

Letters from an American

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Both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* today ran op-eds from Republicans or former Republicans urging members of their party who still value democracy to vote Democratic until the authoritarian faction that has taken over their party is bled out of it.

In the *New York Times*, Miles Taylor and Christine Todd Whitman wrote, “We are Republicans. There’s only one way to save our party from pro-Trump extremists.” Taylor served in the Department of Homeland Security and was the author of the 2018 *New York Times* piece by “Anonymous” criticizing former president Trump. Whitman was governor of New Jersey from 1994 to 2001, after which she headed the Environmental Protection Agency under President George W. Bush.

Taylor and Whitman note that “rational Republicans” had hoped after Trump’s defeat that they might take back the party, but it is clear now, they write, that they are losing the party’s “civil war.” But while they originally hoped to form a new party, they now agree that the only way to stop Trumpism “is for us to form an

alliance with Democrats to defend American institutions, defeat far-right candidates, and elect honorable representatives next year—including a strong contingent of moderate Democrats.” To defend democracy, they write, “concerned conservatives must join forces with Democrats on the most essential near-term imperative: blocking Republican leaders from regaining control of the U.S. House of Representatives” and the Senate.

They call for Republicans to put country over party and back moderate Democrats, while also asking Democrats to concede that “there are certain races where progressives simply cannot win and acknowledg[e] that it makes more sense to throw their lot in with a center-right candidate who can take out a more radical conservative.”

At the *Washington Post*, Max Boot takes an even stronger stand: “I’m no Democrat—but I’m voting exclusively for Democrats to save our democracy.” Boot is a Russian-American specialist in foreign affairs who identifies as a conservative but no longer supports the Republican Party. He writes: “I’m a single-issue voter. My issue is the fate of democracy in the United States. Simply put, I have no faith that we will remain a democracy if Republicans win power. Thus, although I’m not a Democrat, I will continue to vote exclusively for Democrats—as I have done in every

election since 2016—until the GOP ceases to pose an existential threat to our freedom.”

Boot singles out the dueling reports from the Senate Judiciary Committee about the nine ways in which Trump tried to pressure then-acting attorney general Jeffrey Rosen to back his claims of election fraud. The Democrats on the committee established these efforts with an evidence-based report, only to have the Republicans on the committee, led by Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA), respond that the president was simply trying to promote confidence in the election results and that since he did not ultimately replace Rosen with another lawyer who promised to use the Justice Department to challenge the election—after the other leaders of the Justice Department threatened to resign in a mass protest—he did not actually abuse his office.

Boot writes, “It is mind-boggling that a defeated president won’t accept the election outcome.... What is even more alarming is that more than 60 percent of Republicans agree with his preposterous assertion that the election was stolen and want him to remain as the party’s leader.”

Taylor, Whitman, and Boot are hardly the first to be calling out the anti-democratic consolidation of the Republican Party. Yesterday, Representative Adam Schiff

(D-CA), who chairs the House Intelligence Committee, managed Trump's first impeachment trial, and sits on the House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the U.S. Capitol, gave an interview to CBS's *Face the Nation* in which he called the Republican Party "an autocratic cult around Donald Trump" that is "not interested in governing" or "maintaining the solvency of the country."

But what makes today's op-eds stand out is that they are from former Republicans, that they are calling not for a separate party but for Republicans to shift their votes to the Democrats, and that their identification of the Republicans as an existential threat to our democracy is being published in major newspapers.

Mainstream television and newspapers have been slow to identify the radicalization of the Republican Party as a threat to democracy. The Eastman memo, uncovered by Bob Woodward and Robert Costa at the end of September in their new book *Peril*, flew largely under the radar screen, explained away as more of Trump being Trump even as it laid out, in writing, the steps to overturn the 2020 election and even as we knew that the former president tried to put that plan into place. A study by *Media Matters* showed that ABC, NBC, and CBS all chose not even to mention the memo; they reach more than 20 million Americans.

On Saturday, a monologue by comedian Bill Maher about the Eastman memo titled “Slow Moving Coup” laid out in 8 minutes how Trump tried to steal the 2020 election and how, when officials resisted him, he set out to solidify his power for 2024. Maher woke people up to the ongoing crisis in our democracy.

Maher’s monologue, along with the draft Senate Judiciary Committee report, which sets out in detail the efforts the former president made to bend the Department of Justice to his will, seems to have driven home to members of the press the fact that they cannot present today’s news as business as usual, especially after their presentation of the debt ceiling crisis as a political horse race when one side was trying to save the country and the other to destroy it. In the *Philadelphia Inquirer* yesterday, journalist Will Bunch wrote: “The future of American democracy depends, frankly, on whether journalists stop burying their head in ‘the work’ of balanced-but-misleading reporting and admit that, yes, actually, we are at war.”

Bunch pointed out that on Friday, the Nobel Peace Prize went to two journalists, Maria Ressa of the Philippines and Dmitry Muratov of Russia. Both have braved political persecution and threats to hold the autocratic leaders of their countries—Rodrigo Duterte and Vladimir Putin—to account, battling against the online disinformation and attacks on the press that shore up their support.

"In a battle for facts, in a battle for truth, journalism is activism," Ressa said in 2020. Disinformation, she said, "is how you transform a democracy. This is death by a thousand cuts. The same thing is happening in the United States. I think the goal of influence operations or information operations is to seed it, repeat it, incite hate and...change the way real people think, and that impacts the real world. This is happening all around the world. That's what the research has shown us, that's what the data shows us."

In 1854, the elite slaveholders who controlled the Democratic Party at the time pressured Congress to bow to their will and overturn the Missouri Compromise that had kept enslavement out of the western territories. Northern men, who disagreed among themselves on party allegiance, and immigration, and economic policies, and women's rights, and Black rights, recognized that the acquisition of new western slave states would mean it was only a question of time until the enslavers took over the federal government and made their oligarchical system national.

Northern men recognized they must put their political differences aside until they saved democracy. Abraham Lincoln later remembered that men were "thunderstruck and stunned" by the passage of the law that overturned the Missouri Compromise, "and we reeled and fell in utter confusion. But we rose each fighting, grasping whatever he could first reach—a scythe—a pitchfork—a chopping axe, or a

butcher's cleaver.... “[O]ur drill, our dress, and our weapons, are not entirely perfect and uniform,” Lincoln said, but “[w]hen the storm shall be past, [men] shall find us still Americans; no less devoted to the continued Union and prosperity of the country than heretofore.”

Notes:

<https://www.npr.org/2020/08/06/898852112/philippine-journalist-maria-ressa-journalism-is-activism>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/11/opinion/2022-house-senate-trump.html>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/10/11/im-no-democrat-im-voting-exclusively-democrats-save-our-democracy/>

<https://talkingpointsmemo.com/news/schiff-blasts-gop-for-becoming-an-autocratic-cult-around-trump>



Face The Nation

@FaceTheNation

WATCH: "We have a Republican Party that is now an autocratic cult around Donald Trump," California Democrat [@RepAdamSchiff](#) tells [@margbrennan](#).

"It is not interested in governing. It's not interested in even maintaining the solvency in the credit worthiness of the country."

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https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/media/sullivan-eastman-memo/2021/09/29/68d93000-211f-11ec-9309-b743b79abc59_story.html

<https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/nobel-peace-prize-ressa-muratov-journalism-20211010.html>

Abraham Lincoln, Speech at Peoria, Illinois, October 16, 1854.