

Corey Brettschneider: *The Presidents and the People: Five Leaders Who Threatened Democracy and the Citizens Who Fought to Defend It*. Identifies earlier moments in US history when elected presidents acted anti-democratically and in so doing endangered democracy. How such presidents interpreted (maybe genuinely understood--but does it matter?) the Constitution to authorize, even require their conduct. How "constitutional constituencies" understood the Constitution and the foundational principles of the US differently and fought--resisted--presidential impulses. Except for Watergate, where the people didn't/couldn't fully counteract the president's malfeasance. And of course we have the felon now. Brettschneider ends by invoking Patrick Henry and his concern with a president who would intentionally use immense presidential powers--anti-democratic, self-serving, uncorrectable--to destroy our democracy...

Targeting resisters and pardoning criminal partisans, anti-democratic stances and actions, appeals to "mandates" from the favored (whatever numbers elected) to exploit, deny, and otherwise mistreat the disfavored and the opposed--nothing new here folks. Same old and tired playbooks. But the plays shape-shift and require ongoing and focused resistance not to destroy them (do we/can we ever?) but at least to send them back under their rocks for a while...

Adam Becker: *More, Everything, Forever: AI Overlords, Space Empires, and Silicon Valley's Crusade to Control the Fate of Humanity*. Lucidly and credibly identifies and analyzes the assumptions that allow technologists to promote and justify their aspirations. Becker presents Andressen, Thiel, Bezos, Zuckerberg, and countless technologists both well-known and little and turns them into cartoon villains as he explodes the ideas like the notion that physical things can grow or shrink infinitely. Whatever nourishes growing runs out; then growth stops and the entire system actually dies. The specific nanometric size of silicon atoms limits Moore's Law. Becker also explains that technical titans obsess about benefits they aim to provide (solutions for everything) and about new problems they foresee in a devastated future (hostile artificial general intelligence that masters its human developers). As they do so, they downplay real problems that challenge real people in today's world (hunger, housing, oppression). How/why can they ignore real needs? Because expected value formulae multiply high improbability by speculative humongous populations and justify such negligence. No wonder people who don't trade in such abstractions distrust and hate people who do. On p. 244, Becker cogently quotes Upton Sinclair: "it is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends on his not understanding it."

Isabel Wilkerson: *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. Characterizes "caste" as a hierarchy of human rankings more pernicious and self-sustaining than mere racial characteristics, however specious. Identifies 3 major, visible and influential caste societies that stand out among the countless hierarchies that have emerged on earth: India, Nazi Germany, and the United States. Notes that the Nazis who would construct a German caste system built upon an archetype of US racism (centuries ahead of them). Explodes the common notion that people voted against their own interests when they elected the felon by explaining that the interest driving many of those people was their place of advantage within a caste system, which serves their interests more

than economic or other measures of social well-being. Our caste system, often not even acknowledged as such, overwhelms more readily recognized and understood factors. Jeffrey Kopsten & Stephen E. Hanson: *The Assault on the State*. Addresses “patrimonialism.” An approach to government that treats the government as the family business of the leader—truly a government of men as opposed to a government of laws—and yes, it’s usually men at the center and advantaged. Contrasts patrimonialist governance with expert-based bureaucracy and for all its foibles and failings, promotes stronger bureaucracy as the antidote to patrimonialism. Situates Trump/Trumpism as one of several 21st-century patrimonialist states (including Russia, Hungary, Israel, Boris Johnson’s UK, and US, with aspirants in Turkey, India, Brazil) adapting to the model inspired by Tsarist Russia by Putin. Inherently corrupt and inept, patrimonial governments fail but not necessarily before they significantly damage their countries, and skilled bureaucracy (civil service) doesn’t necessarily replace them. It takes deliberate effort.

Heather Cox Richardson: *Democracy Awakening: Notes on the State of America*. Surveys U.S. History as a struggle between elites (want to honor hierarchy with themselves at the top and rule the rest) and egalitarians who would honor equality of all (as understanding has evolved). Relates this struggle to current situation. The right has always simmered to boiled and the Civil War represents their most nearly successful attempt to establish and ensconce their dominance. Richardson conflates authoritarianism, racism, right-wing religion, political sabotage of the previous admin (always Dems, by Repubs) and denigration of facts. Standard list of Republican villains: Nixon, Goldwater, Reagan (aligned and leveraging), Roger Stone...along with Strom Thurmond. The idea that some people are better than others-The Republicans are definitely the bad guys.

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt: *How Democracies Die*. Two professors of government at Harvard. One studies Latin America and the developing world; the other, Europe from the nineteenth century to the present. So they know what threats to democracy look like and why these threats develop. They wrote this book during Felon 1.0 and saw the signs and started to worry. They also propose ideas and scenarios that might help...but I’m not sure how valid or promising they are now, several months into Felon 2.0. But you learn a lot by reading them. They also wrote *Tyranny of the Minority*, which I need to reread or at least review before I add that book to this list. It’s about how U.S. institutions allow the conservative, largely rural, mostly white minority to dominate the rest of us politically and governmentally. I’ll review it more carefully and add it. Watch this space.

Brian Merchant: *Blood in the Machine*. Merchant presents Luddites as pro-worker activists who resisted the dehumanizing workers and controlling them with machine-based factories and exacerbating the inequality so facilitated. Luddites weren’t anti-technology/anti-progress throwbacks. They didn’t object to technology per se. They opposed the human agents who would use technology to impoverish and control the skilled workers that machine labor could replace. They opposed how technology enabled an elite class to control and deny workers—a social development.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJSehRIU34w> Chenowith TED talk