to this day? Its self description as victimized after the Civil War has been taken up with such ease by white people dominant today.

I have never lived anywhere in the US that could be called a Southern State. My personal encounters with Black/White dynamics have all taken place in the North, centered on Boston, on Philadelphia, and on Puget Sound, my home for over 40 years. Remember this is a personal story. What you will read is what I believe I saw.

Frank Rizzo in Philadelphia and Louise Day Hicks in Boston

This entire essay could be devoted to Rizzo and the people around him. That it is not is due to the huge relief I felt when I escaped from Philadelphia in less than two years, MA from Penn in hand. In that town "Blacks are to blame" was both an intimate reality and a mind-blowing political trope.

First the intimate. In the late 1960s, U. Penn demolished blocks and blocks of west Philly, using eminent domain, as part of a vast campus expansion (invisible to the naked eye these days).¹ As a result the streets I walked, around my home on Powelton Avenue were stripped of their residents, and lined instead by plywood walls, an invitation to God knows what. Was Penn seen as having caused our neighborhood fears? No it was the Black community, who actually lived on the far side of

¹ There's plywood outside our New York apartment in 2021. Columbia University is well into a similar community erasure project.

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Powelton, that somehow was going to assault me as I walked away from them in the opposite
direction and along Penn's blank plywood walls towards the Penn campus every day.

The political mind-bender operated on a different scale. In September 1970 the Black Panther Party hosted a Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. Frank Rizzo at the time still ran the police. That he later became Mayor and almost managed to get the city charter changed to enable him to run for a third term is evidence of where we were already headed as a nation, well before Philly shed its Italian, Polish and Irish identities as locals blinded by the labels Black and White have now done. Rizzo aggressively drove this change. Mid-summer 1970, he was publicly complaining that the US Constitution prevented him from blocking the Panther's assembly. Seriously. This was NOT just talk. The Panthers had to go to Federal Court. Everyone in the Black community already knew Rizzo's cops were violently dangerous. When the top cop in your city tells you he wishes the Constitution did not apply, it's important to listen. The Convention went ahead. Sadly nothing larger than a local political fight came of it.

In quick order last night, a Federal judge, acting on a suit filed by the Black Panthers, ordered the Philadelphia Police Department not to violate the constitutional rights of the Black Panther party while two Common Pleas Court judges freed 14 party members, arrested in raids last Monday, after reducing their bond.
Another Common Pleas Court judge dismissed a request for an injunction against the convention.
Finally, Temple University officials approved the use of McConigle Hall for the convention.

Did Rizzo's attitude do him any harm? Not at all. He ran successfully for Mayor twice. His attempt to change the charter failed but he was in yet another run for the office when he died of a heart attack. His funeral cortege is still said to have been the largest in Philadelphia's history.

In Boston, Louise Day Hicks' claim to fame rested on her strident opposition to school integration through bussing. She was already powerful well before I arrived in the USA. Her role in my immigrant consciousness was to force the realization that some people could say outrageous things again and again and again and again. Press coverage back then, just as it has been in 2020, was ready to scatter the poison widely and repeatedly. Electoral victories for Hicks followed and, while the majority of those earning real political power from their explicit and often crude opposition to justice were men, there were women as well.

Rizzo and Louise Day Hicks were ringleaders in a radical re-imagination of the cultures of race and class in the NE United states. In the early 20th century WASPS living on Philadelphia's Main Line and Boston's Back Bay had looked down on their urban Catholic neighbors of Irish and Italian heritage. Job ads in Boston regularly said "Blacks and Irish need not apply." In the 1970s "White" was subsuming immigrant identity in schooling and in suburban redlining. By 2020 Whiteness had gone nationwide. From Hicks and Rizzo to Nixon and then via Newt Gingrich, with considerable help from progressive inclusion programs to Trump. Confederates would be delighted by the news. Just imagine the headline: CONFEDERATES — ANOTHER VICTORY: "WHITE" IS NOW A WIDELY ACCEPTED IDENTITY ACROSS THE USA.

IN REAL LIFE THERE IS NO INTERMISSION: Living in Northern States - an autobiography Puget Sound part 1 – Salmon Fishing

In 1854, the US government and Indian Tribes along the southern shores of the waterway identified on official maps as Puget Sound, signed the Medicine Creek Treaty. Among other terms, the Treaty agreed that the Tribes could fish “in common” with the new Settlers in their “accustomed manner.” By the time I arrived to live on these same southern shores of Puget Sound in June 1972, the local Tribes had endured decades of active harassment from Washington State officials as they tried to enact their Treaty rights.

I have written about this in an earlier pamphlet. There was a trial. The Indians won. In 1974 Federal Judge George Boldt ruled the Treaty remains the supreme law of the land, that Indians must have access to half the fishery, that State officials must collaborate with Indians in managing the fishery in the future. The ongoing relationship between State and Tribes is complex but fruitful.

One core feature of the settlement I still consider stunning. The “reparations” paid. Not to the Indians who endured arrest and jail time. No. The harassment stopped but there were no pardons, no payouts for suffering, no punitive damages for false arrest. No job terminations for the enforcers who sent these people to jail.

It was the White fishermen, those who had already had more than their fair share dominating the Sound for 100 years whose hypothetical future losses were to be made whole. The Federal Government paid them to quit fishing. It paid to buy their boats, recouping a small percentage of the money we tax payers laid out by reselling those boats at bargain prices to salmon fishers in Alaska.

Somehow perpetrators had become victims. In understanding where we find ourselves today, this is tremendously important. In the USA it is too easy to set aside the facts, to be completely wrong about where suffering has been most intense, about whose lives are entitled to repair.

Puget Sound part 2 – Evergreen State College: racial justice, 1999 and 2017

When Evergreen made its first faculty hires in 1970, racial justice and inclusion were already important agenda items. Over the 50 years since, the vision expanded: An on-campus, Native American Long House; a second physical site in Tacoma in the middle of the Hilltop (which middle class people called a ghetto); more teaching onsite at Indian Reservations around the Sound. First Peoples, a student-oriented advising center focused on the wellbeing of traditionally marginalized students. Lots more faculty and staff hiring directed towards building an inclusive campus. Did it change the college for the better? That’s not what I am writing about, though the College keeps on trying despite the difficulties.

Regardless, it is Evergreen’s anti-racist agenda, an agenda that dates back to the College’s founding documents, that grabs outsider attention. Two particularly intense moments stand out:

1999 – Philadelphia’s cops discover Evergreen State College and what they see makes them angry.

2017 – Fox News discovers Evergreen State College and what it sees make lots of people, even Frank Bruni of the New York Times angry.

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The on-campus result was the same on both occasions: Intimidators flooded Evergreen's staff, faculty and students with hate mail. They brought threats of violence directly to the campus. Did those who endangered us bear any costs? No.

1999 Evergreen's student commencement committee invited Governor Gary Locke, Washington's first governor of Chinese ancestry, to speak. He accepted. Later the committee extended another invitation: a taped address by Mumia Abu-Jamal, imprisoned in Philadelphia after a highly controversial trial in which he was convicted of killing a policeman. Gary Locke rescinded his acceptance. Nationally famous Women's Rights expert Stephanie Coontz (who also happens to be an Evergreen Faculty member) agreed to take his place, and Rob Knapp stepped into Stephanie's prior slot as "Faculty selected speaker."

That was when we at Evergreen discovered that police forces across the country, which were startlingly inept at collaborating to deal with criminals across state lines, had a fully functioning network ready for outrage. "Cop Killer" emails started flooding into the office of College President Jane Jervis and others. Then the College was informed that cops from around the country carrying guns, were planning to attend the graduation along with the widow of the cop who died. They came.

On the day no-one was physically hurt. Some students stood and turned their backs or walked out when Mumia spoke. Not hundreds of students as press reported. For me, right there, the intra-student disagreement looked perfect. We'd been seminar-ing all year long and this was a seminar in the large. The ring of armed men in uniform standing at the back felt quite different. Dangerous. Angry. Not listening. It was not a coincidence that the harassment directed at the President was vicious. She was a woman. Decades later we all saw similar vitriol directed at Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama. Visible women are particularly liable to be attacked. At Evergreen, this truth became even more evident during the next assault on our anti-racist work.

2017. With Trump now in office, the backlash against racial justice agendas had become explicit nationwide. Evergreen faculty and staff, by contrast, were still designing new ways to make even stronger the commitment to education which works well for the traditionally marginalized. One faculty member published several essays in the College newspaper assailing the anti-racism project as an impediment to "free speech." I say watch out for men whose passion is the freedom to say whatever they want. Think Frank Rizzo. Think Donald Trump. Bret Weinstein, Evergreen faculty member may have been less crude than the two pols but his hostilities were just as explicit.

He then turned his ire on the staff member whose job required her to be the voice and administrator for one of Evergreen's most long standing justice efforts, known locally as Day of Absence, Day of Presence. I've written about that too and for anyone who wants to know more detail, check out my peacemakerpress.com website. It's all there.

What matters for these purposes is that Bret's attack on the staff member set off a student "upheaval" and 24 hours later Bret was on Tucker Carlson on Fox News, excoriating the students, the

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College and the Day of Absence, to the delight of the entire Fox news audience. Frank Bruni and
plenty of others in the liberal media joined the attack.

1999 on steroids. The on-line harassment was so severe that within days the College had to put our
entire email system behind a firewall, a disaster for incoming students trying to set up new faculty
connections. Then things got even worse.

The Proud Boys, yes the very same organization Trump was talking about in 2020, decided to send an
armed posse to our campus. That cost the Washington State Patrol the salaries and administrative
energies needed to send 60 officers to campus to prevent violence. Then college administrators
concluded they dare not risk graduation on a plaza with no protective perimeter, which meant
spending \$100,000 to rent a stadium with controlled entry in Tacoma.

Later that summer Bret sued the College for \$3 million, claiming like other Whites these days that HE
was the victim. In effect he lost but he still got a settlement, \$250,000 each for him and his wife (also a
faculty member) though they were forced to resign. When last heard of he was at a virtually all white
research group at Princeton University, the James Madison Institute.

The staff member he attacked? She resigned with no money. The vitriol which poured into her email
was grotesque and evil. She would never be able to feel safe at Evergreen again. Pay offs to Whites
but not to those they have harmed.

This kind of terror to which Rizzo, Hicks, Trump, college profs like Bret Weinstein and the cops have
been subjecting Blacks for centuries. That is what has to stop. The rest of us have to stop pretending
that any of this is “new.”

* * *

WOMEN’S WORK: Trying to stay safe

When I arrived in the USA in the summer of 1969, I had been living autonomously for at least four
years: A “gap” year in Paris, Florence and Winchester (UK) and three years as a student at Oxford. I
didn’t have access to a car in any of those places. I was living like any young person in Europe, out at
all hours, pubs, theaters, parties, walking home alone whenever.

And then I got to Penn. Where the TV studio classes were night classes. We needed long stretches of
time to work. And I was told explicitly that I must never walk either to or from campus alone at night.
Too dangerous. Those plywood walls.

Donna, who became my closest friend, had a car. She drove me two nights a week. Taking myself off
downtown to concerts with the famous Philadelphia orchestra? Go to a matinee on Friday afternoon

WOMEN'S WORK: Trying to stay safe

with all the dowagers from the Mainline, whose waiting limos blocked the main drag out of town every weekend during the concert season.

For two years, unless Rob was in town with his car or Donna had a proposal, I acted housebound. A couple of times I tried subway trips to the movies, and the deserted streets and trolley cars spooked me. I got the message

“You must stay home. You're in serious danger if you are out alone at night.”

One still vivid reason I love New York City is that even back then it was the one place I, a carless woman, could be out alone at night. Subways were crowded, streets were crowded and there were movie theaters everywhere. By 1971, I was married and living in small towns with easy access to wheels. That particular constraint disappeared from my daily life.

Most women in the USA live under that constraint to this day: Don't go out alone on foot in the dark.

If women make efforts to stay safe in the USA, and they should, where is the threat truly intense? Not from a stranger, that Black man behind one on the street. It is inside our own homes. Spouse, lover, ex, if you are an adult. Uncle, older cousin, priest, if you are a kid. 1986 was a particularly bad year in Thurston County, where we then lived. The women murdered that year were all killed by a close relative, every single one.

October 12, 2017: from an opinion piece in the local newspaper about the women's shelter:

This summer, SafePlace has seen some of the worst accounts of physical violence among our clients since we opened our doors in 1981. . . Out of about 30 calls per day to our helpline, 25 are extreme cases of physical violence, which often include torture. This is unheard of in our 36-year history, with no signs of stopping.

Trump 2020 talking to housewives about “your suburbs” echoes Rizzo's trope back in Philadelphia, in 1969.

I no longer consider that I was in danger from my Black neighbors back then. Lies just like that one are still being spread. And I have to add, White women in 2020 who are nervous out in public in response to this particular kind of lie are complicit in the racism that undergirds the lie.

A few weeks ago I began wondering who truly KNOWS the USA to be more purple than contrasting reds and blues, who knows how widely everyone is partly right? Dolly Parton came to mind. She too does women's work and when I saw her in the 1980 movie *9 to 5*, I began being able to see that a busty, be-wigged country singer, product of a thousand plastic surgeries, might be a skilled boundary crosser, might be one of the most radical Americans around. These days I am sure she is. Dolly Parton does understand that EVERYONE is partly right. In the next section, The 9th Noble Truth. Right Attention for these COVID times there's a recommendation about getting into Ms. Parton's real work

DEEPER THAN ELECTIONS: *Since I Been Down* and other important media. “Right Attention” – Buddhism’s 9th noble truth for these COVID times

With a critique spanning Philadelphia in 1969 to Thurston County in 2017 – you could be forgiven for assuming that I have doubts whether this country has changed, or at least can change enough.

In fact I do not.

I know it has changed and is still changing. Just as I also know that for every type of progress, like the abolition of slavery during the Civil War, the US experiences an enormous backlash, like the crushing of Reconstruction after the Civil War. Bussing protests were the backlash for the requirement to end segregated schools. Slashing rebuke of “Political Correctness” is the backlash against the decision to call people out for their explicit or implicit support of racist agendas. Trump’s Presidency is backlash for Obama’s two terms.

So where are we now? Why in the middle of the backlash phase. With the range and power of digital technology amplifying its every feature. Also, under a cloud of virus particles that has driven us all further apart physically. At the same time we, and the conspiracy theorists, are reaching across previously unimagined distances, cooking side by side via zoom, celebrating birthdays and spreading fears both real and imagined across hundreds and thousands of miles. Hopefully we are also coming into the very last phases of a bruising election which has shown us via 81 million votes to 74 million votes that the USA in 2020 is no less precariously balanced than the 13 original states, seven “free” to six enforcing slavery.

The heading for this section is a nod to another of our realities, we are all “watching” more than “doing.” In the USA this may not all be a loss. Sometimes I wonder whether Americans, including me, when we spot a problem instantly want to do something about it. Perhaps this sitting and watching is one way we can learn to think and contemplate more wisely, acting collaboratively if we do act.

So herewith some items to deepen your sense of why we should stop saying we are surprised by Trump and surprised by the threats his supporters make to anyone, particularly any Black person or woman visibly embodying this country’s possible realignment in a more just future. Also some items to help us come face to face with truths and wisdoms where once we might have turned away.

First a docudrama. I find movies about journalists who open doors to justice engrossing. [The Thin Blue Lie](#), about Rizzo’s time as Mayor of Philadelphia is hair raising. And scary. Really dreadful things did happen, repeatedly and the entire system of courts and jails was in on the process.

Second a documentary that has garnered a big response, a film version of Michelle Alexander’s book [The New Jim Crow](#). The film is [13th](#). It’s about that part of the 13th amendment which still allows the enslavement of people imprisoned for crime. If the history on which today’s “criminalization” of blackness is not clear to you, [13th](#) makes the lineage from slavery through to today crystal clear.

Third, another docudrama. [Just Mercy](#). Bryan Stevenson is just one among a large number of brilliant and influential Black men visible and active in sapping the energies out of racism’s yearning for a

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backlash. He came to national prominence as a result of his book by the same name, the story of the work he his colleagues are doing through the Equal Justice Initiative to free Black man from death row. Personal stories, individual stories can have an emotional power that sticks where general data in history books can have a harder time settling into our memories. Stevenson is the instigator behind the Montgomery Lynching Memorial as well, and when travel becomes possible once again Rob and I will go South to pay our respects, and to visit our Alabama-based friends.

There’s a theme here. We Americans really do need to come to grips with the ways in which we attribute dangerousness to people of African origin, with dreadful consequences for their lives. My **fourth** movie connects to a topic that has been lurking throughout this pamphlet: Money, Reparations, Repair. In recent years, that word has been closely associated with Ta-Nehisi Coates. His Atlantic article, the Case For Reparations, caused a stir. His book, Between the World and Me, a letter to his son, had an even bigger impact. Despite these COVID times, Coates along with two collaborators, turned the book into a wonderful film, putting his words into the mouths of many others, the book alive with the joy of Howard University life, the threats of injustice, the colors of change and hope.

These first four films are all out, all ready for your viewing any time you sign on to Netflix or wherever. The last, the most important, called Since I Been Down is not yet out but you can still see it if you focus on it right after you get this pamphlet. If we’re lucky it will be streaming, at your convenience, soon. If you are my age, then the film will take you back across years dominated by stories of urban crime and anguish that you actually lived through. If this all happened before you were an adult, keep trying to stay aware of all those young men imprisoned when they themselves were very young, and they are still “down.”

The film pivots around the Hilltop in Tacoma, the people who lived there, died there, and therefore were caught up in the prison systems of Washington State. It takes us, co-inhabitants of the very same society, through the stories of the lives many of us are prone to “other,” lives spent incarcerated. Inside. Down. The men (they are mostly men), alive and in prison, work with each other to create better worlds than the ones they came from and better selves than the ones they came in with. Footage of street deaths, of aggressive policing, of incarcerated men in spotlessly clean prison sweats. Footage of activists with their pungent and cogent analyses of the ways this society builds structures that are designed to do harm, leaving people, families, entire communities crippled. And yet none of this is stripped of hope or the chance for a better way to be and to live.

Since I Been Down entered public life circulating around 2020’s truncated film festivals. Paradoxically, thanks to our reconfigured online world, the fact that most of us missed the **Social Justice Film Festival**, where it won a Gold Award, doesn’t mean that we have missed the chance to see that festival’s films. Social Justice is going online again January 22-24. I won’t say more now. Except: please watch it if you get a chance. To see from the inside what it is like to be Inside.

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A BIT MORE HISTORY

If it would be useful to put down the screens and to switch off sound. . . and if it would be useful to get another view of ways these United States are riddled with imperfections. . . check out Rudyard Kipling’s Letters from America dated 1899-1908. He traveled first in the United States as a tourist straight from India, via Japan (which he loved) and China (which he did not). His closest friends were American. He married an American woman and lived for quite a few years in Vermont. From the very start, his experiences here were paradoxical. He was uncomfortable, infuriated, fascinated, appalled, excited and amazed. If one didn’t know about those American friends, his wife and his life in Vermont, the negatives in his letters would stand out. Most of all, though I recommend them because I am pretty sure he would echo my response to that Republican elections official in Georgia: “let’s stop being surprised that living together is hard and can be dangerous.”

AND SOME JOY AS WELL

Candles have been lighting my life in recent weeks and I, at least, have been trying to make time to see them as well as to explore difficult thoughts. Recommendations? Check out NPR’s seven episode podcast “Dolly Parton’s America.” Then get back into the best of the Obama years by watching Michelle Obama’s book tour for her autobiography Becoming. At the very last stop of this 34-city tour, Michelle closes with the words: “This country is good, people are good, people are decent . . .”

I remain hopeful people want better, if not for themselves, then for the nation. Obama’s book tour took place in 2019, a reminder that even in the worst of times, much about this country was still miraculously joyful and full of energy.

This pamphlet is being finalized the day it looks as though Georgia may have turned US electoral politics on its head. Let’s not forget that if this happens, it was Stacey Abrams, Black, a Woman and Fearless who stands before us as a great maker of change. The last page, text in purple, was added on the morning of January 7, 2021.

WE ARE NONE OF US ALONE: We are Black and White or are we Purple?

Looking at CNN's election maps or 538.org's polling data, it would be easy to conclude in the light of the 2016 and 2020 elections that the United States is a hopelessly polarized country. Some are even arguing that two known factors, the disappearance of local news outlets and the dominance of a handful of discrete digital and cable TV silos, have combined in the last 20 years to undermine that commonplace dictum attributed to US House Speaker Tip O'Neill that "All politics is local."

I would argue that the rising oversimplification of US politics pre-dates the new media, even if the new media are able to reinforce it. Oversimplification is a rabble rouser's preferred tool, used again and again in the racism propagated by Louise Day Hicks and Frank Rizzo and their racist predecessors across the span of this nation's history. Hicks and Rizzo merely exported into the politics of the "Union" States the critical notion that bound the Slave/Confederate states together: that human beings are naturally divisible into very simple categories, two of which are "Negro" and "White."

In those parts of the USA where I have lived, "White" has only recently become a dominant term. One reason it is truly widespread since the millennium is the increased consciousness among progressives that white skin endows one with privileges, but its origins lie elsewhere. "Whiteness" took its first serious strides northwards in the 1950s and 1960s and, like Jim Crow before it and mass incarceration since, represents yet another resurrection of the Confederacy.

This is clearly a big claim. I will end by raising doubts about descriptions of the USA polarized between White and Black. It was always and still is a complex tapestry, a myriad of light and dark hues, variations of the color purple to which I keep referring. I will leave this section with one particular 2020 election map on which very little is either bright red or bright blue.

The large scale data on which I make this claim about the newness of "Whiteness" is to be found in the Census. Census 2000 compared with the Census in 2020. Capital letters emphasize its official status. For readers not in the USA, this decennial count of the US population is an explicit mandate in the US Constitution. Hence it is fair to describe it as a national self-portrait, different features highlighted as the political climate of the country evolves and changes.

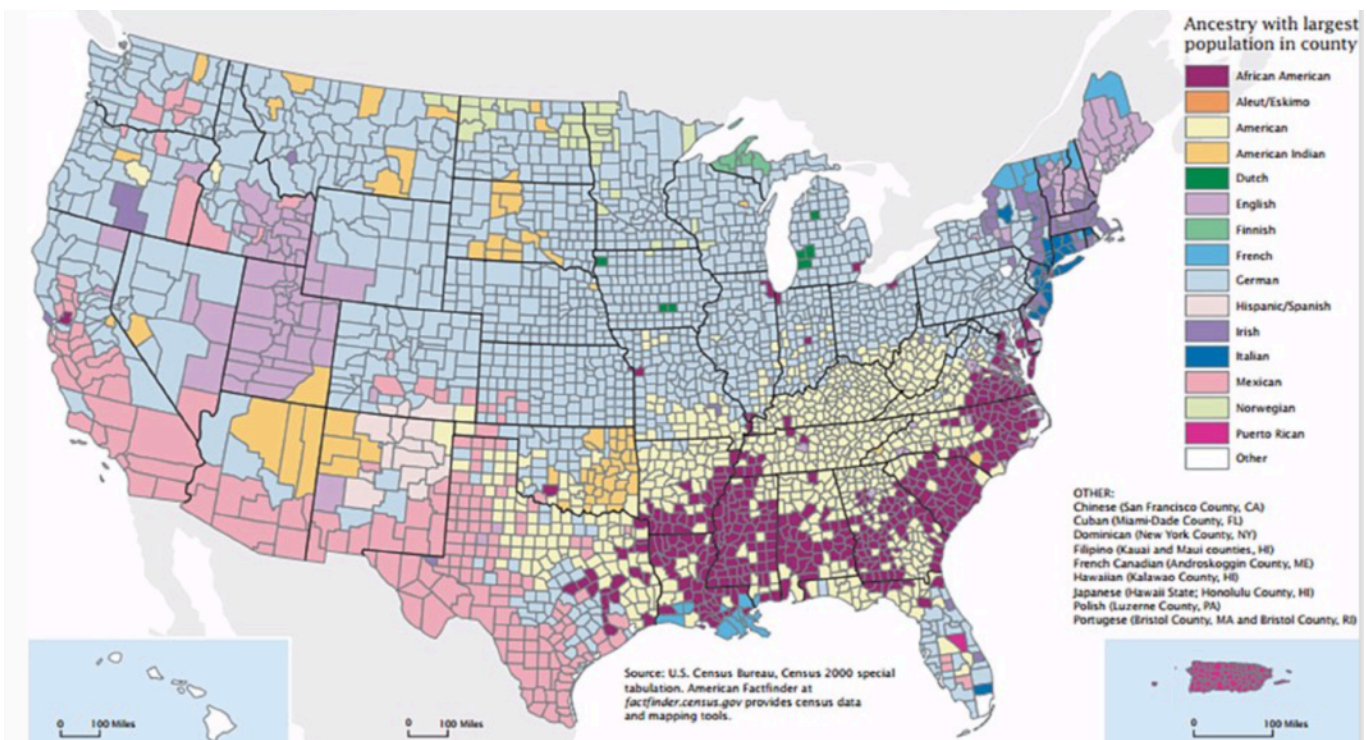
I have evidence too of the anecdotal variety and that's where I want to begin. The communities I lived among in my early years in the USA taught me that whole areas saw themselves in a direct line of descent from distinct parts of Europe. Parents, grandparents and great grandparents arriving in steerage on ships at Ellis Island spread out across the Northeast before heading West. People divided up into different urban zones according to their ancestral origins, clustered together by religion as well as nationality, language and culture. My wanderings in the environs of New Haven CT this Christmas have served as a reminder of the extent to which Italian-ness was a feature of Philadelphia in 1969. In the market in South Philly it was a help that I spoke Italian, even though it was clear I wasn't part of that community. The Quaker family I visited in Haverford had lived there for two centuries and knew themselves to be part of an identifiable circle, just like the Irish Catholics of Boston and

WE ARE NONE OF US ALONE: We are Black and White or are we Purple?

Jewish families in Rob's Upper West Side New York neighborhood. My mother-in-law, a true WASP, could remember when Bostonians placed both Blacks and Catholics in the "Other" category. When we arrived in the Pacific Northwest, we met the Scandinavians who had headed west via Minneapolis to Seattle. Intra-Scandinavian tensions they brought with them from Sweden, Norway and Denmark were literally written down for all to see in a 1962 waterfront memorial in Seattle honoring the Norwegian explorer, and "discoverer" (?) of these lands Leif Erikson. The national identity of each of the memorial's donors is clear— virtually all Norwegian, a few from Finland and not a single one from Sweden. Our best friend was Danish and proud of it.

CENSUS 2000

The first item of Census data is a map representing the answers to a single question in the 2000 Census. It was a pretty simple question: Where did your ancestors come from? The respondents could write whatever they wanted into the form. The responses on this map are arrayed county by county, colored according to the dominant plurality.



In it I see several striking features:

- 1) Two ethnicities covered much more of the country than I had ever imagined. (a) Even 20 years ago, people claiming Mexican ancestry were the plurality along the entire southern border from the Texas Gulf Coast to the Pacific. (b) among Europe-origin populations, Germans are the largest national affiliation in far more of the country than I had ever imaged.
- 2) In 2000, Europeans in the Northeastern states still predominated in the very same places their ancestors first came to rest in earlier times. Italians and Irish, English and French still where they

WE ARE NONE OF US ALONE: We are Black and White or are we Purple?

had been Settlers. Dutch are to be found around Calvin College in SW Michigan; French up on the Canadian border and also down in New Orleans; “American Indians” in Eastern Oklahoma at the end of the Trail of Tears, in the SW Four Corners region and across the northern states where reservations are large, even though not very densely populated.

3) Last, and oddly to my eyes, Mormon-dominated areas describe themselves as English. Perhaps because Joseph Smith originated there?

There is one more feature of the map which blew my mind. Quite literally.

Look hard at the Southeastern states, the former Slave States. Those two colors.

Look again at the legend on the big map.

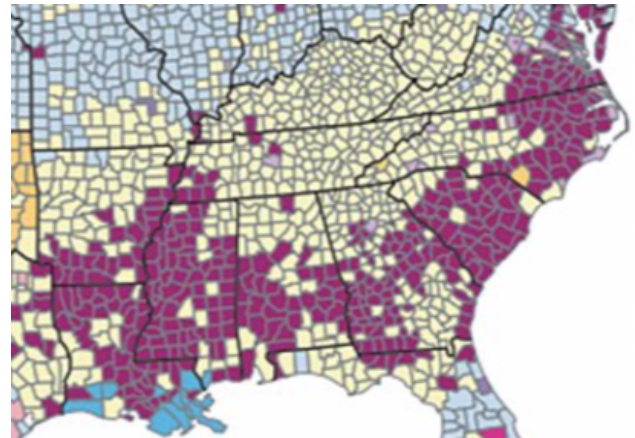
The old Deep South is the only part of this nation where any meaningful number of counties are majority black.

Look again at those very states.

What ancestry runs across the counties in the former Slave States that are not majority Black?

Not English. Not Scots Irish. No.

The majority of White people in every single majority White county describe themselves simply as AMERICAN. For the people in the US South who do not self describe as African American there is no prior identity. Whiteness makes them American and thereby separates them from their non-American neighbors.



CENSUS 2020

This year’s census was entangled with Trumpian politics even before the virus arrived to make a mess of all kinds of public policy. Its data is no-where near tallied in any sense. But here are the relevant questions for 2020.

9. What is Person 1's race? Mark one or more boxes.

White
 Black, African Am., or Negro
 American Indian or Alaska Native — *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.* ↴

Asian Indian Japanese Native Hawaiian
 Chinese Korean Guamanian or Chamorro
 Filipino Vietnamese Samoan
 Other Asian — *Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.* ↴ Other Pacific Islander — *Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on.* ↴

Some other race — *Print race.* ↴

8. Is Person 1 of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

→ **NOTE: Please answer BOTH Question 8 about Hispanic origin and Question 9 about race. For this census, Hispanic origins are not races.**

No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
 Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano
 Yes, Puerto Rican
 Yes, Cuban
 Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin — *Print origin, for example, Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on.* ↴

WE ARE NONE OF US ALONE: We are Black and White or are we Purple?

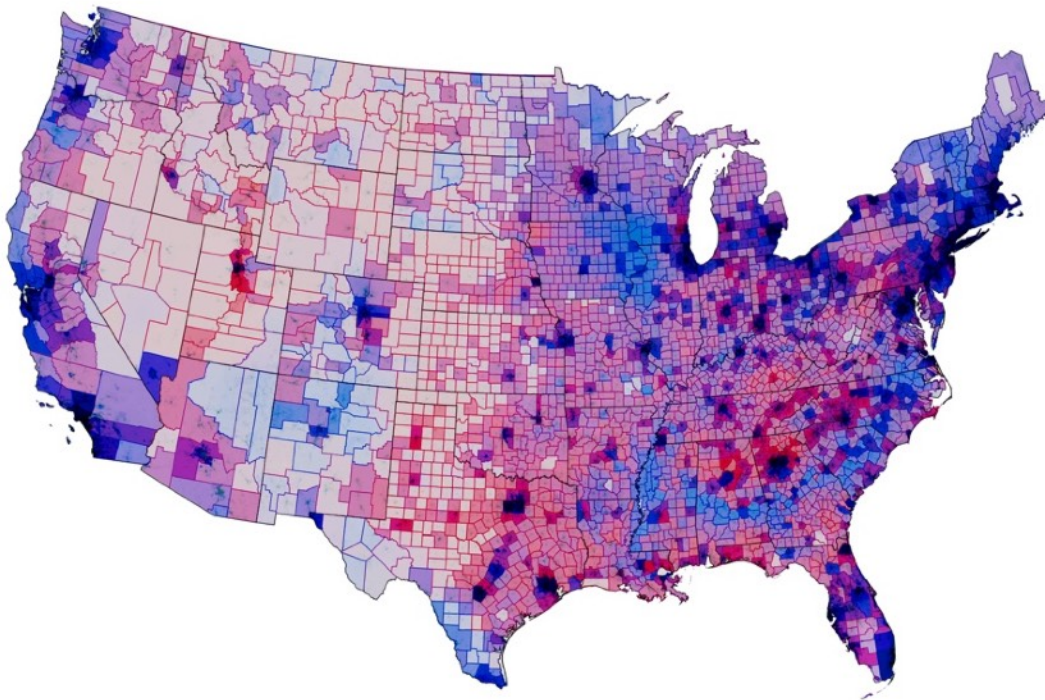
Once again there are several slots for open-ended answers about ancestry. Native Americans can list the Tribe in which they are enrolled. Asians and Hispanics can check mark a list of possible countries of origin, though they have open ended options as well. There is space even to identify a race which does not fit into the existing categories.

Only two groups are offered no option to set out any details of their ancestry: White people and Black people. Those Euro centric categories identifiable in 2000 have been erased. Back in 2000, people of African ancestry could also have used the form to fill in more detail. Trevor Noah could have said South Africa. Colin Powell could have said Jamaica. No longer. If one wants to paint a binary, White/Black picture of the country, this is a great way to collect data in support of the image. Data from the 2020 Census superimposed on my first multicolored map would reduce it to a four colored array – Pinkish along the southern frontier and up some parts of the west, ochre Tribal areas as well, just as they are in the 2000 map. Light yellow would blanket the rest of the country, except for the African American southern counties and a handful of northern cities.

ELECTION 2020 — TAPESTRY USA

Election maps reinforce this oversimplification. The Electoral college imposes a binary picture.

peacemakerpress.com
has links to yet more
alternative maps



Recently map makers have been trying to represent actual voting records, often county by county like the census map. They offer quite different perspectives on our apparent polarization. This one is my favorite. Lighter colors for smaller populations. More purple than either red or blue. This is a picture makes the hope of ReUniting seem attainable, makes it reasonable to believe that everywhere is partly right, even if not equally right.

REPAIR: “People want better” [Michelle Obama]

“Better” is being able to tell ourselves truths once forgotten or ignored. Better is an education that is willing to set aside old tales and to start anew:

To relate: a double sense:
connect and tell over;
this knitting self-narration
the duty perhaps of every man
if history is ever to be
embraced and known.²

US history is being and needs to renewed, connected and retold. James Baldwin was fierce about our obligation to do that work. Repeatedly we have needed to Begin Again (the title Eddie Glaude gave to a book about his own wanderings through Baldwin’s work). In 2020 Trump, Arbery, COVID, forest fires and so many other realities have cried out that we bring forward in schools and in the public square previously obscured facets of how and where the USA was built: on the backs of slaves and in territories expropriated from Indians already sovereign here, expanding across land and waters already inhabited by a myriad of other beings.

And yet under Trump a willingness to see the story change and evolve has itself been controversial. “Make America Great Again.” Even among those like me who want to do the work, our achievements to date would earn no more than an “incomplete” in a college class. Still, 2020 has seen books with “better” stories about race and justice selling out. Memorials in bronze and stone have been coming down. Public rituals now often open with an acknowledgment that we have made our Settlements on lands that once belonged to the Tribes. Greta Thunberg brought American young people into the streets by the million when she was in New York for the annual UN meeting at the beginning of 2020. COVID, spanning the entire globe by its own means has revealed humans to be utterly fragile, shaped by local conditions, simultaneously both vulnerable and strengthened by very widely dispersed interconnections.

Rob and I are in the midst of relating in that double sense: connecting and telling over. Who knows what pushed us? Our private decision to move house, with its concomitant opportunity to scan boxes and boxes of old family papers and letters? Our aging acceptance of responsibility for our own family history? Herewith a little of what we are learning for the first time, interwoven into stories we already knew. I am thinking of our eight grandparents as I write this. What’s here is only a sketch, a sketch of ways our ancestors played visible roles in events in the public square.

Rob has paternal ancestors called Hazard, Settlers opting to root on Indian lands in Peacedale, Rhode Island. Among them is a woman who became an early President of Wellesley College. No one ever told us about her though I suspect Rob’s female cousins, daughters of his distinctly feminist aunt were fully informed about Caroline Hazaard. One of her ancestors, a yeoman farmer, challenged his

² Sewell Elizabeth, "Cosmos and Kingdom," in *Signs and Cities*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1986, 41.

REPAIR: “People want better” [Michelle Obama]

father’s ethics head on. It was the 1740s and Tom Hazard had been persuaded by a Presbyterian Deacon that it was wrong to own slaves, an idea not yet rejected by Quakers. No one told us about Hazard slaves either. Later on the Hazards built substantial wealth in textiles which back then included manufacturing “slave cloth,” (the truly poor fabric used by slaves to make their own clothes) though it’s clear that the raw materials the Hazards spun and wove were mostly wool and “waste” (presumably recycled cloth) not slave grown cotton. Regardless, ancestors in textiles in New England, whether laborers or capitalists, are commonplace. Becoming able to see that textiles very likely mean complicity with slavery and share cropping – that was not an idea that Rob’s ancestors passed down to us either, though we do plan to pass it on.

Some of the textile Hazards moved to Syracuse where they too made money and built homes, this time in a village they named Solvay. They had persuaded Belgian inventors to license to them the “Solvay Process,” an innovative way to make Soda Ash, itself a key constituent component in everything from soap to glass to paper. One of Rob’s elder cousins produced a book about the their ancestral mansions and family relationships in Solvay. They made tons of money. Rob’s father lived his younger years in a house said to have had 39 rooms. They also made tons of waste which now sits on the edge of Lake Onandoga, enough waste to look like a “natural” cliff, enough waste to turn the lake into a SuperFund cleanup site. Rob’s parents, moving nearby in their retirement, began to understand that their Settler ancestors had impinged severely on native lives. They spoke of and admired the Onandoga chief Oren Lyons, but they never talked about the waste. Of course a good deal of the waste dates from decades after the family sold the company, but the Hazards began it.

Rob’s Hazard ancestors also played a vital role in the establishment of Planned Parenthood in Syracuse. Rob’s feminist aunt continued the work in her generation. Rob’s parents helped in the building of a brand new art museum for Syracuse, which had never had one. Back in Peacedale, the original Solvay Hazards endowed a beautiful public library.

The Hazard name continues, carried both by Rob and by our daughter Emily. The lineage in its entirety is becoming more visible than it once was.

In different forms there is detail to be added across the lineages of all our grandparents. Relating and connecting in new ways into their stories impels both of us to actions we would not have contemplated until the last few years. Details available if that is of interest.

Let me move out now from our personal agenda to hopes for the general, the “terrestrial.”³ If we are to construct stories for a better future, I personally assume they are stronger if they can be tied actively to specific places and to physical experiences. I suspect I should avoid ——>

(1) Digitizing everything because it requires the organic to be linear in opposition to natural life, which is not actually arranged in tidy GIS squares. (hence the paper format in which this document appears)

³ That’s a word I am trying out as an alternative to the worlds global and planetary. That endless tangle between particular and universal whose dynamics depend so much on rich word choices.

REPAIR: “People want better” [Michelle Obama]

- (2) Judgements about the past that are constantly negative. (Sally Hazard of Syracuse was lauded as the “Queen of Syracuse” in the newspaper story covering her death and funeral. I am nothing like republican enough to repudiate people for their queenliness, certainly not family royals)
- (3) Casting responsibility for our present woes too haphazardly or too widely. (This is a time to think carefully and take up our share of the responsibility rather than to delegate it to others)

Things I hope for:

- (1) Enough travel, journeys to see and experience other places and also “other” people directly with our own equally “other” bodies. This includes helping others to journey as well.
- (2) Tempered reactions to all kinds of issues, with enough equanimity to respond with a combination of wisdom, risk-taking and care.
- (3) Celebrations of the seasons of life and resilience in hard times.

Responsibility for the past? We cannot really talk about foreseeing events already done. But foresight matters.

“The real question is not what I would have done [to stop the Holocaust] in ’42 or ’43. The real question is ‘What would I have done in ’32 or ’33? Then it’s a question about courage, but not a matter of life or death.” (Susan Neiman quoting Volkhard Knigge in Learning from the Germans, p.286)

My own family history is enriched by the legacy of one person’s answer to that actual question. In 1932 my grandfather, August Weber, gave a Reichstag speech fiercely denouncing the possibility that his colleagues would select Hitler as Chancellor. In 1933, once the deed was done, he sent all four of his teenage children into exile. He stayed on in Germany himself in active opposition, and of course at personal risk for six more years, finally fleeing to England in February 1939.

Across the histories of the Tribes and the incomer inhabitants of the USA it will be very easy to find plenty of stories of courage. We should all be able to find them. The challenge is to see our own walls of waste, our own Quaker slave owners. Doing that work depends on our own collective courage, whether like Tom Hazard’s in challenging one’s parents, or Caroline Hazard’s in becoming a college president when women’s education was so very unusual, or August Weber’s in facing down the prospect of Nazi Germany.

Maya Angelou said it this way: “Courage is the most important of all the virtues, because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently.”

* * *

Author Bio

Helena Meyer-Knapp is a scholar/activist and an immigrant for whom August 2019 marked the 50th anniversary of her entry into life and work in the USA. That work centers on peace making. Her life includes a marvelous family as well. She earned a BA in History at Oxford in the UK, the country of her birth, and an MA in Communications and Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Political Studies in the USA. She was a member of the faculty (International Relations and Political Studies), 1984 - 2017 at the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington State. Since 2001 her research has taken her regularly to NE Asia, most often to Japan but also to South Korea.

CHANGE: January 6, 2021 — real change — perhaps

Dear Family and Friends You, the recipients of this email are mostly younger than I, more than 25 years younger. I hope that what I write, deriving as it does from my experiences before you were born, is somewhat encouraging.

Events in Washington DC yesterday neither scared me, nor surprised me. In fact, given my understanding of some of America's many histories, I was at ease with core features of the action, while ready to recognize the antecedents of the aggression, and ultimately almost hopeful that this particular series of retrograde years may be coming to a close. Don't get me wrong. I don't see this as the beginning of a benign and tranquil life, just another small step away from the toxic past that still taints our USonian lives.

Mix US proceduralism, embodied in a Constitution which is full of detailed descriptions of procedure, with an individualism that gets impatient when procedure slows and even determines outcomes, and with traditions dating back to the first Settlers that allow and indeed encourage ordinary people to "take matters into their own hands" to assume "personal responsibility," and yesterday hardly looks unique. It was extreme, for sure. And unacceptable because the President, who is supposed to embody procedure, was the ring leader. None of us can want to see yesterday repeated.

And yet.

When I heard the storming of the US Capitol was underway, my first thought was "oh good." The enablers can no longer hide as easily from the consequences of their actions. Senators who refused to demand a reckoning from Trump, who refused to impeach him; the thousands of Republicans who "support the blue" while their Black neighbors are shot and killed; those jurors who refused to convict gun toting white men who threaten public officials — many of them already show that they are seeing the world with new eyes.

The demonstrators?

The contrast between police efforts yesterday and the treatment meted out to the George Floyd protestors in Lafayette Square in the summer has not gone un-noticed. But let me emphasize, that yesterday was not the first in my experience in the USA of invasions of "sacred" legislative spaces. Evergreen College students, unarmed but serious, have done the same. When I was younger, thousands of our peers tried to shut down the Pentagon and Washington DC, to shut down colleges and city streets in protest against the Vietnam War and in support of the pressing racial justices of the time.

Of course most protests even in the US are planned and managed according to public law. But not all. Civil Disobedience has long been a vital political tool despite the fact that law enforcement in the USA has a long tradition of opposing social change. Serious Civil Disobedience is usually risky. Yesterday's people often seemed more interested in selfies than change, but they were not ranging far out beyond the classic realms of US political action, only at one extreme.

Our shock should not focus on their action— storming the capital — but on the goal — the overthrow of an election. In months of campaigning this year there have been repeated suggestions that this might happen. In the two months since November 3, the President has pushed harder and harder for that outcome.

As of today procedure has outflanked aggressive actions. For which all of us are grateful, but let's not say the worst of yesterday was what they did.

The worst was what both they and the President wanted to do. To overthrow an election. In that they failed.

A few hundred miles further south African Americans in Georgia had VOTED, and voted by the hundreds of thousands, to repudiate the evil that is Trump and to bring the Senate under Democratic control. That is no panacea either but to be able to say the words "Minority Leader Mitch McConnell" on the same day that Trump stormed McConnell's Capitol leaves me smiling.