

Connect with
JSRI on [Twitter](#)
& [Facebook](#)

Number 115

January 2021

Our Dangerous Times Bigotry and the Big Lie

By Dennis Kalob, Ph.D.

*Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you
commit atrocities — Voltaire*

When Donald Trump rose to political fame by leading the “birther movement”—raising doubt that President Obama was born in the U.S. and therefore questioning the very legitimacy of the presidency of the first African American to hold that office—it kicked off a particularly grim era in our nation’s history.

Photo by [Louis Velazquez](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The “birther” lie was given oxygen by certain conservative media and it found a receptive audience. A few years later, when [Trump announced](#) his presidential run, he deliberately chose to speak of immigrants and refugees in stark and stereotypical terms, playing to an audience eager to hear such depictions.

[During his presidency](#), Trump included white supremacist marchers (many chanting “Jews will not replace us”) in his remarks about there being “very fine people on both sides” at the Charlottesville protests. He called Haiti and African nations “s***hole countries.” Trump repeatedly referred to Senator Warren as “Pocahontas” and has called COVID-19 the “kung flu.”

Demonizing “the other” and utilizing well-worn stereotypes is an old political technique in U.S. (and world) history, and Trump knew how to play that card to his short term political advantage. While much of this country was shocked and sickened by these developments, Trump managed to gain a cult-like following from those who long yearned for a political leader who would be willing to say and do the things that he did. To be sure, not all Trump voters embraced his darker impulses and policies, but a large part of his base surely did.

At the 2017 Charlottesville gathering of white supremacists referenced above, former KKK grand wizard [David Duke said](#), “We are going to fulfill the promises of Donald Trump. That’s what we believed in. That’s why we voted for Donald Trump, because he said he’s going to take our country back.”

The extremist right has, indeed, been encouraged and emboldened by Trump. [The Southern Poverty Law Center](#) found that the number of white nationalist hate groups increased 55% from 2017, the year Trump took office, to 2019.

Such groups are not new. They ebb and flow with the times. But their current ascendancy has been particularly frightening, given their growth and distorted worldview that is reinforced by social media and the support that they feel they have from the now former President.

The [January 6 insurrection](#) was an event that will be forever remembered, as it revealed the true threat level posed by the most extreme and hateful elements in U.S. society and the deep emotional connection they have to Trump. Storming into the Capitol building were believers in bizarre and dangerous conspiracy theories (e.g. QAnon), white supremacists, militia members, and neo-fascists (e.g. Proud Boys).

And let’s make very clear that these invaders of the Capitol building were compelled to commit their crimes against our nation by [The Big Lie](#)—the false idea that Trump had actually won the election rather than lost it by seven million votes. This lie not only led to the violence on January 6, but will continue to poison our damaged democracy. Millions of our fellow citizens continue to embrace the lie as surely as many still believe that President Obama was born in another country. Such beliefs have caused damage to our land and they may yet give rise to more violence in the future.

Our task ahead is to confront hate and those who give oxygen to it, defend democracy, speak the truth, and embrace nonviolence and justice.

Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans.

Please send feedback to jsri@loyno.edu

[CLICK TO JOIN OUR ADVOCACY NETWORK](#)

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS

As our number of enrolled students continues to rise, we need to make sure that each and every one has access to an exceptional educational experience. We can't do it without your help. [Give today!](#)

Published by the Jesuit Social Research Institute
Office Phone: 504- 864-7746 | E-mail: jsri@loyno.edu | Website: www.loyno.edu/jsri
Mailing Address: 6363 St. Charles Avenue, Campus Box 94, New Orleans, LA 70118

6363 St. Charles Avenue | New Orleans, LA 70118

This email was sent to .
To ensure that you continue receiving our emails, please add us to your address book or safe list.

[manage](#) your preferences | [opt out](#) of all Loyola e-newsletters

Got this as a forward? [Sign up](#) to receive our future emails.

[Subscribe](#) to our email list.

Take Five For Social Justice



Take Action!

Click the buttons below to sign
a petition and send advocacy
emails.

[Stop Solitary
Confinement](#)[Stop Formosa
Plastics](#)

JSRI Future Activities

February 12

Fr. Kammer will provide a social analysis presentation concerning New Orleans to novices of the Jesuit Central and Southern Province working here in the city.

JSRI staff and associates—working from home—will continue monitoring local, state, and federal administrative, legislative, and judicial actions regarding our priority issues and the impact of Covid-19; participating in advocacy communications with authorities; recommending resources on our website and by social media; research and writing for our publications; and activating our advocacy network.

JSRI Recent Activities

December 22

JSRI released [The State of Working Mississippi 2020](#), authored by Dr. Dennis Kalob, and designed by Kelsey McLaughlin.

January 12

Dr. Sue Weishar interviewed JSRI Advisory Board Member Dr. Ashley Howard for the first edition of the new JSRI video series, [Take Five For Social Justice](#).

January 13

JSRI staff met via zoom.

January 14

Fr. Fred Kammer, SJ, addressed the current Jesuit Volunteers across the country on doing social analysis.

January 16

Fr. Kammer addressed the Jesuit Volunteers on discernment.

January 20

Dr. Weishar participated in a planning meeting for the 2021 [Loyola Student Peace Conference](#).

Spring 2021 Semester

Dr. Dennis Kalob is teaching *Social Problems* for the Sociology Department here at Loyola University.