

# Mr. Schiff Comes to the Village

**Hosted by Cooper Union, Congressman Adam Schiff addressed the continuing risks to our democracy**

By Eric Uhlfelder

It's been a while since a congressman could be counted as a profile in courage, a concept John F. Kennedy coined in his 1956 book. But Adam Schiff, the California congressman from the state's 28th congressional district, certainly could.

Having earned the ire of Trump and Republicans, along with plenty of death threats, Schiff's actions during the 2019 hearings about Russia's interference in our election, and his role as lead manager during Trump's first impeachment, were bright spots during a dismal time. He's now on the House Select Committee investigating the January 6th insurrection. Schiff's oratory—a unique blend of practical and pastoral—will be an historic marker.

Below is an edited version of his comments directed to his Republican colleagues who were trying to oust him as chair of the House Intelligence Committee. Listen to the five-minute speech to get the full impact: <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/adamschiffyoumightthinkitsok.htm>



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**ACY:** Congressman Adam Schiff and Preet Bharara at Cooper Union's Great Hall this past November. *Photo by Marget Long.*

My colleagues may think it's okay that the Russians offered dirt on a Democratic candidate for president as part of what was described as the Russian government's effort to help the Trump campaign.

My colleagues might think it's okay that when that was offered to the son of the president, who had a pivotal role in the campaign, that the president's son did not call the FBI, he did not adamantly refuse that foreign help. No, instead that son said that he would "love" the help of the Russians. You might think it's okay that he took that meeting.

You might think it's okay that Paul Manafort, the campaign chair, someone with great experience in running campaigns, also took that meeting. You might think it's okay that the president's son-in-law also took that meeting. You might think it's okay that they concealed it from the public. You might think it's okay when it was discovered a year later that they'd lied about that meeting and said it was about adoptions—you might think it's okay that the president is reported to have helped dictate that lie. You might think that's okay—I don't.

You might think it's okay the national security adviser-designate secretly conferred with a Russian ambassador about undermining U.S. sanctions, and you might think it's okay he lied about it to the FBI.

I don't think it's okay that during a presidential campaign, Mr. Trump sought the Kremlin's help to consummate a real estate deal in Moscow that would make him a fortune...that he advocated a new and favorable policy towards the Russians even as he was seeking the Russians' help—the Kremlin's help—to make money.

You might say that's all okay...But I don't...I think it's immoral. I think it's unethical. I think it's unpatriotic. And, yes, I think it's corrupt, and evidence of collusion...

And the day we do think that's okay is the day we will look back and say that is the day America lost its way.

On November 22nd, the day after casting his vote for the Build Back Better legislation this fall, Adam Schiff was interviewed in Cooper Union's Great Hall by Preet Bharara, the former US Attorney for the Southern District of New York and now an adjunct professor at NYU Law School. The Q&A focused on what Schiff describes as *Midnight in Washington*: How we almost lost our democracy and still could. Schiff's book by the same title is a compelling read, cataloguing the various ways Trump abused the presidency.

Below is a sample of the interview, whose content ranged from the comedic to the cautionary.

**Preet Bharara:** How did you respond to the relentless bashing you received from Trump on Twitter?

**Adam Schiff:** Mike Thompson, one of my colleagues, stopped me and said, "Adam, you should tweet back: When they go low, we go high, Mr. President. Go fuck yourself."

**PB:** Is Kevin McCarthy, the House minority leader, a liar?

**AS:** (In 2010, when Schiff shared a plane ride with McCarthy, he said he believed the Democrats would win the pending midterm elections. McCarthy told the press Schiff felt otherwise.) I told him, "Kevin, you know I said the exact opposite of what you told the press." He says, "Yeah, I know Adam, but you know how it goes." And I was like, "No, Kevin, I don't know how it goes. You just make shit up—and that's how you

operate? Because that's not how I operate." It was a perfect illustration of what he's made of.

**PB:** Do you think the Republicans believe what they are saying?

**AS:** The historian Robert Caro once said in an interview, power doesn't corrupt as much as it reveals. You can see all you need to see about what people are made of by comparing two members of Congress: Liz Cheney, who said, "I will not carry a Big Lie, no matter what it may cost me in terms of my leadership position," and Elise Stefanik, who made plain if her party needs someone to tell the Big Lie, she would volunteer. This period in our history has demonstrated just how many people in positions of power are willing to sacrifice their ideology, their ethics, everything.

**PB:** That can't be leading us to a good place.

**AS:** We are at a very dangerous place. The Big Lie led people to attack the Capitol. But even more broadly, if you persuade people as the former president and his enablers in Congress have done, if you persuade millions of people they cannot rely on elections anymore to decide who should govern, then what is left but violence?

**PB:** And the Republicans have continued down the same path.

**AS:** What I find so awful about the period since January 6th is that when we saw where that lie brought us, when we saw the result of Trump and Trumpism was a bloody attack on the Capitol, the decision to double down on that lie is almost incomprehensible. We now see efforts around the country to strip independent election officials of their duties and give them over to partisan boards and officials. It seems to me the lesson Donald Trump and Republicans learned from the failed insurrection is that next time they will succeed, if not with a violent attack, they will succeed by making sure that if Brad Raffensperger wouldn't find 11,780 votes that don't exist, they will put someone in that position who will.

You can hear much of Schiff's discussion with Preet Bharara at:  
[cafe.com/stay-tuned/inside-the-fight-for-democracy-with-adam-schiff/](https://www.cafe.com/stay-tuned/inside-the-fight-for-democracy-with-adam-schiff/)