This is What Democracy Looks Like



Friday, January 20, 2017, Inauguration Day, was one of the hardest days of my life. I felt, at turns, crushing despair and overwhelming nausea, mingled with a steady stream of red-hot rage at the people who brought us to this sorry pass.

Many friends refused to watch. I would not have missed it for the world.

A long-habituated politics nerd, I watched the proceedings, as I have for every transfer of power since Nixon rode his helicopter into the sunset.<fn>I also watched LBJ take the oath, but missed the incoming Nixon event. </fn> Every time, I have been amazed that this kind of thing happens, that an outgoing President can welcome his successor with grace, courtesy, and dignity, and walk away – voluntarily – to leave the office in the hands of someone eagerly prepared to undo as much of the standing legacy as possible.<fn>The transfer from Reagan to Bush an obvious exception to this dynamic.</fn> Not because it is written into law – it's not – but because it has become a symbolic dramatization of the kind of Republic this nation strives to become.

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Another reason to watch: this could be the last time it ever happens this way.

Try to imagine President Asterisk gracefully welcoming his

successor. Go on, I can wait.

Trump and his crowd – and that includes pretty much the entire GOP at this point – has shown themselves more than happy to discard any of the established norms of governance that they find inconvenient. Conflict of interest, naked cronyism, and – very likely – collusion with a foreign government to influence the election outcome<fn>A neat trick invented by Nixon, enhanced by Reagan, and perfected by this gang.</fn>, all of these decisions to violate established norms are a clear declaration: They will not be bound by anything other than a desire to impose their will.

The stonewalling of Merrick Garland, the steamrolling of Tillerson, DeVos, &c. – these are the tactics of a gang that has been given the power to do whatever it wants. And you can bet they are going to use it to the hilt.

This is not what democracy looks like.

But it's what we got.

For now.

Because as despair-inducing as Friday was, the next day was all bright-sunshine, despite the all-day rain and tornado watches. On Friday, we despaired. On Saturday, we marched, motherfuckers.

I'm a cynic about marches, street protest. Oh, I show up sometimes, and usually end up feeling embarrassed by the miasma of impotence that attends most such events. My standard experience: a pitifully small cluster of people waving unreadable signs, desperate to gin up enthusiasm by mandating choreographed theatrics and indecipherable slogans.

And despite the occasional horn toots of support, I generally felt like people were laughing at our pathetic gestures. Because if it was the other side doing it, I would be laughing

at them, too.

So the day of the Women’s March upon us, I was all set to stay home and bury myself in books and music. But Herself was determined to go, hoped I’d join her, gently suggested it would be a good thing to do. I’ve been to too many of these things, found myself in a bedraggled cluster of a couple dozen earnest people, and gone home more hopeless than I had been before. And the forecast called for terrific thunderstorms all day. I pictured myself standing like a drowned rat with a couple of anarchists in Guy Fawkes masks. I demurred, opposed, argued.

I went. And man, am I glad I did.

We arrived about two hours ahead of the march. There were around a hundred people there, already way past my expectations. Alrighty then.

We ducked into Proof for a fortifying pint. It was nearly empty when we arrived.



The intrepid team

Twenty minutes later, it looked like this.



The pudding is in the Proof

And when we walked outside, we found this.



This is what it looks like

And this.



Let it rain down justice

And it rained. And people chanted, often unintelligibly, but with real fervor. We were not alone.

Beyond a certain size, it’s hard to tell from inside a crowd just how big it is. But when we reached the top of the hill and looked back, our scientific calculations gave us a precise answer:

Fucking huge.



Twitter let us know that it was happening pretty much everywhere. All around the globe, from Australia to Kenya (!) to Paris and London and Dublin. A protest organized on a ship in Antarctica.

And there was New York and Boston, Chicago, LA. Washington, DC.

Smaller towns, too, like Helena, Montana (population 30,000), which turned out 10,000 people. Tiny Mentone, Alabama (!), pop. 360, turned out 50 people.



Mentone, AL. The Bitter South. Hell yes.

And when it was all said and done, lil ole Tallahassee, Florida, population 190,000 or so…how'd we do?

Official estimate: 14,000-plus.

Hot damn. This is what democracy looks like.



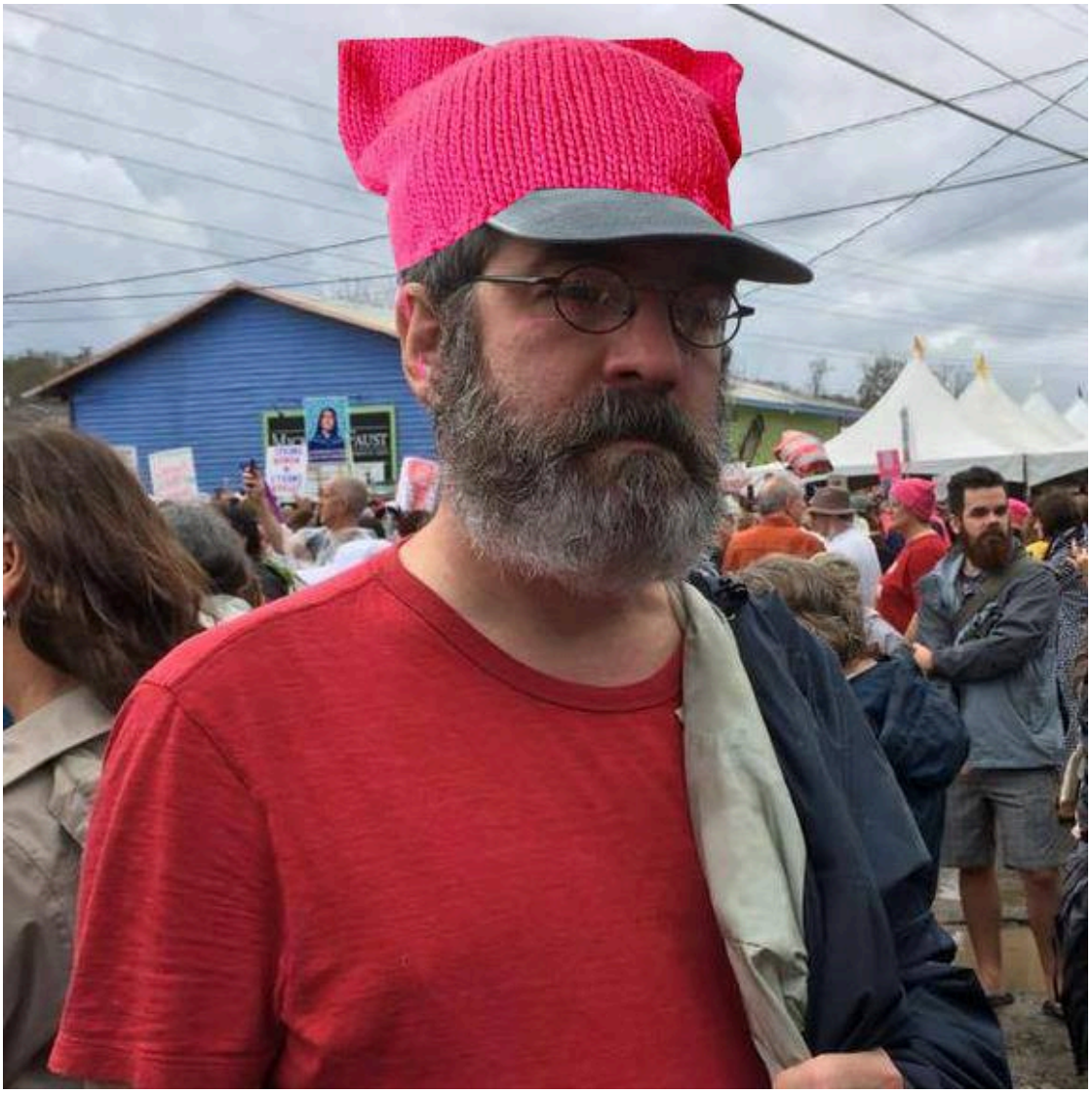
Real America

And it was a rainbow, a real picture of Real America. None of this rural white bubble that voted for Trump, but the Real America, people who stand for all their neighbors, who stand for people who may not look like them. People who stand for equality.

So the day after the end of the world, we find ourselves once again becoming acquainted with hope.

Make no mistake: all the levers of power are arrayed against us. But we are on the right side of history, and the more we keep standing up, organizing, and resisting in ways that effectively push back at the flood of bullshit headed our way, the better our chance of stemming the tide.

Don’t give up. Fight. It’s the Way of the Pussy.



Old Goat as Pussy Warrior