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## To Hell in A Handbasket of Deplorables

By Mike Tully

Hillary Clinton was right: they are deplorable. “You know, to just be grossly generalistic, you could put half of Trump’s supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables,” she told a New York fund raiser in 2016. “The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamaphobic—you name it. And unfortunately, there are people like that. And he has lifted them up.”

Only half?

More than four and half years later, her comment smacks of understatement. Clinton focused on garden-variety bigots but didn’t realize – as most of us didn’t – that there were a lot more deplorables out there and many of them were dangerous and crazy. About a year after the election, an anonymous user who signed off as “Q” began posting bizarre conspiracy theories to an Internet cesspool known as “4chan.” He or she – or they – soon attracted followers who morphed into a cult-like movement known as QAnon. The author of the posts claimed to have a special security clearance known as “Q clearance,” [as reported by BBC News](#). “These messages became known as ‘Q drops’ or ‘breadcrumbs,’” recounted the BBC, “often written in cryptic language peppered with slogans, pledges and pro-Trump themes.”

The BBC defines the QAnon movement as “a wide-ranging, completely unfounded theory that says that President Trump is waging a secret war against elite Satan-worshipping paedophiles in government, business and the media.” When most of us initially heard about QAnon, we dismissed it as a lunatic fringe movement that would attract, at most, a splinter of the populace. How wrong we were. An [NPR/Ipsos poll published last December](#) found that “Thirty-seven percent are unsure whether this theory backed by QAnon is true or false, and 17% believe it to be true.” Think about that. If you encounter a group of half a dozen people, one of them might be actively psychotic. And you thought COVID was a reason to stay indoors.

The QAnonites share the basket with white supremacists, anarchists, would-be revolutionaries and criminals. It’s a larger and more dangerous basket than what Hillary Clinton described, as we learned on January 6<sup>th</sup>. The insurrection resulted from a volatile alchemy of devotion to Trump, resentment at the changing demographics of the country, and fear.

About fear: Philip Bump of the *Washington Post* [recently wrote about an Economist-YouGov poll](#) that asked respondents which of these statements “comes closest to your view.” The first statement read: “Our lives are threatened by terrorists, criminals, and illegal immigrants and our priority should be to protect ourselves.” The second statement: “It’s a big, beautiful world, mostly full of good people, and we must find a way to embrace each other and not allow ourselves to become isolated.” Three out of four Biden voters embraced the latter, more optimistic statement. Two-thirds of Trump voters endorsed the fearful statement.

Conservative columnist David Brooks, writing in *The New York Times*, [draws a line from the poll result to the insurrection of January 6<sup>th</sup>](#). “With this view,” he wrote, “the Jan. 6 insurrection was not a shocking descent into lawlessness but practice for the war ahead. A week after the siege, nearly a quarter of Republicans polled said violence can be acceptable to achieve political goals.” Brooks, a traditionally conservative Republican, advises his fellow traditionalists to “draw a bright line” between themselves and the deplorables. “This is no longer just about Trump the man,” he wrote, “it’s about how you are going to look at reality — as the muddle it’s always been, or as an apocalyptic hellscape.”

Right now, the apocalyptic hellscape is winning. “I can tell a story in which the Trumpians self-marginalize or exhaust themselves” Brooks wrote.” “Permanent catastrophism is hard,” he added. “But apocalyptic pessimism has a tendency to deteriorate into nihilism, and people eventually turn to the strong man to salve the darkness and chaos inside themselves.”

The GOP may be lost to the apocalyptic hellscape. Two freshman Republican members of congress, Marjorie Taylor Greene and Lauren Boebert, believe in the QAnon conspiracy. Josh “Raise A Fist” Hawley clearly hopes to ride a hellscape tide into the White House. When, as Brooks notes, a quarter of a political party endorses violence as legitimate, a nation is dangerously close to the encroaching shadow of Fascism. Deplorables don’t believe in democracy. Sadly, neither does most of the GOP.

The Republican Party once had governing principles but has devolved into an insurrection that supplants expression with repression. Consider attempts to limit the right to vote. The *Brennan Center for Justice* [recently reported that](#), “As of March 24, legislators have introduced 361 bills with restrictive provisions in 47 states.” Those are not the only attacks on civic participation. Recently introduced bills take on the right to assemble, imposing criminal and other penalties aimed at suppressing public protests. The provisions include, [as noted by \*The New York Times\*](#), “bills granting immunity to drivers whose vehicles strike and injure protesters in public streets.”

Meanwhile, Republican leaders ignore the dangerous excesses of groups like the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, Boogaloo Boys and others. All of them, along with white supremacists and neo-Nazis, have first-class seating in the GOP’s hand basket.

And we all know where the handbasket is headed.