

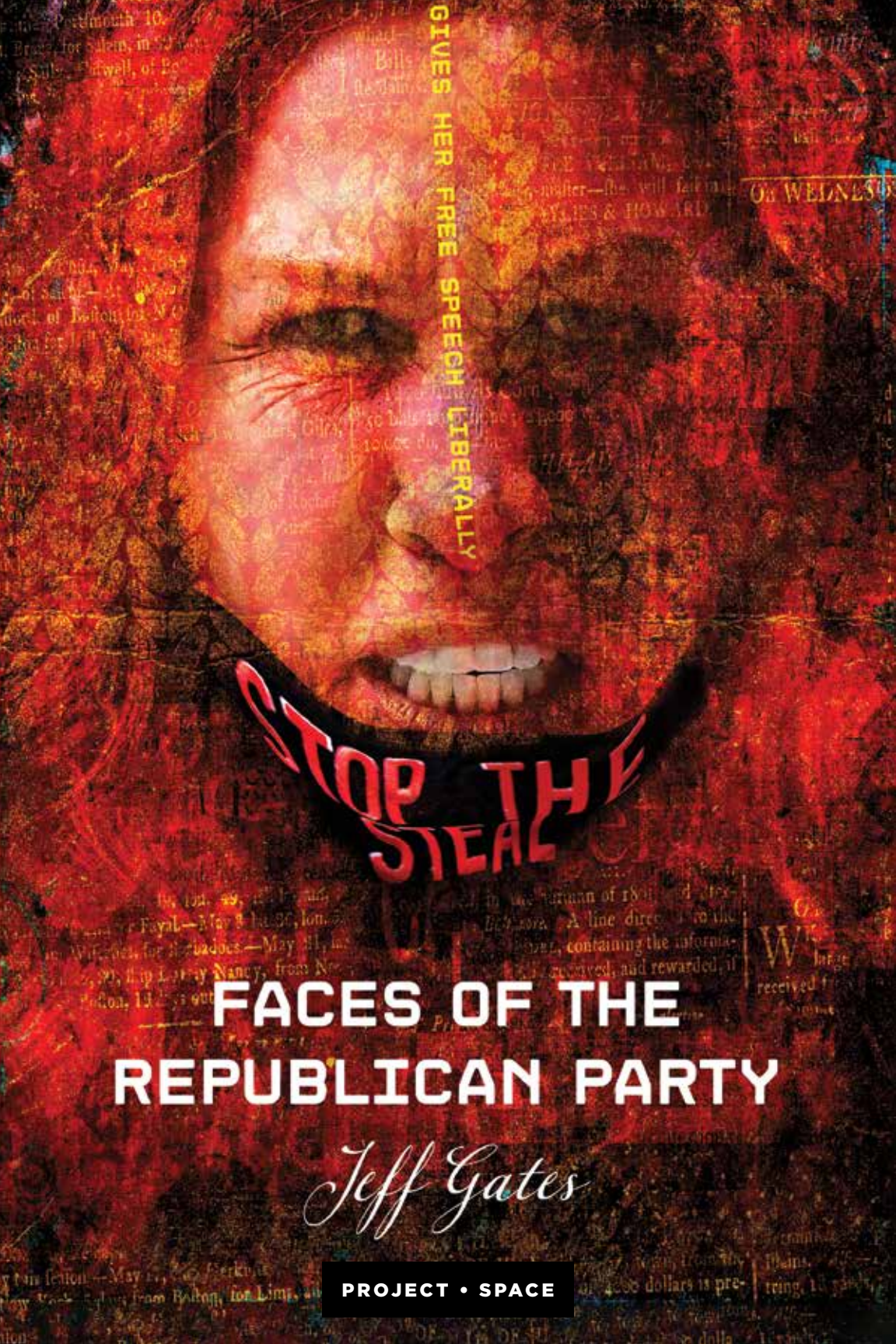
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STOP THE STEAL

FACES OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

Jeff Gates

PROJECT • SPACE



FACES OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

JEFF GATES

September 7 - December 8, 2024

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY MUSEUM PROJECT SPACE

Introduction

In July 2010, as the Senate held Supreme Court confirmation hearings for Elena Kagan, news reports suggested her confirmation vote would run along party lines, with all Republicans voting against her (as it turned out, five Republican Senators voted to confirm her). Polarization was becoming the wall dividing America. This



was the beginning of the Chamomile Tea Party, the moniker Jeff Gates chose for this project. Starting with old World War I and World War II propaganda posters, he began remixing these posters with new text and imagery into commentary on the sorry state of contemporary American political discourse.

Why would someone elected to represent the American people put their party ahead of what was good for the country? At first, Gates believed “the greater good” would rise above

party politics. But he misjudged the game of power.

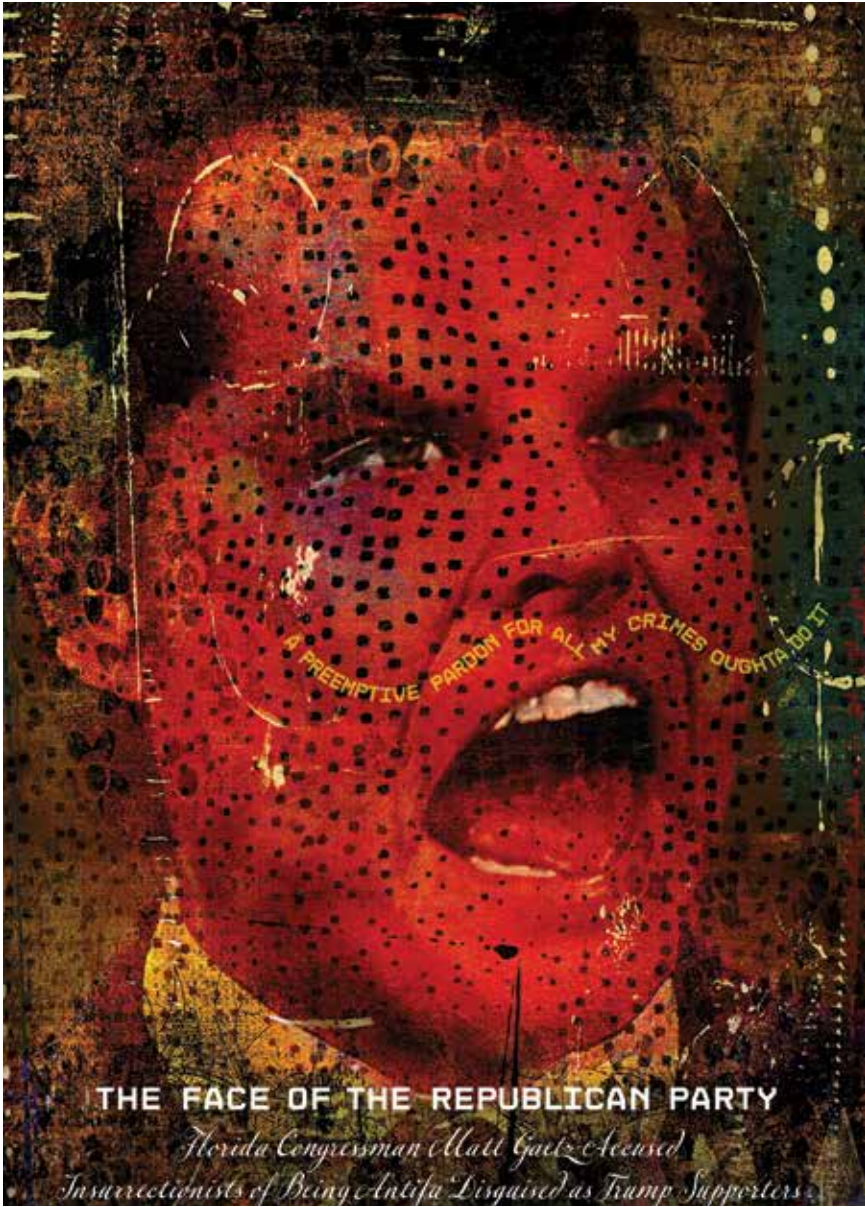
Jeff Gates has now created over three hundred posters chronicling American politics during one of the most turbulent periods in our country’s history. His writing and images have become a visual history of these times.



Jeff Gates, *I Lost My Job While You Played Party Politics*, © 2012, Chamomile Tea Party, Gallery Place Metro Stop, Washington, DC.

But what's a poster if it isn't seen and used by the public? In 2010, just before Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert's "Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear" on the National Mall, he invited viewers to download his posters and bring them to the gathering to voice their concerns about the gridlock taking place in Congress. And they did. In 2012, Gates was the first artist to buy ad space in Washington, DC's Metro, where he placed his posters on platform advertising signs. Every day, he would stand in front of his work and engage commuters about the issues his work spoke to.

The Chamomile Tea Party began as a commentary on the bluster of the Tea Party, which rose to prominence as a protest against Barack Obama's social and fiscal agendas. In the intervening fourteen years, the political landscape has morphed. Tranquility and compromise, which, at first, seemed merely challenging to obtain, now seem impossible. And this is reflected in Gates's latest work, *Faces of the Republican Party*. As Donald Trump remade the Republican Party to reflect his own image, Gates began creating a visual inventory of his acolytes. This work combines both documentary and artistic expression. The texts under these portraits are facts, often using quotes from each subject. The portraits are interpretations of each person's role in the political dynamic and drama that has become American politics.



Florida Congressman Matt Gaetz Accused Insurrectionists of Being Antifa Disguised as Trump Supporters, 2022.

All images are: Digital prints, 23 x 16 in. Courtesy of the artist.

ARTIST STATEMENT

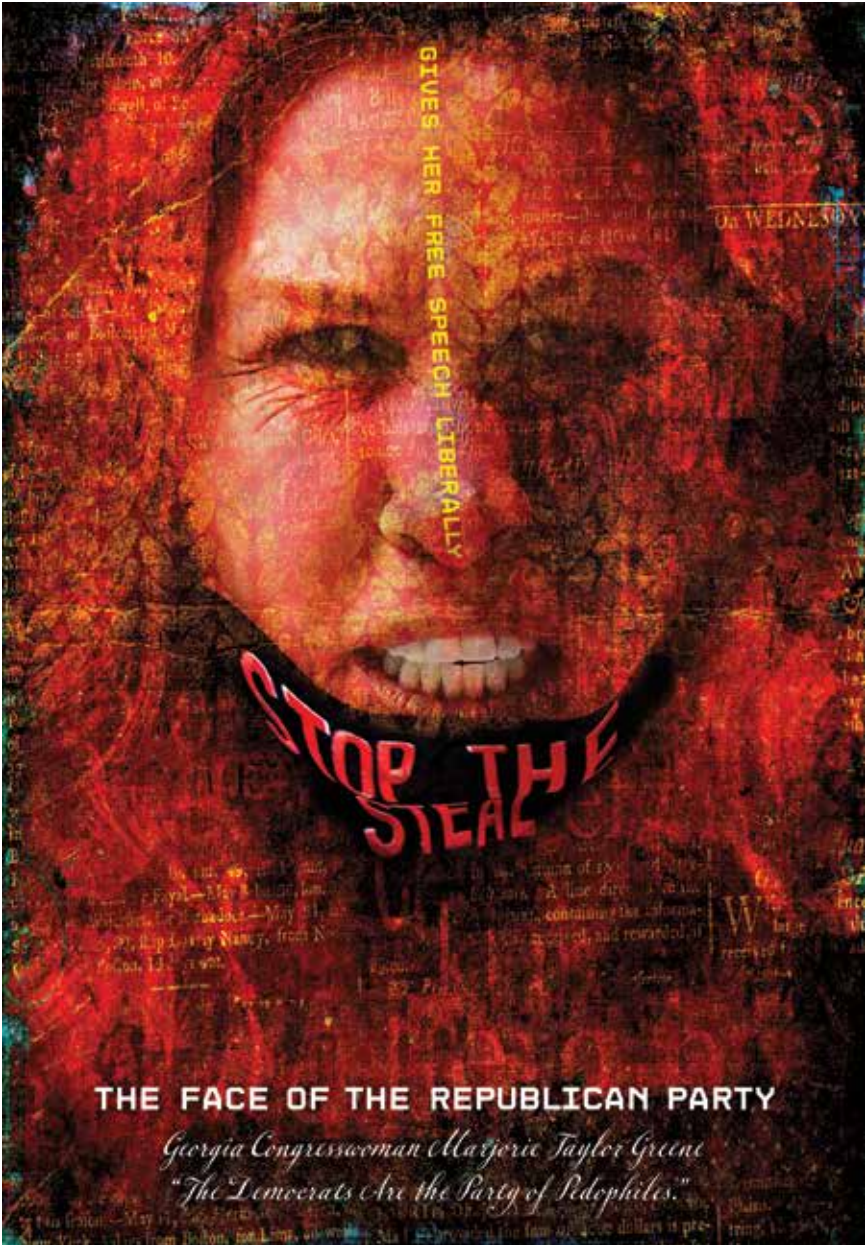
What an extraordinary opportunity to show my work in our nation's capital during the 2024 presidential election. Who knows where we'll be on November 5. Will it be a repeat of 2016? I remember the feelings I had the day after that election. Standing on the subway platform, waiting for my ride to work, as the train pulled into the station, I asked the stranger beside me, "Is this the train to Toronto?" We both laughed, some comic relief from the shock. But this time, we know the stakes are even higher.

How did we get to this point? We've been inundated with constant drama, from Donald Trump's inauguration to the January 6 insurrection and his hush money trial. And that concern is reflected in my *Faces of the Republican Party* series.

As someone recently said to me, "Washington, DC is the angriest city in which I've lived. People come here from all over the country to air their grievances." These images echo that sentiment. By contrast, the actual prints are beautiful, even painterly. This dichotomy mirrors our country's zeitgeist: the difference between the ideals of American Exceptionalism and the reality of our tumultuous experiences.

To make these portraits, I collage parts from various photographs. I tie each person's likeness to their actions in our political drama. Using Photoshop to manipulate their expressions, my understanding of anatomy is indispensable. I'm experimenting in ways I've never done before. I never know beforehand what the final image will look like. This differs from my previous way of working, where I made all decisions in my camera's viewfinder. But after being an artist for over forty years, I've discovered a sense of confidence in the face of uncertainty. Is this piece working? Sometimes, no matter what I do, it isn't, and I force myself to start over. But in the end, there is always a sense of fortuitous discovery. It happens every time.

The words I use on each image are factual. The imagery is a visceral reaction to these facts. I'm commenting on this point in our history, documenting and interpreting what we're experiencing. And along the way, my understanding may change. Over the course of making this series, I've reworked images and words as new facts are revealed. I've never worked on a body of work in such a constant state of flux. Most interestingly, as we move from the run-up to the election to its aftermath, the context of these images will change. So, viewing this series at different times during this exhibition will provide new insights. Its context will be an ongoing dynamic. It's no coincidence that my process mirrors the state of our society at this uncertain point in time.



Georgia Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene "The Democrats Are the Party of Pedophiles," 2022.

Jeff Gates: Faces that Ooze Contempt

STEVEN HELLER

Jeff Gates is angry, and reasonably so. “I’m angry at those who manipulate our cultural zeitgeist for their own aspirations,” he says. Creating political posters that visually ooze contempt through take-no-prisoner images, each poster in *Faces of the Republican Party* is executed with emotional intensity. Each politico’s face is captioned with a simple indictment for crimes against the nation. His targets are the fervent MAGA-men-and-women in Congress and those opportunists who are just along for the ride.

Make no mistake, this work is not gratuitous trashing but heartfelt protest. “To govern effectively, we need people who listen to each other,” Gates says, “especially those from different parts of the political spectrum.” The congressional representatives for whom he shows no mercy aren’t interested in governing. “The Republican Party isn’t interested, either,” he insists. They want raw power, and Gates’s images reveal this as vividly as he can.

His images are neither caricatures nor portraits; let’s call them *character traits*. In the tradition of German polemicist John Heartfield, the acerbic Weimar photomontage executioner, Gates’s raw material comes from public photographs. “I will often alter their faces just enough to emphasize the emotions and attitudes they’re already conveying.” They are arguably exaggerated portrayals and decidedly vicious in their intent. Gates takes exception: “If we’re going to use the word ‘vicious’, these people’s rhetoric and actions are vicious. As a visual critic, I’m just pointing it out.”

Jeff Gates’s biography reads like a testament to the First Amendment and the tremendous power of political commentary. With a political science and graphic design background and living in Washington, DC, he found a critical voice by addressing political causes. In the late 1980s, he founded Artists for a Better Image (ArtFBI) to study stereotypes of contemporary artists. Early on, he understood the social ramifications of the web, which influenced his choice to join the Smithsonian American Art Museum as lead producer of New Media Initiatives; for twenty-two years before retiring in 2018, he helped shepherd the museum into the online world.

He is also the founder of the Chamomile Tea Party, where he's created over 300 posters on the hypocrisy of American political discourse. Just before the 2012 presidential election, he was the first artist to buy ad space in Washington, D.C.'s Metro, hanging posters about the effects of legislative partisanship on platform signs. From 2018-2020, Google Arts & Culture published an eight-part online exhibition of this work, allowing Gates to create a visual history of American politics from the rise of the Tea Party to the election of Donald Trump. His *bête noir* is the onerous gang of ultra-right agitators, including Matt Gaetz, Marjorie Taylor Greene, Lauren Boebert, and Paul Gosar. Each "deserves to be taken to task for their lack of civility, their unwillingness to compromise for the betterment of Americans' lives, their belief in conspiracy theories, and their desire to disrupt our institutions instead of helping their constituents."

Gates is nostalgic for saner times when "the purpose of our government [was and] is to solve problems so we can survive and flourish. It's not a place for personal vendettas or manufactured cultural wedge issues." His "Faces" reflect frustration with this existential perverse transformation of American beliefs.

Gates's earlier montage work began as remixes of twentieth-century propaganda posters, and he has always been an ardent observer of advertising. "I'm interested in how to 'sell' an idea using images and text in very economical ways to increase their impact." His philosophy for making agitprop art has deep personal roots. "Western and Eastern philosophies show us two different ways we deal with power and anger," he explains. "Think of the West's boxing versus the East's martial arts. In boxing, it's who hits hardest and longest: direct power against power. In martial arts, one uses their opponent's energy against them, taking the oncoming force and redirecting it. I'm more of a martial arts guy in my interactions with others. I grew up in a house where whoever yelled the loudest won. Later, I learned to disable my father's 'boxing' by redirecting his anger. It was fascinating and compelling."

His art is a psychological release. "I'm redirecting their power to give voice to my opinion." As a visual political critic, Gates understands the limits of his power as an artist. "I make these images for myself. It's a way of countering the powerlessness I feel these days. I'm not a political powerbroker. The success of my work is getting it out into the public where people can react to it and even use it (this is why I offer all my digital images as free downloads)." He hopes the people depicted in these images might see and react to them. But Gates has no illusions. "They won't inflict pain on people so self-absorbed. If anything, they feed on criticism."

Throughout history, artists have often faced consequences for their opinions. Among other banned graphic commentators of the 1920s, George Grosz was put on trial for libel and “sacrilegious” work for protesting militarism and caricaturing key military leaders. In this country, Gates has the freedom to be contentious. “The First Amendment protects my right to comment on [our leaders’] behavior unless I am inciting violence, which I’m not. There are no religious or social edicts against visually depicting Congresspeople.” Libel means to defame. Merriam-Webster defines defamation as “communicating false statements about a person that injure that person’s reputation.” There is nothing false about these images or the words they utter. Gates either quotes them or describes behavior that has already been documented. “Any defamation of their character is self-inflicted,” he says. But he’s anxious about losing that freedom.

Nonetheless, courageous satiric and acerbic art that comments on social, cultural, and political events has a long, impactful history. Gates believes that artists like Hieronymus Bosch, Francisco Goya, Honoré Daumier, Pablo Picasso, Romare Bearden, and William H. Johnson, and more contemporary artists like Ai Weiwei, Banksy, Nan Goldin, and Kara Walker have “documented their times in their work.” “As we refine our history to include previously obscure events or marginalized people and their experiences, art creates and enhances expanded worldviews.”

And where does his current commentary fit into today’s dysfunctional body politic? “Many see my work as part of the left critique,” he explains. “But I find some things very illiberal about the far left. This isn’t an issue of ‘bothsidesism,’” he insists. “The GOP is much more destructive. It keeps churning out cultural wedge issues, such as banning important books that tell a more realistic history of the American experience. And they often attempt to rewrite history.” Look at the fact he places under the image of Florida’s governor, Ron DeSantis: *Defending Florida’s New Education Curriculum, Governor Ron DeSantis Agreed That Slavery Led Many Blacks to Learn Essential Skills ‘For Personal Benefit.* “Republicans’ propaganda—that Democrats are making Whites feel responsible for our past racism—is a canard. Racism *is* systematic. Our present reflects our past. And that past is not an illusion.”

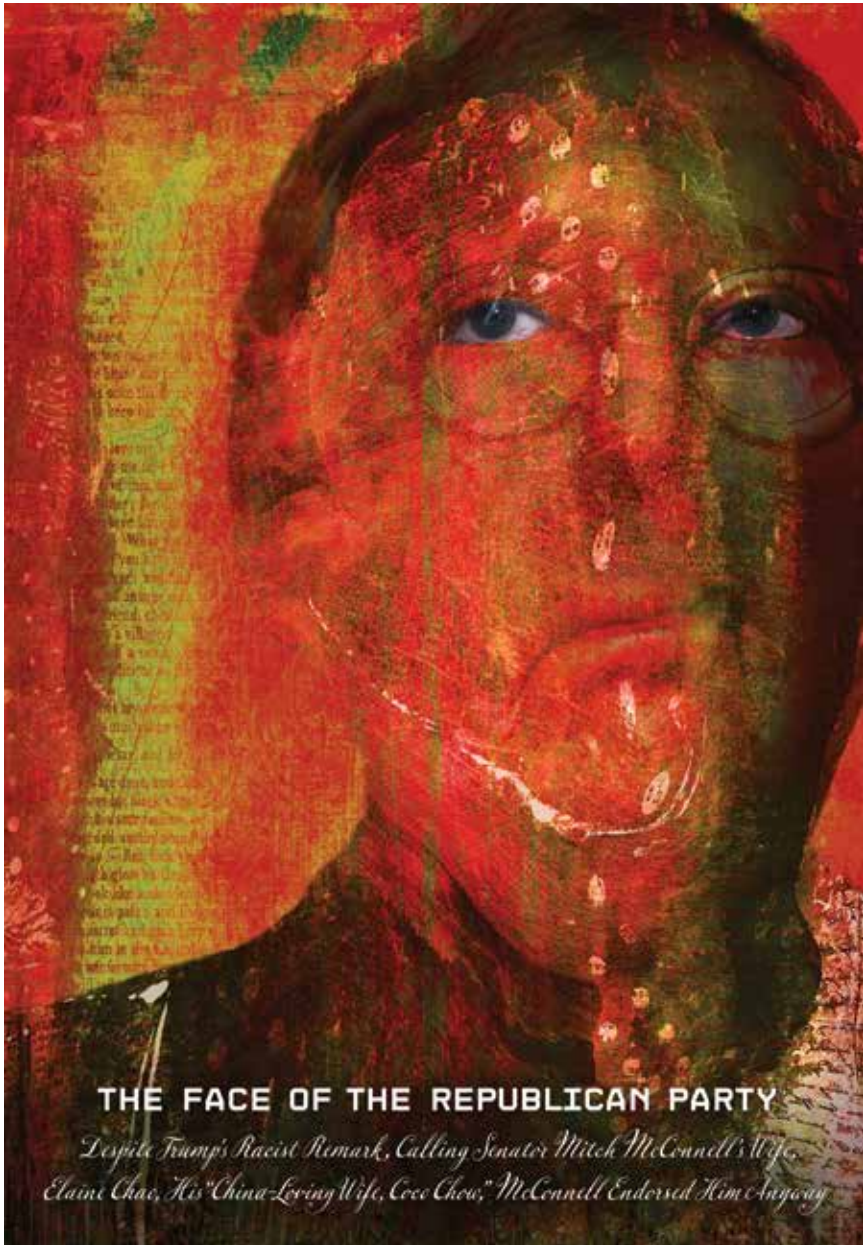
There can be no mistaking Gates as non-partisan. His work to date has focused on the Republicans. Yet he describes his position as not being *on* the political spectrum but outside it. “I consider myself a humanist and learn from the wide breadth of others’ stories. “I can work with traditional conservatives who value order and tradition,” he says. “But I can’t accept Republicans who live their lives in constant opposition...and their attempts to lock history into a narrow paradigm.”

Visual commentary, Gates argues, reflects, and comments on destructive currents in our culture. “I reject our status quo, and my art reflects this. To quote the sixth-century Buddhist Sent-ts’an, ‘If you want the truth to stand clear before you, never be for or against. The struggle between ‘for’ and ‘against’ is the mind’s worst disease.’” Jeff Gates believes, “Whether visual or written, art attempts to keep our history elastic. We can fill it with as much lived experience as we want.”

Steven Heller is the founder and co-chair emeritus of MFA Design: Designer As Entrepreneur program at the School of Visual Arts. He was an art director of *The New York Times* for 33 years and art director of *The Times Book Review*. He writes “The Daily Heller” and is the author of 200 books on the history and practice of graphic design, illustration, satiric art, and popular visual culture.



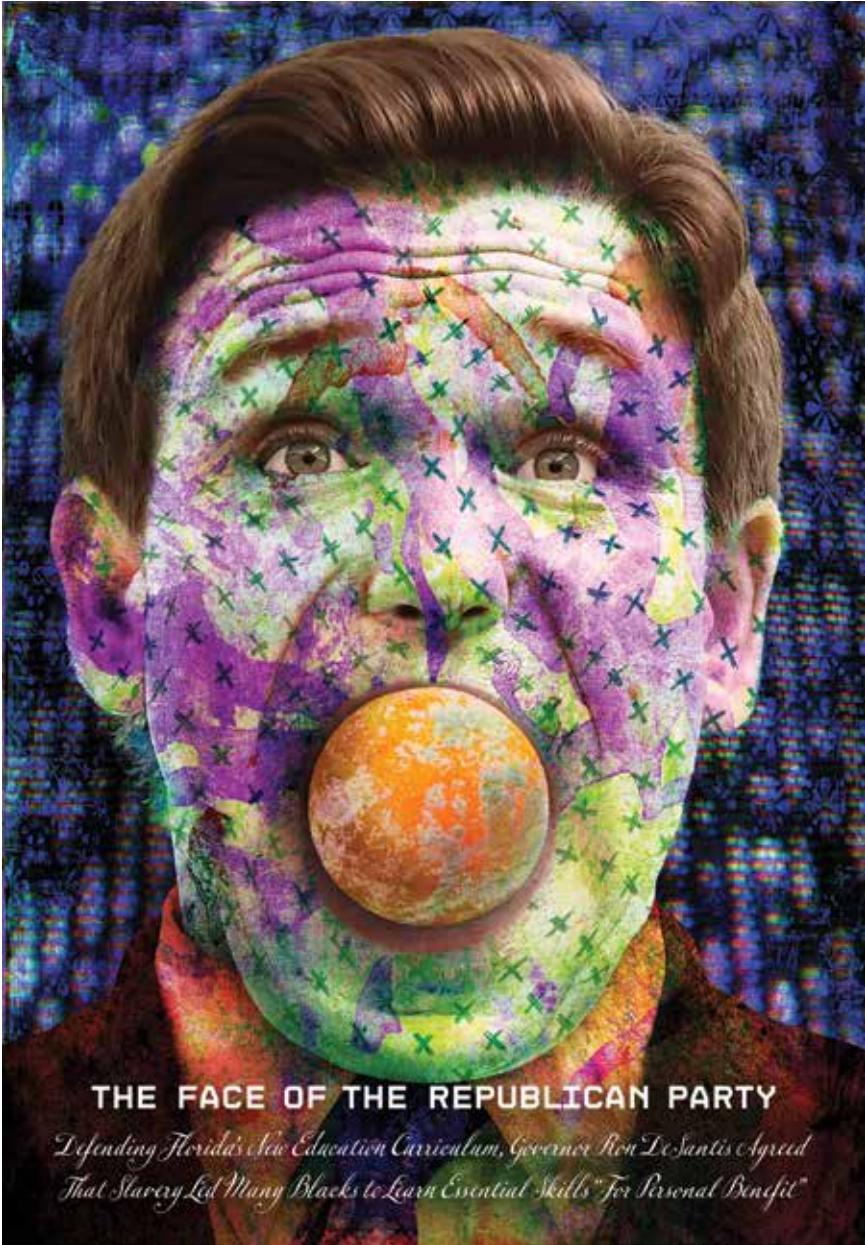
Jeff Gates at work.



THE FACE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

Despite Trump's Racist Remark, Calling Senator Mitch McConnell's Wife, Elaine Chao, His "China-Loving Wife, Coco Chow," McConnell Endorsed Him Anyway

Despite Trump's Racist Remark, Calling Senator Mitch McConnell's Wife, Elaine Chao, His "China-Loving Wife, Coco Chow," McConnell Endorsed Him Anyway, 2024.



THE FACE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

Defending Florida's New Education Curriculum, Governor Ron DeSantis Agreed That Slavery Led Many Blacks to Learn Essential Skills "For Personal Benefit"

Defending Florida's New Education Curriculum, Governor Ron DeSantis Agreed That Slavery Led Many Blacks to Learn Essential Skills "For Personal Benefit," 2022.

We're Choking On Our Words

JEFF GATES

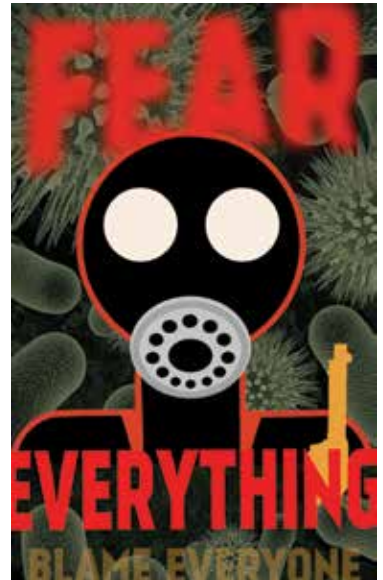
My words are failing me. Writing, of course, is only a proxy for understanding the world. But as it teeters on a precipice, I'm trying to find words to make sense of it. Our world is not black and white, no matter what our politicians tell us. Instead, it's full of undulating grays. We encounter these grays daily but are often blind to them. They're chaotic and don't make our lives easy to understand. And our words reflect that. We're frustrated and lash out without thinking. It's easier to believe what we want to believe without questioning.

Reactionary rhetoric has subsumed logic and intelligent commentary. Truth and discourse are eroding. "Alternative facts," said with straight faces, are maddening. We give words no respect, tossing them around with little thought but with a lot of anger. This is happening across the political spectrum, and finding our voices has become more difficult. That's why so many are yelling.

Social media magnifies this by acting as an extremist megaphone. In reality, the United States is a centrist country.¹ But our political structures divide us, reducing our collective voices into gerrymandered congressional districts and Electoral College votes. A flawed primary system accentuates intolerance, while fear fuels our elections and governance.

I've been making art and writing about American politics for fourteen years. Under the guise of the Chamomile Tea Party, I design posters about the sorry state of American political discourse.² Finding the right words is crucial to my work.

After the 2016 election, suddenly, I was amassing a substantial backlog of material for my images, provided every day by Donald Trump's tweets and Mitch



Fear Everything, Blame Everyone,
© 2014 Jeff Gates, Chamomile Tea Party.

McConnell's and Paul Ryan's plans to remake this country into a rich man's paradise. Each unbelievable pronouncement was more incredible than the one before. That's when I first noticed words failing me.

The GOP's dismantling of citizens' safeguards seemed disastrous and transparent; worse, they conveyed them without conscience. "Hyperbole," "hypocrisy," and "hubris" lost their meanings. In 2022, Florida Republican Senator Rick Scott proposed "sunsetting" Social Security and Medicare, long-term programs that have successfully helped middle Americans. Like appropriating "woke" as a pejorative (when it originally meant an interest in social justice), the right labels any program that attempts to balance social and economic disparity as "socialist," equating the word to communism and totalitarianism.

Growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, I was enamored with commercial advertising. How were words and images used to sell a product or an idea? The same can be said in politics. Phrases like "Defund the Police" and "From the River to the Sea" were meant to convey one meaning. Yet, in our murky world, we often interpret them differently.

"Defund the Police" became a movement after the death of George Floyd in 2020. It originally meant an effort to reallocate funds earmarked for social services and mental health from the police (who are often not trained in these areas) to social and healthcare organizations better suited to handle these issues. However, the phrase's message was unclear and frequently misinterpreted. To many, it was a pejorative and meant to reduce the police force. After the Israeli-Gaza war began in October 2023, "From the River to the Sea" was often seen by Palestinians and others as aspirational—the return of a people to a land with historical ties. Yet, to many others, it was seen as a call for the destruction of Israel, becoming an existential threat to Jews worldwide. Both phrases failed to send clear messages. And both exacerbated our political divide. I keep searching for expressions that are clear and have retained their gravitas. But I have a hard time finding any.

New York Times writer Paul Herrman states that political discourse is being weaponized, both by the right and the left. No one is safe, he says, and "the fabric of civilian life is now wrapped in a linguistic fog of war."³ That fog has turned into smog, and the air has become rancid with vitriol. We use words as threats. The right appropriates phrases like "fake news" and "lame media" as convenient weapons against fruitful dialogue. The far left uses "racist" as a mark of scorn, like Hester Prynne's scarlet letter, but one devoid of context. Is it possible to find our way out of this morass?

WHAT'S GOING ON WITH THE RIGHT?

In the world of competing points of view, the past has some lessons we may have forgotten. Trump didn't create White supremacy, but he did shock many of us by revealing how entrenched it continues to be. A narcissist and master of manipulation, Trump knows how to get what he wants. And he knows how to tap into Americans' anger to get it. But that animosity has been present since the beginning of our country. Racial hatred, anti-Semitism, and distrust of immigrants and other marginalized groups like the LGBTQ community have long histories. Trump made them relevant again. And the Republican Party, in lockstep, gladly joined his authoritarian crusade.

In May 2023, Alabama Senator Tommy Tuberville was asked if White nationalists should be allowed into the military. He responded, "Well, they call them that. I call them Americans." *New York Times* writer Charles M. Blow put what many of us were thinking into words. Terms like "White nationalism" aren't opinions. They're facts. "'White nationalist' means something: White nationalism is a form of White supremacy that advocates White dominance and White control. You don't have to take my word for it, you can look it up."⁴

For decades, Republicans have hijacked the word "patriotism" to mean unbridled nationalist pride, an authoritarian "America: love it or leave it." So rather than see White nationalism as something racist, Trump and Tuberville see one's allegiance to nationalism as a test. Are you a *real* American? A real patriot? In doing so, everyone else becomes the enemy. Words represent critical ideas, and the right is co-opting them. We must make sure they don't. Blow calls this "tortured logic" that will lead to ridiculousness. And it has.

I'm not surprised by Trump's and Tuberville's logic. But I'm angry that so many Americans buy into it, often brazenly. And at any moment, we can find ourselves the object of this hatred. A YouTube video shows the police arresting a woman for spitting on two Muslims in Florida.⁵ I was just at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery looking at Trump's photograph in the museum's Hall of Presidents. When I commented on his image to friends, a woman in a blouse adorned with a sequined "Q" gave me a dirty look. We didn't exchange words. But it was a reminder of the danger that now lurks everywhere.

The GOP knows demographics are not on its side. The Brookings Institute predicts Whites will become a minority in the United States by 2045.⁶ To combat this, Republicans use two strategies to offset their losses: cultural exclusion and voter suppression. They claim that acknowledging historical and systematic racism makes Whites feel badly about themselves. So, they forbid

African American history in our textbooks. Their “White replacement theory” has become our new Jim Crow.⁷ As if there was a positive side to enslaving millions, Florida’s Governor Ron DeSantis suggested that slavery allowed many Blacks to learn essential skills “for personal benefit.” Tortured logic leads not only to ridiculousness but also to the erasure of valuable lessons we could use to make our country more egalitarian. That was the hope of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Drag queens are out; book bans are in. Migrants are out and replaced by dangerous child labor.⁸ Women and their doctors can no longer determine what’s best for their health. Queer and transgender people are ostracized and prevented from living their chosen lives, and people are murdered weekly by AR-15s. Politicians are legislating what we can and can’t do and think. When your goal is to win by opposing anything Democrats propose, compromise is impossible. Governing fails, and many Americans suffer.

By suppressing the ability to vote, the GOP hopes to reduce more moderate voters from having their say. Gerrymandering congressional districts, opposing mail-in and extended voting, purging voter rolls, and refusing to allow former felons the right to cast their ballots are being used to benefit the Republican Party. In a recent talk to conservative donors, Trump lawyer and election denier Cleta Mitchell presented a plan for limiting voting by minorities and students.⁹ Her disdain for student voters was evident when she said, “They basically put the polling place next to the student dorm, so they just have to roll out of bed, vote, and go back to bed.”

Since the end of the Trump Administration, these right-wing culture wars have become hotter. In April 2023, the Tennessee House ousted two Democrats after they protested gun violence on the chamber floor.¹⁰

The same month, the Montana House voted to prevent transgender Representative Zoey Zephyr from attending any more sessions of the body for speaking out about the lives of transgender youth as they debated a bill to ban gender-affirming care.¹¹ These acts are meant to silence others “by giving dissenters the choice of assimilation or elimination.”¹²



GOP Lawyer Cleta Mitchell Is Trying to Suppress Student Voting. "They Put the Polling Place Next to the Dorm So They Just Have to Roll Out of Bed, Vote, and Go Back to Bed,"
© 2023 Jeff Gates, Chamomile Tea Party.

WHILE ON THE LEFT

The extreme left divides us in different ways. During the spring of 2017, students at The Evergreen State College in Washington State chanted “racist” when they called for the dismissal of Professor Bret Weinstein, a Bernie Sanders supporter, for questioning their demand that all White students leave campus during the college’s annual *Day of Absence*. Until that year, people of color volunteered to leave campus to discuss important issues of race and status, returning to honor diversity with a *Day of Presence*.¹³

In a video of this confrontation, Weinstein tells the students, “There is a difference between debate and dialectic. Debate means you are trying to win; dialectic means you are using disagreement to discover what is true. I’m not interested in debate. I am only interested in dialectic, which means I listen to you, and you listen to me.” A student yells, “I don’t care what you want to speak on. This isn’t about you.”¹⁴ How does one respond to that? The president of Evergreen, George Bridges, stated in a *New York Times* interview, “Using the word ‘racist’ halts the conversation. It just ends it.”¹⁵ It’s a powerful word, and when used indiscriminately, it loses its meaning and obfuscates our search for solutions.

According to Justin Gest, author of *The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality*, this explains why the White working class’s devotion to Trump remains steadfast. In a *Washington Post* podcast, Gest said, “For [the White working class], racism has become an instrument of silence. It’s a way of invalidating people. By saying someone’s a racist, it means they cease to matter—don’t listen to them.”¹⁶

In March 2023, audience members heckled Trump-appointed Judge Kyle Duncan of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals as he began his talk at Stanford University’s law school. Judge Duncan, a staunch conservative, could not continue. The incident created a wave of criticism by the right and a meaningful response by the law school’s dean, Jenny S. Martinez, who apologized to Duncan. Her letter to Stanford’s law students illuminates many problems we’re experiencing as a society.¹⁷ If you substitute “country” when she mentions “university,” we can apply her words to our culture at large.

“The mission of the university is the discovery, improvement, and dissemination of knowledge. Its domain of inquiry and scrutiny includes all aspects and all values of society. A university faithful to its mission will provide enduring challenges to social values, policies, practices, and institutions. By design and by effect, it is the institution which creates discontent with the existing social arrangements and proposes new ones. In brief, a good university, like Socrates, will be upsetting.”

The nature of the discourse, not our differing viewpoints, divides our nation. She continues, “The cycle stops when we recognize our responsibility to treat each other with the dignity with which we expect to be met. It stops when we choose to replace condemnation with curiosity, invective with inquiry. The cycle of degenerating discourse won’t stop if we insist that people we disagree with must first behave the way we want them to. Nor will it stop if we try to shame each other into submission.”

Instead of using words to connect and discuss, we use them to separate and isolate. The incidents at Evergreen, Stanford, and Donald Trump’s ongoing political rallies embrace an ideology of exclusion. Our words reinforce an unsustainable black-and-white world.

MY RESPONSIBILITIES AS AN ARTIST AND WRITER

Growing up in my family, I had to learn to think fast and use my words to defend myself. I wanted to be heard. Years later, I discovered that if you want to be heard, speak to others in ways that will help them hear you. To do that, I must first listen. This has been a critical part of my art for over forty years. Looking back on my past projects, actively engaging with those who encounter my work has been essential to my art practice.¹⁸

Given the world as it is, I’m tiptoeing through a cultural minefield. Both the extreme left’s politically correct orthodoxy and the right’s intransigence are corrosive. So, where do I stand? It’s not somewhere on the political spectrum between those two extremes. It’s not that simple. As an artist, I’m somewhere else—between anger and curiosity and between our fears and truths—weaving through those nuanced grays. Some have said *Faces of the Republican Party* is too partisan for the art world. I counter by saying, “The people depicted in this series are the partisans.”¹⁹

Shortly after the 2016 election, a Facebook friend and ardent Bernie supporter posted: “I’m told I’m nuts for assuming people who promoted [Hillary Clinton] agreed with her policies.” Should I respond and risk the wrath of ideologues that could cause an exhausting war of words? I considered it, dismissed my reluctance, and jumped into the fray. I voted for Clinton but didn’t agree with many of her positions. This was a complex decision, and I had to consider the electability of Sanders and Trump’s threat of autocracy as alternatives. Politics is complicated (made more so by our American electoral process). With her defeat,

I realized there had been a significant paradigm shift. What I thought impossible had become a reality: the American people voted against the status quo. The election outcome was not what I had wanted. But it opened up new possibilities. And my views continually change to embrace that shift.

Instead of being chastised for faulty reasoning, someone actually listened to me. One immediately responded to my comment: “I’m just blown away to read someone on Facebook acknowledged opinions naturally develop and change.” My friend added, “This is the first honest and heartfelt response I’ve gotten.”

THE HERE AND NOW

After Joe Biden’s presidential win, I hoped we would step back from the authoritarian precipice of the Trump presidency. But as we approach the 2024 election, Donald has elevated his extremist rhetoric as he once again becomes the Republican nominee. Despite being impeached twice, his role in the January 6 insurrection, and being found guilty of thirty-four felonies for trying to falsify business records to hide a sex scandal that could have hurt his 2016 presidential campaign, his base continues to support him. He and his confederates, like Fox News and MAGA legislators, continue to peddle falsehoods, including that Trump won the 2020 election.

The Democrats and Republicans are not equally to blame for this mess. The GOP continues to support “rugged individualism” for the wealthy but legislates the personal lives of the middle class and poor. By manufacturing racial and cultural estrangement and ignoring the poor and elderly, Republicans divide us. A recent study on election trust and partisan identity from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins concludes that “a political party that has undermined its own voters’ faith in elections is a destabilizing force



Enough!, © 2021 Jeff Gates, Chamomile Tea Party.

in a democracy.”²⁰ The Democrats have their problems, but they don’t threaten our country’s foundation and democratic institutions.

Our national mantra is based on the concept of American Exceptionalism. Many revere the United States as “the land of opportunity,” the Horatio Alger notion that through hard work and perseverance, anyone could rise from “rags to riches.” But this nineteenth-century idea is no longer accurate (if it ever was). For the middle class and poor, creating generational wealth is becoming impossible. In 2020, while CEOs and other corporate executives received huge monetary compensations, it took American men fifty-three weeks of work per year to earn enough to pay for the essential middle-class life.²¹ It took women sixty-six weeks to do the same. And, yes, a year is still only fifty-two weeks. Corporations reward their leaders with large salaries and their stockholders with increases in share prices. But why aren’t the workers compensated for their company’s success?

Despite the actions of our political extremes, American ideas and ideals are complex. Distilling them into overly simplistic principles is impossible. Understanding our problems and how to solve them requires care and critical thinking. However, according to the Department of Education, fifty-four percent of Americans have less than a sixth-grade reading level.²² How can anyone think critically when they can’t read?

We’ve lost trust in honest and intelligent dialogue. The object is not to win; it’s to serve the American people. The currency of meaning is worthless when acts of hatred and anger diminish it. How can we effectively address these issues when we legislate curiosity out of existence with book bans and manufactured cultural mandates? Under these circumstances, how can we know what words to use in this polluted atmosphere? How do we know the difference between fear for our futures and ideological hatred? Every person and every act demands our scrutiny.

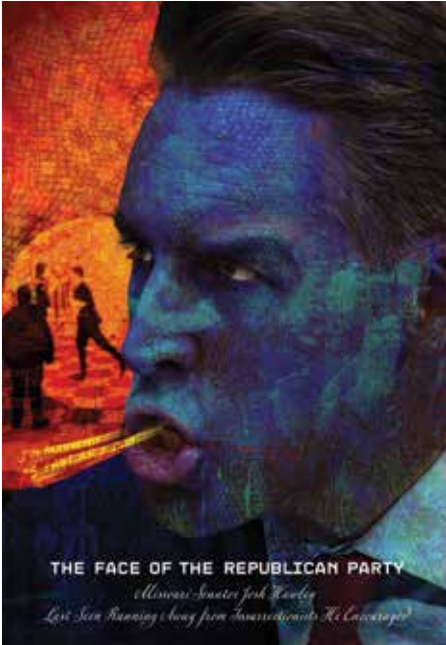
As I encountered on Facebook, being heard and reflectively responding to others’ words are compelling experiences. This should be the foundation of our American experience. When honest statements acknowledging uncertainty and change surprise people, it’s clear we’ve lost our way. I’m fighting hard to make my way to higher ground, out of this filthy, smoggy air, to a place where we can communicate more constructively. It’s a dangerous time. As it stands, this air is making me sick. It’s making all of us sick. We’re choking on our own words.

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TRUTH AND DISCOURSE
ARE ERODING. WE GIVE
WORDS NO RESPECT,
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BUT WITH A LOT OF
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JEFF GATES



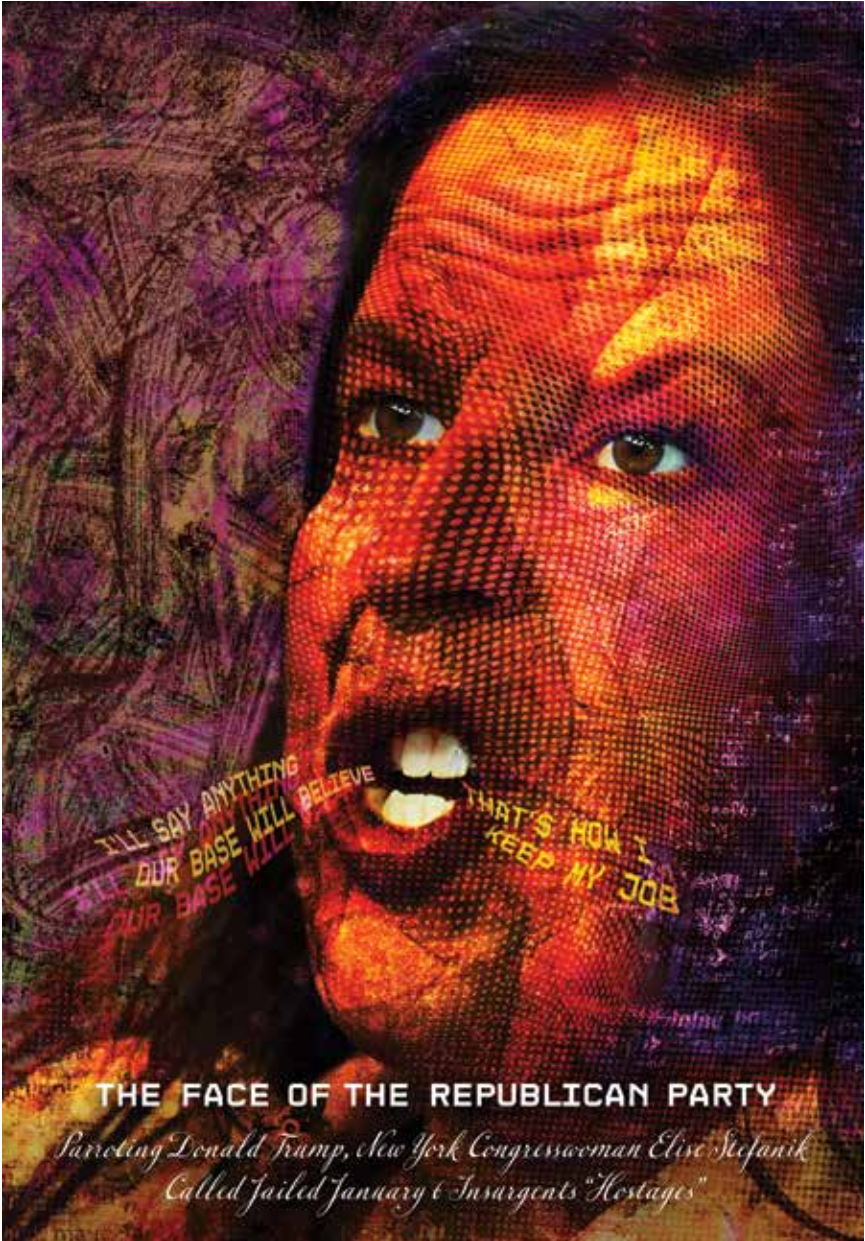
Missouri Senator Josh Hawley, Last Seen Running Away from Insurrectionists He Encouraged, 2022.



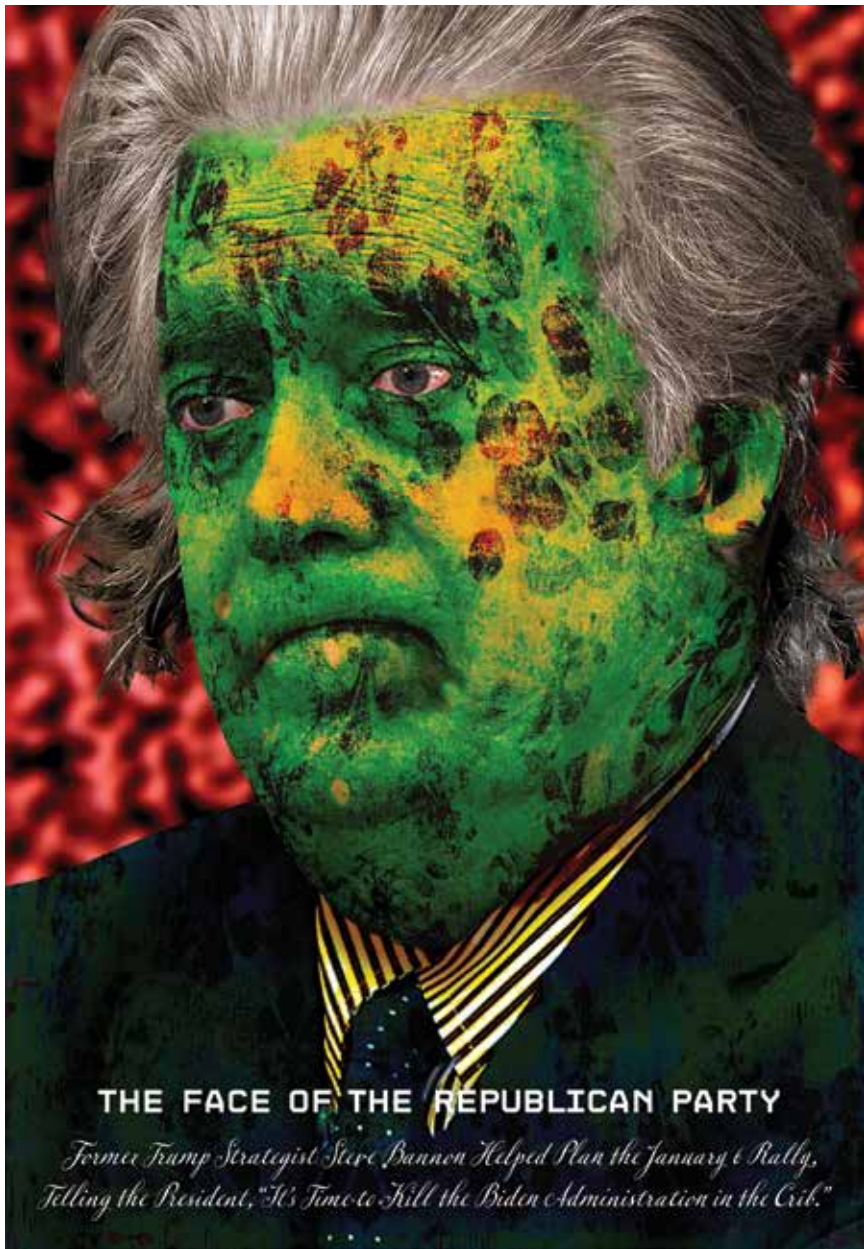
"My Pronouns Are I/Won," Said Defeated Arizona GOP Gubernatorial Candidate Kari Lake after Demanding Election Officials Be "Locked Up," 2024.



Colorado Representative Lauren Boebert Was Asked to Leave a Live Theater Performance after Surveillance Video Showed Her Grabbing Her Date's Crotch, 2022.



Parroted Donald Trump, New York Congresswoman Elise Stefanik Called Jailed January 6 Insurgents "Hostages," 2022.



Former Trump Strategist Steve Bannon Helped Plan the January 6 Rally, Telling the President, "It's Time to Kill the Biden Administration in the Crib," 2022.



Congressman Jim Jordan Stated, "I've Got Nothing to Hide." Yet He Refused to Cooperate with the January 6 Committee., 2024.



Court of Appeals Eviscerated Trump-Appointed Judge Aileen Cannon for Interfering in DOJ Investigation of Classified Documents Taken by Donald Trump, 2022.



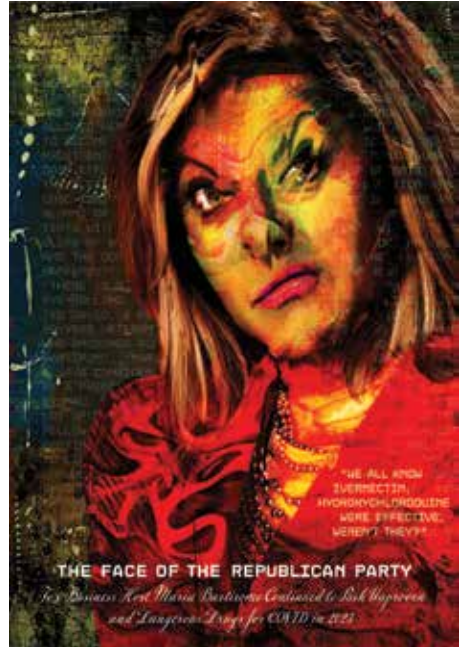
Secret Service Official, Tony Ornato, Refused to Corroborate He Witnessed Donald Trump's Irrate Behavior on January 6.



South Carolina Congresswoman Nancy Mace Called Joe Biden "The Most Corrupt President in US History." GOP Investigations Found Nothing., 2024.



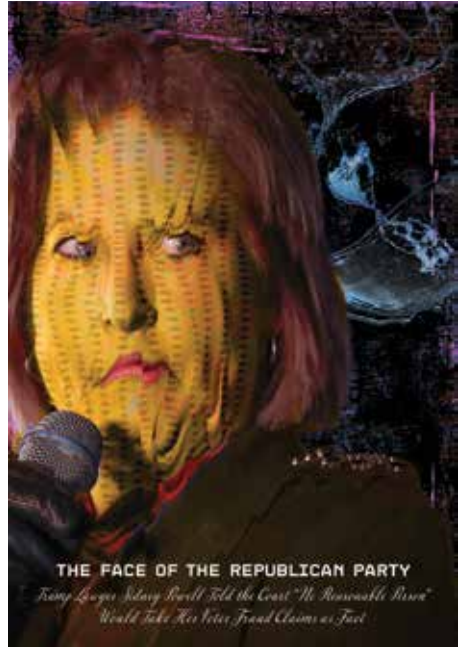
Shocked When Indicted for Fabricating Fake Elector Scheme, Kenneth Chesebro Said, "This Is What Lawyers Do," 2023.



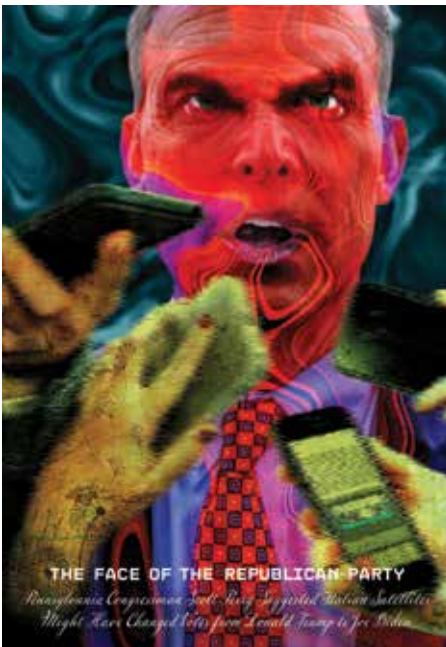
Fox Business Host Maria Bartiromo Continued to Push Unproven and Dangerous Drugs for COVID in 2023, and Langeron Lays for COVID in 2023.



Tennessee Senator Marsha Blackburn Asked Supreme Court Nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson to Define "Woman" as an Attack on Transgender Rights, 2024.



Trump Lawyer Sidney Powell Told the Court "No Reasonable Person" Would Take Her Voter Fraud Claims as Fact, 2023.



Pennsylvania Congressman, Scott Perry, Suggested Italian Satellites Might Have Changed Votes from Donald Trump to Joe Biden, 2023.



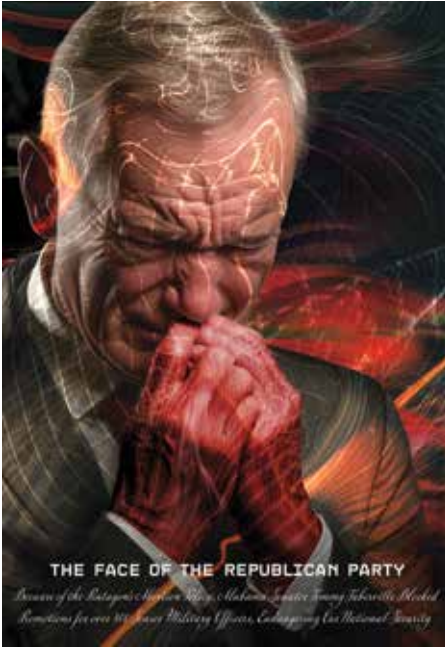
Michigan Dairy Farmer Hank Choate Was Charged with Eight Felony Counts for Claiming He Was a Duly Elected Trump Elector, 2023.



South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham, Who Once Called Trump "A Race-Baiting, Xenophobic Bigot," Is Now His Most Devoted Sycophant, 2023.

I'M TIPTOEING THROUGH
A CULTURAL MINEFIELD.
THE EXTREME LEFT'S AND
RIGHT'S INTRANSIGENCE
IS CORROSIVE. I'M
NOT STANDING ON THE
POLITICAL SPECTRUM
BETWEEN THOSE TWO
EXTREMES. AS AN ARTIST,
I'M SOMEWHERE ELSE
—BETWEEN ANGER AND
CURIOSITY AND BETWEEN
OUR FEARS AND TRUTHS—
WEAVING THROUGH THOSE
NUANCED GRAYS.

JEFF GATES



Because of the Pentagon's Abortion Policy, Alabama Senator Tommy Tuberville Blocked Promotions for over 400 Senior Military Officers, Endangering Our National Security, 2023.



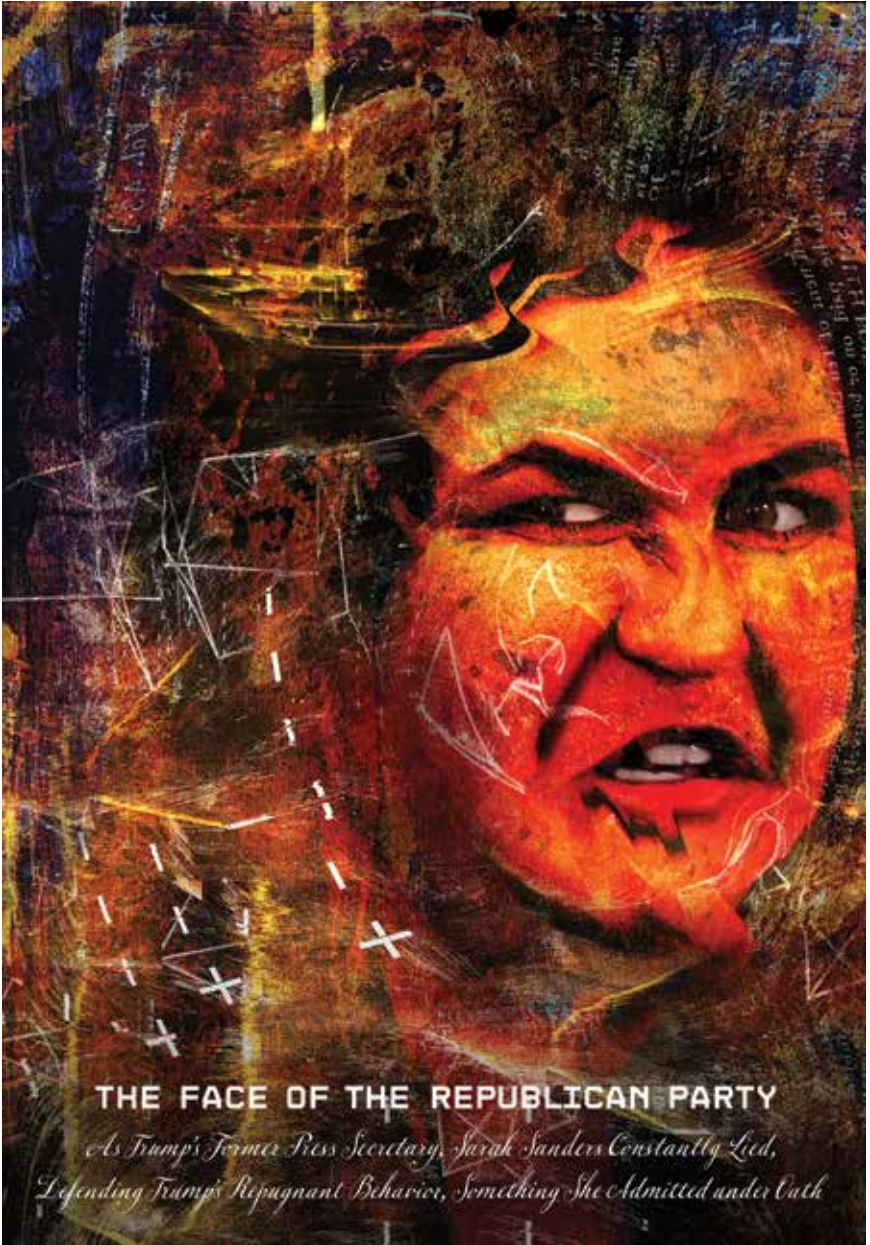
Jenna Ellis, Senior Legal Advisor to Donald Trump's 2020 Campaign, Pleaded Guilty to a Felony of Abetting False Statements in Georgia Election, 2023.



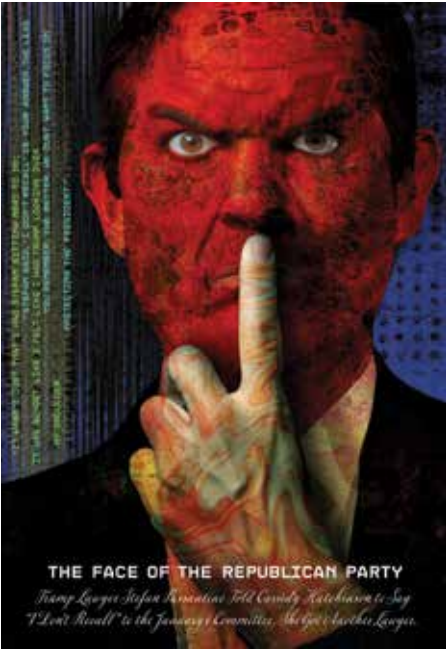
Peter Navarro, Former Trump Advisor, Pleaded for Money on the Street to Fund His Court Case for Defying January 6 Committee Subpoena. Found Guilty, 2023.



The Face of the Republican Party: Project 2025's Kevin Roberts: "We Are in the Process of the Second American Revolution, Which Will Remain Bloodless if the Left Allows It to Be," 2024.



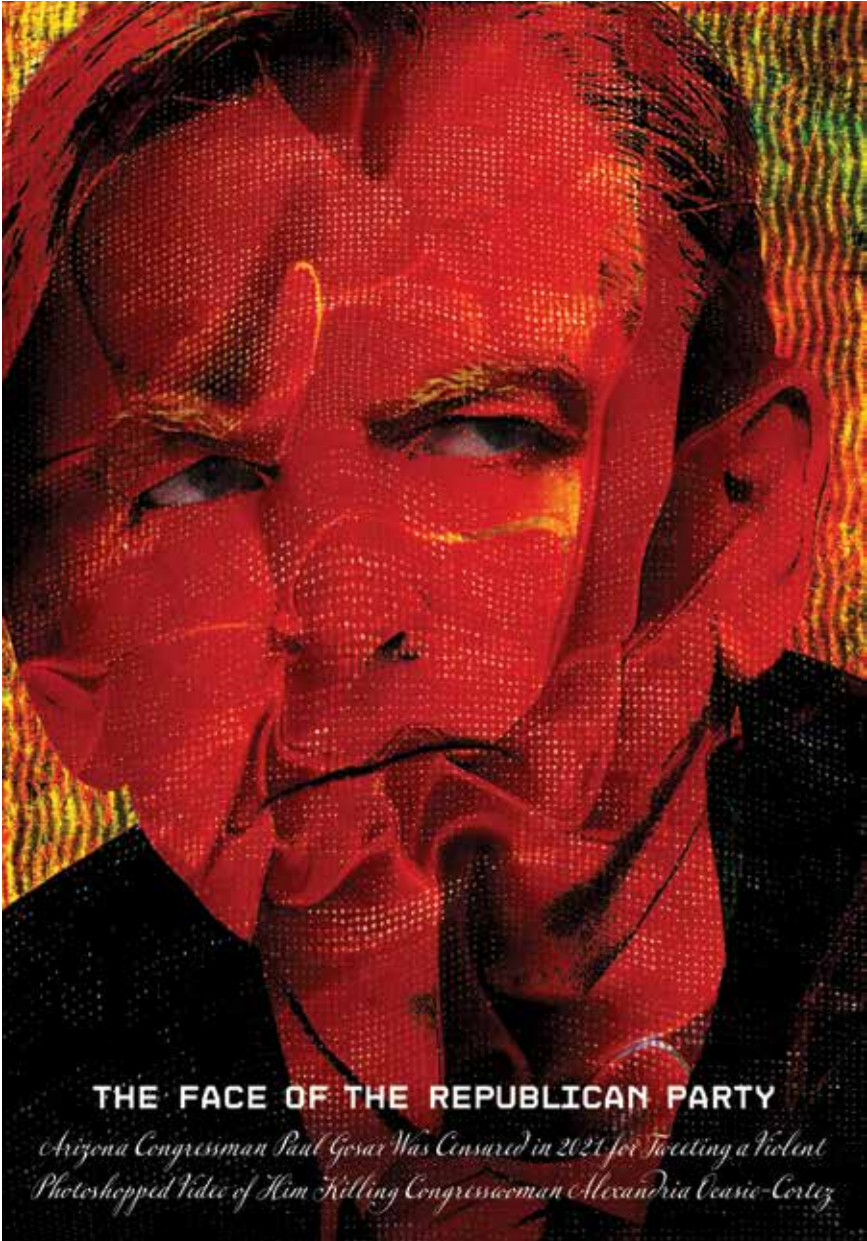
The Face of the Republican Party: As She Admitted under Oath, Trump's Former Press Secretary, Sarah Sanders, Often Lied When Defending Her Boss's Repugnant Behavior, 2023.



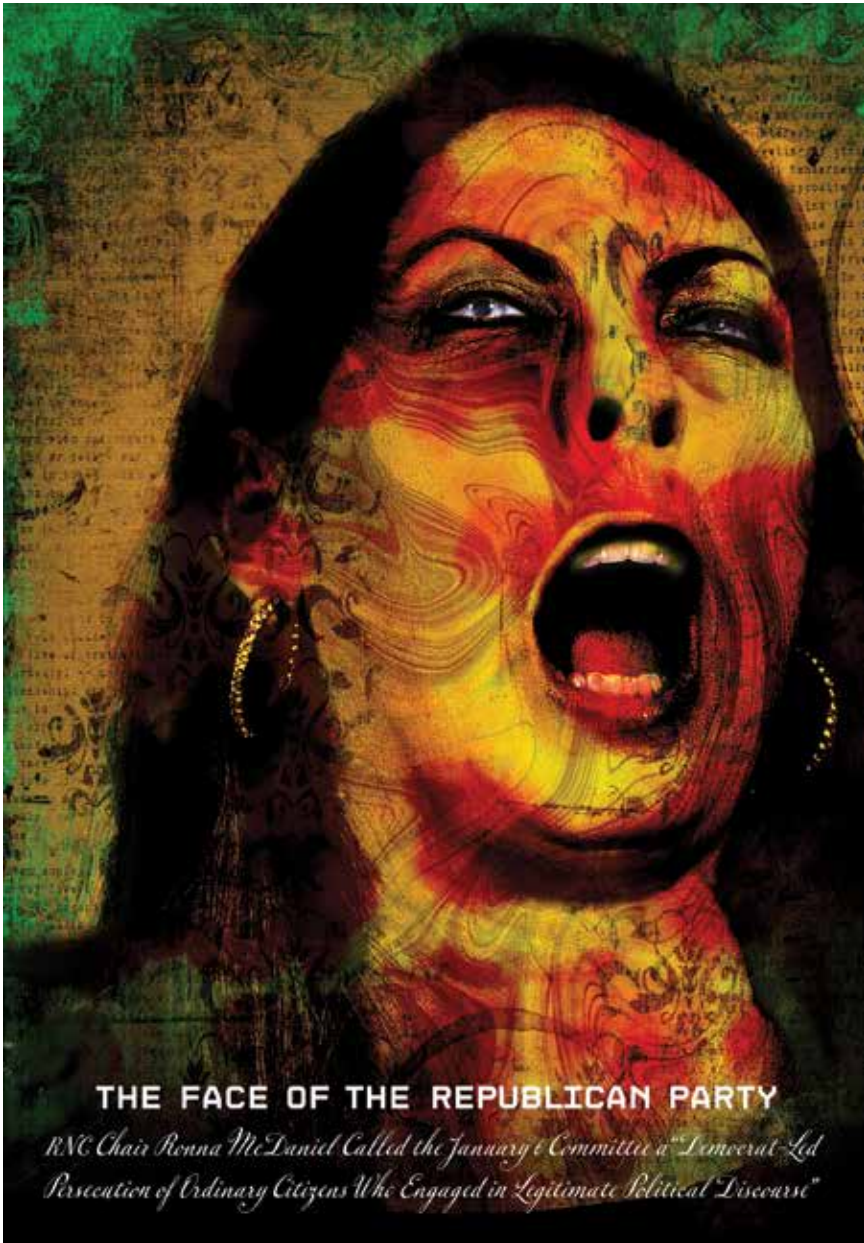
Trump Lawyer, Stefan Passantino, Told Cassidy Hutchison to Say "I Don't Recall" to January 6 Committee. She Got Another Lawyer, 2023.



Enrique Tarrio, Chairman of the Proud Boys, Was Sentenced to 22 Years in Prison for Sedition for His Part in the January 6 Insurrection, 2023.



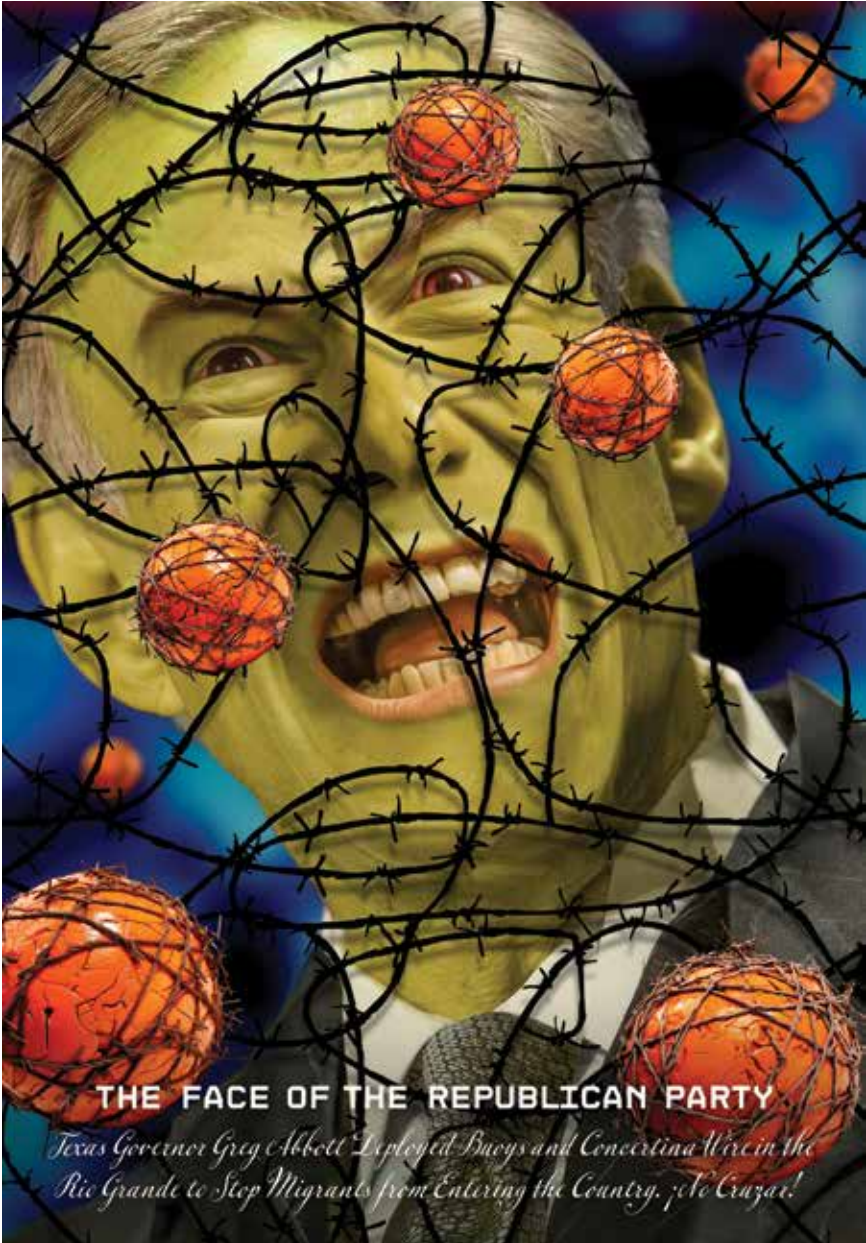
Arizona Congressman Paul Gosar Was Censured in 2021 for Tweeting a Violent Photoshopped Video of Him Killing Democrat Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, 2022.



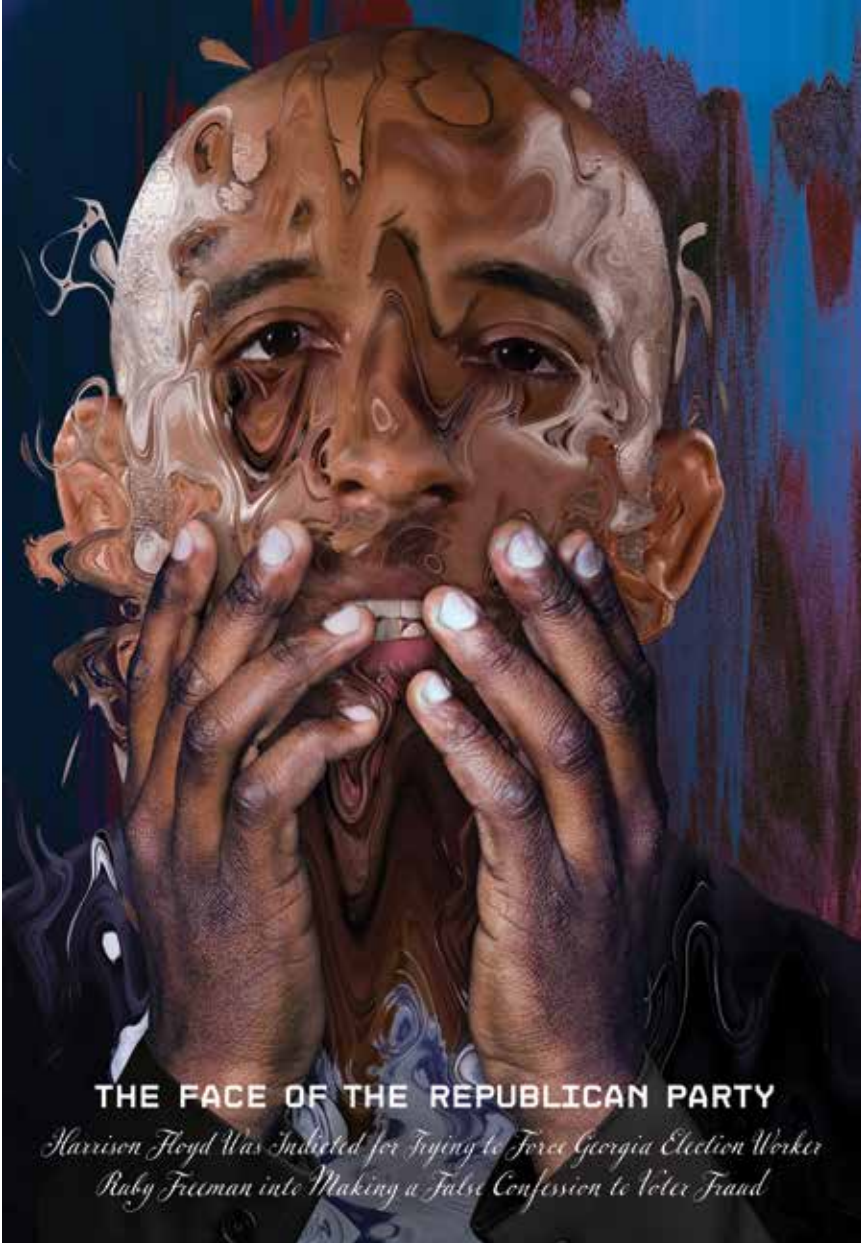
THE FACE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

RNC Chair Ronna McDaniel Called the January 6 Committee a "Democrat-Led Persecution of Ordinary Citizens Who Engaged in Legitimate Political Discourse," 2023.

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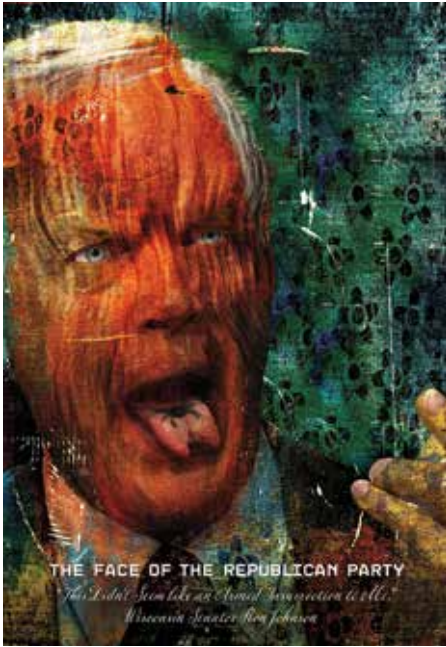
Texas Governor Greg Abbott Deployed Buoys and Concertina Wire in the Rio Grande to Stop Migrants from Entering the Country. ¡No Cruzar! (Don't Cross!), 2023.



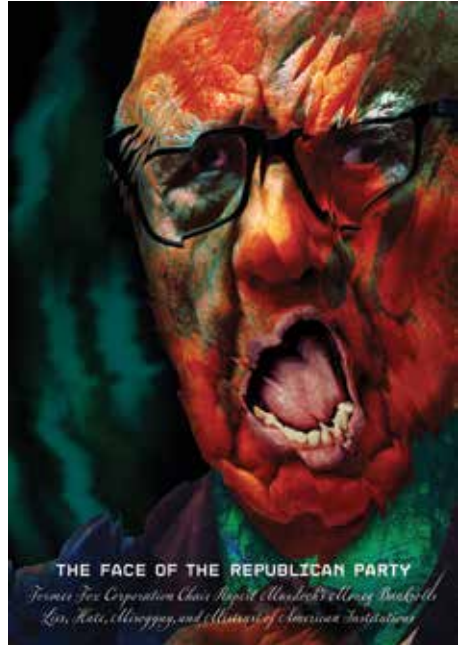
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Harrison Floyd Was Indicted for Trying to Force Georgia Election Worker Ruby Freeman into Making a False Confession to Voter Fraud

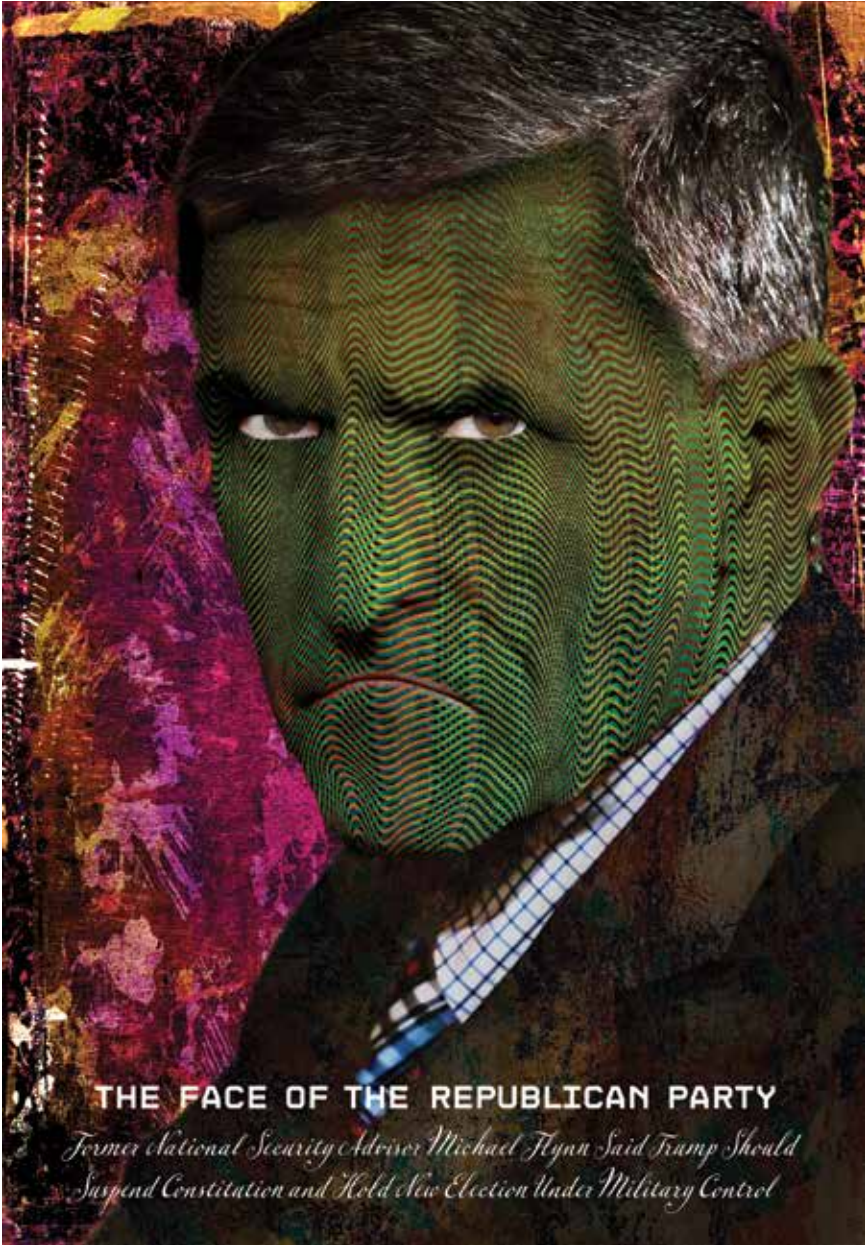
Harrison Floyd Was Indicted for Trying to Force Georgia Election Worker Ruby Freeman into Making a False Confession to Voter Fraud, 2023.



"This Didn't Seem like an Armed Insurrection to Me."
Wisconsin Senator Ron Johnson, 2024.



*Former Fox Corporation Chair Rupert Murdoch's
Money Bankrolls Lies, Hate, Misogyny, and Mistrust
of American Institutions, 2023.*



THE FACE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

Former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn Said Trump Should Suspend Constitution and Hold New Election Under Military Control

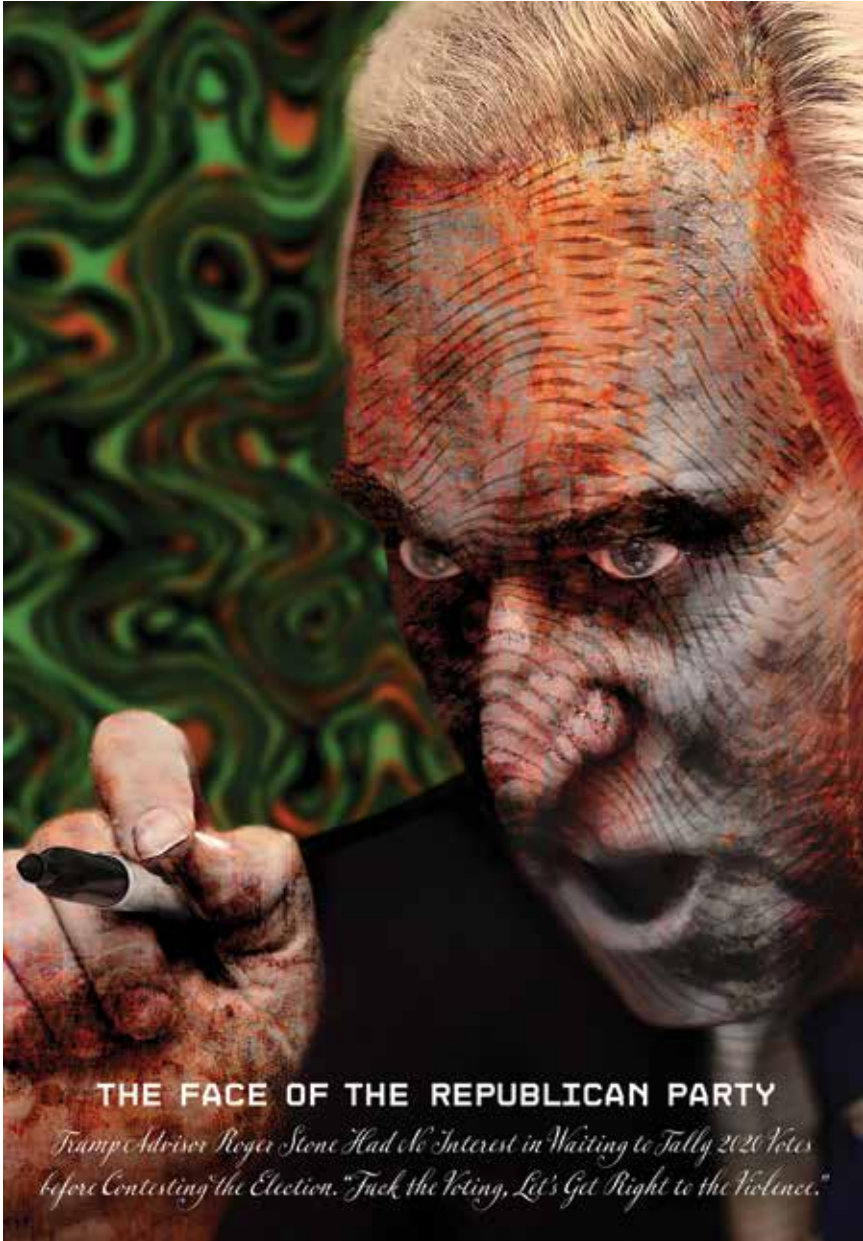
Former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn Said Trump Should Suspend Constitution and Hold New Election Under Military Control, 2023.



Maryland Congressman Andy Harris Voted to Overturn the 2020 Election. Voted against Awarding Congressional Medals to Police for Actions on January 6, 2024.



Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton Threatened to Prosecute Anyone Who Assisted in Giving a 31-Year-Old Woman with a Non-viable Pregnancy an Abortion, 2024.



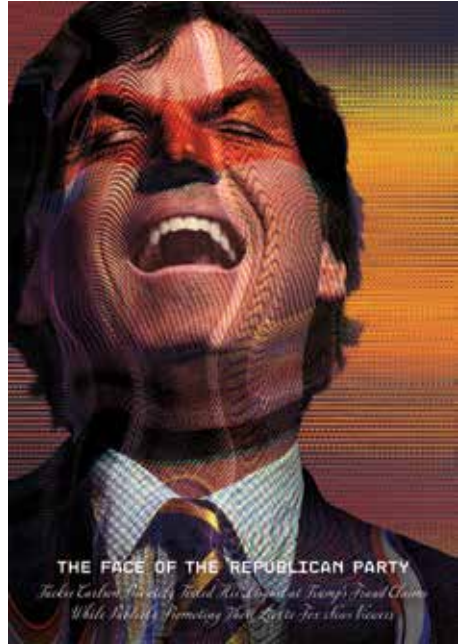
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Trump Advisor Roger Stone Had No Interest in Waiting to Tally 2020 Votes before Contesting the Election. "Fuck the Voting, Let's Get Right to the Violence."

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In a Humiliating Display of Adoration, South Carolina Senator Tim Scott Told Donald Trump, "I Just Love You," after Trump's Win in New Hampshire, 2024.



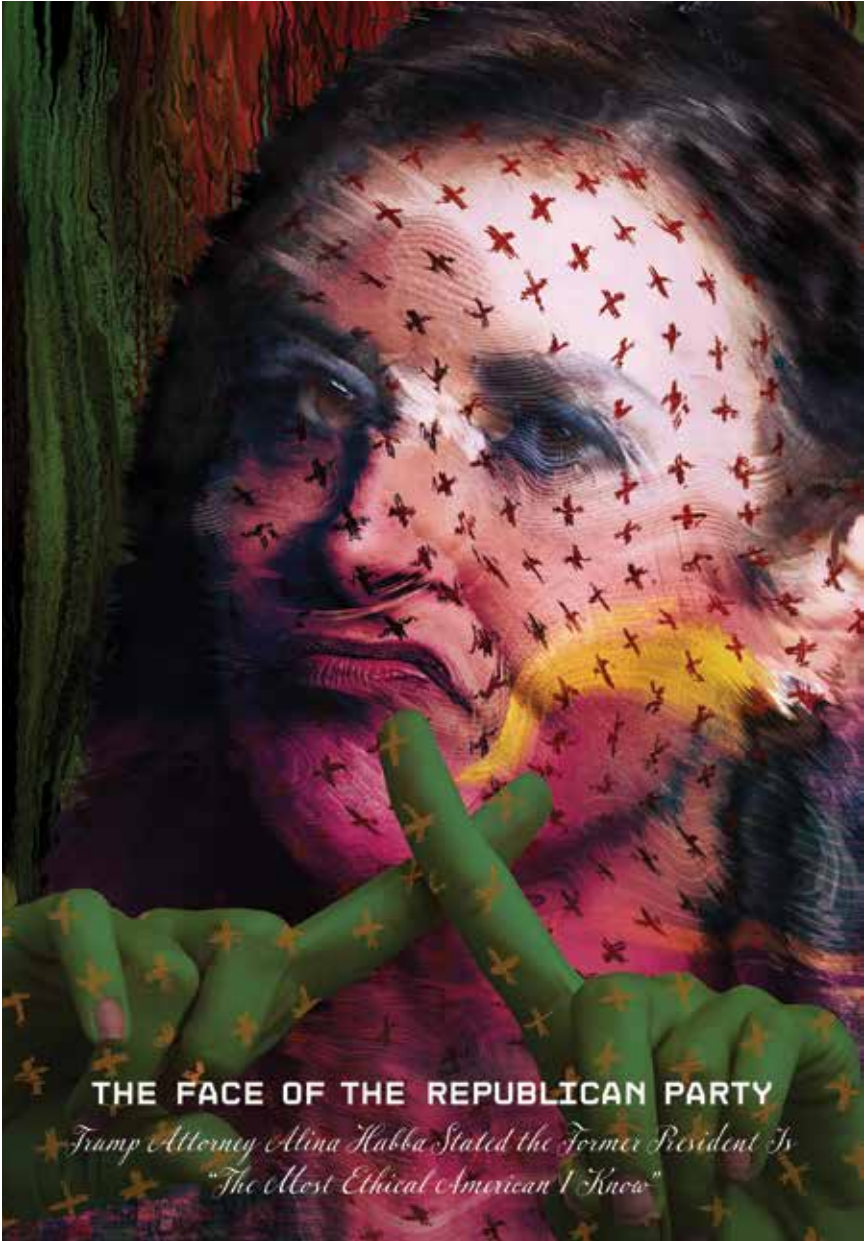
Tucker Carlson Privately Texted Disgust at Trump's Fraud Claims While Publicly Promoting Those Lies to Fox News Viewers, 2023.



House Speaker Mike Johnson Wanted to Blur Faces of Rioters in January 6 Footage: "We Don't Want Them to Be Retaliated against and to Be Charged by the DOJ," 2023.



Rudy Giuliani Admitted Defaming Georgia Poll Workers Ruby Freeman and Shay Moss, Calling Them "Ballot-Stuffing Criminal Conspirators," 2023.



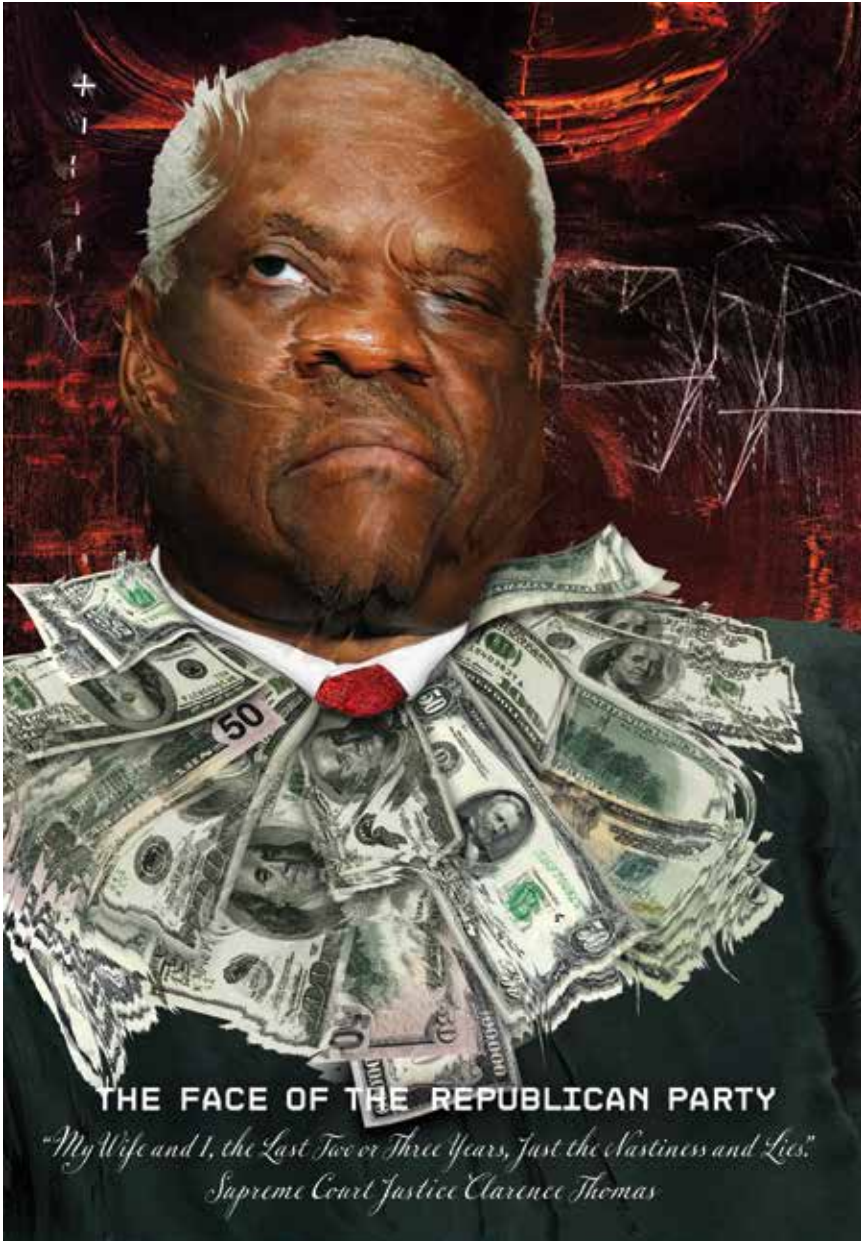
THE FACE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

*Trump Attorney Alina Habba Stated the Former President Is
"The Most Ethical American I Know"*

Trump Attorney Alina Habba Stated the Former President Is "The Most Ethical American I Know," 2023.



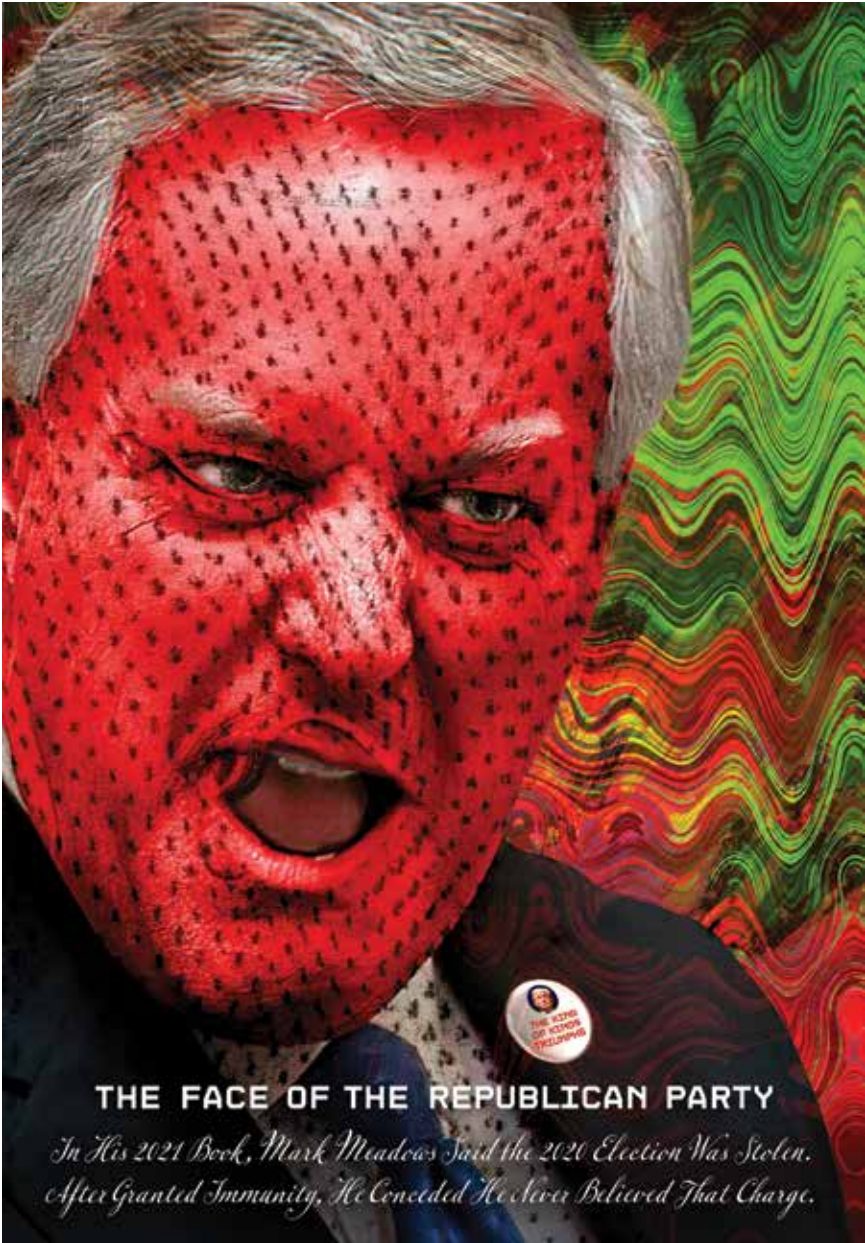
Conspiracy Theorist and Wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, Ginni Thomas Texted Mark Meadows Calling the 2020 Election a "Heist," 2023.



THE FACE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

*"My Wife and I, the Last Two or Three Years, Just the Nastiness and Lies."
Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas*

"My Wife and I, the Last Two or Three Years, Just the Nastiness and Lies." Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, 2023.



THE FACE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

In His 2021 Book, Mark Meadows Said the 2020 Election Was Stolen. After Granted Immunity, He Conceded He Never Believed That Charge.

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Asked Why He Didn't Concede After Electoral Votes Were Counted, Mike Pence Said He Wanted to Respect the President. Trump Threw Him under the Bus Anyway, 2023.

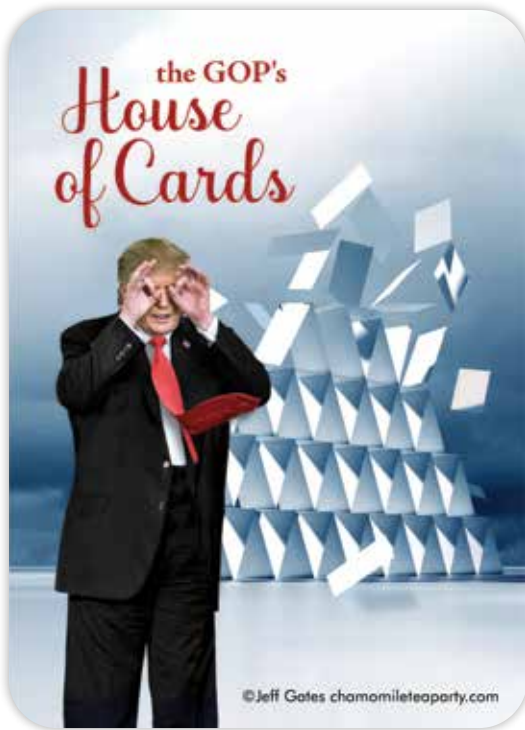
Asked Why He Didn't Concede After Electoral Votes Were Counted, Mike Pence Said He Wanted to Respect the President. Trump Threw Him under the Bus Anyway, 2023.



STILL THE FACE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

Trump Blocked a Bipartisan Border Bill That Would Have Given the GOP Much of What It Wanted. He Bragged He Didn't Want to Give Biden Another Victory.

Trump Blocked a Bipartisan Border Bill That Would Have Given the GOP Much of What It Wanted. He Bragged He Didn't Want to Give Biden Another Victory, 2024.



THE GOP'S HOUSE OF CARDS

Deck of poker cards created by the artist. Portraits on all cards come from Gate's *Faces of the Republican Party* series.

"If we're going to gamble with our democracy, let's place our bets and play our hands. Strategy with a bit of luck will determine the outcome of this political game."

Jeff Gates



The GOP's House of Cards, © 2024 Jeff Gates, Chamomile Tea Party.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

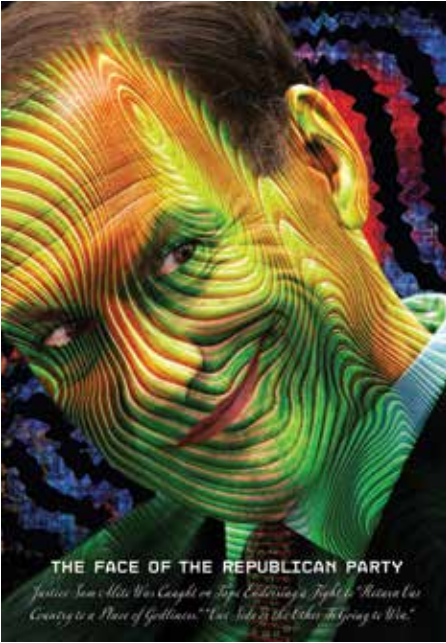
Jeff Gates is an artist and writer interested in the intersection of art and culture. Since 2010, he's created over 300 images on the sorry state of American political discourse under the guise of the Chamomile Tea Party.

Experimentation with new technologies and public engagement are essential to Gates's work. During the 2012 presidential election, his posters appeared on subway platform signs in Washington, D.C.'s Metro. Standing in front of his images, he spoke with commuters about the social issues being debated a few miles away on Capitol Hill. Interested in the nature of online communities at the onset of social media, in 2008, he created *My Tweet Tooth*, tweeting his root canal live to dentists in the U.S. and Canada. After 9/11, he launched the website *Dichotomy: It Was a Matter of Time and Place*. People posted their stories from two perspectives: those affected directly by the attacks and those who witnessed the events via the media. One story from each point of view appeared next to each other to focus on how aspects of our shared experience differed by how we encountered the event. In 1999, concerned about online privacy, Gates used eBay to auction his personal demographics. Interactions with viewers were essential components of all these pieces.

From 1983 to 1993, Gates created *In Our Path*, a photo documentary about the building of the last freeway to be constructed in Los Angeles. His imagery and writing focused on the social impact of the highway on the communities adjacent to it. In addition to interviewing displaced homeowners, Caltrans officials and workers, and community leaders, he held simultaneous exhibitions and panel discussions along the freeway's path, connecting these divergent communities using the early internet. Gates received a National Endowment for the Arts grant for this series.

In 1989, he founded Artists for a Better Image (ArtFBI) to study stereotypes of artists in contemporary culture. He collected depictions of artists from film and television and traveled around the country using these examples to speak to audiences about artists' roles in our society. He produced a line of "proto-social media" bumper stickers inviting commuters to consider the importance of artists in our culture.

Gates's writing and art have appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, *Smithsonian*, *The Nation*, and on National Public Radio. Google Arts & Culture has published eight online exhibitions of his work. He is the author of the book *Uneventful: The Rise of Photography*, exploring photography's evolution from the 19th to the 21st centuries. Jeff Gates has a B.A. in Political Science and an M.F.A. in Photography and Graphic Design.



Justice Sam Alito Was Caught on Tape Endorsing a Fight to "Return Our Country to a Place of Godliness." "One Side or the Other Is Going to Win." 2024.



Martha-Ann Alito Said, "I Want a Sacred Heart of Jesus Flag Because I Have to Look across the Lagoon at the Pride Flag for the Next Month." Vergogna!, 2024.

DESPITE THE ACTIONS OF OUR POLITICAL EXTREMES, AMERICAN IDEAS AND IDEALS ARE COMPLEX. DISTILLING THEM INTO OVERLY SIMPLISTIC PRINCIPLES IS IMPOSSIBLE. UNDERSTANDING OUR PROBLEMS AND HOW TO SOLVE THEM REQUIRES CARE AND CRITICAL THINKING.

JEFF GATES

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Courtesy of the Artist



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