

The Donald Trump threat to America

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On Monday in an *Op Ed* in the Washington Post, Economist and former U.S. Secretary of Treasury Lawrence Summers says he is weary of a Donald Trump presidency. Summers says that because of Trump's erratic policy proposals, especially Trump's statements about the possibility of restructuring United States debt in the manner of a failed real estate developer, that if Trump were to become president, he [Summers] would expect a protracted economic recession to begin within 18 months.

It could very well be that Trump would bring economic chaos were he to become president. But an even graver danger is what a Trump presidency might do to American ideals and its democracy.

In times of peril and danger America has been lucky to have just the right leaders to come along. Leaders like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Dwight David Eisenhower, and Harry S Truman. Why is Truman on this list? Well when Roosevelt died, America could have lost all its confidence, but it was a lucky accident that Truman was there to rise above all odds to become a worthy successor, to finish the job of concluding WWII and to steer us through the early cold war confrontations with the Soviet Union. Yes, America has been lucky.

Will Donald Trump be the one that breaks our string of luck? Will he be America's downfall, the one that proves the American idea was just a dream, that it was doomed to fail, that it was too out of synch with human behavior.

If there is one fundamental idea about America, an idea that makes America unique, it is no matter what land you come from or what is the color of your skin or what religion or creed you believe in, we welcome you to join us on our journey in creating a more perfect adherence to basic human rights and freedoms, and acceptance and tolerance of cultural, religious and racial differences.

Even in the face of past obstacles like slavery once having been the law of the land, racial segregation in fact and in law, discrimination towards hordes of Irish and Italian and Asian and other ethnic immigrants that flooded our cities, for the most part America has made progress towards making her ideals a reality.

How serious a threat is Donald Trump to these American ideals of tolerance and inclusion, cultural openness, equality of opportunity, and fairness? Is Trump just a bump in the road in our progress towards making these American ideals a reality? We don't really know the answer, but some libertarians and constitutional scholars are worried. In a New York Times article last Friday several experts were reported to question what could happen were Trump to get to the White House. The article quotes a retired law professor, David Post, about Trump statements against Mexicans and Muslims and Trump's encouragement of supporters to rough up demonstrators and his promise to make it easier for public officials to sue for libel. Post says, "This is the way authoritarianism starts."

The Times article quotes a lawyer at the libertarian Cato Institute, Ilya Shapiro questioning, "Who knows what Donald Trump with a pen and a phone would do?"

When Trump questioned the birth place, religion and love for America of Barack Obama, America's first black president, when Trump says he is for torture and for killing family members of terrorists, when he says Mexican immigrants are rapists, when he mocks a disabled journalist who is just trying to do his job, when he mocks women for their appearance, when he poses a religious test for entry into the United States, do you recoil and think that is not what makes America great? Or are you one of those who secretly or even openly cheer him on?

Is this one of those ah, ha moments when it is time to stand in favor of good over evil?

Tom Joyce who has written novels and stories that take place in WWII Vienna, Austria says he tries to imagine himself as a youth in Nazi Germany during the time of Hitler's rise to power and the beginnings of Hitler's wars. Joyce wonders would he have been a supporter of Hitler, perhaps a member of the Hitler's, Youth League of the National Socialist Workers? Or could he have risen above these temptations to go along and to be part of this world where Hitler was becoming popular and accepted as the charismatic leader of Germany? Or would he have swallowed the anti-Semitic hatred and become a hater himself?

In his novel The Known World, Edward P. Jones writes a compelling story of slavery in America, a story that doesn't preach but nonetheless teaches us the treacherous dimensions of, and the inherent cruelty of a law that allows one human being to own another. It is a story of blacks in 1830s Virginia who managed to get their freedom but themselves become slave owners. The law allowed this, it was the known world at the time, to own slaves was a way to get ahead, to better oneself, and the law protected any free man's right to do so.

Ask yourselves, if you had lived a free man, white or black, in Virginia in 1835 would you have gone along and accepted the slave laws or even to become a slave owner? Or would you have rebelled against such an abomination.

We of course don't get that chance to test ourselves, to put ourselves back in time to different known worlds, to see how we would have lived and behaved in those times.

But is this one of those times? Does the Donald Trump phenomena rise to the level of a moral test? Is it a test of our adherence and belief in the American ideal?