

Criminals

by Bill Herbst

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On September 8th, 1974, when I was 24 years old, President Gerald Ford pardoned Richard Nixon, who had recently resigned his Presidency in disgrace to avoid being impeached by the House of Representatives, convicted by the Senate, and removed from office because of Watergate. At the time, I was livid. I still am.

President Donald Trump may pardon himself before Joe Biden is sworn in as President on Wednesday. Whether or not he does, however, Trump will remain vulnerable to prosecution by states' Attorneys General and city DAs. Much discussion and debate is underway about how Trump should be dealt with. Should he be pursued for punishment, which has the ring of Old Testament retribution? Would continuing investigation and attempted prosecution of Trump for any or all of the various crimes committed during or before his Presidency detract from the Biden administration's agenda for the country's recovery? In more general terms, would legal pursuit of Donald Trump further divide the country, stoking the aggrieved resentment of the Trump and QAnon Cults (which, as we know, is already red hot) to provoke further domestic violence?

Let me offer my opinion in response to each of the three questions:

#1: Should Trump be pursued for punishment?

You betcha he should be. Without hesitation.

#2. Would continuing investigation and attempted prosecution of Trump for any or all of the various crimes committed during or before his Presidency detract from the Biden administration's agenda for the country's recovery?

Almost certainly. Do it anyway.

#3. Does legal pursuit of Donald Trump further divide the country?

Absolutely. But *not* legally pursuing Trump won't lessen the inevitability of further hatred and more violence from the White Supremacy crowd. In other words, the Kumbaya-like hope of reunifying Americans is a foolish pipe dream. Give it up. It's not happening. Period.

But Bill, haven't you written about moving toward Universal Compassion by increasing those we consider "Us" and decreasing those we consider "Them"? Yes, I have written about that and will quite probably continue to do so. Look, I'm not lobbying for Trump (*and* his family, *and* the scumbags in Congress who support him) to be lined up against a wall and shot. No, I'm saying that we can't let them get away with crimes that harm others (and sometimes everyone).

Strangely enough, I'm not arguing on the basis of "justice." To me, this is less about justice than about collective power — who has it, and how we use it. It's said that Power corrupts (and absolute Power corrupts absolutely), but what that means is that Power not sufficiently guided by Love produces unintended consequences in results that are inevitably corrosive, chaotic, and cruel. Justice would be nice, as would fairness and equity, but I have no confidence in our collective ability to achieve anything close to those lofty ideals in the near future, given how far down the road to perdition we've gone.

My view is that, at this point in America, the practical possibility of opening our hearts to reunify the population does not exist. To everything there is a season, and this is not a season for Love. Is it smart, wise, or useful to maintain our internal efforts toward increased empathy and compassion? Yes for sure. I am sympathetic to the suffering of many rank-and-file members of the Trump Cult. Their "solutions" are bat-shit crazy, but their feelings of betrayal by the country of their birth are justified.

Huge numbers of Americans have lost faith and trust in damn near all of our social institutions, and with good reason. Those institutions have failed slowly and incrementally over many decades — largely because of increasing corruption — which has led up to our current situation of spectacular failure. The privileged, powerful, well-off, and uber-wealthy who comprise the top 20% have been the exclusive beneficiaries of that institutional corruption, while the bottom 80% have been mostly ignored and discarded. Those percentages are composites, of course, based on multiple values, including class, race, and economics.

Can our institutions — along with Americans' faith and trust in them — be restored? Not yet. Further breakdown is in the cards (and, as an aside, in the heavens as well). While our institutions continue to decay and crumble, signaling the sharp decline of the American Empire, and as greed, narcissism, and corruption continue to run rampant, showing how damaged we are as a people, the rest of us need to do whatever we can to stave off complete disaster. Yes, we're all delusional to a degree, but some of us are more deeply deluded than others.

Near the end of World War II, when it became obvious even to Hitler that Germany had lost the war, the Fuhrer ordered that Germany herself be destroyed, arguing that loss of the war demonstrated that Germans were not

worthy of survival. Luckily for tens of millions of Germans, military generals and others close to Hitler refused to implement his domestic scorched earth policy.

I think America is in a similar position today — not perfectly parallel, but close enough for horseshoes. The so-called and self-styled “patriots” who scream about freedom are *not* saving the country, despite their delusions. They’re destroying it. And the rest of us must stop them. We can’t convince them that they’re wrong — they are immune to argument, completely unreceptive to any rational basis in fact about how misinformed they are — so the best we can do is prevent them from doing more harm. Am I happy about the use of force to do this? No. Do I think it’s necessary and unavoidable? Yes.

So by all means, let the legal system (or whatever’s left of it) investigate without restraint and prosecute whenever possible. Go after Trump and his enablers, most especially those in Congress. They are all criminals.

None of this is what I’d call sanity, but I think it’s as close as we’re going to get for now and over the four years ahead. Astrologically, I look out to 2025 as the next crossroads where we might begin choosing a saner path forward, but getting there in one piece is going to be a hell of a challenge.