

Suicidal Vengeance

by Bill Herbst

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This is the companion piece to last week's post. That previous Commentary (#261), entitled "Exploitation," focused primarily on the tendency of American business to exploit other Americans through an ongoing and predatory transfer of wealth that amounts to massive theft. Rather than commerce functioning to distribute whatever goodness we find or create, it concentrates all material wealth into the fewest hands possible, insuring that the elites will continue to dominate society and call the shots.

This week, I want to look at a particular subset of exploitation in America that is even more perverse than the typically commercial and generic Us-versus-Them cruelty, one that is emerging as a real threat to our collectively rising to address the dire challenges that imperil both America's and humanity's future.

The Republican party, along with the entire right wing of the political and cultural spectrum in America (what was once called "conservatism," but, over the past three decades, has transformed into something very different and strange), is engaged in suicidal vengeance. If they can't win (which they can't, for reasons I'll list in the next couple of paragraphs below), then they might just take down everyone and everything with them in a spectacular act of self-immolation.

I think back to various Buddhist monks in Southeast Asia during the 1960s who performed public suicides to protest the Vietnam War by lighting themselves on fire. What Republicans and the Far Right are preparing to do, however, is more akin to the suicide bombings we have seen in the Mideast over recent decades, where the martyr not only kills him or herself violently, but takes down as many enemies as possible in the act. That may seem over the top as a comparison to the derangement of contemporary America, but it's not. The handwriting is on the wall.

What does the Right want? Limited government and balanced budgets have faded away as principles. Republicans now fully embrace the culture wars:

- *no more legalized abortion*
- *LGBTQ people get sent back into the closet*
- *an end to the trans-gender movement*
- *return to a Norman Rockwell image of 1950s America*
- *adoption of Christianity as America's state religion*
- *no more immigrants of color allowed entry*
- *restricted voting rights for minorities*
- *partisan control of election outcomes*
- *guns, guns, and ever more guns*

OK, so why can't the right win, even if they seem to get much of what they want? The reasons are straightforward: Two of the most relevant and inevitable demographic changes underway in America are implacably against them.

First, America's rural population is dwindling. We have become a predominantly urban nation, where most people live in cities. Thomas Jefferson's ideal of a rural and agrarian society is gone. Could it return? Only after an apocalyptic end to modern civilization, but even that possibility is remote. Whatever happens to humanity over the coming decades, the likelihood is that we will need to congregate rather than disperse for safety and survival. Isolated enclaves of smaller groups exist now and would likely continue in most scenarios of what may transpire, but their impact will be minimal. Cities are the future.

Second, we are already far down the road toward becoming a majority-minority population. The days of this country being predominantly white are numbered and will soon be finished, once and for all. The American "melting pot" was always a questionable meme, despite the Statue of Liberty's stirring invocation to "*give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.*" That was always a lie. With the exception of Nazi scientists plucked from Germany after World War II (Project Paperclip) and the more recent importation of doctors from around the world, the vast majority of immigrants to America have always been relegated to the bottom rung of the socio-economic ladder.

Even so, however, the long-term birth rates have upset the applecart. The tides of change will not be stopped. People of color can no longer be easily ignored or marginalized. The days of their systematic mistreatment are coming to a close. Basically, the whole white supremacy thing is just so 19th century. Yes, it's vomiting up again, as happens periodically, but it's last gasp stuff.

The Republican Party and the Far Right, as currently configured, cannot survive these sea changes in the American polity. They must adapt or die.

Right now, Republicans are choosing death. They are aggrieved at both real and imagined losses of status, wealth, and power in America. And they are hell bent on vengeance. This is worse than just cutting off one's nose to spite one's face. That's an act of pique that injures oneself more than others. No, this is something quite different. This is suicidal vengeance, as in the possessively macho male, cursed with deep sexual insecurity, who announces, when spurned by his lover, "*If I can't have her, no one can.*" So, first he kills her, then he turns the gun on himself. It is, in a sense, the ultimate Fuck You.

And we're watching it unfold — day by day, week by week, month by month. I don't pretend to know how it will play out, but it's quite a spectacle.

As much as the lunacy of the Centrist Dems and the Woke Left is truly shocking to behold, what's happening with the Republicans and the Far Right is even more bold-faced and ludicrous. To say it's a bizarre caricature is an understatement. This would be comic were it not so lethal. I don't know where to turn for sanity anymore. The madness on all sides is overwhelming.

Over and over, people ask me what astrology says about all this. I think they would like to hear from me that astrology has predicted this terrible passage, and that it can also tell us when the madness will stop. Sorry, no such luck.

In the grand panorama of symbolic evolution that astrology presumes to be revealed by heavenly movement, the past century has transported us to another realm entirely. This is mainly because of Pluto (first posited by mathematicians in 1905 and finally discovered by astronomers in 1930). Given Pluto's symbolism, all bets have been off for more than a hundred years now. I wouldn't say that everything that's happened since 1905 was "predicted" by astrology, but the advent of Plutonian death-and-rebirth into the astrological lexicon has fundamentally changed the rules. As Dorothy famously quipped in *The Wizard of Oz*, "I don't think we're in Kansas anymore, Toto."

From my perspective, what astrology predicts is that collective death is ongoing through the welling up of primal power we cannot control. What astrology can't specify are the results and repercussions, the various ins and outs of how that's going to look and how bad it might get — I mean, how many people will die? Millions? Billions? Most of us? *All* of us? — and whether or not a rebirth follows. Might that rebirth be a reboot of civilization, a transformed human species into something new, or just our swan song? The meteor that killed the dinosaurs changed life on earth. We are our own meteor.

Perhaps an anecdote might illuminate my position. During the 1980s, I lived in Minnesota, in the Twin Cities. One winter I flew to Arizona for a week. While there, I acquired a cactus, which I took back with me to Minneapolis. It was a potted cactus, about six inches round. Removed from its natural environment in the southwestern desert and plopped down into the middle of a Minnesota midwestern winter, the cactus proceeded to bloom unexpectedly by sending out an astonishing and beautiful flower. Almost immediately after, it died. Apparently, the climatic change (even though I kept it indoors, of course), triggered the cactus to expend all its energy to create that flower, after which it was done. The main lesson I took from that experience was never again to import a cactus.

I relate the story because it feels to me a little like what's happening now in America and civilization. The raw power whomped up by our species over the past half-millennium is incredible, and sadly, far beyond our wisdom to handle. All the various metaphors — the Sorcerer's Apprentice, the dragon eating its own tail, releasing the genie from the bottle, rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic — have become too real. I worry that, like children playing with matches, we won't have enough time to mature before we burn down the house.

As I write so often these days, I hope I'm wrong.