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OPINION

Paul Murray: A sick and divided America is on the cusp of a second civil war



Paul Murray The West Australian

Thu, 7 January 2021 10:00AM [Comments](#)

Paul Murray





'Attack on democracy': European leaders express shock at storming of US Capitol

1:43

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European leaders condemned an attack on democracy as chaos unfolded in a country they once relied upon for global leadership.

○ Anyone who was shocked yesterday by the scenes of anarchy and mayhem at the heart of American democracy just hasn't been watching closely enough.

○ Back in June, when Black Lives Matter protests set the country's streets ablaze, I wrote a column calling out the societal sickness that has broken America.

○ The normalised violence, ingrained inequality, the intense racial and political divisions, the poisonous media wars that inflame every issue have been obvious for a very long time.

This was how CNN anchor Chris Cuomo responded on June 3 to critics who saw the BLM protests as a problem for national unity:

“No, the problem is what forced your fellow citizens to take to the streets: persistent, and poisonous, inequities and injustice.

“Please, show me where it says protesters are supposed to be polite and peaceful.

“I can show you outraged citizens are what made America what she is and led to many major milestones.”





📷 Supporters of US President Donald Trump protest in the US Capitol Rotunda. Credit: SAUL LOEB/AFP

He has to live with his words. I'll live with mine:

“Any nation that feeds its citizens on an electronic diet of aggression and violence for several generations should expect to see it bear fruit.

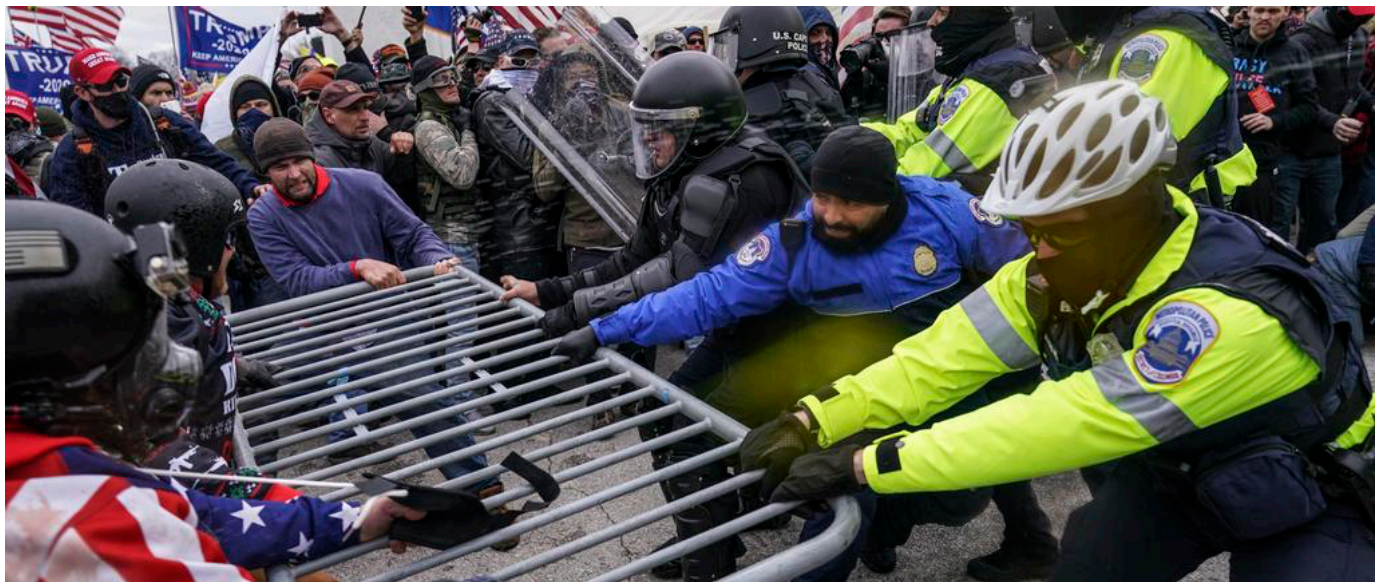
“Add in the constitutional right to bear arms which creates a national mentality that weapons and violence have a role to play in a civil society.

“When young people are indoctrinated with apocalyptic visions as popular entertainment, it is likely to breed adults with a nihilistic outlook.

“The problem for us with this American plague is that they export it to the world. We reap what we sow.

“The world witnessed in the past week a broken America. Once the envy of civilised people everywhere, the self-proclaimed leader of the free world, the United States is exposed as a sick and divided nation.

“Donald Trump did not cause these riots. His election was a symptom of the sickness and he certainly does not offer the solution.”





📷 Trump supporters try to break through a police barrier. Credit: John Minchillo/AP

The difference with yesterday's uprising is that Trump has to take at least some of the blame for the attack on the Congress.

He didn't explicitly call for violent action, but he was well aware of what might happen when he supported the protests and therefore complicit in the result.

I choose these next words very carefully. America stands within sight of civil war.

The political divisions are so intensely framed, but almost of equal weight, so that neither side has a natural majority big enough to settle the feud.

There is simply very little common ground on which to build a consensus.

Even the Democrats' surge to take the Senate from the Georgia re-runs was done on such wafer-thin margins that it has further inflamed the Trumpists' sense of electoral injustice, not deflated them.





 A protester holds a Trump flag inside the US Capitol Building near the Senate Chamber. Credit: Win McNamee/Getty Images

That Georgia result neuters the Congressional Republicans and allows every vestige of Trump's agenda to be eliminated by the Democrats.

Trump's insistence the presidential race was stolen ensures he remains central to the civil unrest instead of retreating as a vanquished dissident.

Yes, Joe Biden won the election. And yes, he should be given a smooth transition of power regardless of what anyone thinks of the process that elected him.

Solely because the alternative erodes any remaining belief in the democratic system.

But no one should expect it will happen. And recent history suggests that it won't.

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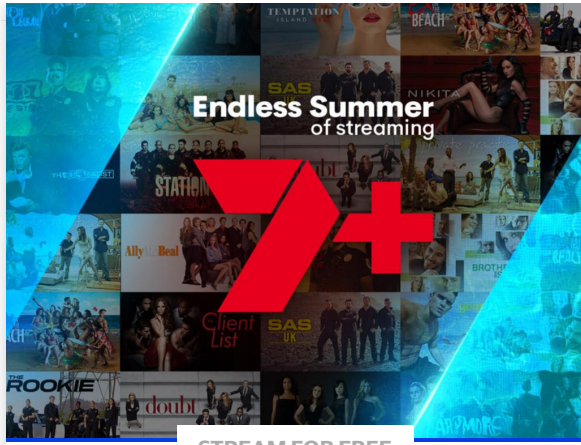
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