

# Why ‘send her back’ is even worse than ‘lock her up’

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By [Max Boot](#)

July 17, 2019, is a date that will live in infamy. That was the day President Trump and his followers unveiled the unofficial slogan of his 2020 reelection campaign, “[Send her back](#),” the successor to the unofficial slogan of his 2016 campaign: “Lock her up.” Both slogans are noxious and un-American, but the new one is even worse than the old.

Before explaining why that’s the case, it is first necessary to dispense with the fiction that Trump has “disavowed” the “send her back” chant, as credulous Republicans such as Sen. Mitt Romney (R-Utah) [asserted](#). It’s true that, after hearing negative reviews from nervous Republicans, Trump [said](#) on Thursday that he was “not happy” with the chant and “started speaking very quickly” to drown it out. Anyone who saw video of the Greenville, N.C., rally knows that this denial is as truthful as Trump’s [denials](#) that he was aware of Michael Cohen’s payments to adult-film actress Stormy Daniels. Trump paused for a full [13 seconds](#) to savor the chants and did not in any way reprimand the chanters.

By Friday, Trump was no longer expressing faux remorse. Instead, he was [praising](#) the racist chorus as “incredible patriots” and doubling down on lies about the congresswomen of color who are their objects of hatred. Trump claimed that Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) hates “our country” and called it “garbage” — which is [blatantly false](#) and an encouragement to the same ugly sentiments voiced in Greenville. This was a repeat of Charlottesville, with Trump once again [walking back](#) his initial walk-back. It is only a matter of time before “send her back” is heard at another rally. Trump will most likely throw up his hands in mock despair as if to say: *What can I do? This is the voice of the people!* It is, in reality, his own people telling him what he wants to hear.

“Lock her up” was bad enough. By vowing to imprison his political opponent, Trump was telling his followers that he would violate the president’s duty to enforce the laws fairly and without favor. Now having gotten away with this outrage — having, in fact, been rewarded for his assault on the rule of law by election to the nation’s highest office — Trump is committing an even worse offense against the very foundation of our republic.

The promise of America was summed up by Ronald Reagan in his [last speech](#) as president, when he cited a letter from a man who told him: “You can go to live in France, but you cannot become a Frenchman. You can

go to live in Germany or Turkey or Japan, but you cannot become a German, a Turk, or a Japanese. But anyone, from any corner of the Earth, can come to live in America and become an American.” This, Reagan said, “is one of the most important sources of America’s greatness. We lead the world because, unique among nations, we draw our people — our strength — from every country and every corner of the world.”

Oh, I know that this ideal has often not been honored. We have a long, ugly history of white supremacy in this country, ranging from Jim Crow laws to keep African Americans down to the 1924 Immigration Act to keep non-Europeans out. But in recent decades, we had been making real strides toward becoming a more inclusive society. Coming here by jetliner in 1976, a Jewish immigrant from what was then a hostile state (the Soviet Union), I have never felt any less American than a Protestant whose ancestors arrived on the Mayflower in 1620. Trump is now telling me and millions of other immigrants otherwise.

With his “go back” demands and his followers’ chants of “send her back,” Trump is signaling that a refugee from Somalia — or even an African American from Cincinnati, a Palestinian American from Detroit or a Latino American from the Bronx — is an alien, an outsider, someone who is not welcome in a country that, as he previously said, is already “full.” Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R.-S.C.), Trump’s born-again true believer, [said](#) in his defense that “a Somali refugee embracing Trump would not have been asked to go back.” So now the test of whether you are a real American is whether you are comfortable as part of a howling “MAGA” mob? I might as well start packing my bags.

Note the racist double standard. Trump is allowed to criticize this country as much as he likes. He can [call it](#) a land of “carnage,” say it is “becoming a third-world country,” claim that we are losers and laughingstocks, even deny that there is anything exceptional about America. His very campaign slogan — “Make America Great Again” — contains an implicit assertion that we are not now great. That apparently is his right as a white man. People of color, he suggests, do not have any such rights. Because they are conditional Americans, present at the sufferance of the white majority, they can love it or leave it.

In claiming to defend America, Trump is actually transforming it into something I don’t recognize — or like. With the help of his nihilistic Republican enablers, he is mobilizing the forces of racism and dragging us back to our darkest days, our worst selves. His slogan should not be MAGA but, rather, MACA: Make America Cruel Again.

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