

The Left is 'Bleeding Kansas'

By Victor Davis Hanson

In the late 1850s, "Bleeding Kansas" was the term used to describe the escalating cycle of violence, when surrogates for the Union and soon-to-be Confederacy fought each other over whether Kansas would be admitted as a free or slave-owning state.



As the assaults and killings increased, radicals set the agenda. The logical next step was the nightmares of Fort Sumter and Bull Run.

Those calling for restraint and peaceful resolutions were considered weak and traitorous. The thuggish and violent, instead, were praised as the true idealists and patriots, the real "base" of their respective parties.

We have witnessed a growing wave of left-wing assassins and would-be assassins in the last few years: James Hodgkinson, Luigi Mangione, James Crooks, Ryan Routh, Elias Rodriguez, and Tyler Robinson, who have targeted Republican House leaders, CEOs, Donald Trump, Jews, and Charlie Kirk. For months, leftists vandalized or torched anything to do with the Tesla brand, and with virtual impunity, they sometimes went after individual Tesla owners. Jews walked in the shadows on

campuses, where mobs cheered Hamas killers.

From June through October 2020, Antifa- and BLM-led rioting led to 35 deaths, \$2 billion in damage, 14,000 arrests, and 1,500 injured police. On January 6, violence left five dead, four from the protesting side. But whereas the federal government immediately and often excessively jailed both violent and peaceful 2021 protesters, almost all of the 14,000 protesters and rioters of 2020 were released by left-wing blue-city and federal prosecutors and judges.

ICE officers and facilities remain under siege in a number of major cities. In this current left-wing legitimization of violence, the Democrat Party is now embracing an eerie channeling of an earlier, pre- and post-Confederate ethos. Nonstop Democrat grandees call for their resistance to hit the street, if need be, to go lower than the "gutter," and to "let your rage fuel you."

The demagogic, anti-ICE bluster of Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker, Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson, California Governor Gavin Newsom, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, Oregon Governor Tina Kotek, and Portland Mayor Keith Wilson is nullificationist and state-rights supremacy to the core.

New York mayoral candidate Zoran Mamdani, in the spirit of Jefferson Davis, recently summed up the left's resistance best, bragging that he hoped to disconnect New York local governance from federal government authority entirely—at least in the obligatory rather than beneficiary sense.

But do not left-wing states' righters also applaud rogue lower-court federal judges who create and apply all sorts of edicts to stop the enforcement of federal law?

The Democrat-appointed judges confidently and accurately assume: 1) that they will certainly be reversed but can successfully continue to fabricate laws and make up jurisdictions and rules to delay and obstruct the

administration; 2) that unlike their Democrat supporters who opportunistically ignore federal authority, the targeted Trump administration will abide by their federal rulings until they are reversed; 3) that any loss of judicial reputation by their biased and unsound rulings is more than made up by their new folk status among Democrats as fanatic Never Trumper activists.

Blue-state elected officials, both local and statewide, believe not only that the federal government has no jurisdiction to enforce the laws of the land in their locales, but that they themselves have the right, and indeed the duty, to use their own resources to impede them.

But blue states and cities have a peculiar notion of “states’ rights.” Under the Obama administration, Democrats once cheered on the federal government’s blockage of former Arizona governor Jan Brewer’s efforts to use state resources to enforce federal immigration law, which an open-borders Obama White House had refused to fully do.

How odd, then, that the left supports federal supremacy when it chooses not to enforce its own laws but opposes it when it follows and enforces federal statutes.

Of course, should any red city, county, or state declare itself immune from a Democrat-run federal government—for example, local authorities ignoring federal gun registration laws or endangered species mandates—then the left would use the full force of the federal law to crush such “state-righters.”

This new one-sided, left-wing, states’-rights movement also took off during the first Trump administration. Then, some 600 state and local “sanctuary city” jurisdictions declared that they would not hand over arrested criminal foreign aliens residing unlawfully in the U.S. to federal authorities.

Currently, local Democrat officials from Chicago to Los

Angeles unabashedly boast that not only will their own police forces not aid in the deportation of apprehended or criminal illegal aliens, but they will also often actively oppose federal law enforcement—whether by offering street sanctuary to violent anti-ICE protesters in Portland or ordering Chicago-area police not to come to the aid of embattled and blockaded ICE officers.

An unhinged Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) now brags she wants local California officials to arrest federal ICE officers. But the former Speaker of the House does not elaborate on what sort of “encounter” will follow when the latter federal, armed officers are lawfully enforcing the law, and the former armed state officers are breaking the law in trying to stop them. Bleeding Kansas? A mini-Fort Sumter?

The last time we saw such brazen state efforts to nullify federal law took place in 1957 at Little Rock, Arkansas (President Eisenhower versus Governor Orval Faubus); in 1962 at Oxford, Mississippi (President Kennedy versus Governor Ross Barnett); and in 1963 at Tuscaloosa, Alabama (President Kennedy versus George Wallace). Like their current counterparts, all such governors pleaded states’ rights, damned federal intrusion into their own affairs, and counted on their own state residents to protest and intervene for their shared anti-federalist and nullificationist agendas.

Social media is now ablaze, as are street protests, with attacks on federal officials and with defiant calls from state and local residents to use any means necessary to stop federal enforcement. State officials smear federal officers as “Nazis” and “Gestapo”—and then up the ante by creating electronic “ICE trackers” so that illegal aliens and their supporters can evade federal officers, dox them, and put them in physical jeopardy. The logical end to the violent designs of California nullificationist officials will be either wounded or dead ICE officers.

That 80-90% of currently arrested cohorts of illegal aliens either have prior criminal records or past-due deportation orders seems irrelevant. The cause of the current nullificationists is not so much illegal immigrants per se but rather using state resources to defy the Trump federal administration, as it acts lawfully as representatives of the U.S. government.

No wonder the antebellum firebrand and killer John Brown has become a popular blue-state rights icon—precisely because he was willing to kill his opponents. The violent left-wing “John Brown Gun Club” is now mainstream. Howard University professor Stacey Patton recently urged white liberals to “be like John Brown. Ask yourself, what am I willing to burn so somebody else can breathe?”

She apparently was advocating the sort of violence that characterized Brown’s armed raid on Harpers Ferry that helped ignite the Civil War, or his earlier 1856 Pottawatomie Massacre, where he oversaw the execution of five pro-South settlers.

The escalating violence in Chicago, Los Angeles, and Portland bears an eerie resemblance to the precursors to the “Bleeding Kansas” madness of the late 1850s, in which, eventually, local law enforcement often ignored or joined in the violence of ad hoc thugs, sometimes in opposition to the federal government.

As in the bloodletting of 19th-century Kansas, the current activist left, in the street and on social media, makes no effort to hide their glee over Charlie Kirk’s death, to mask their disappointment that Trump survived two assassination attempts, or to deny that assassin Luigi Mangione is now a popular left-wing icon.

L.A. Mayor Karen Bass, whose incompetence and left-wing blinders ensured the L.A. fire, seems unconcerned with her failed city, as she daily poses on the barricades as a

resistor of federal law.

Governor Gavin Newsom has no answers for his multibillion-dollar high-speed rail catastrophe. He remains indifferent to the state government's responsibility for dozens of horrific forest and brush fires.

Perennial candidate Newsom is unconcerned with the state's crippling costs of insurance, gas, and electricity, or California's record high gas and income taxes, or its now chronic multibillion-dollar budget deficit, or its \$1.6 trillion in unfunded liabilities.

Instead, Newsom only comes to life to post that the federal Homeland Security Secretary will soon have a "bad day" ("Kristi Noem is going to have a bad day today. You're welcome, America"), or that he is willing to smack the mouth of the President ("We are going to fight back and we're going to punch this bully in the mouth.") or to strike his Republican opponents ("We are going to punch these sons of bitches in the mouth.").

In sum, officials both threaten and sanction violence against ICE.

When challenged by federal officers, violent street thugs run to the protection of sympathetic local police.

If an ICE officer is besieged, he has no assurance that local or state officers will come to his aid and confront his attackers.

Assassins are praised; their victims are slandered.

So we are Bleeding Kansas.

Democrats and the left nevertheless press ahead—even as they know where their madness ultimately leads.

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