

HYDE PARK

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

Submit contributions to wayne@looking4light.com.

Occasional Virtual Soap Box

December 3, 2021

You know how *GQP* bloviators are always saying, “*Democrats* want X; liberals say Y; or progressives believe Z”?

Have you ever encountered that crap and thought to yourself, “Hey! I’m a *Democrat*/liberal/progressive; but I don’t want, say, or believe any such nonsense!”

If so, you’ve encountered one of the most common and most annoying of logical fallacies: the straw man argument.

A straw man fallacy occurs when someone takes another person’s argument or point, distorts it or exaggerates it in some kind of extreme way, and then attacks the extreme distortion, as if that is really the claim the first person is making. (Owl.)

When you bump into it, call it out. Don’t let anyone turn you into a scarecrow.



Wayne’s blog: <https://looking4light.com/scarab/>.

Back issues of *Hyde Park* can be found there.

Note

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Editorial

Give 'em an inch, and they'll take a mile!

Wayne Dickson

Anyone who's ever reared a child, taught school, or trained an animal has had to learn quickly the necessity of setting boundaries and enforcing them—consistently and continually. And all of us who've had to put up with Donald Trump for the past six years know that the same rules apply in politics, in law, and in government.

Another rule that's becoming increasingly more firmly hammered home is that of the necessity for speedy, fair, and consistent justice. A phrase that wasn't invented but was made infamous during the O.J. Simpson trial was "rush to judgment." A second phrase (or sentence) was made famous a few years earlier by Martin Luther King Jr.: "Justice delayed is justice denied." The golden mean between the two is justice delivered with due haste and without undue delay.

Closing on 4000 actions, Donald Trump is by far the most litigious president in *U.S.* history. He has won or settled to his own advantage many cases simply by dragging them through the courts until his opponents have either run out of money or lost the will to continue. Remember how long it took to get Don McGahn before a congressional committee? Remember how long the "Fraudit" dragged on in Arizona?

Donald Trump goes by rules like this: "If I don't like you or if you have something I want to take away from you, I'll hit you. Then I'll complain about how unfair it was you forced me to hit you. If you hit me, then I'll hit you twice as hard." His sycophants are taking it even further.



At a **rally** in *Franklin, N.C.*, Madison Cawthorne had this to say:

The *Second Amendment* is not for hunting or target shooting but rather for fighting tyranny. He advises the crowd to begin stockpiling ammunition for what he says is likely American-versus-American "bloodshed" over unfavorable election results.

And, of course, we're all familiar with Paul Gosar's anime style cartoon hey Richie pictures himself murdering Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.



Not long after the notorious phone call in which Donald Trump urged *Georgia Secretary of State* Brad Raffensperger to commit fraud by “finding” just enough votes to help him win the electoral college contest in *Georgia*, Raffensperger made to follow and comment to Trump:

What you don't have the ability to do, and you need to step up and say this, is stop inspiring people to commit potential acts of violence. Someone's going to get hurt. Someone's going to get shot. Someone's going to get killed.

The same should be said to Cawthorne, Gosar, Marjorie Taylor-Green, and other *Republican* elected officials. Their vicious talk and increasingly aggressive behavior continues to gather momentum as it rolls downhill. We've seen it manifested already right here in *Volusia County* in local board meetings.

An attempted violent overthrow of the government of the *United States* occurred on January 6th. As I write, it is now November 28th. Those who were

most responsible for the insurrection have thus far not been held accountable in court for their actions. They have treated *Congress* and the law with utter contempt. Indeed, members of *Congress* who participated in the insurrection have been allowed to lie about it and to do their best to block any investigation of their crimes.



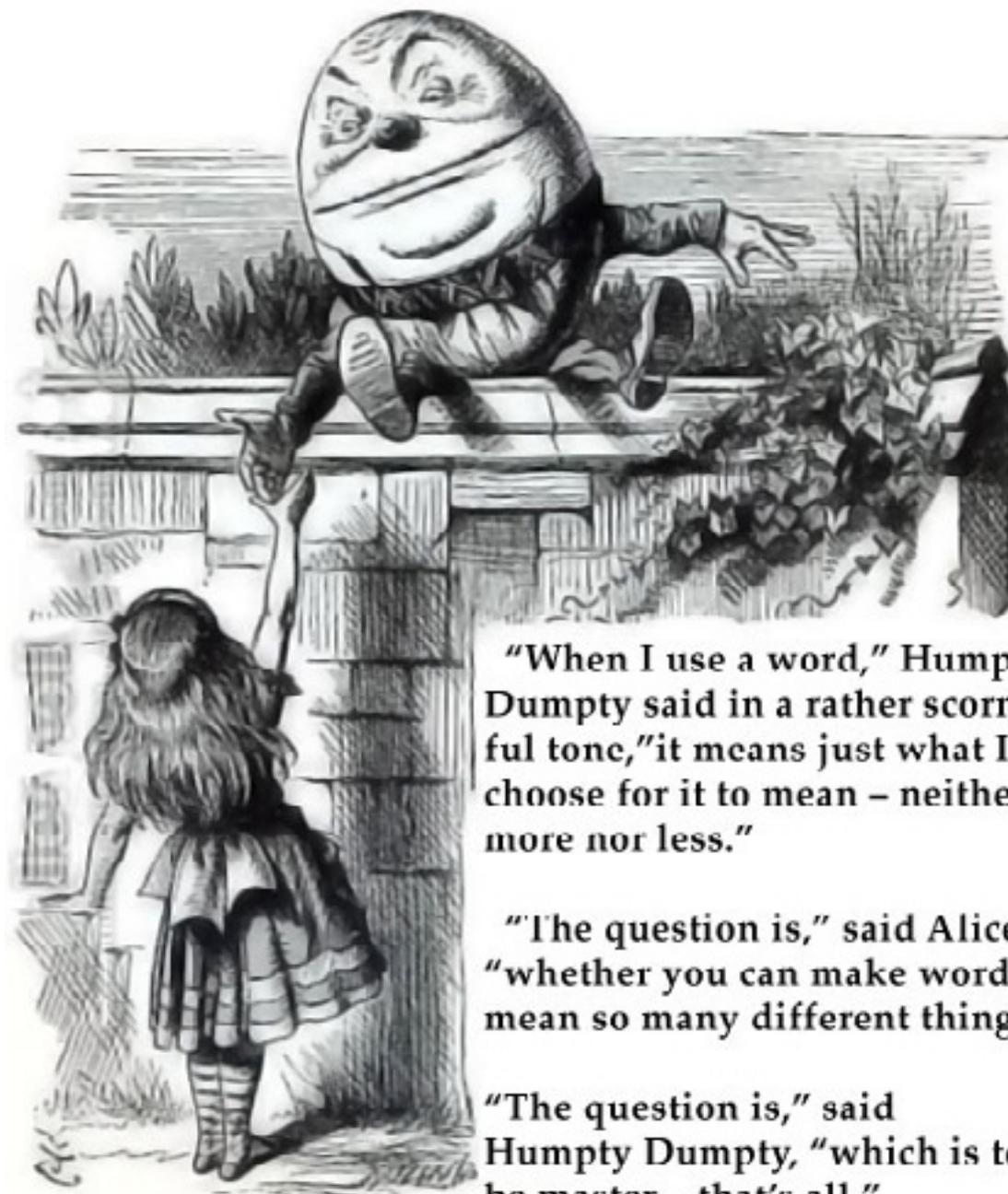
They've been given an inch, and are now well on their way toward grabbing a mile and more. As Raffensperger said, “Someone's going to get hurt. Someone's going to get shot. Someone's going to get killed.” And not just “someone.” American democracy itself will die. We must not give up. We must make our keyboards, our telephones, and our presence felt.



Feature

Words, words, words...

Wayne Dickson



"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose for it to mean – neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master – that's all."

What do words mean? Who gets to decide? Why?

Everywhere, really, but in the U.S. by law—because we have no *Royal* or *National Academy* of language—words mean what the people using those words think they mean. This creates an obvious problem. What if person (a) speaks or writes a word thinking it means “X”; but person (b), hearing or reading that word, thinks it means “Y”?

I opened this article with one of John Tenniel’s famous illustrations from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. Humpty Dumpty tells Alice that he uses words arbitrarily, to mean what he chooses for them to mean at that particular moment. Very few of us are that openly arrogant. But all of us use words to mean what they mean to us and what we *assume* they mean to others, confident that those others will operate by the same assumption. They won’t, of course. They can’t! Too many independent variables are at work.



Last night my wife Jewel and I were watching the Christmas movie *Polar Express*. A little girl gives the train conductor her ticket, and he uses his hand device to punch the word “LEAD” on it. “Lead?” She asks, with puzzlement, pronouncing the name of the heavy metal.

“No,” the conductor replies. “The word is also pronounced ‘lead,’ ” pronouncing it like the name of *Leeds Castle* in southern *England*.

Same spelling, different pronunciation, different meaning altogether.



In *Act II, scene 2* of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the courtier Polonius volunteers to King Claudius to try to discover why Prince Hamlet is acting so strange. This is an abbreviated version of the conversation that ensues:

LORD POLONIUS

What do you read, my lord?

HAMLET

Words, words, words.

LORD POLONIUS

What is the matter, my lord?

HAMLET

Between who?

LORD POLONIUS

I mean, the matter that you read, my lord.

...

LORD POLONIUS

[Aside] Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't.

Hamlet is being deliberately cruel to Polonius (with some justification). He's doing so by playing with the meaning of words. Polonius asks what he's reading, and Hamlet's reply is totally literal: "Words." He ignores the fact that the words are arranged as phrases, clauses, and sentences, printed in the form of a book.

Polonius tries to clarify by asking him, "What is the matter?" He's using the word "matter" in the sense of "subject" or "meaning." Hamlet deliberately misinterprets, answering as if "matter" meant "wrong" or "problem."

Communication is always difficult, even more when "words, words, words" are written rather than spoken.

My second year of college at *Stetson*, I took a course required of all English majors, designed to enhance our understanding of language and vocabulary. I remember that our professor was impressed by the fact that I recognized the distinction between *uninterested* and *disinterested*.

Back in those days the former meant *bored*, the latter *objective*. (If on trial, you would want the judge and jury to be *disinterested*, but not *uninterested*.) Ironically, I'm willing to bet that if you look them up in a current dictionary you'll find them listed as synonyms. Language is alive. Meaning, pronunciation, usage, *etc.* evolve continually. Those who are using language don't always keep up as they should.

Feature

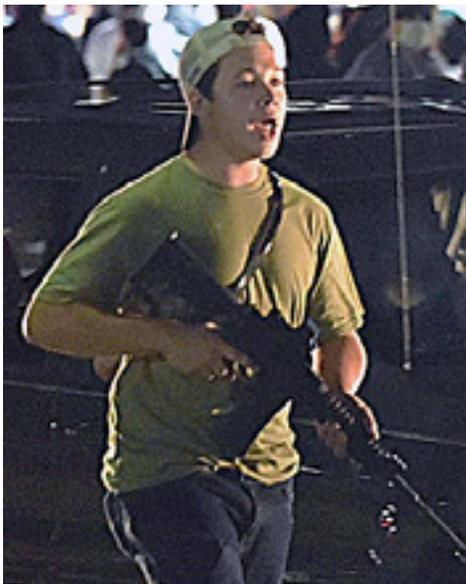
Thr rhyming and repetition of history

Guest Contributor

“History doesn’t repeat itself, but it often rhymes.”

—Mark Twain

This November 2021 saw two trials. In the first, the defendant, a 17-year-old named Kyle Rittenhouse, who fancied himself a protector of property, got a friend to give him a semi-automatic assault rifle so he could patrol the streets of a city in a neighboring state where protests and looting had occurred. His presence provoked others and he shot three, killing two unarmed men and permanently injuring another. He claimed self-defense, was found not guilty, became a hero of the conservative right wing, and became best buds with Trump when he visited the Don.



In the second trial, three self-appointed armed vigilantes in pickup trucks chased an unarmed jogger who they said they supposed to be a burglar, killing him when he tried to defend himself. These three defendants also claimed self-defense, but luckily one of them had videotaped their crime and all were found guilty of murder.



Since 2020, militia groups have been involved in rallies against COVID-19 related restrictions, gun control measures, and Black Lives Matter protests. After Trump lost the election, militia groups mobilized to protest the election results, culminating in the January 6 insurrection in which members with ties to various militia groups participated in the attack. (Trump responded, “We love you. You’re very special.”) In recent years, there have been increasing incidents in which *Republicans* have directly co-opted militia groups for political and ideological purposes. Threats have been made

to school board members who try to protect students' health and lives, election officials who don't support the Big Lie, and even moderate *Republicans* who attempt bi-partisan legislation.



Can things get worse? Will the results of the Rittenhouse trial embolden any of these militia groups like the Oath Keepers or Three Percenters, or just another 17-year-old to roam the streets armed to the teeth while hiding behind *Old Glory* (or a *Confederate* flag)? Will they set up victims so as to attempt to justify a claim self-defense? Will racists be more careful about videotaping their crimes? This country has midterm elections coming up and primaries for the 2024 soon after. Should we be worried?

I enjoy reading about history and often find something of the past seeming to relate to something contemporary. Currently, I'm reading historian William L. Shirer's 1960 study *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* and have found a number of disturbing similarities

between then and the present times. I have always been puzzled as to how one of the most advanced and cultured countries of that time could be taken over by a radical right wing which represented a minority percentage of the population and which was led by an admittedly bigoted, divisive, and hate-filled demagogue.

I've found a number of examples from Shirer's work that seem, as least from my vantage point, to rhyme with the present, when exactly the same phenomenon seems to be transpiring right here in the *United States*.

- [Hitler] was intrigued by what he called the "infamous spiritual and physical terror" which he thought was employed ... against their political opponents. At first ex-servicemen were assigned to attend the meetings to silence hecklers and, if necessary, toss them out. Hitler organized a bunch of roughneck war veterans into "strong-arm" squads, officially naming them the *Sturmabteilung* ["storm troopers"], abbreviated "S.A." The storm troopers [were] outfitted in brown uniforms (p. 66).



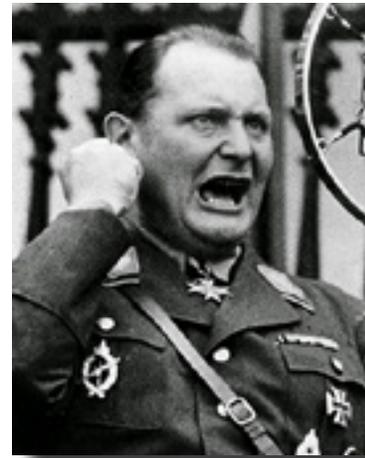
These uniformed rowdies, not content to keep order at *Nazi* meetings, soon took to breaking up those of the other parties (p. 77).

- But the brown-shirted *S.A.* never became much more than a motley mob of brawlers. To have at hand a more dependable band, Hitler created the *S.S.—Schutzstaffel* (“protection team”)—...and made them swear a special oath of loyalty to him personally (p. 175).
- [Hitler], who was so monumentally intolerant by his very nature, was strangely tolerant of one human condition—a man’s morals. No other [political] party in Germany came near to attracting so many shady characters (p. 177).

Hitler regarded them as ...a band to strike terror in the streets against his political opponents and to keep up political enthusiasm in the *Nazi* ranks (p. 233).

- [In 1931] A wave of political violence and murder such as even Germany had not previously seen immediately followed. The storm troopers swarmed the streets seeking battle and blood (p. 239).
- [In 1933] Goering [cabinet minister and later commander of the *Luftwaffe*] removed hundreds of officials and replaced them with Nazis, mostly *S.A.* and *S.S.* officers. He ordered the police to avoid “at all costs” hostility to the *S.A.* and the *S.S.* ...but on the other hand to show no

mercy to those who were “hostile to the State.” He urged the police “to make use of firearms” and warned that those who didn’t would be punished. This was an outright call for the shooting down of all who opposed Hitler. Police power ...was thus largely carried out by *Nazi* thugs. It was a rash *German* who appealed to such a “police” for protection against the *Nazi* terrorists (p. 275).



Hermann Goering

- [L]aw and order were crumbling in *Germany* as the frenzied brown-shirted gangs roamed the streets, arresting and beating up and sometimes murdering whomever they pleased while the police looked on without lifting a nightstick. Judges were intimidated; they were afraid for their lives if they convicted and sentenced a storm trooper even for cold-blooded murder (page 292).

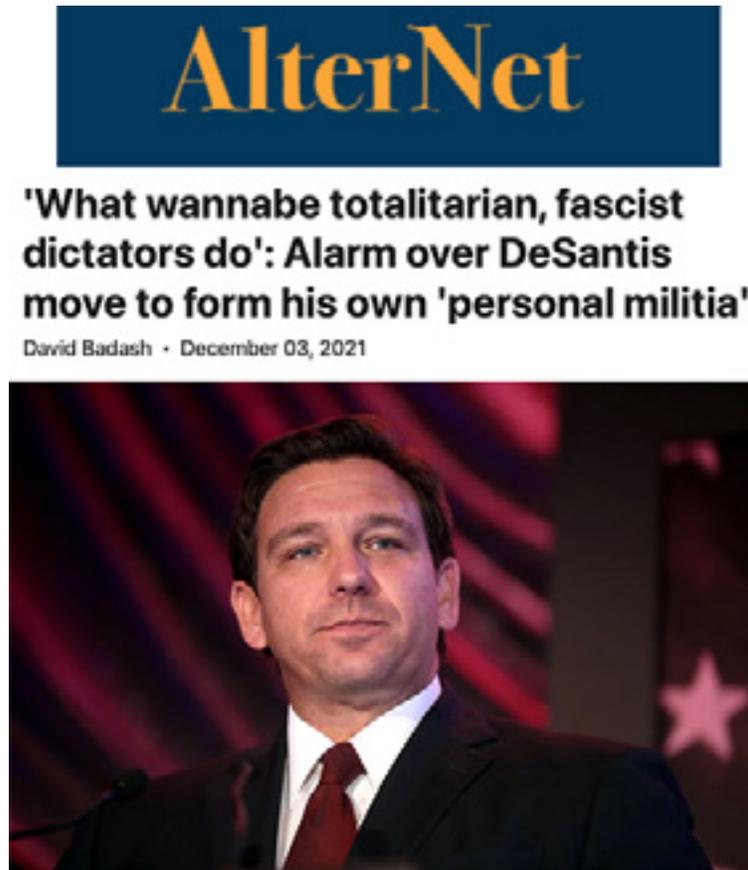
“Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it.”

Winston Churchill [and others]

Feature

And, to follow up the previous article...

Wayne Dickson



Critics are responding with alarm to news *Florida GOP* Governor Ron DeSantis is asking for millions of taxpayer funds to create his own militia force, separate from the existing *National Guard*.

CNN calls it “a World War II-era civilian military force that he, not the Pentagon, would control.” And while the law allows for the move, it was created “as a temporary force to fill the void left behind” when the state’s *National Guard* was deployed overseas, and “disbanded after the war ended.”

But the highly-controversial *Florida Republican*, seen as one of the top 2024 *GOP* presidential candidates, is also making clear his motives are a further escalation in his war of words against the Biden administration.

“DeSantis also said this unit, called the *Florida State Guard*, would be ‘not encumbered by the federal government.’ He said this force would give him ‘the flexibility and the ability needed to respond to events in our state in the most effective way possible.’”