

HYDE PARK

Got something to share with fellow Democrats?
Now's the time and here's the place!

Occasional Virtual Soap Box

October 12, 2021

Caveat Lector! NSFW!

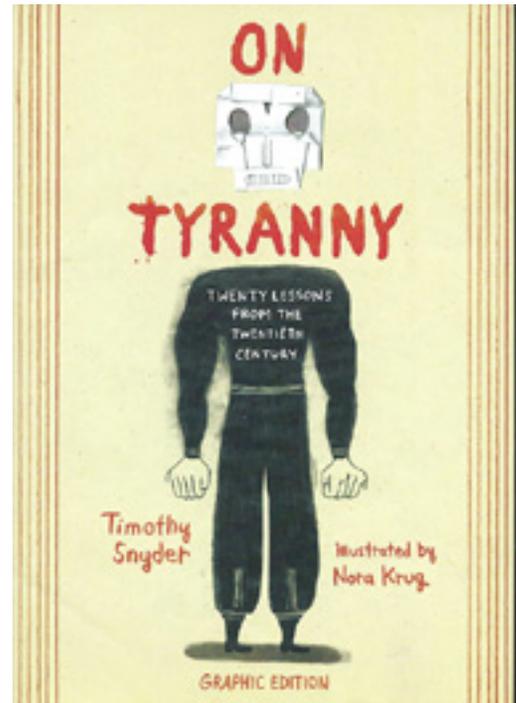
I don't swear nearly as much as a kid in middle school or a twice-impeached ex-presidential grifter, but I am on occasion a bit of a potty-mouth.

I'm working on a series of articles about finding and evaluating both information and ideas online. I'd like to include suggestions, recommendations (positive or negative), and anecdotes shared by readers based on their own personal experience. You can email them to me at wayne@looking4light.com.

I've already received a suggestion from Polly Steeves of the *Northwest Volusia County Democratic Club*. She's recommended a blog by a book author she and her husband Paul admire. I'll include it in the upcoming article.

Speaking of which, I just learned that there are rumors *Facebook* might change its name. This is a common ploy by companies buried in controversy, in this case the company's undermining of American democracy.

Reviewed in this issue:



Note

The content of this newsletter has not been approved by the Volusia County D.E.C. Each item is the responsibility of its author. Questions and comments are welcome. Direct them to wayne@looking4light.com.

To unsubscribe, email volusiadem@gmail.com

Paid political advertisement distributed by Volusia County DEC independently of any candidate or committee.

Feature

All politics is local...and also national!

Wayne Dickson

Almost everyone recognizes the aphorism, “All politics is a local.” Readers of *Hyde Park* will probably also recognize that it’s usually presumed the phrase was coined by then *Speaker of the House* “Tip” O’Neill of Massachusetts, although Barry Popik of *Red State* **insists** it was first used by *Washington AP* bureau chief Byron Price. I don’t really know...or care.



However, regardless of who coined it, the meaning of the aphorism isn’t nearly as clear as people suggest, and it doesn’t always hold true. Chris Matthews, who had been O’Neill’s Chief of Staff, cited the following as a positive example:

O’Neill introduced a \$1-billion jobs bill to the table. *House Republican Leader* Robert H. Michel of *Peoria, Illinois*, opposed the bill, but O’Neill delivered an address broadcast in *Peoria* that showed how many infrastructure problems in *Peoria* would be fixed by the bill. Matthews wrote, “By hitting his rival where he lived, O’Neill translated

a wholesale debate over national economic policy to the local, retail level.” (*Wikipedia—caveat emptor!*)

Andrew Gelman, writing for *FiveThirtyEight*, **cites** a counter example from *Newsweek* commentator Mickey Kaus:

[O]ne thinks of 1980, 1994 and 2008 as elections in which national issues and themes mostly predominated over local issues. ... 1998 (impeachment) and 2002 (terrorism) and 2006 (Iraq War) ... In other words, every midterm for the last two decades has been inexorably nationalized. [My emphasis.]

Kaus’s point is well taken, and I would suggest we add one more factor as we reflect on it: the *US Census* that’s conducted once every ten years. For example, remember what happened in the same year as the previous census? Yes, 2010. In Barack Obama’s words, *Democrats* were “shellacked” that year by the Koch brothers-financed “Astroturf” *Tea Party* revolution.



DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF VOLUSIA COUNTY

In many states, including *Florida*, irrationally radical *Republicans* gained control of statehouses and legislatures. Which meant that congressional redistricting was controlled in a majority of states by radical right-wingers. Which meant lots of gerrymandering. ***Which meant that a majority of elected representatives in Washington and state capitals and statehouses represent the interests of a minority of the voters.***

Since 2010 the *Supreme Court* has gutted the *Voting Rights Act*; we've had the ***Big Lie***; we've had the attempted coup to overthrow the *US* government; and we are being shattered by a tsunami of anti-democratic (small *d*) voter suppression. And, ta-da!, We've had another census. Which means more gerrymandering.

Don't talk to me about 2024! Because if we don't achieve significant gains in 2022, then we will

already have lost 2024 and every other election to follow. The *Republican* plan is simple:

- Choose who gets to vote.
- Choose who gets to count the ballots.
- If a Democrat still gets elected, then launch a never-ending campaign of lies and "fraudits."

We Democrats must work with, not against, one another. We must be willing to find the best candidates or even to run ourselves. We must be willing to contribute time, effort, and money. We must turn out the vote. And, obviously, we ourselves must vote!



Feature

A nation of laws...or of terror?

Wayne Dickson

Letter to Daytona Beach News-Journal.

I just now hit <Send> on this “Letter to the Editor.”

Is ours a nation of laws? Or a nation of bullying, threatening, intimidation, and terror?

ter·ror·ism | 'terə, rɪzəm|

the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims

The outrageous behavior we see at meetings of boards and councils here as well as across the state and nation has involved a threat of violence, often explicit and detailed. (The horrors experienced by Jennifer Jenkins of *Brevard County* are viral on the internet.) It's obviously an attempt at intimidation. That's the whole point. It's unlawful. Everyone has a right to speak passionately, but no one has a right to harass and threaten others. Finally, it's clearly in pursuit of political aims.



So, yes, both by common understanding and by formal definition it's terrorism.

What can we do about it? As I implied in my first paragraph, I hope ours will prove to be a nation of laws rather than of “in your face” playground bullies. But clearly that's a larger issue, which we can't directly control. On the other hand, we can control what kind of cities and counties ours will be.



How? On 1/6 Rudy Giuliani called for “trial by combat.” That's not the way we behave in a democracy. Instead, we rely on our elected officials to enforce the law. And we ourselves must directly and unwaveringly pressure those officials to do so by arresting, trying, and—on conviction—seriously penalizing those who scoff at the law by terrorizing fellow citizens.

Letters to the editor are limited to just 250 words by the *News-Journal*. Think of all the examples I could have assembled to support my argument!

Feature

Seeing what the framing leads us to believe.

Wayne Dickson

Liberals in general and mainstream *Democrats* in particular have two serious interlocking problems. First, we're inclined to think that presenting well-documented facts is sufficient to win an argument. Second, we're cripplingly clueless and insensitive when it comes to using language to frame a debate.

Let's start with facts. Back during the George W. Bush administration Ron Susskind wrote the following for *The New York Times Magazine*:

The aide [widely—but, as far as I know, not definitively—thought to be Karl Rove] said that guys like me were “in what we call the reality-based community,” which he defined as people who “believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.” I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. “That’s not the way the world really works anymore,” he continued. “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality — judiciously, as you will — we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors... and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.”

The next *Republican* administration was Trump’s; and, as with everything Trump touched, the attitude toward factual truth turned from the

sophistication we saw above to something revoltingly crude. Remember what Kellyanne Conway said when asked by Chuck Todd on *Meet the Press* about Sean Spicer’s having lied about the attendance at Trump’s inauguration?

Conway: “You’re saying it’s a falsehood and Sean Spicer, our press secretary, gave alternative facts to that.”

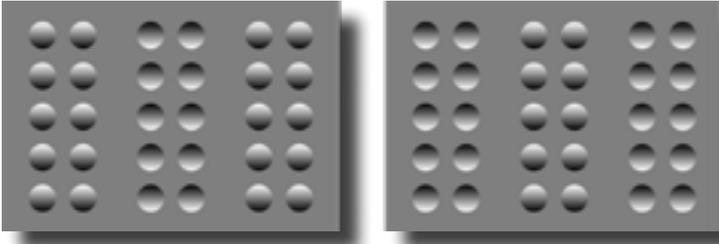
Todd: “Alternative facts are not facts. They are falsehoods.”

Conway: “If we’re going to keep referring to the press secretary in those types of terms I think we’re going to have to rethink our relationship here.”

(In the phrase made famous in *All the President’s Men*, that is what’s known as a “non-denial denial.”)

I used to teach a college course titled “Image and Identity.” One of the presentations I created for that course was titled *Believing Is Seeing*, a reversal of the common aphorism. We’ve all heard someone say, “I know what I saw!” We ourselves may have said it—for example, in reference to what happened on January 6th. But that’s wrong. The truth is that we *see* what we *know*.

The best way to confirm this is to look at a few optical illusions. Consider the images below. What's the difference between the two?



The answer is that there is absolutely no difference! To create the image on the right, I simply copied and rotated the one on the left 180°. The identical images are 2-dimensional, of course. If some of the circles seem to be raised bumps while others seem to be indentations, that's because our brains have been tricked into perceiving them that way.

Without an explicit indication to the contrary, our brains expect a source of light to shine down, by default convention from upper left to lower right. That being so, the upper left part of an indentation will be in shadow, the lower right illuminated. For a bump, the effect will be reversed. Thus, simply by turning the lefthand part 180°, I tricked your brain into perceiving the very same image as its mirror opposite. I reinforced the trick by adding a conventional drop shadow to the lower right of the combined image.

As I said, the key is the expectation that a light source will shine from upper left to lower right. Creating that sort of subconscious expectation and consequent interpretation of data is called "framing"—that is, creating a controlling metaphor. In this case we've been talking about the basic sense of vision. But it works exactly the same way with even the most complex phenomena.

Think of the complex healthcare program that came to be known as "Obamacare." (Calling it that was itself a way of creating a frame, by the way.) The actual full title was *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*. *Democrats* themselves quite happily shortened it to "ACA" or "Affordable Care Act" when they were talking. That was fedorkingly stupid!

Incidentally, it's 6:33 p.m., October 19, 2021. On air, speaking to Ari Melber, Barack Obama's former campaign manager David Plouffe just referred to the "Affordable Care Act"!

Why was calling it *The Affordable Care Act* a mistake? Because it ensured that debate about the program would totally omit the patient protection part (preexisting conditions *etc.*) and focus exclusively on the costs. Try it! Ask someone how he or she felt about the relative merits of the "Patient Protection Plan" compared to those of the "Affordable Care Act." I betcha most will have no idea you're talking about the very same program.

With that in mind, think about this headline: "4 Ways to Understand *Democrats'* \$3.5 Trillion Spending Bill." And this one: "What's in the *Democrats'* \$3.5 trillion spending plan?" Or this one: "*Democrats* Are Trying To Use \$3.5 Trillion Spending Bill To Pass Immigration Reform."

Spending bill? The framing is that a bunch of *Democrats* got together and said, "Hey, guys! Let's write a bill to spend \$3.5 Trillion!"

Bullshards! The *Democrats* got together and said, "Hey guys [for me that's a gender- and even species-neutral term]! Let's write a bill to save the planet; restore and update our infrastructure; improve our citizens' health, nutrition, and

education; *etc.* Let's pay for it by asking obscenely wealthy individuals and corporations to contribute their fair share of taxes. And finally, let's spread the process over a period of ten years."

In other words, it's not a bill to *spend* \$3.5T. It's a bill to *raise* \$3.5T and *invest* it over time in America's future.

Same Ari Melber show I mentioned just above, on a few moments before Plouffe, Mitch McConnell referred to the "*Democrat* tax and spend" bill.

Saying "*Democrat*" instead of "*Democratic*" is a word game *Republicans* began playing several decades back-back when they thought of something democratic (small *d*) as being something *good*, and they didn't want those positive connotations to attach to the *Democratic Party*. Now, of course, they've turned their backs on democracy and instead embraced autocracy. But verbal habits don't die easily!

I think we *Democrats* should use a bit of verbal *jiujitsu* on that slip of the tongue. McConnell unconsciously acknowledged that the investment package includes provision for *funding* (taxing the rich) as well as *spending*. It is not just a *spending* bill!

But we should go further. We should embrace the label "tax and spend." But simultaneously we should add "in contrast to the *spend without taxing Republicans*." Prime example? With the approval of both the *Republican House* majority led by Kevin McCarthy and the *Republican Senate* majority led by Mitch McConnell, Donald Trump added \$1.9T to the national debt in just two years. Together Trump, McCarthy, McConnell and their colleagues *spent* lavishly and *reduced* revenue by cutting taxes on wealthy individuals and corporations.

Oh, those headlines? The first was from the ultra right-wing *Heritage Society*; the second, from *CNN*; the third, from *NPR*! The major media almost always accept *Republican* framing. We *Democrats* must answer the clue phone and learn to fight back.



Turn on any news coverage of the Build Back Better bill, and you'll likely hear about the cost: \$3.5 trillion. But you won't hear much of anything about what the bill would actually fund. And that's making it incredibly easy for Mitch McConnell and a few corporate Democrats team up and kill the bill.

Polls show that the specific provisions of the bill are incredibly popular Universal pre-K.

Affordable daycare. Clean energy and bold climate action. Paid parental leave. Free community college. Expanding Medicaid to cover vision, dental, and hearing.

A member of Congress who opposes all of these popular programs especially a member of the president's own party—should face a political backlash. But if people don't know what the bill actually doe then the politicians are being let off the hook, and key social investments to lift up the working class and repair the planet are in deep, deep trouble.

Review

Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*, 2nd ed.

Wayne Dickson

The full title of Snyder's book is *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. The first edition was published in 2017 (I reviewed it then for the *DEC* newsletter). This second, "graphic" edition, just published, includes revised and updated revisions to the text. And, a huge plus, it is enhanced throughout by wonderful images and design features created by Nora Krug.

The graphic elements aren't there merely to "prettify" the text, but to make Snyder's dire call for Americans to wake up while there's still time and save our democracy jump off the page and remain memorable. (The book might have been titled *On Saving American Democracy from Trump-Inspired Tyranny*.)

Timothy Snyder is the *Levin Professor of History* at *Yale* and a permanent fellow at the *Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna*. He has also held positions at various European universities. He has mastered a variety of languages and written a number of important books on history.

Nora Krug is a German-American author and illustrator. Her graphic novel *Belonging: A German Reckons With History and Home* won the 2018 *National Book Critics Circle Award in Autobiography*, 2019 *Schubart-Literaturpreis*, and 2019 *Evangelischer Buchpreis*. She is also an *Associate Professor of Illustration* at the *Parsons School of Design* in New York City.

To provide an appetizer (or *amuse bouche* as they're called in hoity-toity restaurants), I'll cite several of Snyder's Lessons. Number 1 is "**Do not obey in advance.**" We're all familiar with the concept of self-censorship. A reporter thinks, "Why bother writing this? The editor will cut it anyway." Her editor thinks, "Why bother publishing this? The censor will cut it anyway." And that's how freedom of the press dies. If we obey in advance, every other freedom we enjoy will similarly die.

Lesson 9 is "**Be kind to our language.**" "Avoid pronouncing the phrases everyone else does," Snyder urges. "Think up your own way of speaking, even if only to convey that thing you think everyone else is saying. Make an effort to separate yourself from the internet. Read books." Yes, next issue I'll talk about using the *internet*. But this issue I'm providing a review of an outstanding *book*.

Number 10 is "**Believe in truth.**" These lessons are actually independent (though there's logic to Snyder's presentation), and I might recommend reversing the order on 9 and 10. As I say elsewhere in this newsletter, truth must be acknowledged, but truth alone won't carry the day. It must be presented in the language of effective argument.