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Democracy Dies in Darkness

Opinion   Trump's grotesque racism matters

By [Jennifer Rubin](#)
Columnist | **+ Follow**

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Had President Trump not said there were "very fine people" on both sides of the neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville, his [comment](#) Tuesday comparing the constitutional process of impeachment to a "lynching" would have been the most racist comment uttered by a modern president. Even more vile, we now see everyone from hapless White House spokesman Hogan Gidley to Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.) — both white southerners — defend his noxious comparison.

The Post reports:

> President Trump's comparison of the House impeachment inquiry to a "lynching" elicited immediate rebukes Tuesday from Democrats and several Republicans, who condemned Trump's use of a term most associated with the barbaric hanging of African American men.
>
> "You are comparing a constitutional process to the PREVALENT and SYSTEMATIC brutal torture of people in THIS COUNTRY that looked like me?" tweeted Rep. Karen Bass (D-Calif.), chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Let's not pretend the president, who has spent the past four years (starting with that ride down the Trump Tower escalator) stoking racism and trying to convince white Americans that they are the true victims of discrimination, just had a slip of the tongue or made an insulting racial comparison inadvertently. Support for impeachment and removal is growing in recent polls. The evidence of impeachable conduct is overwhelming, and there has been no coherent defense of the president's attempt to extort Ukraine into influencing the 2020 election. Trump therefore deploys a go-to move to buck up his base: He flaunts his racism, and invites his supporters to indulge in another bout of victimization.

The Post also reports that "House Majority Whip James E. Clyburn (D-S.C.), the highest-ranking African American in the House, said he is considering a floor vote to officially condemn Trump's language." I would strongly recommend he do so for several reasons.

First, Republicans need to be reminded how untenable it is for them politically and personally to keep defending a morally abhorrent figure. The price Republicans outside of super-safe red locales must pay for supporting Trump needs to go up. Their support for a racist, lawless president has to become in and of itself disqualifying.

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Second, highlighting this incident exposes Republicans' utter lack of credibility on race, making it that much harder for whites who do not consider themselves racist to turn a blind eye toward the nature of today's Republican Party. When even the sole African American Republican senator, Tim Scott of South Carolina, issues a stomach-turning rationalization for Trump ("There's no question that the impeachment process is the closest thing to a political death-row trial, so I get his absolute rejection of the process. I wouldn't use the word 'lynching' "), it underscores that one cannot be a Republican without signing up for the race-baiting that now characterizes so much of Trump's rhetoric. Frankly, decent Republicans should welcome the opportunity to publicly repudiate Trump's views.

Lastly, Trump and today's GOP attack the notion of a multiracial and multiethnic democracy. That needs to be beaten back at every turn. The public must be reminded again and again by those in positions of power and influence that right-wing nativism is a threat to our diverse democracy. Normalizing Trump's language by ignoring it or making light of it widens the already wide racial divide in our country. Those who make excuses or insist we not "politicize" race (as then-Speaker Paul D. Ryan did in refusing to bring a censure motion against Trump after Charlottesville) need a swift rebuke. Let's hope the House carries through on Clyburn's suggestion.

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Paul Waldman: How Trump helps his supporters justify racism