

The Delray Democrat

Don't Underestimate the Danger of Trump's Big Lie. Hitler, Mussolini and Franco Told the Same One*

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No one should underestimate the danger of Trump's continued campaign to declare the 2020 election results invalid. And we'd best not assume that, once Biden is in office, the detritus left by Trump will all be swept away. Lies, especially Big Lies, told frequently enough by people in authority, can come to be accepted as truth, with disastrous results.

Sure, we know Trump's a sociopath, a pathological liar with the morals of a Styrofoam cup.

Yet, 72 million Americans who saw the same depraved man raving on camera that we did remain loyal members of the Trump Cult.

Post-election polls revealed that between 72% and 80% of Republicans believe Trump and doubt the legitimacy of the election. At least they say they do. We know that some poll responders answer with magical thinking, rather than what they know to be true.

Even so, history proves it doesn't take long for that magical thinking to become a deeply rooted myth, a national "civil religion," as described by sociologist Robert Bellah. Until Trump, America's "civil religion" was the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, a belief system that gave hope to the world.

Trump set out to replace all this with his myth, "Make America Great Again," based on authoritarianism, racism, xenophobia and classism. His is not unlike other, sinister myths which have left unspeakable misery and destruction around the world. Indeed, he brought us to the edge of civil war.

In her new book, "War: How Conflict Shaped Us," historian Margaret MacMillan reminds us of the danger of myth creation. Nazi Germany is the most obvious example.

In 1918, with supplies low and allies withdrawing, the Germans were losing WW I. But all this was kept from the German people. Defeat was near, so General Ludendorff demanded an armistice which was signed on Nov. 11, 1918. But then, Ludendorff did not want to be blamed for the loss. That was the beginning of Germany's Big Myth, a conspiracy theory that the Germans had not really lost the war, and that liberals, socialists and Jews were responsible for the defeat. (Yes, this "Winning but losing" theory is a conundrum.)

That myth was concretized in the German national consciousness until 1939 when the Nazis decided on a solution: The Holocaust. And victory could be achieved only by Adolf Hitler.

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For WWII Italy, the enemies were socialism, democracy, liberalism, Bolshevism...even Ethiopia. And victory could be achieved only by Benito Mussolini.

And for Catholic Spain, the scapegoats were Protestants and atheists, those still loyal to the Second Spanish Republic, liberals, homosexuals, Catalan nationals. And victory could be achieved only by Francisco Franco.

Despite even Republican governors and election officials affirming that the election was free and fair, Trump claims he's the winner. In the Trump Myth, the antagonists are the usual suspects: liberals, Democrats, Antifa, Black Lives Matter, Muslims, immigrants (except those from his parents' heritage, Scotland and Germany, or Slovenia, from where Melania's parents made their way), most democratic international leaders, the free press, and any Republican opposition. In fact, any opposition at all.

No matter the nation or the generation, the DNA of the myth is the same. Refuse to accept responsibility. Blame someone else. Demonize your opponents until the populace believes only _____ (name your dictator) can rid the country of its enemies and restore national honor. And democracy dies.