

A Slippery Slope

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In the midst of a dangerous period of American history, the McCarthy Era, young people, both those in high school and those in college, learned from our history and civics teachers to recognize the attributes of a democratic republic. We learned from progressive historians such as Henry Steele Commager to understand how the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights were enacted and the reasons for creating a “Powerful general government that at the same time recognizes a wide spectrum of individual rights and liberties.”

Emphasizing the basic decency of our country and its basic tenets, Commager’s narrative urged us to adhere to those tenets and reject a government that deprives us of them. He hoped to make clear to the American public the existence of violations and illegal practices of at least two GOP presidents. He cautioned us against “an absence of thought,” which we discern today as the dominant characteristic of our Trump-supporting electorate.

When Congress abdicated its Constitutional responsibility to declare war and accorded former President Bush the authority to “use the Armed Forces of the United States as he determines to be necessary” against Iraq in 2002, our country stepped onto the slippery slope from which we have yet to recover. Indeed, a Canadian political commentator wrote, “How did the chief magistrate of a confederated republic degrade into the global tyrant we experience today, part secular pope, part military despot, part pseudo-philosopher-king, and full-time overbearing global gangster?”

He was prescient. Now, more than two decades later, is this not the very image of the individual who we have instated in our highest office, a “global gangster” and sociopath? Is not our very Constitution under threat of dismemberment if not dissolution? Republicans currently control enough states to call a Constitutional convention and are less than a handful of states away from ratifying any Amendments that might emerge. For example, the First Amendment, nothing less than the soul of our Republic and the source of our most cherished rights, could be stood on its head. In a hideous parody, it could be written to provide that Congress IS FREE to establish a state religion, restrict the free exercise of religion, and/or abridge freedom of speech, the press, and assembly.

Let’s remember our lessons as young people that the founders of this nation, the framers of our Constitution, developed the concept of checks and balances to prevent tyranny – to create a republic, not a monarchy or oligarchy; but under the current conditions that is a distinct likelihood. And difficult as it is to maintain a democracy, without which a republic cannot exist, we must do all we can to retain those checks and balances in the face of a GOP-ruled Congress and a benighted Supreme Court. Let’s also remember that our failure to support the United States Constitution can lead in short order to rampant racism, poverty, and militarism. It did not take many years for that to happen in Germany.

We are living today under such a threat. If we wish to survive, and if we wish to have our progeny survive, we need to bring about an essential change in the composition of Congress and the Supreme Court. We need to disseminate the knowledge of how our government exercises

power and how we can effect the massive transition necessary. As a first step, we need to make the Democratic Party in Florida a prominent and active agent.