

Course correction – In white nation talk, the voice of the Squad

How the Democratic Party positions itself in the poll run-up cuts to the very heart of its identity and America's future

For the first time in over 100 years, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a non-binding resolution on July 16 condemning the President of the United States, Donald Trump. Just days earlier he had tweeted that if four Democratic Congresswomen did not like the state of affairs in the U.S., **they could "go back" to the countries they came from**, countries whose governments were "a complete and total catastrophe, the worst, most corrupt and inept anywhere in the world." He went on to tweet, "Why don't they go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from where they came. Then come back and show us how it is done."

Vote and politics

All four Congresswomen [they have given themselves the nickname, the "Squad"] are persons of colour; three of them (Rashida Tlaib, D-Michigan; Ayanna Pressley, D-Massachusetts; Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D- New York) were born in the U.S., and the fourth (Ilhan Omar, D-Minnesota) was a refugee from Somalia and a naturalised U.S. citizen. The resolution "strongly condemns President Donald Trump's racist comments that have legitimized and increased fear and hatred of new Americans and people of color by saying that our fellow Americans who are immigrants ... should "go back" to other countries, by referring to immigrants and asylum seekers as "invaders," and by saying that Members of Congress who are immigrants ... do not belong in Congress or in the United States of America."

The vote condemning the President (240 Democrats for, 187 Republicans against) was overwhelmingly along party lines. The Democrats were a united bloc and only four Republicans (one black Congressman from Texas, two others possibly either retiring or not seeking re-election, and the fourth a naturalised citizen of Polish origin) and the sole independent in the House (a Michigan Congressman forced out of the Grand Old Party, or GOP, for his opposition to Mr. Trump) joined them.

Leader, party and vision

In publicly telling these Congresswomen to "go back", Mr. Trump was explicitly saying the U.S. was a white nation in which coloured people and racial minorities irrespective of their citizenship status, place of birth, or length of residence, did not belong. And in refusing to join the Democrats in supporting the resolution, the GOP was clearly on board with his vision of a white nation. In the 1990s, faced with the demographic reality that the U.S. would in course of time become a white-minority nation, sections of the GOP had sought to broaden its appeal to Hispanics, Asian-Americans, middle-class Blacks, and other minorities. With the rise of a nativist and white supremacist fringe (epitomised by the Tea Party) the GOP has decided it can dispense with minorities.

Between gerrymandering constituencies, preventing minorities from voting through myriad restrictions, and legalising all this through increasing control over both the judiciary and various state legislatures, the GOP has anchored itself firmly in a white nation. Mr. Trump is both a symptom of this process and its great accelerator. Far from being an aberration or outlier in the U.S. political landscape, he epitomises a considerable section of it only too well.

Mr. Trump was reportedly delighted at the display of Democratic unity on the resolution condemning him for his comments on the Congresswomen. It played fully into his hands for next year's Presidential elections wherein he would position himself as the candidate of a white nation under threat from a rising tide of minorities, immigrants, and various other un-American 'outsiders' living off government handouts and crime. The sight of House majority leader, Nancy Pelosi, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the four coloured Congresswomen was precisely the sort of photo-opportunity that was dynamite as far as Mr. Trump was concerned. (The weeks prior to this show of unity had been marked by bitter differences between the centrist Pelosi and the more progressive Congresswomen on issues such as

socialised health care, immigration reform, border control, and Israel-Palestine, to mention the most prominent).

Poll-centric theme

It is obvious that Mr. Trump intends to make the upcoming Presidential elections a contest about race, and paint the Democratic party as beholden to unpatriotic, radical socialist, non-white minorities.

How the Democratic party positions itself *vis-à-vis* Mr. Trump's idea of a white nation cuts to the very heart of its own identity and the nation's future. There is the temptation to seek an increasingly evanescent middle ground through the candidacy of someone such as Joe Biden. With a track record that includes opposition to busing early in his career; shepherding draconian anti-minority laws through Congress (by securing the bipartisan support of southern racists, no less) on the pretext of getting "tough on crime"; serving as Vice President to Barack Obama as the latter consolidated an unprecedented carceral state (with 5% of the world's population, the U.S. is home to around 25% of the world's prison population); and as a white male, Mr. Biden might cut into Mr. Trump's core constituency of angry whites threatened by a loss of privilege. Yet, for those same reasons he is unlikely to make any headway with the young, with minorities, and those who have stayed away from the polls in the post-Obama period. There is the added danger that the "Trump Democrats" in the rust-belt may prefer the unvarnished bigotry of their man to the triangulated message of a Biden.

With their more progressive and articulate economic agenda, the likes of Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders or Kamala Harris are likely to offer a much better prospect for the Democrats. If a hidebound party leadership does not stymie their chances (as it did with Mr. Sanders for the nomination the last time around), a ticket comprising two such leaders might offer the best bet. Yet, the obstacles are likely formidable. Precisely because of their accomplishments, intellect and articulateness, Ms. Warren and Ms. Harris are likely to evoke the sort of misogyny that clearly contributed to Hillary Clinton's defeat, while Mr. Sanders' avowal of social democracy often bafflingly alienates many underclass people who need it most. That his socialism is seen as a problem while Mr. Trump's practically treasonous and utterly pusillanimous relations with Russia's President Vladimir Putin does not deflect his followers simply beggars belief.

A thread of hatred

More importantly, as with a host of other countries (India, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the Philippines, Brazil — to mention only a few) right-wing strongmen and their supporters riding on a cocktail of racist, casteist, majoritarian and misogynistic ideologies seem to be winning everywhere. A visceral politics of hatred for racial minorities and other putative outsiders, energised by social media resonance machines we still poorly understand, has returned incumbent regimes that would have been swept out of power in times past. It may not matter what the Democrats do and Mr. Trump may yet be re-elected. But in confronting his racism and misogyny, in making a forceful case for progressive taxation, for reforming a dysfunctional health-care system, in bringing the U.S. back into conformity with international law on asylum seekers, and in derailing the endless war machine that it has become, whoever wins the Democratic nomination would be well advised to listen to the four minority Congresswomen: they represent the future, however cloudy that may seem at this moment in time. And it would be the right thing to do.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **run-up** (noun) – a period of time just before an important event.
- **cut to the heart** (phrase) – be overcome with emotional anguish, grief and/or suffering.
- **catastrophe** (noun) – destruction, damage, disaster.
- **inept** (adjective) – ineffectual, inadequate, unsuccessful.
- **infested** (adjective) – overrun, ridden, plagued.
- **person of colour** (noun) – any person who is not European American or white.

- **naturalized** (adjective) – (of a foreigner) allowed to the citizenship of a country.
- **racist** (adjective) – prejudiced, discriminatory, intolerant.
- **legitimise** (verb) – validate, legitimate, permit/endorse.
- **hatred** (noun) – dislike, hostility, resentment/aversion.
- **asylum** (noun) – protection provided by a foreign country to somebody who is unable or unwilling to return to their home country due to fear of persecution (harm, harassment or oppression).
- **invader** (noun) – attacker, intruder; a person invades a country.
- **overwhelmingly** (adverb) – with a great majority.
- **bloc** (noun) – group/fold, association, partnership.
- **explicitly** (adverb) – clearly, unequivocally, without any doubt.
- **demographic** (adjective) – the statistical study/structure of populations, especially human beings.
- **white supremacist** (noun) – a supporter who believes white people are inherently superior to other races.
- **fringe** (noun) – the outer/marginal part (of a group).
- **epitomize** (verb) – exemplify, represent, incorporate.
- **dispense** (verb) – allot, distribute, disburse/supply.
- **gerrymandering** (noun) – manipulating, arranging, manoeuvring the limits of an electoral constituency fraudulently.
- **myriad** (adjective) – a great number, unlimited, various/multiple.
- **anchor** (verb) – secure/attach, connect/bind, provide a basis.
- **aberration** (noun) – discrepancy, deviation/departure, mistake.
- **outlier** (noun) – a person/thing which is detached from the main system.
- **landscape** (noun) – the distinctive features of a field of activity.
- **play into someone's hands** (phrase) – do something in way without knowing that will help someone else (or damage the one who does it).
- **handout** (noun) – freebie, aid, subsidies.
- **stand shoulder to shoulder** (phrase) – work together & support each other to achieve something.
- **sort of** (phrase) – to some extent, somewhat, moderately.
- **photo opportunity** (noun) – photo call; it is an arranged event (opportunity) to take photos of politicians/celebrities posing for publicity.
- **dynamite** (noun) – an extremely impressive thing.
- **as far as** (phrase) – to the extent/degree.
- **bitter** (noun) – savage, hostile, ferocious/resentful.
- **centrist** (noun) – a person whose political opinions are not extreme, falling between those of liberals and conservatives.
- **beholden** (adjective) – indebted, obligated, duty-bound.
- **unpatriotic** (adjective) – agitational, rabble-rousing, trouble making.
- **radical** (adjective) – progressive, reforming, reformist/revisionist.
- **vis-a-vis** (preposition) – in relation to, with regard to.
- **temptation** (noun) – desire, urge, impulse/inclination.
- **evanescent** (adjective) – diminishing, shrinking,
- **the middle ground** (noun) – agreement, understanding, settlement.
- **candidacy** (noun) – candidate-ship.
- **shepherd** (verb) – guide, conduct, usher/lead.
- **draconian** (adjective) – (very) harsh/severe, oppressive/repressive, authoritarian.
- **bipartisan** (adjective) – involving cooperation between two (opposite & big) political parties.
- **pretext** (noun) – a false reason/excuse given to do something by hiding the true purpose (which is usually a bad one).

- **consolidate** (verb) – strengthen, reinforce, fortify.
 - **unprecedented** (adjective) – not done or experienced before.
 - **carceral** (noun) – relating to a prison.
 - **cut into** (phrasal verb) – Interrupt the course of.
 - **make headway** (phrase) – make progress, make strides, gain ground/progress.
 - **stay away from** (phrasal verb) – evade, avoid, dodge.
 - **rust-belt** (noun) – a term, sometimes considered pejorative (disapproving/insulting), for an informal region of the United States that experienced industrial decline starting around 1980.
 - **unvarnished** (adjective) – straightforward, plain, simple.
 - **bigotry** (noun) – prejudice, bias, discrimination.
 - **triangulate** (verb) – position oneself in a way to satisfy two contrasting standpoints.
 - **articulate** (verb) – communicative, effective, lucid/vivid, expressive.
 - **hidebound** (adjective) – orthodox, fundamentalist, hardline.
 - **stymie** (verb) – impede, prevent, hinder/obstruct.
 - **formidable** (adjective) – intimidating, daunting, alarming/frightening.
 - **evoke** (verb) – induce, simulate, suggest.
 - **misogyny** (noun) – prejudice, dislike, hatred (of women).
 - **avowal** (noun) – assertion, declaration, statement.
 - **bafflingly** (adverb) – bewilderingly, perplexingly, mystifyingly/confusingly.
 - **alienate** (verb) – set/drive apart, separate, disunite.
 - **treasonous** (adjective) – involving a betrayal, particularly of your country.
 - **pusillanimous** (adjective) – timid, faint-hearted, spiritless/spineless.
 - **beggar belief** (phrase) – inexpressible, undefinable, beyond description.
 - **thread** (noun) – theme, subject matter, burden/strain.
 - **a host of** (noun) – lot, large number, great quantity.
 - **ride on** (phrasal verb) – depend on.
 - **cocktail** (noun) – mixture of different substances.
 - **casteist** (adjective) – relating to something which has an attachment to a caste system.
 - **majoritarian** (adjective) – relating to a philosophy that states that a majority (sometimes categorized by religion, language, social class, or some other identifying factor) of the population is entitled to a certain degree of primacy (priority) in society, and has the right to make decisions that affect the society.
 - **misogynistic** (adjective) – firmly biased against women.
 - **visceral** (adjective) – full of strong emotions without any logic, not intellectual, instinctive, unreasoning.
 - **putative** (adjective) – supposed/claimed, commonly regarded, generally considered.
 - **incumbent** (adjective) – current, existing, present.
 - **swept** past participle of **sweep** (verb) – to win a contest completely.
 - **misogyny** (noun) – prejudice, dislike, hatred (of women).
 - **sweep out** (phrasal verb) – remove.
 - **dysfunctional** (adjective) – not functioning/working normally or properly; troubled, unsettled, flawed.
 - **asylum seeker** (noun) – displaced person, escapee, exile.
 - **derail** (verb) – obstruct, interrupt, impede/thwart.
 - **well advised** (adjective) – wise, sensible, advised.
 - **cloudy** (adjective) – indefinite, uncertain, unclear.
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Course correction – **Marking Tipu's legacy to foster historical temper** ***Developing an understanding of our conflictual pasts, and not retribution, is the way to deal with 'historical wounds'***

On a recent visit to the University of Leicester, I had the opportunity of visiting the newly established memorial to Britain's controversial King Richard III, the last of the Plantagenet Kings, and also the last British King to die in battle in the War of Roses against the Tudors. Richard III (r. 1483-1485) also has the distinction of being the only British King whose remains, found under a parking lot in Leicester close to the Cathedral, were identified by mitochondrial DNA in 2012.

In 2015, he was reburied in the Leicester Cathedral, under a simple yet beautiful gravestone, unadorned except for a coat of arms in pietra dura. The 'rediscovery' of his remains became the basis of a controversy that was finally settled in court, and the city of Leicester has been the beneficiary, raking in money from tourists who wish to discover for themselves the legacy of this controversial King.

Shakespeare's portrait

Why controversial? Richard III's ascent to the throne, after his brother's children were declared illegitimate, has been under a cloud: did he 'disappear' his brother's son? Shakespeare, loyal to his Tudor masters (the victors of the Battle of Bosworth) fostered the portrait of Richard III as a malevolent ruler in his celebrated play of the same name, from the very first scene.

Shakespeare's Richard III is wracked by self-hate and doubt, ("I am determined to prove a villain") and invites the harshest words from others: like "foul defacer of God's handiwork"; "hell's black intelligencer"; "carnal cur"; "bloody dog"; and "bloody wretch". Richard III was not spared the ignominy of being described as a hideously deformed, "foul bunch-back'd toad" though we now know he only had a 'crooked' spine. But it is what the Leicester Cathedral has done to this legacy that has interested me the most: the display called for a contemporary reconciliation with the conflicting aspects of the memory of this King, emphasising the necessity of commemorating a brave and remarkable soldier, despite many popular memories to the contrary. Richard III is no unblemished hero, and there is no attempt to varnish that legacy.

The previous **Karnataka** government had introduced a 'Tipu Jayanti', which was scrapped by the recently sworn-in Yediyurappa regime in one of its first actions in power. I wish the previous regime had installed a 'Museum to Our Conflictual Pasts', which would allow all visitors to come to terms with the most controversial figure of Mysore history, Tipu Sultan. Such a museum would have allowed both those who malign his memory and those who celebrate it to learn how to come to terms with historical controversies — and the Indian past is replete with many such examples. Tipu Sultan for long emblematised the valiant struggle of Mysore against the British and, like Richard III, was the only one to die on the battlefield (all others were defeated by, collaborated or made their peace with, the emerging British power).

Over the last few decades in Karnataka, there has been a steady inflation of shrill debates about Tipu's legacy. There are of course those who focus on his undoubted virtues, as the first early modern ruler to put in place a form of *etatisme* in the absence of a social class which could undertake radical economic change; whose lust for knowledge bequeathed to us a marvellous library of books; whose spectacular military successes stunned the British, and whose technological inventions — particularly the rocket — were pillaged by the West; whose penchant for restless innovation made him try his hand at transformations that would only much later bear fruit (for instance his experiments with silk production and his interest in large scale irrigation). The list is endless.

There is equally the memory, particularly in South Canara, Kodagu and Malabar, of Tipu's real and imagined excesses: his zeal for conversion; his massacre of populations he considered hostile; and his introduction of Persian as the state language at the expense of Kannada.

Reading multiple sources

Our 'Museum of Conflictual Pasts' would not stage Tipu's brief and embattled rule (17 years) as something requiring condemnation or celebration, but present it as an opportunity to develop a historical temper, a new sense of the past. It would urge the visitor, and especially the young visitor, to think historically: to read a variety of conflicting sources — including the words of the man himself — from the vantage point of his times. The museum would make the visitor ask why colonial accounts of this indefatigable foe, which necessarily cast him as a tyrant and a villain, enjoy such an enduring influence up to the present day; or to ask why the early 19th century Jain historian, Devachandra, saw Tipu and Haider Ali (his father) as just one moment in a long Mysore past peppered with desecrations, thefts, and destructions — particularly of Jain temples. Visitors could come to understand why Tipu supported some non-Muslim religious people and institutions and not others and why one temple was attacked but another, located 700 metres away, was left alone, as in Kodungallur Kerala. They could equally ask why he commandeered some Muslim communities and not others — the Navayat traders of Bhatkal recalled, in the richly textured *kaifiyats* collected by Colin Mackenzie and magnificently annotated by M.M. Kalburgi, that they were made to perform Tipu's government work under duress.

Visitors to the museum could ask why the Dewan of Mysore, Purnaiah, when asked by the British in June 1799 about who they should install after Tipu's defeat, replied that the memory of the Wodeyars had all but been forgotten, and then went on to serve the British faithfully as a placeholder for Krishnaraja Wodeyar III. What does the rich symbolism of Tipu's court — his obsessive use of the tiger stripe for instance — and indeed his adoption of Persian as the official language tell us about the quest for legitimacy? Moreover, was the religious zeal of Tipu, the son of a usurper, politically pioneering since his kingship had to be seen as deriving directly from god (hence *Khodadadi* — or god-given — *sarkar*)?

Why is it that indisputable facts — such as Tipu's protection of Sringeri Math following the Maratha attack in 1791, and his continued donations to the place — equally serve as testimony to his 'secularism' and as an example of his political chicanery?

Coming to terms with the past

Tipu Sultan, in short, provides us with mind-boggling opportunities to fulfil one of the most urgent tasks of our times: to help people, and young people in particular, to come to terms with India's many conflictual pasts, to teach people that understanding and appreciation, rather than revenge or retribution, are the ways in which we may deal with real and perceived 'historical wounds'.

Karnataka's pasts offer limitless possibilities for such instruction, and for refashioning the relationship between history and memory. Such a 'Museum of Our Conflictual Pasts' will help us to deal with the inconveniences of the past, and perhaps heal and reconcile, instead of staging afresh the battles of history.

In a gigantic edifice dedicated to the memory of the 'Battle of the Nations', the city of Leipzig commemorates the successful battle involving 6,00,000 people in 1813 against Napoleonic forces. The adjoining museum, however, acknowledges the many achievements of Napoleon, and is free of the vituperative celebrations of victors. We too must find the resources to develop a historical temper that acknowledges the inconvenient truths of our past.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **legacy** (noun) – footprint, effect/outcome (something received from a predecessor or from the past).
- **foster** (verb) – encourage, promote, develop.
- **temper** (noun) – disposition, nature, spirit.
- **retribution** (noun) – retaliation, revenge, retaliation.

- **War of Roses** (noun) – a series of English civil wars for control of the throne of England fought between the House of Lancaster and the House of York from 1455 to 1485.
- **mitochondrial** (adjective) – relating to the parts of cells that turn sugars, fats and proteins that we eat, into forms of chemical energy that the body can use to carry on living. Mitochondria is “powerhouses of the cell”.
- **pietra dura** (noun) – a term for the inlay technique of using cut and fitted, highly polished colored stones to create images. It is considered a decorative art.
- **rake in** (phrasal verb) – earn, make, gain.
- **ascent** (noun) – rise, growth.
- **under a cloud** (phrase) – under suspicion, discredited/disgraced, shamed.
- **malevolent** (adjective) – bitter, hostile, vengeful.
- **wrack** a variant of **rack** (verb) – torment, afflict, torture/pain.
- **handiwork** (noun) – creation, product, work.
- **defacer** (noun) – vandalizer, spoiler. One who defaces; a vandal.
- **intelligencer** (noun) – a secret agent, spy.
- **cur** (noun) – villain, rogue, wrongdoer.
- **wretch** (noun) – rascal, criminal, villain.
- **ignominy** (noun) – shame, disgrace, humiliation/embarrassment.
- **hideously** (adverb) – in an extremely ugly/unpleasant manner.
- **crooked** (adjective) – lopsided, asymmetric, uneven.
- **commemorate** (verb) – celebrate/honour the memory of someone/something with a ceremony/event; pay tribute to, pay homage to.
- **unblemished** (adjective) – clean, spotless, without fault.
- **varnish** (verb) – disguise, conceal/hide, gloss over.
- **scrap** (verb) – abandon, cancel, withdraw.
- **malign** (verb) – misrepresent, abuse/defame, speak ill of.
- **replete** with (adjective) – filled with, well supplied/stocked with, overloaded.
- **emblemize** (verb) – be symbolic of, represent, stand for.
- **inflation** (noun) – simply meaning “cost of living”; increase of price level of goods & services and vice versa decrease of currency value.
- **shrill** (adjective) – loud/strong, high-pitched, ear-piercing, harsh.
- **virtue** (noun) – propriety, morality, integrity.
- **étatisme** (noun) – the authoritarian control by the state
- **radical** (adjective) – fundamental, basic, essential.
- **lust** (noun) – desire, longing, yearning.
- **bequeath** (verb) – grant, make over, pass on.
- **pillage** (verb) – plunder, rob, deprive.
- **penchant** (noun) – predisposition, desire, inclination.
- **bear fruit** (phrase) – yield/get results, succeed, be effective.
- **irrigation** (noun) – the process of (artificially) supplying water to farm land to grow crops & plants.
- **excesses** (noun) – uncontrolled/unrestricted behaviour.
- **at the expense of** (phrase) – sacrifice, loss, neglect of.
- **vantage point** (noun) – point of view, viewpoint, opinion.
- **account** (noun) – narration, narrative, interpretation.
- **indefatigable** (adjective) – tireless, untiring, unflagging.
- **tyrant** (noun) – dictator, despot, autocrat/absolute ruler.
- **enduring** (adjective) – lasting, persisting, continuing.
- **pepper with** (verb) – cover with, fill with, spot/sprinkle.

- **desecration** (noun) – violation, dishonour, contamination.
- **commandeer** (verb) – seize, take possession of, take away.
- **duress** (noun) – compulsion, force, pressure.
- **placeholder** (noun) – proxy, substitute, deputy.
- **obsessive** (adjective) – excessive, haunting, tormenting.
- **quest** (noun) – search, hunt, pursuit; mission.
- **usurper** (noun) – a person who seizes a position of power illegally.
- **pioneering** (adjective) – distinctive, groundbreaking/creative, innovative.
- **kingship** (noun) – the state of being a king.
- **testimony** (noun) – evidence, proof, attestation/witness.
- **secularism** (noun) – the belief that religion should not have a strong influence in education or other public parts of society.
- **chicanery** (noun) – trickery, deception, duplicity/bluff.
- **refashion** (verb) – improve, rectify, correct.
- **edifice** (noun) – a complex system/structure.
- **vituperative** (adjective) – abusive, bitter, belittling, diminishing.

☞ **"The Struggle You're In Today
Is Developing The Strength You Need For Tomorrow"** ☞