

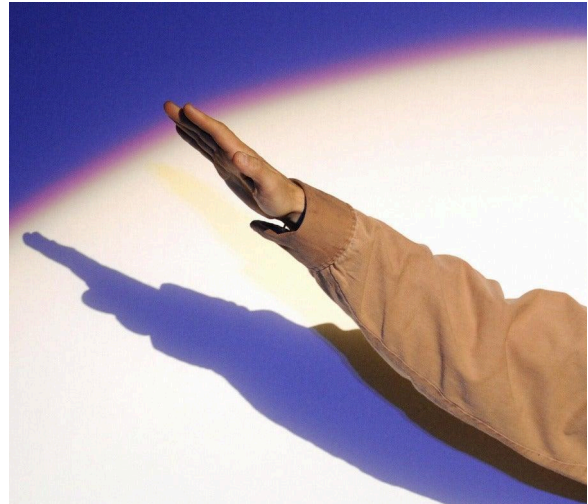
The Nazi in the Coal Mine

by Andrew Christie

A lady asked Dr. Franklin Well Doctor what have we got, a republic or a monarchy? A republic replied the Doctor if you can keep it.

- Journal of James McHenry (1753-1816), Maryland delegate to the Constitutional Convention

Benjamin Franklin's famous observation upon the completion of the Constitution of the United States has gotten a lot more famous since Jan. 6, 2021, and it should be on all our minds this year.



And for anyone monitoring the health of the world's longest democratic experiment, it should definitely come to mind when Nazis start showing up, for the same reason that one should pay attention when a canary in a coal mine keels over: There's something in the air.

But, as a rule, considerable effort has been expended on not paying attention.

One year ago, [the Nazis came to San Luis Obispo](#). They variously hung banners off a Templeton overpass and distributed fliers on South Street in San Luis Obispo. The fliers announced that "the comforts our European ancestors granted us are slowly being siphoned away," a succinct summary of white supremacy and its discontents.

Local keyboard warriors immediately jumped online to assert that those weren't really Nazis. The stiff-armed salute they were giving onlookers? That was the salute of the Roman legion. The odd-looking sigil festooning the "embrace white pride" banner they dangled off that Templeton overpass? That was a medieval rune. Never mind that it also appeared on the collars of Waffen SS officers.

On June 10, 2023, [Nazis rallied outside Walt Disney World](#) to proclaim their admiration for Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. They had several reasons to do so: The governor's book-banning tendencies, his persecution of the most vulnerable members of society, his rewrite of the curriculum to portray slavery as [a job training program](#). But their choice of location made it clear: The Nazis liked all those things fine, but what they really loved was the governor's decision to wield the power of the state to punish a private company that expressed views he disliked, his clearly stated intention to force Disney to run its business in line with the governor's ideology, i.e. the dictionary definition of fascism.

As Nazis are still folks from whom you don't want to get a big thumb's up, many MAGA disciples said those weren't really Nazis, claiming they were Democratic Party operatives and/or FBI agents. (Because, of course, both those entities keep large supplies of Nazi flags and

swastika-festooned paraphernalia on hand for special occasions.) They were just trying to make the governor look bad. They had to be something else. But no such luck: Florida Representative Anna Eskamani noted that “One of the neo-Nazis outside of Disney appears to be Ronald Murray Junior, who has appeared at multiple anti-LGBTQ protests in Texas.”

MAGA folk said that the mob that stormed the Capitol Building on Jan. 6, 2021, was actually Antifa, disguising themselves as Trump supporters to make the president look bad. Oddly, they also floated the notion that the mob was just peaceful protesters touring the Capitol building. The point being they must have been either the opposite of what they were or else nothing at all, just so long as they were not admitted to be an insurrectionist mob trying to overturn democracy at the president’s bidding.

Last summer, Robert Reich noted that Trump has painted the 2024 elections as the final battle for the soul of America. Reich didn’t disagree, insofar as that the battle will clarify “how eager Trump and the Republican Party are to abandon democracy and the rule of law in order to gain power. It will show that the vast majority of Americans reject their position.”

“Americans hold different views about many things,” he wrote, “but most of us oppose authoritarianism. We reject fascism. We value the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. We are committed to democracy, even with its many flaws. We support the rule of law. We want to live in a nation where no one is above the law. We want to be able to sleep at night without worrying that a president might unleash armed lackeys to drag us out of our homes because he considers us to be his enemy.”

This seems like a good place to mention that The Heritage Foundation has produced a governing blueprint for “the next Republican president” called Project 2025, which includes a 900-page book, [Mandate for Leadership](#). It is dedicated to replacing all federal civil servants with political henchmen, ensuring that the MAGA agenda will inhabit the entire government, and requiring all federal appointees to attend a Presidential Academy to make sure they will toe the Trumpian line. Per the *Mandate for Leadership*:

“The Cabinet secretaries, deputy secretaries, undersecretaries, assistant secretaries, deputy assistant secretaries, administrators, agency heads, and on and on that a new President chooses to place throughout the executive branch must be principled individuals already aligned with the President’s conservative vision. And they must be willing to execute it on the President’s behalf.”

That last sentence is a pointed reference to Trump’s first term, when there were “adults in the room” to restrain his totalitarian impulses and ensure that his craziest commands went nowhere. The Heritage Foundation wants to fix that mistake for the President who told the Proud Boys to “stand down and stand by.” The President who said there were “very fine people on both sides” of the clash in Charlottesville, Virginia, that resulted in the murder of Heather Heyer by white supremacists chanting “Jews will not replace us.” The President whose presidency paralleled and fueled the resurgence of neo-fascists, neo-Confederates, white nationalists and right-wing militias. The [“I am your retribution,”](#) dictator-on-day-one who will [deploy the U.S. military on domestic soil](#) to crush protests and otherwise fulfill the vision laid out by Russ Vought, his

former budget director and likely pick for his next chief of staff, for a [“post-Constitutional”](#) America.

The Heritage Foundation knows exactly who he is. The Nation magazine has aptly described Project 25 as [“the plot against America.”](#)

Pay attention.