

A Tale Of Two Debacles

December 16, 2024 Category: Domestic Politics

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The party duopoly in the United States entails an either/or contest between two entrenched political juggernauts: the Republicans and the Democrats. For many voters, this is a Sophie's Choice. Yet in each electoral cycle, people are obliged to go with the least repulsive option. Which of those two parties advocates for universal public healthcare? Neither. Which is willing to flout corporate interests? Neither. Which is willing to get money out of politics altogether? Neither. It's no wonder the 2016 and 2024 presidential elections turned out as it did.

Since 2016, America's corporatists have been happy to see the Democratic party establishment go to war with MAGA. For they know that, however each election turned out, they would ultimately prevail. Translation: So long as the choice is between the corporatist Democrats and the G.O.P., plutocracy wins either way.

With regard to the Democratic party, there remains the nagging question: What does it say about a political party that was defeated by such a buffoon—and such an obvious con-man—twice? That such a party is feckless would be an understatement. Now, in performing a post-mortem of Kamala Harris' doomed presidential run, we find that it was a variation on the same mistakes made by Hillary Clinton eight years earlier (and, to a lesser extent, by Joe Biden four years earlier). The 2024 presidential election was a deafening wake-up call; and served as corroboration of an incontrovertible yet oft-overlooked fact: Faux populism cannot be defeated by anti-populism.

In the wake of November 5, 2024, we can see one thing clearly: The cadre of Potemkin Progressives walking the halls of power have once again shown how truly out of touch they are with the common-man. Once the party of the working bloke, the Democratic party is now led by a gaggle of self-important dandies who issue edicts from the cozy sanctum of their lavishly-appointed parlors. And with an ample amount of hand-waving, they deign to give their boorish talking points a shimmering, pseudo-Progressive gloss...even as they remain resolute in their service to their corporate paymasters.

Taking a wider view of the Washington Beltway, it becomes abundantly clear that the Washington Consensus is no longer viable. Yet mainline Democrats offer no credible alternative to MAGA. Capitol Hill is a veritable orgy of quid pro quos; and the Democratic party—infested with corporatists—is almost as guilty as the G.O.P. when it comes to legalized graft.

The problem is not that the working class let the politicians down; the problem is that the politicians let the working class down.

It is worth recognizing that, in both the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, the Democratic party had someone who could have handily prevailed over Trump. But instead of embracing Bernie Sanders, the party leadership castigated him; and—for good measure—ostracized his followers (dismissing them as “Bernie Bros” and secret misogynists). In doing so, they rebuffed the most vital segment of the electorate: the working class. (But, hey, it made Lloyd Blankfein happy. So what's the problem?)

How are we to make sense of this? As it turns out, corporatist Democrats despise Progressives even more than they despise MAGA. (One need only watch five minutes of MSNBC or CNN for this to be clear.)

Their dirty little trick is to paint left-wing populists (actual populists) as right-wing populists (faux populists; the most extreme manifestation of which are fascists); and then malign them both. This perfidious approach to politics is tremendously beneficial to the Democratic party establishment, as they hit two birds with one stone. Anyone who fails to support them is the enemy, so can all be thrown into the same vortex of derision.

Lost in this is a fundamental distinction—creating misconceptions that further embroil us in pointless feuds. *Faux* populism is about appealing to the common man, even as it serves centers of power; *genuine* populism is about supporting what is actually good for the common man, even as it undermines centers of power. The difference is between merely placating the masses vs. empowering them. Put another way: Right-wing populism (a.k.a. fascism) is about pretending to look out for the regular Joe, yet ultimately screwing him over; whereas “Left” populism (a.k.a. Progressivism) is about looking out for the regular Joe. (All demagogues—especially fascists—profess to be a “man of the people”.) This brings to mind a famous line from the film, *The American President*. I paraphrase: The people are so thirsty for leadership that they’ll crawl through the desert toward a mirage. And even though there’s no water there, they’ll drink the sand—not because they’re thirsty, but because they don’t know the difference.

Corporatists in the Democratic party are happy to paint ALL populism as right-wing populism (in order to scare people away from genuine populism); while the MAGA movement is happy to paint themselves as populist (in order to earn the support of a rank and file seeking bold solutions). {A} Some of the best exposition on genuine populism—and lack thereof—has been done by Thomas Frank in his books *Listen, Liberal* and *The People, No*.

So what happened in 2016 and 2024? In assaying these two electoral debacles, let’s start with a basic truth. There are only two possible reasons anyone would consider—for even a moment—supporting Donald Trump: severe ignorance or severe iniquity. In other words: such a person is either egregiously misinformed or egregiously immoral. (If he/she is not one, he/she is the other.) There is no other plausible explanation for one throwing in one’s lot with MAGA.

This means that when decent people supported Trump (of which there were plenty), they did so because they were nescient. Meanwhile, when those who should have known better did so, it was because they were venal. {B} Alas, all we can do is address the former problem; as any attempt to “fix” the broken moral compass of others (plutocrats, bigots, Christian theocrats) is a quixotic venture. There’s just no getting through to such people. (Addressing the rampant moral bankruptcy—and protracted intellectual stagnation—of modern society is another task for another day.) Fortunately, it is the former group that is far larger. So it is to this task, the attenuation of ignorance, that we turn here.

Such an endeavor can be accomplished primarily by generating awareness—something that requires the promulgation of a compelling narrative (spec. one that effectively counteracts right-wing agit-prop). Said narrative cannot presume that the audience is well-informed. Indeed, pursuant to the presidential election of 2024, we have once again learned that we should never underestimate how incredibly low-information America’s low-information voters actually are. {C}

Consider three baffling disconnects:

1. Even as pro-choice sentiment increased across the general population, support for the anti-choice presidential candidate actually gained support amongst women—including self-professed pro-choice voters.
2. Even as people are more fed-up than ever about corruption, support for a man who is—by far—the most flagrantly corrupt politician in the nation’s history went UP.

3. Even as most people are sick and tired of “elites” not looking out for the interests of the working class, they opted to back a man who off-shored hundreds of thousands of jobs (think of the UAW workers who supported Trump even as he sent many of their jobs to Mexico)...and then passed massive tax-cuts that almost-exclusively benefited the ultra-wealthy.

What in heaven’s name is going on here? Well, as it turns out, due to a confluence of heightened emotion (primarily: frustration) and mental lethargy, many Americans have been swept up in MAGA fervor. Put another way: It is their lizard brains, not their critical faculties, that guide them. As it happens, many of those who are ignorant are not interested in learning. Such people will tend to not be receptive when inconvenient truths—no matter how incontrovertible—are brought to their attention. (This goes especially for facts that do not accord with the conclusions on which they have already settled.) Rather than set their ego aside and modify their views, the Dunning-Kruger effect takes hold (see Endnote 21). Consequently, they will plant their flag and dig in their heels.

Such obstinacy is chilling to contemplate; yet we must deal with the world we have, not with the world we wish he had. Unfortunately, this is how most people operate. Why? In the advent of social media’s domination of our daily lives, intellectual curiosity is becoming increasingly rare; attention spans increasingly short; and intellectual courage more a liability than an asset. So the question is: Given this set of exigencies, what are we to do?

Amongst those of us who (ostensibly) espouse Progressive ideals, there was a monumental miscalculation regarding the degree to which resentment—unmediated by critical reflection—can translate to irrationality. This miscalculation also failed to factor in the degree to which tantalizing optics take precedence over substance. Moreover, many (including the present author) underestimated how capriciously many will throw in their lot with a bumbling fool...sheerly out of spite.

It is no coincidence that, when it came to a demographic breakdown of voter choice, even as the Democrats bled support from people of color (especially with Latino men), the most salient disparity in the 2024 election was not race; it was college educated vs. uneducated. I point this out not to disparage those without higher education, but to make sense of those who fell for the MAGA sales-pitch. People without a solid education often lack the exposure to (even basic) knowledge about the wider world; and tend to be deficient in (even basic) critical thinking skills. This is not to say that graduate degrees are requisite for erudition. (Plenty of morons have an expensive sheepskin framed in mahogany on their wall.) It is simply to say that those who are more provincial-minded are far more susceptible to being swindled by Trump’s pseudo-populist ramblings.

The solution: Don’t shame such voters for being uneducated; educate them.

In 2024, Kamala Harris lost the presidential election largely because she left the average Joe with little confidence that she sincerely cared about his travails. In effect, she did / said virtually nothing to allay his concerns about the elevated prices of groceries, gas, housing, medical care, or anything else. Instead of promising to stop sending truckloads of taxpayer money to Ukraine and Israel (which most Americans were adamantly against), she trotted out celebrities, CEO endorsements, and even Liz Cheney. This was not only a grave misreading of the electorate, it was a strategic blunder of epic proportions.

MAGA gimmickry may be a shell game; yet it involves an easily-digestible, compelling narrative. This explains why it has captivated many of those who were frantically looking for clarity during trying times. (Never mind Blackstone; it’s those pesky Brown people receiving medical assistance who are driving up housing prices!) The Harris campaign did nothing to dispel such misapprehensions; and did very little to address the underlying problem. “Those undocumented immigrants are putting undue strain on an already-

strained healthcare system.” Pay no heed to the fact that it is strained because it is over-privatized; and could handle the demand were it socialized. “And we’re fed up with all the petty crime!” Pay no heed to the fact that undocumented immigrants commit crime at a lower rate than native born citizens; just read “The Camp Of The Saints” and you’ll see that all our ire should be directed not toward corporate power, but toward those who are seen as outsiders.

One might say that the implied message of the Democratic party boiled down to the following: As you struggle to pay the bills, we’re going to send taxpayer money overseas to fund pointless wars...which only serves to divert federal outlays into the coffers of private military contractors. (Oh, and by the way, you’re a bigot if you think biological males with gender dysphoria should be allowed to compete against biological females in sports.) We’ll serve our corporate paymasters; but just not the same ones as the G.O.P. Plus, haven’t you hear that we don’t like racism?

So we should not be entirely surprised that all the stage-managed pomp—and endless virtue-signaling—by the Regressive “Left” did nothing to stanch the attrition of support amongst p.o.c. In fact, such antics likely CONTRIBUTED to that attrition. When we assess Trump’s 2024 triumph vis a vis the two previous elections, we find that it was not so much that he gained support amongst non-p.o.c.; it’s that legions of disaffected p.o.c. migrated to the MAGA movement...by default. (We find a similar problem with the working class IN GENERAL: a precipitous erosion of support for the Democrats since Obama.) Translation: Political correctness and identity politics did far more harm than good.

This is not simply about losing elections; it’s about losing THE ELECTORATE.

But wait. What of the confounding appeal of a man that is not only a demagogue, but a buffoon? From the extensive testimonials of his fawning supporters, the thinking was roughly as follows: “He hates ‘the system’ just like I do. And—like me—he is derided for it by all those polished Washington insiders and pompous media elites.” In other words: The average Joe could relate to him. For many, Trump’s bombastic style worked in his favor, as it made him seem more like an outsider (rather than just another scripted politician). His brashness was taken as an indication that he was a no-nonsense kinda guy, a man of action. Rather than the twaddle of a bumbling fool, Trump’s zany hijinks are seen by some as the bold moves of a fearless leader—a man who is willing to break the rules in order to get things done.

Why the preponderance of such shoddy judgement? The Trump-ification of our culture has amounted to a program of glamorized derangement—whereby charismatic speakers are able to capitalize on our proclivity for mass mania / mass hysteria. **{D}** Trump’s swooning fanbase proclaims, “Nobody can tell THIS guy what to do!” They fail to realize that *anyone who buys him off invariably tells him what to do*. Like any other corrupt politician, his motivation is self-enrichment (and self-aggrandizement), not civic duty.

The tendency for so many to succumb to—what is effectively—political Stockholm Syndrome is as profound as it is astonishing. This widespread susceptibility can be attributed—in large part—to the fact that most voters do not base their choices on a fastidious evaluation of policy. Rather, they base their choices on overall vibes—which is to say: emotive response. Here’s the catch: Emotion does not operate based on an accurate picture of the world, it is guided solely by personal impressions. This is where fallibility becomes folly. In America’s dyspeptic heartland, still contending with the fallout from Neoliberalism, so many have been duped into believing that the salve for their woes is....MORE corporatism.

Since Machiavelli, it has been understood that politics is about taking control of the impressions people have of things (see Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-Tung, and Kim Il-Sung). Leo Strauss understood this and encouraged it. So did Henry Kissinger. Hence their brand of “Realpolitik”. Noam Chomsky understood

this too. The difference is that he rang the alarm bells.

Emotional manipulation is a matter of knowing what triggers people to react to their circumstances in certain ways. The idea is to then ensure they are presented with the stimuli that will elicit the desired response. In other words: It's knowing how to "push people's buttons". How can this be done? In a word: conditioning.

A conditioned response is, in part, about creating associations (that is: by dictating what impressions people have when they encounter certain things). So, in politics, presentation trumps substance; as it is personal impressions—not sound judgement—that determines many voters' decisions. Consequently, political success is more about savvy branding (which is largely about instantiating certain associations, no matter how illusory) than it is about objective merit. In this sense, politicians find themselves operating in a marketplace rather than in an agora; and voters are more consumers than they are participants in a deliberative democracy.

The best way to manipulate people is to keep them from noticing that they are being manipulated. (Put another way: The best way to control people is to convince them that they're not being controlled.) That's why the illusions of empowerment is far more effective than overt disempowerment. This is how religion works; and it is how effective propaganda works.

Who are the easiest people to manipulate? Those who are frustrated and/or insecure. Translation: One is best able to manipulate people through anger and fear. Mental lethargy makes this all the more easy; which means the American populace are an ideal mark. The moral of the story: Only when there is a yawning vacuum of critical thinking, and mechanisms in place to ensure widespread mis-information, is something like MAGA possible; as those are the conditions that make any and all cult activity possible.

And so it went: In 2024, rather than simply Googling "what causes inflation?" or "what effect do higher tariffs have on prices?" or "who benefited most from Trump's tax-cuts?", many Americans simply went with a functionally-illiterate nincompoop who seemed to give a shit about their financial woes. He talked tough; and seemed unafraid to speak his mind.

Aside from overactive limbic systems and inert pre-frontal cortexes, many people are simply suckers for a good story. So it is a compelling narrative, not a firm grasp of policy implications, that ultimately sways them. The results of both the 2016 and 2024 presidential elections were jolting reminders of how powerful propaganda can truly be (see hasbara in Israel; Juche in North Korea; xuanchuan in China). {C} Both elections were political catastrophes; and we court continued disaster if we allow those in the Democratic party who were responsible for both outcomes to offer an errant diagnosis of the problem; and thereby dictate the plan going forward.

The Democratic party needs to ask: What led us to this moment? The problem is that introspection is not, exactly, the DNC's strong suit. People are looking for bold solutions; and the party's feckless leaders have no idea how to deliver.

In the midst of such disheartening circumstances, we Progressives should be careful not to be consumed with resentment and bitterness. We must maintain level heads; and work diligently to get to the bottom of things.

In proffering an astute diagnosis, step one is to reject identity politics wholesale. Why? Well, for starters, purportedly "anti-racist" identitarians obdurately claim that all White men are inherently—and irredeemably—racist / sexist. They rant about "cultural appropriation", then insist that we all use daffy

terminology like “menstruating / birthing person”. They proceed to castigate anyone who neglects to use plural pronouns for gender non-binary individuals. (Wonder how off-putting all this is? Consider the tagline for the most-run—and most successful—Trump ad of 2024: “*She’s for they/them; he’s with you.*”) It’s almost as if Potemkin Progressives were looking for the most surefire way to get as many people in America’s disillusioned working class as possible to say, “Go fuck yourself.”

Never mind any of that, though. Potemkin Progressives have an ideological agenda to pursue, as well as big-money donors to appease; and they won’t be deterred.

Putting oneself in the shoes of the average, working-class bloke, we are obliged to wonder: If one is racking one’s brain about how to cover exorbitant medical bills, keep up with the rent, make car payments, and feed one’s family, it’s hard to take someone seriously who is obsessing over pronoun usage...while chastising you for some arcane transgression called “cultural appropriation”.

Identity politics ends up distracting us from the actual explanation for social injustices: the increasingly high concentration of wealth / power in a few hands. (It doesn’t matter what color those hands happen to be, it is the aggregation that is the problem.) While the well-positioned few hoard the fruits of the nation’s economic activity, the rabble degenerates into a cacophony of quibbling factions.

The identitarian mindset tells us nothing about the cartels that bilk us each and every day—from big Pharma to big Oil. As the socio-economic elite feast at their hedonic banquet, the rest of us fight each other over the table scraps; then blaming each other when things don’t work out well. For, you see, our financial woes are the fault of THE OTHER—defined in terms of demographic category. We are led to believe that our plight has nothing to do with the architecture of society’s major power structures: the depredations of the for-profit sickness-treatment industry, the racket that is the prison-industrial complex, the malefaction of the gun lobby, the control over our food by agricultural conglomerates, the stranglehold that private military contractors have over Capitol Hill, and the outsized influence of the financial services industry on the world’s economic machinery.

Never mind the rent-seekers / financiers, who have rigged the system for their own benefit...at everyone else’s expense. That dark-skinned fella trimming the hedges is receiving food stamps!

Racial animus keeps us all divided. This goes both ways. While WASPs don’t want to listen enough to p.o.c., many p.o.c. refuse to listen to Progressives if they happen to be WASPs. And so it goes: In weighing in on the issue of social (spec. racial) injustice, the Regressive “Left” touts a divisive program that would have many people of color say things like, “Well, if it’s coming from a White person, then I don’t want to hear it.”

This declaration has several variants—including:

- “You being White automatically makes you part of the problem.” (The implication: “You are therefore disqualified from contributing to the discussion; and should accept the charge of guilt-by-association.”)
- “If you’re White, we’ll insist that you have unfair ‘privilege’, no matter what your circumstance might be.” (The implication: “You are complicit in all racial injustice by dint of your racial identity, so forfeit your right to weigh in on the matter.”)

As I argued in *Robin’s Zugzwang*, this attitude is worse than un-productive; it is profoundly counter-productive. Not only is such posturing detrimental to the Progressive cause, it repels many of those who might otherwise be on board with Progressive policies. (!)

This misguided approach is based on a misapprehension of racial injustice: what it is, how it works, and what causes it. In reality, the crux of the problem is structural, not personal; as we live in a society that is egregiously anti-meritocratic; and—more to the point—anti-meritocratic in favor of certain demographics (White Judeo-Christian men). Because of the skewed nature of America’s institutions, being White makes it far more probable that one will be in a position to benefit from unearned socio-economic status (a.k.a. “privilege”). But *White-ness in and of itself* is not a (source of) privilege.

I submit that with every diagnosis of social injustice, one must stipulate: “And although these structural defects adversely impact a disproportionate amount of p.o.c., it is not ONLY p.o.c. who end up with a raw deal. It impacts a lot of struggling White people as well.” Until the Regressive “Left” learns this crucial lesson, it will continue to drive tens of millions of working-class WASPs into the arms of MAGA.

How, then, are we to make sense of structural inequalities that exist along *racial* lines? The point is not to blame White-ness per se; it is to recognize that not being a person of color makes the chances much higher that one will be granted opportunities that many p.o.c. never have (see Endnotes 43 and 54). Be that as it may, it is imperative that we recognize that this is not because of some nebulous thing called “Whiteness”...permeating society like a noxious aether. Rather, it is due to the grotesquely defective architecture of America’s power structures, which determine who is granted avenues for success (access to affordable housing in safe neighborhoods, to quality education, to gainful employment, and to good healthcare). The unfairness is due to a SYSTEM (which has been set up to favor one demographic profile over another—from jurisprudence to career opportunities). In other words: It is not due to the level of melanin in any given person’s epidermis.

Holding everyone in the more statistically “privileged” demographic culpable for this inequitable state of affairs is tantamount to collective punishment. There is no more something wrong with being White than there is with being Brown or Black. Whiteness PER SE is not the problem; it’s the system that favors it that’s the problem.

So what are we to make of the faux populism that is MAGA?

If we are to ascertain the (actual) agenda espoused by Trump, we might consider a handy rule of thumb: Don’t listen to what he says; heed a slightly different version of the old adage: *Follow the money* (which reveals ulterior motives and clandestine influences). I recommend the new adage: *Follow the glee*. In other words, amongst those with power, see who is HAPPY that he won. On November 6, 2024, which big money donors were high five-ing? And which ideologues were offered cushy appointments in the administration? One will soon find the answer is as clear as day: a motley array of fascists—from unreconstructed ethno-nationalists to rapacious plutocrats. (Consider Trump’s cabinet appointments: a rogue’s gallery of degenerates and lunatics.) On Capitol Hill, legislation has always been sold to the highest bidder; but, under Trump, the entire government is now up for sale. And as with most plutocracies, the U.S. is steadily becoming a kakistocracy.

Note that “follow the glee” is a variation on the age-old litmus test, “Cui bono?” In the case of Trump’s re-election, the answer is: Oligarchs, Neocons, and Christian Dominionists. (In the fortnight following the election, Elon Musk’s net worth increased by about \$60 billion.) This tells us much of what we need to know about what lay behind Trump’s policy positions—to wit: who’s interests those positions serve. (Hint: Not the 99%.) Make no mistake, as every devastated Progressive was reeling in bewilderment in the weeks following the election, virtually *every other* client of Kamala’s corporate consultation firms were popping champagne. (Thanks, Bully Pulpit Interactive, Canal Partners, and Gambit Strategies.)

All the while, many on the putative “Left” still find themselves embroiled in petty squabbles—fussing over “lived experience”, wondering about “safe spaces”, and quibbling over personal matters like “micro-aggressions”. When they see all this Tomfoolery, corporatist Democrats are eager to play along: “Go ahead. Tie yourselves in knots over identity politics; just don’t demand universal public healthcare. And, by the way, you know we’re one of the good guys, because we’ve convened yet another D.E.I. workshop.”

Those who normally vote Democrat have to start asking: Who serves who when party bosses expect constituents to fall in line rather than vice versa? Though unintended, the Harris campaign’s pleas to the electorate amounted to the following: “Even though we aren’t delivering for you nearly enough, we expect you to deliver for us in the voting booth...because, hey, at least we are slightly LESS corrupt than the horrifically corrupt alternative.” This is hardly an enticing proposition. One may as well announce: “What we’ll do is...We’ll ease up a bit on the corporatism; but then throw in some identity politics; then insist that everyone be politically correct.”

It’s a wonder anyone still finds the Democratic party appealing.

In light of its manifold depredations, it is not at all surprising how much credibility the Democratic party has lost with America’s working class. The more pressing question is: How did the Democratic party alienate so many otherwise gettable voters? As mentioned in the Preface to this book, rather than a party of (real) populists, it has become a party of Wall Street Bankers, toadies for the military-industrial complex, and shills for the for-profit sickness-treatment industry (PhRMA, AHIP, the AHA, etc.) As if that weren’t disgraceful enough, terrified of being accused of “anti-Semitism”, many with a (D) next to their name have cozied up to Revisionist Zionists just to stay in the good graces of AIPAC; so are willing to abet crimes against humanity in faraway lands.

Will the devastating election result in 2024 be a wake-up call to the Democratic establishment? Sadly, probably not. The Democratic party is primarily a corporatist party—a lamentable fact that has been demonstrated time and time again. The DLC and its sycophants have made crystal clear that they have nothing but contempt for genuine Progressives.

As with 2016, in the wake of the 2024 results, the Democratic party’s top brass will assuredly bend over backwards to ensure that they learn absolutely nothing from their obvious missteps. So it comes as little surprise that, since the election, we have heard questions like: “The socio-economic elite adored her. What, then, could the explanation for Kamala’s loss possibly be?” (Harris actually sent out a letter boasting about the slew of endorsements she’d received from corporate CEOs—a gesture that was almost as boneheaded as touring with Liz Cheney.) Big money is the problem with the Democratic party, not the solution. Unless Democrats first have a major reckoning, they cannot have a revival.

We also heard comments like, “Kamala had all those celebrity endorsements, so how could she have lost?” Lost, indeed. Lost on the high-priced political consultants is the fact that those highfalutin endorsements not only didn’t help; they reminded a restive electorate how exasperatingly out-of-touch mainline Democrats were (and still are). While many of us love Beyoncé, it would be foolish to suppose she GETS the average bloke working 9 to 5 in small-town America. For many, celebrity endorsements often served more as a handicap than an asset. (One might say that while the Democratic establishment is utterly tone-def, Trump plays his audience like a fiddle. Either way, the rank and file gets the shaft.)

What else proved fatal? Against all sense, Kamala hitched her cart to Joe Biden’s pallid horse. Barring a brief nod to the working class via the selection of Tim Walz for the bottom of the ticket, her floundering campaign eschewed full-bore Progressivism. She thereby retained the repellant stigma of *the establishment candidate*

. In light of this, every corporatist associated with the Democratic party was elated. (Here's looking at you, Jamie Dimon.)

In spite of the mountain of evidence as to why MAGA once again prevailed, we are now treated to a panoply of birdbrained analyses like: "Kamala had the backing of the Swifties and the BeyHive, and even campaigned with Liz Cheney! So the explanation for her loss must be that most Americans don't want a woman of color in the Oval Office!" (Point of contrast: Mexico is both more Christian and more riven with misogyny than the U.S., yet...overwhelmingly voted in a Jewish woman for president. Wherefore? She had a powerful—and sincere—Progressive message.) Phyllis Schlafly, trailblazer of Christian Nationalism, was a woman. Susie Wiles, the mind behind the MAGA movement, is a woman. This is simply to say that there are despicable people of all demographics. The moral of the story: Judging people by their genitalia and/or skin-tone is—at best—an exercise in fatuity.

Since 2016, Democrats have failed to see that they are dealing with an intellectually-benighted, dispossessed electorate that was fed up with the same ol' song and dance. Low-information voters don't want to feel preached to, they want to feel HEARD.

The Democratic leadership wasn't listening. In its three months of existence, the Harris campaign failed to see how important it was to explain the reasons behind the working class' plight—which meant providing a cogent explanation for why a transition to a Green New Deal would not endanger employment opportunities, but BROADEN them. Many in dire economic straits did not—and still don't—understand that investment in basic public infrastructure stimulates the economy and CREATES jobs—to wit: that it redounds to appreciable benefits for the working class. Had the full version of "Build Back Better" been allowed to pass in 2021 (and the Green New Deal been allowed to materialize), the American economy would have soared. Instead, we got a severely emaciated "Inflation Reduction Act"...a pathetic half-measure, the limited benefits of which were set to be delayed for many years.

Above all, it was Kamala's unwillingness to distance herself from the despised Democratic machine (read: Biden, Pelosi, Schumer, et. al.) that accounted for her inability to cultivate support in America's heartland. Instead of "turning the page", as she often put it, she opted to tout continuity with an administration that represented the very Establishment for which most of the working class—of all demographic profiles—had nothing but scorn.

From all this, Kamala's grossly over-paid advisers (most of whom had no idea what they were talking about; and, in any case, were all vehemently anti-Progressive) concluded: "We need more Cheney fans!" (Memo: many of the same consultation firms also serve corporate power.) So the Harris campaign proceeded to parade around with a woman who's father was the high priest of the Neocon ideology, and who voted with Trump 95% of the time...and did so as they told Palestinian rights activists to fuck off.

Such operatives are paid obscene amounts of money to doll out horrible advice. The idea is never to recommend the MORAL thing; it is always to recommend that which is most beneficial to those in power. What matters is not the common good; it's only the good of those *who "matter"* (see Endnote 60).

Yes, Kamala listened to the wrong people. Also notable, though, was her failure to explain what had caused inflation after the pandemic-induced supply-chain disruptions had been rectified. (Answer: rampant corporate malfeasance; coupled with a complete lack of constraint on the financial services industry.) Inflation was the source of many people's ire; and left with misapprehensions, they were certain to channel that ire in the wrong direction (i.e. NOT toward corporate power, but toward policies that would probably ALLEVIATE the inflation).

Kamala’s delinquent messaging caused her to hemorrhage supporters amongst crucial parts of the electorate...who, it cannot be emphasized enough, were irate about price increases; and were frantically looking for explanations. Few people were aware: Private equity firms drove up real estate, thereby eradicating affordable housing. Meanwhile, massive corporations—often with monopolistic control—engaged in price-gouging with impunity, affecting everything from poultry and eggs to car insurance and gas. It was unfettered corporate power—and insufficient investment in vital social services—that led to all the jarring inflation that rankled so many.

The Harris campaign’s abject failure to dispel the absurd belief that inflation was somehow due to TOO MUCH public investment probably also cost her the election; as such a ruinous misimpression entailed that the blame for economic hardship would be entirely misplaced. {E} Said misimpression led to the supposition that perhaps EVEN MORE right-wing economic policy (austerity measures; acceding to corporate interests; massive tax-cuts for the super-rich) might be the magical solution to their financial straits. (Contrary to the myth of supply-side economics, still prevalent in right-wing circles, economies are stimulated from the demand side.) In the meantime, low-information voters were inclined to blame stratospheric real estate prices not on plutocrats, but on impoverished immigrants. (“High rent? It’s because of those darned Mexicans!”)

Little do many in the working class realize: Socio-economically, they have more in common with said immigrants than they do with Donald Trump and his cronies.

So what would have prevented inflation? Less catering to corporate interests and more investment in basic public infrastructure. An understanding of this simple fact would have made support for Trump utterly inconceivable (for anyone with a moral compass, that is).

All this misdirected angst virtually guaranteed that people would misunderstand why society has the problems it has. They failed to grasp that it was because economic policy wasn’t Progressive ENOUGH that inflation occurred. The answer to their woes was MORE investment in vital social services, and fewer tax-breaks for financial behemoths.

Yet, in the throws of their seething resentments, biddable voters were more willing to believe that Haitian migrants were eating their pets than that Trump’s policies only benefited America’s most affluent...while screwing over everyone else.

The working class abandoned the Democratic party because the Democratic party abandoned them.

Saddled with memories of Biden’s flagrant senility, Kamala soon became the new face of an out-of-touch establishment. (“Crime is low in wealthy neighborhoods; and the stock market is doing fabulous! So why’s everyone complaining?”) To this day, corporatist Democrats are more smitten with Neoliberalism—replete with its full array of depredations—than they are sympathetic to the plight of the working class.

The Harris campaign burned through well over a billion dollars in just three months. On what? On disastrous messaging (thanks to a brigade of corporate consultants). As a result, Kamala was seen as merely the latest face of an aloof Establishment. (Speaking to her audiences like she was speaking to a room-full of kindergarten kids only bolstered this image.) While there is certainly no love lost between most Americans and country-club Republicans, there is a comparable sentiment regarding “limousine liberals”...for whom the DLC is ground zero.

In the (admittedly provincial) minds of Trump enthusiasts, support for MAGA was a searing repudiation of

the same tired bullshit. Moreover, it was a stern rebuke of corporatist hacks who didn't even pretend to understand the concerns of the average working-class voter. Although Trump lies through his teeth with every breath, at least he PRETENDS to care about the regular Joe. When people wracked with frustration do not have a productive way to vent, they will often channel their ire in extremely dysfunctional ways. Endorsing a blow-hard who pretends to give a shit about them, and who also despises politics-as-usual, seemed to be a good idea. (Hey, at least he'd shake things up. It's good to have a bull in a China shop when people despise the China shop.)

At the end of the day, people need an outlet for their angst; and will opt for whichever outlet best presents itself. We humans tend to be suckers for a good story, so will gravitate to whoever is proffering the most compelling narrative. (This is why there has been a predilection for religion since time immemorial.) Many Americans understandably felt betrayed by the Democratic party; as—since FDR—it had always upheld a somewhat plausible facade of populism. By contrast, with regards to MAGA, there was no sense of betrayal, as—until recently—the G.O.P. never really even pretended to be the party of the working class. Now it is seen as the fresh new alternative to a party that—for the past half century—has done nothing but dash the hopes of everyone who put their faith in it.

Trump's full of shit, you say? Indeed. But the Democrats looked no more sincere. Many voters couldn't be blamed for thinking: If party leaders were willing to be dishonest about something as blatantly obvious as Biden's drastic cognitive deterioration, then what else were they willing to be dishonest about? ("His glaring dementia? His slurred speech? Don't worry; he's as sharp as a tack!")

With regard to the issue of political correctness and identity politics: Though Kamala opted not to put such things front and center; she did little to dissociate herself from them. Simply refraining from prioritizing them on the hustings was inadequate for disabusing most Americans of the impression that the Democrats were still wed to said ideologies. Granted, Kamala did not place identity politics front and center—a prudent choice. However, like it or not, short of explicitly disavowing all the "woke" nonsense (as most people saw it; and still see it), she would continue to be tied to it. After all, it had become part of the Democrats' brand.

To be clear, it was extremely difficult for the average Joe to relate to those who lectured him about neo-pronouns, micro-aggressions, safe spaces, cultural appropriation, and all the rest. The majority of America's rank and file effectively said to itself: "If you think it's fine to give puberty blockers to children who are confused about gender, then how in heaven's name are we supposed to trust you on ANYTHING ELSE? And if you think that all White men are inherently racist and misogynist, then how am I to believe you care about my well-being?"

To this day, such an out-of-touch perspective is found in America's elitist circles. Republican or Democrat, we are met with the idea that impeccable manners is—somehow—a surrogate for moral principles. While there is a mixture of Democrats and Republicans amongst socio-economic elites, but most of them share the same country-club memberships. Looking down their noses at the proletariat is, for them, par for the course. Why? Because the myth of meritocracy persists: If people are affluent, it must be because they've done something admirable to deserve it; and if people are poor, they have nobody to blame but themselves (again, see Endnote 54).

While she did not emphasize identity politics, Kamala stopped short of rejecting it outright; so failed to distance herself from the stigma. Touting a so-called "opportunity economy" did little to re-focus people; for, at the end of the day, that was little more than a slogan. People are not always moved by abstractions; they often need specifics.

To reiterate: The difference between Democratic and Republican corporatists is largely one of branding. The former engage in ersatz Progressivism; the latter tend to be a bit more open about their ethno-nationalism. (Fascists are usually fine with colossal social injustices...so long as they're attending the right galas and using the appropriate fork at dinner.) And when it comes to speaking to the masses, the well-groomed popinjays of the commentariat see fit to hold forth from the safe remove of their in gated communities. It turns out, though, that it's rather difficult to see the consequences of their avarice from behind the castle walls.

It's no surprise that, on the cocktail circuit, Washington's movers and shakers don't hear much about the tribulations of America's abiding socio-economic injustice—let alone about the dire consequences of extreme wealth inequality. For they are only made privy to policies tailored to the corporate interests they serve—interests, that is, which ensure THEIR OWN continued position at the highest tiers of the socio-economic hierarchy. This goes for corporatists in both parties. Indeed, the country-club Republicans AND “limousine liberals” pretend to lament the plight of the everyman...even as they are drenched in sanctimony. The former reminisce about the good ol' days, when everybody knew their god-given place; the latter telegraph their “woke” bona fides in between sips of chianti. Both decry the arrogance of radicals...who just can't seem to accept their inferior lot in life.

Such is the nature of the current party duopoly. It rarely dawns upon most swing-voters that the U.S. already has a right-wing party: the Democratic party. The only viable alternative is a proto-fascist cult that used to be the G.O.P. Any attempt to go elsewhere is considered a “wasted vote”—a stubborn refusal to come to terms with the inevitable.

It beggars the imagination that the world's most famous representative democracy does not have a viable Progressive party. So if the wayward voter is fed up with the Democrats, then he feels as though he must go elsewhere. Where might that be? Well, the only other place available.

Welcome to MAGA! Please pull up a seat, kick back and have a beer.

In November of 2024, as I wrote the present book, Progressives were once again reminded that they must never underestimate the degree to which much of the American electorate is abysmally ill-informed; and—as a consequence—apt to (unwittingly) vote against their own best interests. From the Atlantic to the Pacific, political Stockholm Syndrome is now rampant...just as it is in so many other countries (which have themselves fell victim to the trappings of faux populism).

In a nutshell, the modus operandi of those who join faux populist movements is: “We're fed up with those serving the ‘elites’; and who care nothing about the common man; so we will vote for a man who serves corporate interests more than anyone else...and couldn't care less about the general welfare.”

Even as we may be utterly dismayed by recent events, it is crucial to recognize the degree to which so many Americans were so utterly confused when it came to policy. Note, for example, those who toggled between Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump in the previous couple election cycles. It should not be entirely shocking, then, that—in 2024—many checked the box for pro-choice initiatives and for Trump *on the same ballot*. Take away the plutocrats, bigots, and christian theocrats, and we find that many of those who joined MAGA in 2024 had been partial to Bernie Sanders in the previous two presidential elections. (!) That a person NOT suffering from multiple personality disorder could go from supporting Sanders for almost a decade to supporting Trump attests to the staggering degree of confusion involved. (One imagines flipping a coin between the ACLU and the Klan.) Clearly, as this bizarre shift could not possibly have been due to a firm grasp of policy implications (the policies of the two figures were diametrically

opposed), other factors determine voter choices.

Even more heartbreaking than all this cognitive dissonance: Countless voters of color were adamantly against the Democrats' support for the genocide in Palestine, so opted instead for Trump...who supports the Israeli government EVEN MORE. (Consequently, there were many disillusioned voters who voted for, say, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez down-ballot, yet Trump at the top!) While this represents a kind of political schizophrenia that boggles the mind, it also reveals how many swing voters actually operate. (It also serves as a reminder that cultic thinking is like Novocaine for cognitive dissonance.) The impulses of such voters are not governed by a meticulous critical analysis of all available evidence. Instead, they base their decisions on vibes. Rather than participants in deliberative democracy, many Americans are like impulse buyers—easily snookered into making rash decisions. (For more on this, see Thomas Frank's *What's The Matter With Kansas*.)

Frustration short-circuits our rational facilities; and hampers our ability to engage in critical deliberation. Bogus as it is, Trump's anti-establishment schtick was astoundingly effective amongst those who were fed up with the usual rigamarole (read: the annoyingly "woke" Neoliberalism of the Democratic party). For many, a vote for Trump was a giant middle finger to what they see as the Establishment: a cabal of feckless political operatives who are, so often, so obviously completely full of shit. When ill-informed Americans hear Donald Trump, they feel as though he speaks for them. When those same people hear Democratic establishmentarians (most infamously, Hillary Clinton), they are confident of one thing: He/she does not speak for me.

In the absence of REAL populism, the country's rank and file will opt for a cheap knock-off if it is hawked to them with pizzaz. Ergo Trump. It cannot be emphasized enough: Faux populism can only be defeated by genuine populism; since Bill Clinton, the Democratic party has offered only anti-populism.

The Harris campaign had all the money in the world, yet had no bold positions. As if to make matters worse, it turns out that its celebrity endorsements were *paid for*. The grand vizier of narcissism herself, Oprah Winfrey, insisted that the campaign PAY HER a million dollars to make a couple appearances. This one fact is extremely revealing. (The Black woman who welcomes me at Walmart—likely for minimum wage—gave more money to the Harris campaign than this self-absorbed billionaire.)

Again, there was no answer when it came to standing up to corporate interests; or to ensuring affordable healthcare; or to curbing the price of gas, groceries, medical care, and housing. While serving America's most affluent (and hewing to corporate interests at every turn), it SHOULD be apparent that Trump and his cronies do not care about the well-being of the everyman. But it isn't apparent to millions of low-information voters. Why not? Well, because Trump and co. act like they care; so many Americans feel seen by them.

When people are frustrated, they are looking for clear-cut answers...even if those answers are largely baloney. So the question is not why so many Americans are unable to see through the sham that is MAGA; the question, rather, is why the Democratic party is unable to see THEM. To most people, the Democratic party simply reeks of the status quo.

It is not the working class' job to support the Democratic candidate; it's the Democratic candidate's job to support the working class. Instead, corporatists located at key positions within the Democratic party do little more than serve the powerful lobbies that write them hefty checks. As they dance to the beat of their big money donors, they pay lip service to lofty ideals like "freedom" and "family values". They then turn around and castigate anyone who has the gall to request that they serve the common-man rather than the power elite. The Democrats' message to the electorate is effectively: "We engage in tons of corruption, but

just not quite as much as the other party. Therefore you should go with us.”

This is not a persuasive sales pitch.

The alluvion of ersatz Progressivism on the so-called “Left” only made the Democratic brand look worse. We mustn’t let a cadre of loud, cantankerous pseudo-activists ruin things for the rest of us. Those who care very deeply for the Progressive cause are only painted with the same brush as those who offer only specious claims, frivolous indictments, and harebrained ideas. Again: The Regressive “Left” makes the REAL Left look ridiculous; and provides right-wing polemicists with bountiful ammunition to paint genuine Progressives as nutty ideologues.

For those who are bamboozled by right-wing propaganda, the thinking amounts to: Why go with Republican lite when you can get the real thing? Trump disguised himself as a man of the people. For low-information voters (i.e. the vast majority of America’s right wing), this worked like a charm. Entirely lost on his fawning audiences was the fact that—during his first term—almost none of the much-touted tax cuts went to the working class (the cuts predominantly benefited the ultra-wealthy); childhood poverty skyrocketed; over 200,000 jobs were outsourced to foreign lands; over 3 million people lost healthcare; and—to add insult to injury—the G.O.P. blocked overtime pay for 8 million workers. (Stiffing workers is, after all, Trump’s stock in trade.) All these devastating facts were irrelevant; because Trump managed to brand himself as the outsider who was audacious enough to take a stand against *the establishment*. To most people, everything that was wrong with the country could be pinned on that vague abstraction. And so it went: Virtually every Democratic figure had become a mascot for *the establishment*. And not for nothing.

The reality is, of course, strikingly different from such (mis)impressions. All Trump ACTUALLY does is eliminate funds to vital social services and to important infrastructure projects...while doling out a slew of enormous corporate tax-breaks. He happily pushes the draconian austerity measures that have wreaked havoc in countries around the world (whenever those countries have become overtaken by right-wing economic policy). It makes sense, then, that right-wing libertarians have been appointed to bogus positions of “government efficiency”.

Alas, given America’s party duopoly, the only alternative to pure Reaganomics was a more collegial version of corporatism. For the past half century, the Democrats’ Neoliberalism left room for some mealy-mouthed paeans to civil rights...even as it has been doing the bidding of its corporate paymasters. By the opening years of the 21st century, Democrats offered artificially-flavored hogwash in lieu of bald-faced corruption. Considering its refusal to be genuinely populist, it’s no wonder that, since the waning years of the Obama administration, the Democratic party has lost support from almost every demographic. {F}

There is an ironclad law of politics: When not challenged by genuine populism, faux populism (a.k.a. fascism) wins every time. This has been demonstrated over and over and over again, in country after country after country—in virtually every instance that a demagogue has risen to power. Fascists succeed when their message finds purchase in the minds of a restive population. This occurs whenever the alternative party fails to deliver. When people are fed up with the status quo, they go elsewhere...anywhere...looking for solutions.

In both 2016 and 2024, we saw that faux populism proves effective only insofar as there is a vacuum left by an absence of genuine populism. Corporatists within the Democratic party would rather see proto-fascists win than stand up to Wall Street, Big Pharma, AHIP, the military-industrial complex, and AIPAC. Election cycle after election cycle, they have dependably chosen to cozy up to Blackrock, Goldman Sachs, Raytheon, and a battalion of Revisionist Zionists...rather than fight for social democracy.

The Democratic leadership would rather lose an election than defy their beloved AIPAC. (Wondering if racism / fascism has also infected the Democratic party? There's your answer.) As it turns out, for establishment Democrats, ethno-nationalism is fine overseas...so long as we quash it here in the U.S. They fail to recognize that it is extremely difficult to take a credible stand against ethno-nationalism at home when one is supporting it abroad (see Endnote 51).

Kamala Harris was completely on board when the Biden administration insisted that yet more public funds be diverted to support not one, but TWO genocides: one perpetrated by the Saudi regime in Yemen (fascism based on Wahhabism), one perpetrated by the Israeli regime in Palestine (fascism based on Revisionist Zionism). Salafi fascism or Judeo-fascism: pick your poison. Along with MAGA, the Democratic party picked BOTH.

The Washington Beltway has always been a Bacchanal of influence-peddling and horse-trading. With Trump back at the helm, it is now open season for quid pro quos of the most insidious kind. Trump has already been bought off so as to ensure his AUGMENTED support two fascist regimes: two billion dollars to Jared Kushner from the House of Saud; and hundreds of millions of dollars to Trump from the Adelsons and Tim Melon (not to mention the Mercers and all the other usual suspects). Considering all this, it is an earth-shattering irony that many of those who were persuaded to back Trump did so because they were fed up with all of the DEMOCRATS' corruption. Nobody in the history of American politics has ever been so eager as Donald Trump to sell policy to the highest bidder. This is his "art of the deal".

In terms of presentation, the contrast between Trump and Harris couldn't have been more stark. Like any demagogue, Trump continued to be the consummate crowd-pleaser...playing to his audience like the consummate performer. For those who pay no attention to policy, this seemed to be a breath of fresh air. Meanwhile...during her asseverations, whenever Kamala managed to NOT sound overly-scripted, she devolved into fatuous blather. At almost every turn, she only succeeded in reminding swing voters (i.e. the people who decide elections) that she was beholden to the dreaded establishment. Amidst all the fanfare and choreography, she failed to sound like anyone other than an emissary of Washington's political machine—recycling canned statements and spouting market-tested bromides, in between nervous laughs. (Use of a whiny vocal fry when uttering oleaginous talking-points came off as condescending. That her riffing on the stump often turned into word-salad didn't help either.) Rather than take bold stands (speaking out against the privatization of everything under the sun), she opted instead for sloganeering...which elicited more eye-rolls than inspiration.

After Kamala was effectively coronated at the Democratic National Convention (as heir apparent to Biden), there was very little that seemed organic about her. Even as she paid lip service to a few quasi-populist initiatives (e.g. the child tax credit; paid family leave; new anti-trust measures; support for organized labor; a robust CFPB, and a rejuvenated NLRB), she remained a standard corporatist Democrat—eschewing full-bore economic populism in favor of Neoliberal (and Neocon) framing.

I ask the reader to consider the following message to America's White working class:

While you are struggling to pay extortionate medical bills and scrambling to meet next month's increasingly-high rent (with the meager wages you receive from a stressful job), we insist that you address certain queer individuals with a plural pronoun. And we will scold you for "implicit racial bias"...while forever begrudging you for not being a person of color. You're overworked and underpaid, yet shall be chastised for some sort of "privilege" you have never noticed you had...which, so far as you can see, has yielded diddly squat since the day you were born.

This is the message that much of the rank and file hears from the Regressive “Left”; and it explains why tens of millions of Progressively-inclined Americans THRICE cast a ballot for Trump.

One may as well presage such an ornery pronouncement with, “I do declare...” in a cut-glass British accent. (All the better if said when sipping cognac whilst lounging on ornately-upholstered divans. Eye monocle is optional.) Begrudging people for their ethnicity is never a good idea. Shunning them for imagined transgressions instead of hearing about their very real problems is a surefire way to never get their vote. While some of Kamala’s lack of support amongst the far-right can be attributed to gender and/or racial biases, such prejudice does nothing to explain, well, EVERYONE ELSE who opted not to support her on election day.

Looking back: A successful campaign against the MAGA movement would have conveyed the following sentiment: “I understand why some of you might be tempted to join the MAGA bandwagon. You’re frustrated; and you want to tear down the system, which REALLY IS rigged against you. Trump seems to be the only one who is brazen enough to do it.” Translation: I hear you. And I understand your concerns.”
{G}

Want to get the working class vote? Don’t scold them; understand them. Only then can one help THEM understand which policies will best serve the common good (read: their economic interests). Put another way: Don’t tell people what they are supposed to believe. Instead, give them the unvarnished facts (providing evidence as needed), then articulate the basic principles on which the proposed position is based. Don’t make it about joining the right team; make it about alleviating their travails.

A final point: This can be done without compromising Progressive principles. It would be a misreading of this Appendix to suppose it is—in any way—calling for a movement rightward; or for making “strategic” concessions to the right wing. Getting through to people and capitulating to them are two entirely different things. (Extending an olive branch is not bending the knee.) This is a matter of edification, not “compromise”. (One might even say that it is largely about facilitating de-conversion.) Reaching out to those who are sympathetic to MAGA is in no way conceding that the opprobrious movement ITSELF has credence; it is merely recognizing that some of the concerns that some Trump voters have actually matter.

It is possible that such a revolutionary endeavor will spur major transformation within the Democratic party. Perhaps it will give birth to a new political party. This depends on how entrenched corporate interests are in the party’s infrastructure. I like to believe that the Democratic party is not irredeemably corrupt. After the old guard passes away, we’ll find out.

In sum: MAGA cannot be defeated by a campaign; it can only be defeated by a sustained movement—a movement that actually addresses all the things the Trump PRETENDS to address. The Democratic party—in its current incarnation—is ill-equipped to shepherd such a movement. How so? Because ***only genuine populism can defeat faux populism***. This is why—had he been permitted to be the Democratic nominee—Bernie Sanders would have clobbered Trump in 2016, as well as in the two subsequent elections. (Note: Had they been run on the level, Sanders would have prevailed in both Democratic primaries in which he ran.)

So what is to be done about Trump’s proto-fascist (cult) movement? An ***actual*** Progressive would offer an audacious counter-vision. This would mean offering a stark alternative ON POLICY; which would itself entail bucking the demands of virtually all big-money donors. Identity politics would not play a role in this vision. The panoply of distractions includes gripes about “cultural appropriation”, which sows needless discord. While it is important to acknowledge sentiments and discuss ideals, specific policy proposals is

where the rubber meets the road. So it is on policy that we must focus. A worthwhile Progressive movement will require both integrity and tenacity—two things woefully lacking in the current Democratic party. (While the G.O.P. has none of the former, it's got the latter in spades.)

As the American Republic verges on self-immolation, we must stay firm in our commitment to civil society. Deliberative democracy takes work; and quickly disintegrates when neglected. Quibbling over the ownership of cultural elements not only does nothing to solve society's most pressing problems; such pointless feuds only serve to divide us. More than just undermining the integrity of public discourse, crowding the discourse with petty grievances gives Progressivism a bad name...while providing right-wing polemicists with endless fodder to assail their political adversaries (see Endnote 18).

Never mind that Kamala refused to take a stand against the ethnic cleansing in Palestine (undertaken with her own administration's support)...while actively marginalizing Muslim Americans (or anyone speaking up for Palestinian rights, for that matter) during the course of her campaign. Never mind that she remained a lapdog for the military-industrial complex (including a useful idiot for the boondoggle in Ukraine, which proved to be a bonanza for private military contractors...with almost nothing else to show for the massive infusion of tax-payer money). Never mind that she failed to explain the reasons for inflation. And never mind she stubbornly refused to fight for universal public healthcare. According to identitarians on the Regressive "Left", Kamala's failure to win over hearts and minds in the Rust Belt was largely due to the fact that she has brown skin and a vagina.

They are wrong. (Ask Ruwa Romman of Georgia.) Working-class Americans want good policy. The "catch" is that they need its merits explained in a cogent way—preferably via a simple, compelling narrative—by someone who really means it. (See Ilhan Omar.) Given the right policies and savvy messaging, a green-skinned hermaphrodite would prevail in every election...even in a country where racism and misogyny are still a problem.

Few genuine Progressives have the courage to tell either denizens of the Regressive "Left" or the Democratic party's feckless leadership that THEY are part of the problem. Put bluntly: Corporatism in both major political parties helped to get Trump elected. Twice. So did ersatz Progressivism, which has sabotaged the Democratic party for the past generation. In recognizing this, it is worth recalling a statement made by Abraham Lincoln in his Lyceum speech of 1838: "If destruction be our lot, we ourselves will be the authors."

Footnotes

A: The same stunt was pulled with "socialism", which both Neoliberals in the West AND Stalinists in Russia—as well as Maoists in China—were more than happy to associate with Soviet-style "communism"...depending on whether the aim was to frighten people away from GENUINE "socialism" or to garner support for what was, in actuality, a fascist regime.

B: This is a frank diagnosis, not an aspersion. It is simply stating an incontrovertible fact: Solid moral principles married with a thorough understanding of policy would preclude someone from supporting such a horrific political figure. To make such a bad choice, there needs to be either a case of severe moral depravity, or—if not—colossal ignorance of the implications of Trump's policy positions. (Most Americans don't even understand that the economy is stimulated from the demand side.) This Appendix attempts to show how those with the latter problem might be understood; as most of those who pulled the lever for Trump arguably meant well, yet were extremely misguided. Such people are, in theory, open to persuasion. As for those who are morally depraved (that is: motivated by greed and/or bigotry), the

problem goes far beyond the purview of sociology and political theory. More often than not, trying to get through to such people is a fool's errand. Those driven by avarice don't care who is harmed, so long as obstacles are removed to further concentrate wealth / power in their hands. And those who are driven by racism / sexism are not going to be swayed by sound argumentation. In any case, so far as the politicians they support are concerned, such people are useful idiots. Corrupt politicians simply ingratiate themselves with this target audience to get elected; but once in office, their primary mission is to serve the power elite. (Starting in 1970's, Republican politicians made a Faustian bargain with Christian nationalists that was roughly as follows: "I have something you want: political power. And you have something I want: voters who can help give me that power." For more on this, see Chris Hedges' *American Fascists*.) Consequently, my recommendation: It is only those who are NOT morally depraved with which Progressives should be concerned; as, given the right messaging, they are reach-able. How? By a compelling narrative—namely one that helps voters see which policies will ACTUALLY benefit them (see Footnote B). While it is tempting to dismiss all of this group as a mob of blundering idiots, doing so would be a mistake. Granted, idiocy may explain some of their political choices (they are, after all, dupes); but a lack of understanding does not necessarily correlate with a lack of intelligence. (In any case, plenty of registered Democrats are idiots as well. That said: If a person is highly intelligent and has a solid moral compass, it is unfathomable that he/she would succumb to right-wing thinking.) To understand how and why this sort of thing occurs, it is worth considering how many (otherwise) intelligent people have been duped in other contexts.

C: Soon after the election, analytics revealed that the less-informed voters were, the more likely they were to throw in their lot with MAGA. Level of education (along with frustration with economic issues) was the most salient factor for those in the working class who were persuaded to support Trump. This is a reminder that deliberative democracy cannot abide in the midst of extreme nescience. How serious is this problem in the U.S.? There are three countries in the world wherein the vast majority of the population is completely brainwashed: North Korea, China, and Israel. I submit that, though not nearly as extreme, the U.S. would be next on that list (though it has some stiff competition from the likes of Turkmenistan, Saudi Arabia, and Mauritania). The only way to remedy this is by persistent, effective messaging—messaging that conveys the merits of (genuinely) Progressive policies; and dependably shows who, exactly, promotes said policies (see Footnote C).

D: Harris needed to do two things. ONE: Disassociate herself from the dreaded establishment (which entailed distancing herself from the incumbent administration). TWO: Explain how Progressive economic policy would help the working class (which entailed explaining how Trump's agenda would not). Not only did Harris do NEITHER of these things; it was difficult for her to do either with sincerity. For she was part of the dreaded establishment; and she routinely flouted Progressive policy—both economic and foreign. That was her downfall (see Footnote E).

E: In 2020, inflation began due to drastically-limited supply, which was caused by pandemic-induced global supply-chain disruptions. In the wake of this, corporations gamed the system to no end. Once the supply chains were mostly restored, the fix was already in. Subsequent inflation was not driven by an increase in purchasing power (no by an increase in demand); it was largely induced by corporate malfeasance (read: greed). Purchasing power actually DE-creased. Per the conventional supply-demand dynamic, prices increase when people have the ability to pay higher prices (that is: because they have more money in their pockets)...even as the supply of goods does not increase to meet the augmented demand. The theory here is simple: If you put more money into circulation while holding supply constant, then prices will increase. Businesses charge as much as they can get away with. So an increase in purchasing power is ONE reason prices would go up in the event that supply remains the same...or even decreases. But in THIS instance (2021, 2022, and 2023), prices increased *even though most people were struggling to pay*

. In other words: There was an over-riding factor. That factor was unbridled corporate power. It turns out that the supply-demand curve does not take into account massive power / information asymmetries, whereby pricing can go up due to things other than an augmented purchasing power of (most) consumers. Corporations found that they could exploit latent exigencies, and get away with bilking consumers; so that's exactly what they did. (Proof that most corporations weren't "forced" by dire circumstances to boost prices: virtually all of them posted record profits for these same years.) Even as many parties gamed the system (due to sloppy implementation and poor oversight), the contention that overall inflation could be attributed to TOO MUCH STIMULUS is not only false; it is exactly backwards.

F: In Michigan, had she gotten the entire Muslim vote, Kamala would have handily won the state. In Pennsylvania, had she gotten the Green Party vote tally, and 43,000 people who'd swung for Trump had remained steadfast in their support for the Democratic candidate, Kamala would have prevailed there. And in Wisconsin, just 15,000 people voting differently would have done it. (!) Never mind the tens of thousands of un-inspired voters in those three crucial swing-states who decided to just stay home. (Nationwide, 6.3 million fewer people pulled the lever for the Democratic candidate than in the previous election.) Even as Trump received about 3 million more votes than he did in the last cycle, the majority of those gains were not in swing-states. The increase was predominantly flocks of disenchanted, working-class voters in solid Blue and solid Red states...plus a smattering of Muslim voters who were so disgusted by the Democrats' support for the genocidal regime in Israel that they pulled the lever for Trump sheerly out of spite (or, rather, out of desperation). For them, a vote for Trump was like a Hail Mary, thrown in a fit of vexation.

G: Helpful tip to Democratic party leaders: Try listening to Briahna Joy Gray instead of Joy Reid. Want guidance from Progressive Black scholars? Rather than seeking counsel from (corporatist) consultation firms, heed the wisdom of Cornell West, Adolph Reed Jr., Waleed Shahid, and Butch Ware. And—most importantly—support Progressive firebrands like Barbara Lee, Ro Khanna, Nina Turner, Cori Bush, and Greg Casar rather than establishment apparatchiks like Chuck Schumer, James Clyburn, Debbie Wasserman-Schultz, Josh Gottheimer, and Nancy Pelosi. In the long run, the party must divorce itself from all big-money donors. Every last one. If, on the other hand, the party wants to ensure more losses in the future, it should appoint a corporate goon like Rahm Emanuel as chair of the DNC.