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## The Pieties of the Liberal Class

by [Jason Hirthler](#)



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From the west side of the island, a pedestrian can see, high in the misty gray sky of Manhattan, the carmine lettering of *The New Yorker* hotel. The art-deco staple of the Jazz Age has graced the skyline of the city since 1930. It has hosted movie stars and starlets, ballplayers and boxers, heroic firefighters and geniuses of science. Barack Obama's parents were married there. It is a beacon of bourgeois New York life. City dwellers and tourists see it as a kind of marker of pedigree, its neon serifs floating like a semaphore of sophistication above the bustling metropolis below. Fittingly, it is where elitist insider and liberal icon Hillary Clinton conceded the 2016 election to Donald Trump. Pale and proud, she positioned herself as a champion of women, her flour-haired éminence grise clapping in the background.

From that moment until today, the Democratic Party and its acolytes have lived in deep denial. It is still cobbling together its tapestry of thinly stitched storylines supposedly outing Russia for its nefarious plot to "attack our democracy". In so doing, the tribe refuses to engage in self-reflection, never acknowledging the accommodation of capital that has triggered its demise. It is still launching flaming rhetorical volleys at the president with rare fury, convinced he has compromised America behind the back of the freedom-loving naifs that so innocently trusted our great institutions. It lifts him up as the embodiment of evil against which they nobly rage. It decries his policy actions even as it hides their own like deeds. The piety of the Party is on full display.

**Too Righteous for Reality**

Sharing the same name and a comparable role, the city's elitist manual of manners and opinion, *The New Yorker*, recently published a breathless new report on election media that attributes Russian trolls with the "decisive" content in the world-historical fiasco of Donald Trump's election. The billion dollars flung into the mediasphere by the actual candidates is shoved aside, fodder for this year's midterm campaign strategists but of little consequence in 2016. The report is a feverish campaign to keep the fragile egotism of Democratic elites on life-support, to rejuvenate a party that cannot bear to face the fact that its own sellout to corporate donors has wrecked the party. This is but one of dozens of reports fastidiously produced by incalculable hordes of liberal resisters scurrying along the horizon of the web like wildebeest in flight. Subverting elections, the magazine wisely intones, "doesn't require tampering with voting machines."

Here the bar is lowered. From a multi-layered high-tech hacking job to a simple "influence campaign," the criterion for blaming Russia continues to slide toward absurdity. "Russian masterminds" are parenthetically mentioned but never named. At least until our lantern-jawed paladin, Robert Mueller, swaggers into the press room to gravely announce the indictment of a sundry list of Russians currently residing in distant Russian climes and never likely to see the inside of an American court. Yet they shall be indicted *in absentia*. These faceless trolls are said to have waged "information warfare against the United States of America" (the name of our nation doubtless spelled out in full to underscore the gravity of the event). U.S. intelligence weighs in with "high confidence" on hacking allegations. No evidence is released; national security requires relentless secrecy. We would have to take their word for it, though they never examined the servers in question, though later evidence revealed it was a leak, not a hack. Yet this grave declaration issued from behind the beveled door of the National Director of Intelligence is sufficient for hyperventilating liberals to embrace.

Living in Gore Vidal's "United States of Amnesia," Democratic stalwarts have naturally forgotten the litany of lies the intelligence community has shamelessly produced at the behest of their political betters. Forget the Lusitania. Forget the missile gap. Forget the Gulf of Tonkin. Laugh off the incubator babies. Skip those lingering 9/11 questions. Shelve the torture memos. Ditch the WMD threats and trash the yellow cake expose, Libyan Viagra sprees, and Syrian chemical attacks. Surely this time we can trust our government. "Russian saboteurs" amplified Trump's vile and "divisive" rhetoric, an implicit kind of collusion that perhaps did not require an actual meeting of minds, maybe just a telepathic understanding. Again the evidentiary standards slip. The report, like most of its kind, concludes barking about "likelihood" and probabilities, but concedes that it is "hard to know" if "Russian propaganda and dirty tricks" put The Donald into the Oval Office.

### **Policy Warriors Man the Barricades**

On a more quotidian level, it is half-amusing, half-nauseating to witness the social media myopia of former government employees as they condemn in the Trump administration what they themselves enabled in their own era.

On federal wages, David Axelrod fulminates that the president's denial of a federal wage hike because a trillion-dollar tax break created new deficits was "beyond outrageous." The clever account, "Kamala Harris is a cop" replied, "It's almost as shitty as bailing out the banks while 10 million people lost their homes." Even Eric Holder, Obama's Brooks Brothers AG, weighed in with some sanctimonious cant about Trump and his "fat cat friends". (By the way, by my count, Holder made four grammatical mistakes in that single tweet.) Sure, Trump's tax cuts are outrage-worthy public bribes to big capital. But Axelrod either forgets, or neatly hides beneath the blanket of his rectitude, that Obama froze federal workers pay using deficit fears to justify it, and made one-percent tax cuts permanent. But only Trump generates the wild fury of the liberal class at such injustices. Another instance of that most pernicious kind of fidelity: blind loyalty.

On the Middle East, Samantha Power tweets with ecclesiastical fervor about the horror of Trump's fealty to his Saudi pals at the expense of millions of Yemenis. She forgets—or is the word "compartmentalizes"?—that her boss launched America's support for the KSA's criminal war. Sold

them guns to kill with, even after the war began. In other words, it's bipartisan policy. But for Sam, it's all about the optics. In public relations, perception becomes the highest value, just as in capitalist societies, profit is the singular ethic. How curious it would be to unfurl the Ariadne's Thread that leads to Power's justification for such obtuse piety. One can imagine dear Sam on a weekday morning in her tony brownstone, tapping out her tweets while her Darjeeling steeps quietly on the mahogany desk.

On war, numerous liberal [outlets](#) attacked Trump for not having a strategy on Syria when he bombed an air base last year, viewing his one-off strike related to alleged chemical weapons use with contempt. One must have a "*strategy*", the pundits sniffed. Yet Barack Obama began the Syrian war and provided such baffling backdoor guidance that the Pentagon and CIA were actually fighting at cross-purposes, sometimes slaughtering ISIS terrorists and sometimes arming and providing air cover for their comrades. "Well," says the Democratic foot soldier, "war is a complicated thing. Truth is the first casualty. You've seen the Burns' documentary? Like he said, bad things were done by good men. The fog of war is real."

On immigration, liberals hyperventilate over Trump's derisive treatment of immigrants. But where were they when their heroic changemaker Barack Obama did [much](#) the same? They were silent. Asleep at the switch. Doting giddily over their slim-suited feminist with his supple vocabulary and luminous smile. If there was ever an empirical instance of sheeple, this was it. This is that very loyalty that Democrats angrily demand from independents. "Come on, now!" barks the fed-up liberal, as he slams his neatly folded *Time* to the table, "Come back to the real world. Only two parties can win. You want Republicans running this country? You're being insanely idealistic. Change is slow and incremental. Progress is measured in centuries, not great leaps. Don't make the perfect the enemy of the good!" And on other occasions, as the dinner party pinot loosens the tongue, "You know if you vote third party again, you're culpable if Trump wins. It's on you! You and your utopian socialist peers."

On the Supreme Court, Barack Obama's nominee for the Supreme Court, Merrick Garland, voted with Brett Kavanaugh 93 percent of the time and was described by the National Organization for Women as a "cipher" when it came to his positions of reproductive issues. Garland may have been a more moderate candidate in the end, and surely Kavanaugh's apish antics and disturbing history tell us plenty about him, but what of the fact that his overt support of torture, the Patriot Act, indefinite detention, and a host of other anti-democratic perspectives were broadly shared and reified by Democrats?

On foreign relations, former CIA mobfather John Brennan tosses off another of his sanctimonious tweets about Trump, America, and Principles. This one about Saudi Arabia's apparent dismembering of a journalist in their Turkish embassy. Brennan glad-handed KSA royalty for years and said nothing while they slaughtered thousands of Yemenis in a criminal war of aggression that he and his Commander in Chief could have shut down. And yet, like his other former colleagues, Brennan rages on social media that if Jamal Khashoggi "...is found to be dead at the hands of the Saudi government, his demise cannot go unanswered..." and he demands a "full and forceful U.S. response" from the Trump administration and Congress. In the top left-hand corner of the tweet is a bubble bearing Brennan's stonelike visage, scowling down frightfully at his own words and at "the world community". The man seems to have been waiting his entire life to assume this role, the outspoken authoritarian defender of the noble world order. Aged, august, awe-inspiring. But today, he comes off more as a decorous crank hoping to earn himself a statue somewhere on the National Mall. One can envision the marble-carved or bronze-cast effigy, jaw squarely set, chest thrust forward, a copy of Augustine in one claw, a CIA field manual in the other.

Then there's Barack himself, who is busily cleaning up for himself on the speaking circuit. The presidency is always a *quid pro quo*. Serve our financial aims now, we'll serve yours later. Obama is just another imitation of Bill Clinton, whose incrementalist path he traced through his Oval Office years. He did pause during one recent monologue to [herald](#) a fresh new idea: Medicare for All. Yes,

that novel concept heretofore unknown to men, least of all Obama, who believed in universal care until his inauguration, when with a presidential palm he swept even a public option off the table; he and the vultures of capital had already approved a Heritage Foundation scheme, penned by the insurance industry, and which would require federal enforcement to ensure a substantial segment of the populace would subscribe to it.

## Capital Crimes

In his excellent polemic, [\*Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism\*](#), Vladimir Lenin wrote that we could only take leaders at their word if they opposed a policy not only when the enemy was implementing it, but when their own side was implementing the same policy. On this score, all the Obama liberals fail the test, as do the equally haughty conservatives. Their fake outrage, their pious contempt, and their theatrical astonishment are forms of political posturing and, as the conservatives themselves say, “virtue signaling”. Power evidently corrupts us so thoroughly that when we gain power, our singular value becomes retaining power. We are often principled until our principles confront the opportunity to increase our power. Then they are deprioritized. How does an electoral system that votes on federal seats just twice a decade militate against this human frailty, a moral infirmity we all share?

As Chris Hedges remarks, we still have the “iconography and language” of democracy, but we are made to “kneel before the dictates of the marketplace” and “structure our society around the primacy of profit.” We are left with an institutional “facade.” Which is why it is so proper to treat with derision the reeling hysteria of politicians who claim, in comical hand-wringing interviews, that “our democracy” is under attack. Why it is so perfectly appropriate to mock the mastheads of our major newspapers, which admonish us that, “Democracy Dies In Darkness,” as though the *Washington Post*, owned by a CIA contractor and the richest man on earth, is some kind of bulwark against corporate fascism. It is the very vanguard of corporate fascism. It is not a barricade being manned by scruffy journalists firing lead at would-be usurpers. What a farcical notion, yet one embraced by the liberal class, who fail to see the corruption of their party as a summons to revolution.

This human capacity for self-delusion may be the final nail in the coffin of our species. Perhaps even more than the instances cited above, it is most conspicuously seen in the refusal of the politicians to do anything meaningful about climate change. A new IPCC report spells out climate-induced wreckage to occur in our lifetimes (by 2040). But little if anything binding will be done until the corporate mandarins of industrial capitalism are assured of the super-profits they and their shareholders expect on a quarterly basis. Profits they now rake in by externalizing the environmental disasters their industrial production engenders. This [\*piece\*](#) of public art in Berlin has always struck me as perfectly capturing the futility of human behavior in the face of climate catastrophe: a group of senators gathered in conclave debating some obscure point of contention while the waters of the world rise to engulf them. Engulfed ultimately because they do not recognize the perversity of the system of capitalism in which we are all ensnared and complicit. A sightless species sniffing the air for hints of the skyfall bursting above it.