Flouting The Establishment

If those who are not ideologically-committed to the ultra-right-wing want a desirable outcome in the 2020 presidential election, it is important they understand why NON-ultra-right-wing endeavors (encompassing Progressives and corporatist Democrats alike) imploded four years earlier.It was not because the Democratic candidate was too far to the “Left”.And it certainly was not because she was too populist…let alone too Progressive.It was because Hillary Clinton–the only alternative to Donald Trump–was off-putting to many swing voters.There were two main reasons for this:

- She countenanced some of the daft pieties of political correct-ness, which many swing-voters found off-putting.
- As a corporatist Democrat, she was effectively the vicar of the very thing that on-the-fence voters were so set against: the “Establishment”.

There were, of course, a confluence of factors that led to the disastrous outcome in 2016–among them: the glaring inauthenticity of Trump’s adversary (not to mention the DNC’s now-exposed machinations to prevent Bernie Sanders from receiving the Democratic nomination). {1}

As I hope to show here, these two factors explain Clinton's loss. Indeed, they represented things for which the rank and file had–and continues to have–contempt; and for very good reason.(The fact that Clinton ran what Barack Obama described as a "scripted, soul-less campaign" didn't help either.) There are effectual and ineffectual ways to promote Progressive ideals; and the 2016 election illustrated–more than anything else–what NOT to do.

But, comes a common response, what of misogyny and racism? These are certainly valid concerns; and serious problems in need of addressing. Yet to chalk Clinton's loss up to bigotry–which is, indeed, very real in some segments of the polis–is to miss the point of WHY what happened happened as it did.For those who are right-leaning enough to be bigoted **were never going to vote for a Democrat anyway**.

Incessantly chastising the most odious sectors of the electorate helps nobody.Courting such voters is pointless; as they are–with very few exceptions–a lost cause.It is pointless to focus (what is already very limited) time and energy on those who are already too far-gone, and cannot be reasoned with.Reason is not what determines the worldview of such people.And it is just as foolhardy to castigate denizens of these "lost" precincts as it is to pander to them.(As has been demonstrated in every election since 1980, fundamentalist Christians will ALWAYS vote for whoever the G.O.P. candidate might be, even if he is obviously not a Christian.)

Meanwhile, pretending that anyone who fails to toe the party line is ipso facto PART OF that reprehensible segment of the polis only succeeds in turning off almost everyone else (i.e. those who may be on the fence, and persuadable when reasoned with). Roughly 10% of voters (that is: between 9 and 10 million people) who had voted for Obama four years earlier ended up pulling the lever for Trump in 2016.Many of them had voted for Obama twice.Those people were not racist.There was clearly something else driving their choices.The fact is that many voters who got swept up in Trump fervor did so for lack of a credible alternative.Such people may well have been otherwise inclined to back a genuinely Progressive candidate (who spoke to them in the way they needed to be spoken to); and opted for Trump by default. In some ways, this says more about the options open to them than anything else.

Before proceeding, a word on logistics is necessary.Here in the U.S., presidential elections are decided not by the vast majority of the electorate; or even by just the "swing voters".Due to America's skewed electoral calculus, elections are decided exclusively by THE SWING VOTERS IN THE SWING STATES.That is: Irrespective of political party, a candidate prevails only by securing the swing-states' points in the electoral college, which is often on a knife's edge, ready to teeter one way or the other, depending on which kind of perturbation happens to sway them at the time. (See Appendix 2.)

For better or worse, it's the swing-voters that make the pivotal difference in the electoral college. Consequently, it is incorrect to suppose that Trump triumphed due to factors that were NOT salient with that particular segment of the electorate. To fixate on things that define hidebound ideologues (that is: those who would never vote for anyone other than the G.O.P. candidate) is to squander vital resources.

It is imperative that Progressives understand why the Democratic candidate lost in 2016…lest the same mistake be repeated, leading to a second victory for Trump. This entails focusing on the motivations of swing-voters; not on trying to convert True Believers.

Once we understand this, it becomes clear that over the course of 2016, anti-Trump PR was poorly orchestrated.During that pivotal time, the strategy employed by non-Trump supporters was to attack Trump supporters for being bigots.By labeling Trump's advocates racists and/or sexists, gas was thrown on an already blazing conflagration. {14}

When it has come to any presidential race, those who actually were bigots were never going to be persuaded to switch their support to the Democratic nominee–especially after being castigated for being bigoted.Meanwhile, once tentative Trump-supporters (i.e. NON-bigots who may have fancied Trump) heard their perceived political adversaries lumping them in with ACTUAL bigots, they were pushed even further into Trump's camp.Throwing in their lot for a bumbling demagogue was essentially a "Go fuck yourself" to all those who considered them deplorable. (In other words, their urge to pull the lever for Trump was not so much out of support for right-wing political positions; it was an act of defiance.)

To reiterate: When it comes to campaigns, focused as they are on the near-term, die-hard ideologues are NOT the target audience when it comes to persuasion. {15}

Meanwhile, in relevant segments of the polis, support for Trump was often more out of spite than out of a well-thought-out assessment of Trump's (comically vague) policy proposals.The ham-fisted strategy of the Clinton campaign–alienating large swaths of the American electorate–simply gave POTENTIAL Trump supporters more to be spiteful about.

This brings us to the present assessment.My singular aim is to proffer an explication of why SWING VOTERS (particularly those in swing-states) opted to either stay home or–out of some virulent combination of spite and frustration–pull the lever for Trump in 2016.This fickle part of the electorate was–understandably–seething with resentment; and seeking to vent in whatever way presented itself.As it happened, such people ended up channeling their ire against the figure who seemed to most embody the despised Washington Machine (Clinton); opting instead for a wild-card who railed against the status quo and spouted bold promises (Trump).

This was not (necessarily) because such voters were misogynistic and/or racist.Rather, it was because they were fed up; and–consequently–highly susceptible to the wiles of a demagogue who "spoke their language" in the most accessible (read: simplistic) manner.In short: These swing-voters were credulous and disoriented; so easily hoodwinked.Their vote for Trump was not the result of some meticulous process of critical deliberation; it was a strident rebuke.

And so it went: A tough-talking, tell-it-like-it-is "outsider" seemed to be just what the doctor ordered.Perceptions are EVERYTHING; so it didn't matter that–in reality–he NEVER told it like it really was; or that he was just as much an insider as anyone who'd ever sought the Oval Office.The irrefutable fact is that almost all of Trump's policy positions were–and continue to be–indistinguishable from those of any ultra-right-wing politician of the past generation: from abortion and guns to taxes and corporate welfare.(If anything, he went FARTHER rightward–as with accelerated support for Israel's fascist regime.)

Here, I will refrain from addressing the many reasons to vote for the only viable Progressive candidate in the 2020 race (who also happened to be the only viable candidate in the 2016 race): Bernie Sanders.The present essay is not a disquisition on policy.In any case, Sanders' positions are already well-known:

- His recognition of healthcare as a human right (that is: treating it as a public service rather than a consumer product)
- His support for a "green New Deal" (transitioning the country to clean energy)

- His endeavor to end the Warfare economy (curbing the obscenely-bloated military-industrial complex)
- His determination to reverse the massive tax-breaks / subsidies for large corporations and the ultra-wealthy (thereby ending corporate socialism)
- His long, consistent track-record on supporting civil rights.

Of course, those are all very good reasons to support Sanders.But it wasn't his endeavor to reign in the for-profit sick-ness treatment industry…or his mission to get all money out of politics…that drove people into Trump's arms in 2016. And it wouldn't be a reason for any sane person to opt for Trump in 2020 either.

Rather than litigate the merit of specific policy proposals, the purpose of this essay is to ensure the explanation for Trump's triumph in 2016 is crystal clear.My hope is that the American electorate does not make the same mistakes in the 2020 election that it made four years earlier.

So the thesis here is relatively simple: Trump was victorious in the 2016 presidential election because so many people (particularly swing voters in swing states) were repelled by p.c. culture; and craved ANYONE who seemed to rage against "the Machine".

Hence it is to the motivation of SWING VOTERS that we turn.Predictably, we are presently (in 2020) seeing a reprise of 2016, with the corporatist Democrats (who are sure to lose again to Trump) pitted against Progressives (who's standard-bearer continues to be Bernie Sanders).To repeat: Sanders–we now know–would have won THEN, and will surely win if given a chance NOW.

Alas.As with last time, the Establishment–along with mainstream media–is gunning for the former.CNN, MSNBC, the New York Times, and the Washington Post have shown unabashed, unrelenting contempt for Progressives-in-general, and for Sanders in particular; as has the DNC, DLC, CAP, and every other corporatist arm of the Democratic party.The contention that such "mainstream" operations are even remotely concerned with Progressive ideals is risible.

The fact of the matter is that the apparatchiks of corporatism–in both its Republican and Democratic incarnations–despise Progressives and everything they stand for. But swing-voters are not doomed to sycophancy. They can be won over by a genuinely Progressive option, should it present itself cogently.

Meanwhile, corporatist Democrats despise Sanders (too far left) as much as they despise Trump (too far right).Put another way: They don't like Trump because he's even farther to the right than THEY are; and they don't like Sanders because he isn't far enough to the right. (See Appendix 4.)

The question, then, is: Have NON-right-wing voters finally learned their lesson?Or will we have a repeat of the 2016 election in store for us?Should a 2016 redux occur in 2020 (entailing a second term for Trump), it will be for roughly the same reason: Espousing an Establishmentarian (i.e. corporatist) candidate who flies the "Democrat" banner; and who abides political correctness in a fumbling attempt at moral preening.

We will look at each of these problems in turn.

Political Correct-ness:

Let's start with political correctness–replete with all the absurdities of identity politics and the cloying pageant of faux outrage over the latest frivolity du jour.The dismaying results of the 2016 election served as a deafening repudiation of the p.c. approach to social justice–an approach that animated the campaign of Clinton and her (ersatz-Progressive) acolytes.

The results of the election (especially in the Rust Belt) was a reminder that–far from helping to promote social justice–p.c. tends to just annoy a lot of people; turning them away from (Progressive) causes that they may have otherwise supported.

Too often, p.c.-mongers exhort us to sacrifice candor on the altar of propriety.As Progressives who have the merit of our convictions to offer, we need to stop doing that.The 2016 election made all-too-clear that p.c. alienates potential allies; driving crucial parts of the electorate (spec. swing voters) away from Progressive policy choices–the merit of which does not depend on divisive argumentation.Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 U.S. presidential race served as a demonstration of this phenomenon.

For anyone familiar with right-wing commentary, it should be quite clear: By incorporating p.c. into their repertoire, those on the "Left" only furnish Reactionaries with anti-liberal fodder, thereby emboldening those who may have nascent right-wing proclivities. Put another way: The repercussion of countenancing p.c. is the provision of rhetorical ammunition to right-wing rabble-rousers. {2} To wit: Progressivism does not require p.c.; rather, it is positively hamstrung by it.

Indeed, p.c. is the ultimate saboteur of the Progressive cause, as it is invariably associated with the "Left"…and thus, erroneously, with Progressives.Being as it is authoritarian and puritanical, p.c. is antithetical to Progressive ideals.In their sanctimonious posturing and censorious attitude, p.c.-mongers are manifestly illiberal–just another version of any other sermonizers who are obsessed with etiquette (call it: semantic prudery). It passes propriety off as a prosthesis for probity; and so abjures us to castigate anyone who deviates from the latest puritanical catechism.

Political correctness enables socio-economic elites to launder their culpability in socio-economic injustices.This serves as an elaborate diversion; as it directs public attention away from the iniquities of those elites, by making an exhibition of their "woke-ness" with a few well-placed token gestures; and and a boorish litany of ingratiating lip service.

This charade only works on the most credulous of non-right-wing voters, who are not paying any attention to actual POLICY positions…and are taken in by such oleaginous posturing."I may be supporting right-wing policies, but look!I'm wearing a kente cloth and have a copy of Coate's "Between The World And Me" tucked under my arm!"(For more on this semiotic swindle, see my essay: "Robin's Zugzwang".)

It comes as no surprise, then, that Trump got almost 10 million MORE votes in 2020 than in 2016—which included an INCREASE in support from both Latinos and African Americans (not to mention East Asians). Meanwhile, charlatans like Henry Rogers (a.k.a. “Ibram X. Kendi”) are able to charge tens of thousands of dollars for the privilege of having a 1-hour round-table discussion…with him IN PERSON. (!)

In the end, p.c. is little more than a discursive poultice laced with sugar-coated toxins. It is entirely performative, and operates on a strict regimen of blasphemy laws operating under the auspices of social-justice reform. To be an aficionado of p.c. is to be anti-Progressive; and to ensure that swing voters are alienated by the “Left”.

Yet rejecting p.c. is not enough.After all, TRUMP flouted p.c. to staggering aplomb.Just as any idiot can be politically correct, any idiot can be politically incorrect.On November 8, 2016, it was made clear that neither the protocols of p.c. NOR the mere repudiation of it is the ultimate solution to the problems that afflict America’s disoriented, perpetually-distracted polis.

That it is not enough to eschew p.c. is illustrated by the fact that the majority of anti-p.c. sentiment comes from nefarious quarters of the American agora (that is: from the ultra-right of the political spectrum).Indeed, being politically incorrect is no guarantee of honesty–as has been demonstrated throughout history by brazen demagogues who employ a brusque tell-it-like-it-is schtick.

In the U.S. presidential primaries of 1968, white-supremacist George Wallace amassed a large following.His appeal (beyond the usual paeans to Christian Dominionism, “states’ rights”, and “law and order”) was his refusal to mince words. In a world where mealy-mouthed rhetoric is de rigueur, this was rather refreshing–even if the SUBSTANCE of his politics was risible.After all, in politics the world over, it’s all about OPTICS rather than the merit of the content.Wallace’s ardent supporters were not merely the standard assortment of Reactionaries (racists, super-patriots, and theocrats); they included those who told reporters that they admired him because “he says what he thinks.”One encounters the same appeal with Donald Trump.

Meanwhile, Clinton’s stage-managed performance came off as pandering. It’s not that Clinton seemed kinda phony; it’s that she really was phony.Indeed, everything about her radiated phoniness–from each feigned look-of-concern to each gratingly

fake laugh.She exuded disingenuousness with virtually every word, every gesture. Most people found such a put-on intolerable for the same reason they find p.c. intolerable: they can't stand those who put on airs.

To reiterate: Those who propound p.c. confuse propriety with probity.While p.c. serves as a noetic anesthetic, a robust public discourse–in America or anywhere else–requires something entirely different: a hefty infusion of critical reflection and brute candor.It is not a dearth of sensitivity that plagues us; it is a dearth of rectitude.When we are already afflicted with ubiquitous epistemic sedation, an endless sea of ingratiating affectation is not going to solve any problems.

We fail to see that much of the electorate cares far more about straight-talk than about the nuts and bolts of any particular policy proposal.One is much more likely to say, "I may not agree with him on everything, but he's brutally honest; ya gotta give 'em that" than "Whether or not he's sincere is tough to say, but he says all the things I want him to say; so let's roll the dice."Reciting pieties from an assigned script doesn't cut it; one must be AUDACIOUS.

The prodigious appeal Trump commanded vis a vis his credulous flock was roughly as follows: "Wow!This guy's not afraid to say ANYTHING."This unprecedented gall felt like a breath of fresh air to those who were sick and tired of the same old pablum being churned out by an establishment that only seemed to be conversant in boilerplate.

Gall seems impressive irrespective of the merit of what is actually being said.So rather than being off-put by Trump's bluster and callowness, America's dim-witted are bewitched by it.His (contrived) patina of "outsider" status (regarding the despised political establishment) was compelling, even if it was balderdash.For those hoodwinked by Trump's bluster, the penthouse suites of Trump Tower were a sign of gaudy ostentation were unproblematic; for his gilded life was located outside the vile swamp that lay within the Beltway.

The consummate showman, Trump convinced his audience that he was being CANDID.He read his audience, then played them like a fiddle.Had he REALLY BEEN honest and forthcoming, or had he been an even remotely eloquent speaker, he would have utterly failed.Instead of worrying about polish; he lobbed grenades.

Of course, one would normally think that people would be repelled by Trump's crude bluster; in that it resembled the puerile fanfaronade of a petulant child on methamphetamines. Yet being unseemly was a moot point; Trump wore his gall like a badge of honor. Restive blue-collar workers weren't off-put by this; they found it REFRESHING.

When one is struggling to pay the rent and put food on the table, fixating on frivolities of p.c. seems silly–even offensive. Finally, at long last, here was a man who didn't bother with decorum; he spoke THEIR language.

In other words: Trump may have been completely full of shit with every word out of his mouth, but he SEEMED to be a straight-talker.Consequently, he had an almost irresistible appeal amongst those who were untroubled by the fact that he obviously had no idea what he was talking about.

No matter.The more proprieties Trump flouted, the more appealing he became to those seeking to buck the reviled Establishment.He offered a breath of fresh air to the disenchanted swing-voter; even though it was all HOT air.Thus Trump's LACK OF eloquence had the effect of making him more relatable.Rather than attest to his illiteracy, his crass perorations made him seem more in communion with the unprepossessing everyman.

Trump's garishly uncouth comportment was proof of his anti-Establishment bona fides.The more he seemed to break the rules, the more galvanized his support became.That many on the "Left" were niggling sticklers for inane proprieties made this juxtaposition even more stark.

By contrast, Trump's overly-rehearsed opponent was the epitome of "more of the same shit".Hence his brusque "fuck the system" attitude–reckless and utterly vacuous as it may have been–made him appear to be just what the doctor ordered.Unfortunately, in contemporary American politics, appearances (read: image) is all that matters.That Trump was just another out-of-touch, self-important oligarch who would be a shill for the same ol' corporate interests was–tragically–a moot point to those who were swept up in the fervor of his puerile ramblings.

Trump's feigned contempt for the Beltway oligarchy was encapsulated in his obdurate flouting of political correctness–an ad hoc feint that made him seem honest and valiant to those who fell for his antics.His brazen irreverence–crude yet compelling–was thereby perceived as a badge of his anti-Establishment bona

fides.That he simply transplanted one oligarchy with another was lost on his ardent supporters.They sought to “drain the swamp” by–unwittingly–flooding it with MORE toxins.

Rather than “draining the swamp”, Trump filled it with an even more noxious brew… and called it progress.(Even worse than a contaminated quagmire of corrupt bureaucrats, Trump ensured it would become a toxic bog of plutocrats and theocrats.)Instead of “draining the swamp” as he promised; he made the swamp even more toxic than it had already been: teeming with Wall Street goons, avaricious corporate executives, and ultra-right-wing ideologues.

In an intellectually blighted society like America’s, we should have seen this coming.

And so WHAT OF structural inequality and (actual) bigotry?These are serious issues.Yet aficionados of p.c. are far more concerned with catering to the tetchiest members of the populace–who are encouraged to claim “offense” whenever others use idioms that they deem to be unseemly.There is a peculiar obsession with etiquette on the so-called “Left”, of which many of its denizens are seen as the embodiment.This is a huge problem.After all, puritanism is a RIGHT-wing phenomenon; as is an authoritarian mindset.

Suffice to say, p.c. is deleterious to the integrity of public discourse.And the weaponization of etiquette by a horde of ornery schoolmarms doesn’t help matters.Indeed, it is a foolproof way to make people run as fast as they can in the opposite direction.That they end up running headlong into the arms of a demagogue should not come as any surprise.

Progressivism will only appeal to a wide audience once it expunges p.c. from its repertoire.In the meantime, the so-called “Left” espousing p.c. only serves to galvanize the ultra-right–furnishing them with an endless supply of fodder against which to inveigh, and thereby rationalize misguided antipathy toward Progressivism.

In sum: p.c. hurts the Progressive cause.Want a surefire way to ensure Progressivism loses all credibility with the rank and file?Tout p.c. and then call yourself a “Progressive”.This doesn’t merely hurt the Progressive cause; it dooms it.

Being as it is entirely about coddling our sensibilities, being politically correct not only requires no critical thinking; it actively discourages it.All the pearl-clutching–mixed with intermittent spurts of contrived indignation–makes level-headed people wince.Such histrionics reminds us that virtue-signaling requires no actual virtue.

Most people recoil at all the sanctimonious finger-wagging by puritanical nit-pickers; as most those in the working class have far more important things to worry about than the imaginary hazards of untoward phraseology.In an already-bewildering world, demands that everyone be indiscriminately “respectful” can be downright exasperating.It’s no wonder, then, that so many Americans are so off-put by the notion of “social justice”–negatively stigmatized as it has become, thanks to p.c.-mongering.

Predictably, masses of disenchanted working-class people gravitated toward a buffoonish demagogue NOT because they were conscientiously fascistic, but because he seemed to be the only alternative to the namby-pamby balderdash coming from the “Left”.Trump’s buffoonery was passed off as straight-talk; his empty bluster as resolve; his contrived swagger as confidence; his irreverence as sincerity; his arrogance as strength; his pomposity as panache; and his lofty self-regard as a flashing neon sign that he had the courage of his convictions.

The charade–tacky and obnoxious as it was–proved irresistible to self-styled super-patriots who commanded no understanding of public policy (yet harbored an insatiable urge to lash out at an imagined nemesis).To make matters worse: When people get most of their information from social media outlets, the bar for erudition is set abysmally low.Consequently, it is commonplace for celebrity-charlatans to be perceived as geniuses. {7}

The problem was that–in all his buffoonery–Trump was juxtaposed against Clinton, who was ALSO phony.Of course, in reality, she was no Progressive.(In terms of both economic and foreign policy, she was a right-wing ideologue paying lip-service to Progressive ideals, as I discuss in Appendix 1.)Trump’s striking departure from convention was music to the ears of those who felt slighted by the (self-satisfied) powers-that-be.The more vulgar his bombast, the more FRANK Trump seemed to be.In a bizarre twist of irony, his caustic impropriety was seen as a mark of his authenticity.His juvenile swagger was seen as a sign of swashbuckling grit.

Such posturing appealed to those who were drenched in testosterone and steeped in the heady marinade of super-patriotism.This is to be contrasted with the OBVIOUS posturing of Clinton, who was pretending to be quasi-Progressive when she was clearly nothing of the sort.So it comes as no surprise that so many were bamboozled by (what can only be described as) Trump’s **phony authenticity**. {13}

So why did right-wing (faux) populism triumph over the Democrats' vapid agenda to be politically correct and anoint an Establishmentarian as their standard-bearer?The restive everyman was not looking for a soothing psychical balm; he was looking for a swashbuckling hero who talked tough.

When seeking to articulate inchoate anger, one doesn't need it to be done in an ELOQUENT manner; one simply wants it to be COMPELLING. As any evangelist knows, so long as things are expressed in a way that captivates the target audience, the credence of what's being said is beside the point. The idea is to inspire, not to edify.

Trump was willing to say things that "you're not supposed to say"; and that looked courageous.He posed as a warrior for "The People"; while Clinton merely mouthed tired platitudes–which came off as pandering. When people wanted straight-talk, she only had candy-coated banalities from the same old script.

Instead of coming clean about the moral rot in Washington, Clinton offered supercilious talking points. Instead of inspiring, she was cloying.

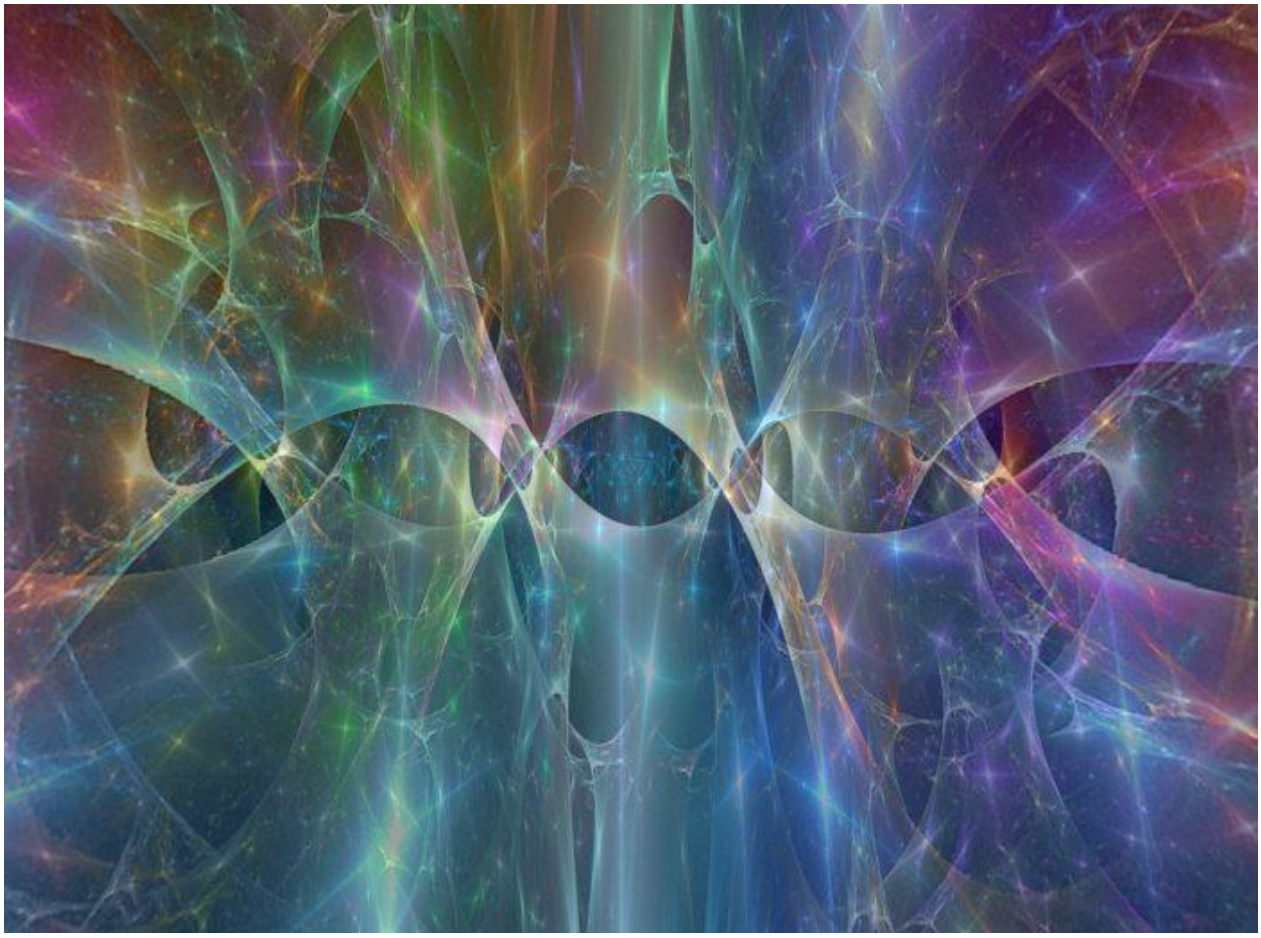
What the country needed was not an analgesic to palliate a temperamental electorate; it needed an un-scripted fighter who refused to play by the rules–a swaggering paladin that it could believe in.In other words: someone who was not the normal "politician".

The grandstanding Trump employed was an intoxicating fusion of braggadocio and executive-board-room gravitas that many found alluring.It was a bizarre blend of abilities to "fire" villains and "fire up" true patriots (whatever that might be conceived to be).His self-righteous bluster was construed as brute candor…which is all that many people were looking for.

The more those in power were galled by Trump's cringe-inducing improprieties, the more his appeal grew.The LESS eloquent he spoke, the MORE relatable he became.It was all about thumbing his nose at the vexingly Pharisaic establishmentarians.He was offering something new and exciting: just what his fawning crowds were hankering for.And so, in a Kafka-esque twist, an arrogant plutocrat was able to garner enthusiastic support from an indignant electorate that was tired of plutocracy.

As it so happened, this corresponded with the large swath of the polis that had become utterly fed-up with p.c.-run-amok.For many disaffected voters, p.c. was an emblem of the derided Establishment.It should have been unsurprising that–exasperated by an alluvion of bullshit–tens of millions were duped into endorsing a proto-fascist alternative.

Bottom line: p.c. has nothing whatsoever to do with genuine Progressivism.So countenancing p.c. is an act of self-sabotage by anyone on the “Left”.



ANTI-ESTABLISHMENTARIANISM:

A repudiation of p.c. was only part of the story; the defiance fueling Trump’s support was more a matter of lashing out at menacing abstractions than it was a matter of standing up to real insiders.Only by understanding this misguided vitriol can the reasons for the 2016 outcome be adduced.

For the agitated masses, Trump SEEMED to be an “outsider” who finally–at long last–was going to stick it to “the man”.In actuality, he represented an even more insidious kind of politician than the Establishment–of which Clinton was an icon.The fraudulence of Trump’s schtick proved to be entirely beside the point.For he captured Middle America’s anti-Establishment acrimony in an enticingly straight-forward manner; and did so without requiring anyone to actually know anything about policy details.If the curtain is dazzling enough, nobody bothers to look behind it.

Trump struck a chord with those who were sick and tired of “business as usual”, yet had no apprehension of what that business might actually be.As it happened, his only viable challenger in the main election personified the loathed Washington elites: the cadre of self-important lackeys with which many–conservatives and liberals alike–had grown disenchanted, even disgusted.Accurately or not, Clinton was stigmatized by tens of millions of voters as the epitome of all that ailed them (that is: just another vehicle for the same ol’ Beltway rigamarole).As it turned out, the putative maverick, Trump, was the singular alternative to this unpalatable option.

Clinton’s corporatist version of “at least it’s not as bad as the Republicans” taught us that one does not prevail over fascism by offering “fascism-lite”.(After all, corporatist Democrats support the military-industrial complex, Wall Street, and right-wing Zionism just as much as Republicans.)If X is held to be opprobrious; then hawking a diluted version of X holds very little appeal.A genuinely Progressive candidate would have offered a worthwhile alternative to the corporatism of BOTH Trump and Clinton.Alas.

Meanwhile, Trump taught us that, when people are convinced the ship might be sinking, they are liable–in the midst of their flailing–to grasp onto anything to stay afloat; and cling to it once they find it.Milquetoast asseverations are futile; and the lesser-of-two-evils dilemma is pathetically un-inspiring.People wanted pizzaz, not sagacity.

The question remains: What begat this simmering stew of disenchantment and frustration?The nagging feeling that the regular Joe had been short-changed, disrespected, by condescending popinjays who always seemed to talk down to them (read: corporate Democrats).The real blame, of course, was a rigged system–which made the super-rich even more obscenely wealthy; and did so at the expense of everyone else.Yet instead of blame the ACTUAL culprits (the plutocrats), the ire was

channeled toward a nebulous bogeyman: the Establishment.The more Democrats espoused p.c. the more they seemed to be completely out of touch with the VERY REAL concerns of the hoi polloi.

Instead of eschewing the plutocracy, support amongst this disaffected segment of the electorate mobilized behind a man who–though the EPITOME OF that very plutocracy–had branded himself the ultimate anti-Establishment crusader.

The everyman rightly saw the egregious inequalities (and mass disenfranchisement); and so recognized that he was not getting a fair shake.But he saw the beguilingly irascible Trump as his savior because he didn't come off as heedless.The fact that Trump was a man who was completely out of touch with the everyman was entirely beside the point.He CREATED THE PERCEPTION that he was on the same side as the "regular Joe".While Clinton's scripted perorations came off as patronizing, Trump–by speaking their language–successfully posed as the everyman's dauntless hero.So–on an inspired whim–many swing-voters backed a plutocrat just to thumb their nose at the "the system".

Across Middle America, support for Trump soared irrespective of the fact that he embodied everything that was wrong with that very system.As had happened under Reagan, the working class in the Rust Belt swallowed the "morning in America" gimmick (replete with promised "trickle-down" effects) hook, line, and sinker… because there was no plausible alternative being offered.That Trump would support the very (right-wing) policies that had CAUSED their woe was immaterial.He was the fuck-the-system poster-boy.

It did not occur to these flailing voters that this bogus paladin was every bit as much a shill for the plutocracy as was Clinton; perhaps even more-so.In the end, BOTH candidates were as pro-Wall Street as Wall Street could have dreamed.So, as far as corporate power was concerned, EITHER candidate would have been acceptable.

A sweet-heart of the Establishment, Clinton promised some superficial change.Well-informed Progressives AND Know-Nothings alike were–understandably–not buying it.The former had hoped for the genuine Progressive, Sanders.The latter, opted for the bombastic TV star who knew how to kick ass and take names.In other words, the wayward swing-voter rejected the embodiment of the USUAL bullshit (Clinton) in favor of a mouth-breathing demagogue who peddled a NEW KIND of bullshit.They were attracted to a sales-pitch that seemed–if nothing else–bold.

Juxtaposed against Hillary's blatant artificiality, Trump's brand of fulminating blather seemed to be positively rectitudinous.Put another way: Though utterly fatuous, Trump's off-the-cuff bloviation projected strength.By embodying indignation in star-spangled splendor, the dashing, New York real-estate mogul captured the seething resentments of the disaffected hard-working-men who fashioned themselves as the vanguard of American patriotism.

It is telling that, by the end of Obama's tenure, anti-Establishment fervor was at such a fever pitch that some of the most blinkered voters had difficulty choosing between an unabashed plutocrat (Trump) and the democratic socialist running on the other major party's ticket (Bernie Sanders); as if–preposterously–these men were roughly two versions of the same thing.For the most aggrieved denizens of the American agora, that these two candidates represented opposite ends of the political spectrum was–astonishingly–irrelevant.After all, both figures were seen as anti-Establishment (each in his own distinct fashion); and THAT–irrespective of the nuts-and-bolds of drastically divergent specific policy proposals–was the bottom line.

It became clear just how duplicitous Trump's promise to "drain the swamp" was when he began appointing his cabinet-members shortly after the election.Predictably, he assembled a cadre of plutocrats (unsurprisingly, largely from Goldman Sachs), corporate shills, and fanatical anti-government ideologues.(To be fair: It was already quite noxious: Obama appointments were ALSO a roster of Goldman Sachs execs.)In other words, Trump made the swamp EVEN MORE toxic than it already was.Nobody who noticed this was surprised by it; and most who didn't notice would not have cared.

In any case, Hillary was–in reality–much farther to the right than she was pretending to be; whereas Trump was perfectly content to ACTUALLY BE as far to the right as he needed to be.Hence: The ultra-right was (unsurprisingly) galvanized whilst Progressives were (unsurprisingly) tepid.The numbers bear this out (see Appendix 2).

The point can't be emphasized enough: That Trump, with his raucous theatrics, served as a prime anger-channeling-conduit made him especially appealing to those with lots of pent-up frustration.This was the case even as said mechanism directed enmity away from the ACTUAL culprits (plutocrats masquerading as stalwarts of entrepreneurial zest) and toward chimerical menaces (those darned spineless Progressives wining about being politically correct and begging for a nanny-state to coddle them).

Ill-informed, disaffected, rural voters (esp. parochial-minded, white men) sought to effect a reckoning via an ornery, superficially successful–yet oft-bankrupted–casino magnate.Disoriented as so many were, brand-Trump was specially-designed to proffer a longed-for savior-figure.(It helps to bear in mind that “Trump” is more a brand than a person.)For such voters, Trump was the incarnation of the fantastical American Dream…waiting for each of us, just over a perpetually-receding horizon.

And so it went that Trump posed as the quintessential anti-Establishment option; and thus an answer to an unacceptable status quo.This is a bait-and-switch that works because it appeals to our baser instincts.Demagogy is the oldest trick on the book: Rally people around a dubious cause by stirring up mass-mania and/or mass-hysteria.(People are more prone to groupthink and militancy when they’re riled up.)In the modern era, this often leads to veiled oligarchy–what Sheldon Wolin called, “inverted totalitarianism”.

The populist rhetoric employed by right-wing movements is invariably a sham.What passes as “populist” in a right-wing context is–invariably–anti-democratic.Another name for “right-wing populism” is “authoritarian populism”; for it thrives off of the sort of populist fervor that can’t help but lead to fascism…as has been amply demonstrated so many times in the past; and in recent years by Trump-ism.(See Appendix 3.)

When well-packaged, ersatz populism appeals to the everyman; as it includes oblique paeans to the common good.Yet it only ends up serving centers of highly-concentrated power.Rather than abetting the commonweal by CHALLENGING centers of power, it is an excuse to FURTHER AGGREGATE power; and–here’s the nutty part–to do so with everyone’s tacit consent.(This alluring pretext is what Chomsky called “manufactured consent”.)

The moral of the story should be loud and clear: Right-wing populism is faux populism.This point is further illustrated by the converging policies of right-wing “libertarians” (who purport to be out for the individual, and so ostensibly have the interests of the everyman at heart) and unreconstructed corporatists (shills for corporate power, who strive to maximize corporate socialism).For both of these ideologies–superficially different yet fundamentally the same–make use of the alluring “it’s for your own good” bromide…even as they are will to undermine democracy at the bat of an eyelash.Such ideologues cajole the rabble into going along with policies that only SEEM to benefit them, but in reality benefit only the well-positioned few.

Thus right-wing populism is a political swindle–an “every man for himself” approach that defies everything we know about macro-economics; and a “devil take the hindmost” attitude that defies even the most fundamental moral principles.Yet the proposition SOUNDS good if one imagines coming out on top at the end of the day. (Never mind the fact that it should matter to me whether or not the family down the street has quality healthcare; and we are all affected by whether or not the kid from the other side of town is being educated well.)

This is the boondoggle known as supply-side economics–geared as it is for a dog-eat-dog world in which material “success” is conceptualized as the primarily economic phenomenon.The policy is nothing more than an excuse for the well-positioned few to further consolidate wealth and power…at everyone else’s expense.Consequently, the misguided “regular Joe” is hoodwinked into eagerly fucking himself.

The grotesque right-wing instantiation of “libertarianism”, then, if FAUX libertarianism; in contrast to GENUINE libertarianism–in the tradition of, say, Thomas Jefferson and John Stuart Mill.For it is a (veiled) prescription for authoritarianism (in the form of plutocracy).It effectively eschews STATE tyranny in favor of PRIVATE tyranny…then calls that liberty.It justifies systems of domination / exploitation in the name of freedom…then tells everyone: “If you’re not living the dream, you have no one to blame but yourself.”Here, affluence is a function of merit–in keeping with the so-called “Prosperity Gospel”.

Trump played his feckless supporters for fools by invoking the usual shibboleths of right-wing populism.This scam (be it in “conservative” or in right-wing “libertarian” garb) is perpetrated by fostering what might be called “political Stockholm Syndrome”–whereby the electorate is duped into supporting its own oppressors, thinking they are somehow empowering themselves.This is typical; as cult activity of ANY kind is animated by a quasi-populist credo.It makes suckers of a credulous audience just as has any cult movement in history. {8}

The story has been the same for thousands of years; and has played itself out in every society on the planet.Using agit-prop, impresarios of the Establishment play off the quotidian insecurities of common-folk.They accomplish this task by stoking fear.Neuroses are engendered in such way that the impresarios of the illusion can then claim to offer PROTECTION FROM the (imagined) nemesis.Create the terms of the predicament, then offer a way out of it.The magical “fix” is proffered as the ultimate solution to everyone’s woes.The gimmick is as old as time: Create the

(perception of) sickness, then offer the (alleged) cure.This is how demand is drummed up for certain cockamamy consumer products–from alternative medicine and car alarms to religious creeds and semi-automatic rifles.

Whether it is Faith or firearms being peddled, the swindle is enabled by a mass appeal that has been strategically engineered.Right-wing populism works only insofar as artificial demand for its nostrums can be drummed up.It's an analogue of the opioid epidemic.

For many who felt aggrieved, Trump's haughty put-on was–though extremely crass–rather refreshing.It was plain to see that Hillary–the quintessential insider–was a shill for the disdained power-brokers on the Potomac.And so, the thinking went, her political adversary must (ipso facto) represent the panacea of integrity that they were so ardently seeking.

That Trump was HIMSELF a power-elite ended up being entirely beside the point.His brand of avarice was seen as the mark of unbridled American entrepreneurship.Rather than an out-of-touch plutocrat, Trump sold himself as the embodiment of the American Dream.He may have been a modern-day Caligula, but–as a celebrity–he represented what his fawning constituents all longed to be: a super-star business tycoon.They were convinced that he would soon pave the way for them realizing their highest aspirations…if only he was let loose to work his made-for-TV magic.

The willingness of right-wing sycophants to accept Trump's truculence is dismaying…until we realize that, for his fans, his bombast is part of his APPEAL.He flouts the dreaded "Establishment"…even though, as a sham, he is an integral PART OF that very Establishment…both personally and in terms of policy positions.

Trump gives his followers permission to never feel shame; and invites them to be proud of their ignorance.White Christian nationalists are encouraged to be unabashedly Reactionary, thereby validating their conceit.Trump is an engine of affirmation—a godsend for fawning crowds who really, really, really don't want their picture of "America" to ever change.

Trump-ism provides his adoring fans with license for their depravity; and is himself proof that one can be depraved AND a superstar.He is a dunce that is SUCCESSFUL; so dunces can feel better about themselves.Not only has he never engaged in a moment of self-reflection, he tells everyone that it's okay that they don't either.It's

OKAY to be oblivious and self-absorbed.It's OKAY to not understand anything…yet pretend that you're "in the know".It's OKAY to be illiterate, so long as you salute the flag with sufficient fervor.

Trump makes provincialism cool.The man isn't a dignified public servant, he's a walking pep rally.He is a showman, not a statesman.The message to disaffected Americans strewn across the American countryside is straight-forward: "If I'M cool, then YOU must be cool too."Thus (false) pride by association.

In sum: Trump's simple-minded asseverations come off as candor; his bombast comes off as strength.His flag-waving bluster is the "We're number one!" chant that appeals to those who simply want to be part of something "GREAT".He doesn't tsk-tsk-tsk his target audience; he fluffs their feathers."You're fine just the way you are.Don't be ashamed."No apologies; just an endless exhibition of contrived swagger…coupled with complete, unwavering certainty…and indefatigable bombast.

And to top it all off: NO NEED TO THINK.

Now, here we are in 2020.Once again, the Progressive candidate is the GENUINELY populist candidate; and has grass-roots–instead of corporate–support.Bernie Sanders continues to promote Progressive policies…with the Establishment scoffing at him every step of the way.

It is imperative that we realize: The results of the 2016 election were no aberration; they were a confirmation of what has already been shown time and time again.We needn't be dumfounded by Trump's victory four years ago; for in then end, the paradox that is right-wing populism prevailed.The good news is that we know how to prevent that from happening again.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DEMAGOGY; AND THE APPEAL OF TRUMP:

As I've discussed, Trump's refusal to temporize made his pronouncements seem more sincere; even as his mendacity was unmatched in the annals of American political history.He was an unabashed plutocrat who, though he'd stridently denounced plutocrats on the campaign trail, staffed his cabinet with the most avaricious of them immediately after being elected.

For anyone paying attention, this was predictable.Alas, those who were hoodwinked by Trump's duplicitous rhetoric were convinced that–despite his reputation–he would somehow vanquish plutocracy from Washington…as opposed to putting it into overdrive…which is, of course, exactly what he did.So how did he pull off this stunt?

People want to feel that they are being heard; so they will often become smitten with any cynosure who's rhetorical flourishes seem to lend credence to their grievances.Such a ruse may find purchase no matter how half-baked those grievances might be.Trump's audacity appealed to the disenchanted because he seemed to validate their every remonstration.

How was this possible?Trump is not an intelligent man; but he is a maestro when it comes to reading a room.He is, after all, a showman more than anything else.So he was incredibly savvy at (what is known in show-biz as) playing to the audience. {3}

People like being validated by authority figures; and Trump mastered the art of echoing the resentments of the poorly-educated, white, working-class across America.With every imbecilic ejaculation during his every bumbling oration, he resonated with people who were tired of all the pompous, political insiders who could not relate to them. {4}

Hence the widespread antipathy toward the quintessential Establishment figurehead: the flagrantly-corporatist Hillary Clinton.Much of that antipathy was based on the disingenuousness emanating from virtually every (scripted) word out of her mouth–replete with choreographed set-pieces and incessant over-acting.Yet the death knell was the fact that she was uninterested in addressing the grievances of regular folk…let alone able to do so in a manner that they readily understood.

It was obvious to everyone that Clinton was heedless of the plight of the common-man.Her insufferable phoniness drove many disaffected voters into the arms of a bombastic, narcissistic showman–a man who's gimmick was an adamant refusal to abide the usual protocols of decorum.He was COMPLETELY unscripted; and therein lay his charm.

To recapitulate: This was all in spite of the fact that Clinton was approximately as right-wing as the blowhard she was pitted against: hawkish on foreign policy and–with every bribe from Goldman Sachs–completely beholden to financial power.(See Appendix 1.)In terms of economic policy and foreign policy, she just wasn't quite right-wing ENOUGH for those inclined to go full-throttle fascist; so Trump was the de facto victor in right-leaning precincts.To say she lost because she was "too Progressive" is preposterous.

For the irate-yet-egregiously-misinformed swing-voter, the fact that Trump was just as perfidious as any other plutocrat lurking in the "swamp" of Beltway politics ended up being a non-issue.For the preening real-estate mogul managed–against all odds–to sell himself as the antithesis of a puppet; and thus as an alternative to the most banal of villains: the "typical politician" (i.e. Clinton).Marionettes are rarely persuasive.

But politicians don't succeed by merely being persuasive; they must be RELATABLE in some way…even if they are the tackiest of popinjays.The ultimate determination of who succeeds in politics is: To whom can the voters best relate?Coming off as "relatable' is largely a matter of image-engineering: the craft in which Trump excelled all his life.

In the rough-and-tumble of campaigning, the one who resonates with the most people wins.Clinton resonated with almost nobody in Middle America.Thus Trump harnessed the very forces that hamstrung Clinton.He was able to persuade people that he UNDERSTOOD them (esp. their frustrations), and that he gave a shit.In other words: He gave voice to their anger, even though he didn't REALLY give a shit.Hillary's cliche pontifications contrasted starkly with Trump's brash sales-pitch: "Fuck the Establishment; and fuck being politically correct; I'm calling it as I see it; and that's that!"

Trump's no-nonsense, tell-it-like-it-is schtick was an obvious boondoggle; yet it worked to staggering aplomb because he put on a good show.Clinton was the opposite of this.With her smug grin and contrived persona, she was simply not someone to whom the everyman could easily relate.With his meandering speeches, Trump radiated confidence.With her canned pronouncements, Hillary came off as stilted and rehearsed.

It was no surprise, then, that many of the rankled working-class were swept up in the thrall of Trump's brusque tell-it-like-it-is schtick.His straight-to-the-point, fustian rants came off as the refreshingly straight-forward commentary so many had been waiting for.Those who didn't bother looking beneath the surface became quickly infatuated with–even entranced by–Trump's simple-minded magniloquence.The more churlish Trump's oration, the more he seemed to be flouting the Establishment.

But WHAT IS this menacing abstraction known as the "Establishment"?In their minds: It is home to a nettlesome cadre of uppity, patronizing bureaucrats who always seemed to be fixated on being "politically correct".Generally-speaking, the Establishment is a sinister leviathan provincial minds tend to correlate with a meddlesome "big government".(Even worst: They associate it with a bogeyman known as "liberal-ism".)In reality, they are–unwittingly–the most loyal SUPPORTERS OF the (actual) Establishment.(See Appendix 5.)

The consequences of that misguided animus were made especially clear with the rise of an obstreperous businessman within the American political arena during the gauntlet of daffy Republican campaigns in the 2016 primary.The flabbergasting development was a reminder that those who are contemptuous of “politics” will gravitate toward anyone who articulates their scruples in a compelling way; and thereby gives voice to their anger.

The predicament for the Democratic nominee was clear to see for those who cared to look.Behold a climate of confusion and irritation–populated with people equipped with attention-spans far too short to actually learn anything of substance about, well, anything of import.In such a climate, where ignorance runs rampant, performance will always trump substance.For an intellectually beleaguered polis, superior theatrics will prevail every time.Resonance trumps credence.Truth is moot when people are captivated by a certain narrative.

Predictably, the more disgruntled of provincial WASPs–mis-informed as many of them were–addressed their frustration in a disastrously dysfunctional way.Such drastic action is typical of people who are sick-and-tired of “the way things are”…and so end up lashing out indiscriminately.People in such straits tend to latch on to the next thing that has the appearance of novelty; that seems to offer a stark change from the usual rigamarole…regardless of how preposterous the idea might actually be.Confidence projects an aura of credence.So even if it is an unabashed plutocrat promising a departure from plutocracy; they will take the bate.

Trump’s gold-plated demagoguery commanded tremendous appeal for the delusive conservative who harbored fantasies about the fabled “American Dream”…and was intoxicated by the allure of American Exceptionalism.His speechifying primarily consisted of maudlin jingoism; which was cat-nip for anyone afflicted with the more virulent strains of American Exceptionalism.By speaking on the level of the aggravated everyman, he managed to tap into a deep-seated frustration of the Established Order.

The benefit of such speechifying was that it did not require his audience to actually have any knowledge about relevant matters (healthcare, macro-economics, national security, foreign policy, structural inequality, separation of church and state, etc.)In providing a venting mechanism for whatever angst happened to be simmering in America’s hinterlands, the temptation to join the gilded Trumpian bandwagon was hard for many to resist…especially for those disinclined to make use of their prefrontal cortexes. {5}

In true demagogic fashion, Trump branded himself as the magical elixir that would "make America great again" (whatever that means).As is often the case, simple-minded declarations were construed as indications of forthrightness.(See Appendix 3.)Trump held sway with such voters not IN SPITE OF his brashness, but BECAUSE of it.(He was overtly hubristic; but at least he was up-front about his own hubris.Clinton's hubris, on the other hand, was made all the more grating because she offered only a cloyingly fake pantomime of the struggling everywoman who "got it".)

In a way, enthralling-yet-vacuous verbiage actually ENHANCED the allure of Trump's stump speeches.People didn't have to comprehend the implications of Trump's grandiloquent rhetorical flourishes in order to be intoxicated by his buzz-word-laden bloviation.When faced with Hillary Clinton (who symbolized "more of the same ol' shit"), virtually ANY alternative–no matter how daft–seemed viable to the myopic, provincial voter. {6}

As Hillary seemed to be (condescendingly) PREACHING TO swing voters, Trump seemed to be REFLECTING them.The former impression was off-putting; the latter was flattering.Those who were disillusioned–yet had no grasp of policy–were subsequently moved to "shake things up" by endorsing a rogue candidate: an unabashed plutocrat who persuaded them–against all common sense–that he would end plutocracy if given the power.Fat chance; but he SEEMED mean what he said.

The daffy dramaturgy of American electoral politics played itself out thus.Trump's contrived authenticity was an enticing novelty next to Hillary's glaring inauthenticity. (It's hard to discern which kind of posturing is more invidious.)The crowds that rallied around this "captain of industry" had anger to vent, and he provided them with a ready-made outlet ("Fuck the system!")As it happened, the face of "the system" was his political adversary (the only other viable alternative); even as he himself was the QUINTESSENCE OF the very system he derided.

As it turned out, most people–rightly–recognized that Clinton was completely in the pockets of moneyed interests (read: the "Establishment"), as her chummy relationship with proto-fascists like Goldman Sachs' Lloyd Blankfein made loud and clear.(See Appendix 1.)The idea was to eschew that…in favor of something else.Trump made himself APPEAR to be that something else.

In performing a post-mortem on the 2016 Democratic race, the point can't be emphasized enough: Hillary was the consummate insider in a political habitat where people were looking in desperation for an outsider. {9}So, predictably, they went with the ostentatious renegade rather than with a glib, careerist politician.Those on the so-called "Left" failed to recognize that the effete Democratic nominee was the prototypical crony: a not-so-smooth operator who was coy about the fact that she was bosom-buddies with some of the most notorious of New York's avaricious investment bankers.In effect: Provincial ignoramuses could see what the DNC would not.

This spectacle laid bare the dereliction of the DNC for all to behold.And so it went that the Democratic Party was hoisted by its own petard.

ASSESSMENT OF RELEVANT SOCIAL EXIGENCIES:

To fully understand the social context of the 2016 debacle, we must recognize the orgy of charlatanry that is the social media domain–from the Twitter-sphere to the blog-o-sphere.This cesspool of (mostly) cockamamie drivel is a symptom the intellectual destitution presently characterizing American culture.Social media is a dogma-factory as much as it is anything.Gossip has always been a thing; but the

internet is like a super-charged grape-vine, giving voice to the most harebrained pontifications.Rather than mere hearsay, social-media technology enables hearsay on steroids.

Once social media becomes most people's primary source of information, all bets are off.A well-informed citizenry becomes untenable.Participatory democracy is predicated on an informed citizenry.Critical deliberation is inimical to social-media activity.Hence this woefully dysfunctional social media environment precludes the possibility of a genuinely democratic system.

There is a lesson to be learned from such discombobulation.Bombast is not a sign of sagacity.Affluence is not a measure of merit.Vanity is not a sign of character.

YET…in 2016, a self-absorbed, avaricious businessman appealed to the widespread anti-Establishment animus of an aggrieved, uber-provincial rank-and-file.Of course, this irony was lost on Trump's riled-up followers.In reality, the New York tycoon represented MORE of the very policies that were to blame for the very problems that had been causing their abiding woes.All of those policies were RIGHT-WING policies: hyper-privatization, supply-side economics, underfunded public services / public infrastructure, highly-concentrated wealth/power, drastic structural inequalities.{8}

So what of that elusive panacea called "democracy"?Did it not malfunction?No; as it happened, it was the NON-democratic part of the American political system that had taken over.It was no more democracy that brought Donald Trump to power in Washington than it was democracy that brought, say, Morsi–then Sisi–to power in Cairo a few years previously.When a nation "democratically" elects a despotic (theocratic and/or plutocratic) regime, the result is anything but democratic.For democracy is about far more than just voting for a plenipotentiary-of-choice once every few years.

Participatory democracy is a complex societal condition; not just the ability to mark a ballot.A country voting for theocracy / plutocracy does not magically make it a democracy–as Morsi's theocratic regime demonstrated in Egypt; and as Erdogan's theocratic regime is now demonstrating in Turkey; and as Duterte's regime is now demonstrating in Philippines; and has Bolsonaro's regime is now demonstrating in Brasil.Authoritarianism is authoritarianism–and oligarchy is oligarchy–regardless of the means by which it is established.As Germany demonstrated in 1932, fascists

have an uncanny knack for coming to power in quasi-democratic ways.Right-wing populism (i.e. faux populism) is the handmaiden of fascism of all stripes.(See Appendix 3.)

In the stultifying 2016 presidential election, it was not democracy PER SE that malfunctioned.Rather, it was the patently anti-democratic facets of the American political machine that–in a perverse twist of irony–ended up working all-too-effectively.This was a reminder that the U.S. is only partially democratic.Washington's severely dysfunctional political system is plutocratic in the extreme–a problem that neither Hillary nor Trump were even remotely interested in solving.

Suffice to say: Nobody who routinely schemes to accumulate such a ridiculous amount of cash from dubious sources–in order to fill their own coffers–is losing sleep at night worrying about the little guy.Trump and Hillary had more in common than many wanted to admit.

When a citizenry is so systemically–and systematically–misinformed, genuine democracy becomes untenable.Deliberative democracy can only work with a well-informed citizenry–something the U.S. is far from having.How many Americans still doubt that investment in clean energy is imperative?How many Americans still think that an economy is stimulated from the supply side rather than the demand side?How many Americans are still waiting for the country's highly-concentrated wealth to eventually, someday "trickle down" to them?How many people are bamboozled into supporting an even more obscenely-bloated military-industrial complex?How many people still think that, rather than public goods, public education and public health should be privatized–and thus relegated to the whims of market forces?

As long as pablum about farcical trickle-down effects continues to proliferate…and as long as people fail to recognize the importance of universal (public) healthcare and universal access to quality education as civil rights…and as long as legislation is bought and sold to the highest bidder…and as long as money is deemed a form of speech…and as long as corporations are treated as citizens…America's severe political dysfunction will persist.

In 2016, what we witnessed was an electorate fleeing dysfunction only to run headlong into catastrophe-in-waiting.Trump's cabinet (nothing more than a claque of bankers, avaricious corporate executives, and die-hard theocrats) ended up being FAR MORE corrupt than anything that had ever existed before.During Trump's

transition to the Oval Office, the world witnessed the first installation of oligarchs–invidious oligarchs at that–into the Executive branch of the U.S. in the nation's history.Note that Trump's original cabinet was the richest in the nation's history.Its members had more combined wealth than a third of the American population; and not a single one was qualified to perform the job for which the position was designed.

As usual, in eschewing intellectual elites (scorned by the pejorative, "elites"), the G.O.P. exalted socio-economic elites (a.k.a. "job-creators").How did they get away with this?

At no point did Hillary even try to explain how her chumminess with execrable corporatists would NOT translate to a continuation of "business as usual".When people are looking for someone who "tells it like it is", such dissimulation was a fatal flaw.Consequently, Democratic strong-holds like Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania (i.e. the "Blue Dog" Democrats of the Rust Belt) were lost to a galvanized anti-Establishment tsunami.As voting patterns in the Democratic primary clearly showed, those crucial areas would have almost certainly gone to Bernie Sanders (who actually DID tell it like it is), had HE been the alternative to Trump. {10}

Alas, the DNC contrived to have things its own way; which was anything but the Progressive way.Sanders' campaign was thwarted by a litany of subterfuge and machinations on the part of DNC operatives (read: Clinton surrogates), who–as the Panama Papers confirmed–rigged the Democratic Primary to ensure Clinton would prevail.It has now been conclusively proven that had the primary be conducted fairly, Sanders would have prevailed. {1}

And in the general election, he would have ALSO prevailed.Trump WON several key areas that Romney had lost four years earlier WITH MORE VOTES.Given all that we have learned SINCE November 2016, it is now indisputable that Sanders would have garnered more votes than Trump in key areas…many of them in a landslide.(See Appendix 2.)

That's what the DNC gets for anointing an overtly Establishmentarian candidate.It is a lesson we pray the electorate will learn in 2020. {16}

Much of this dysfunction can be blamed on the eco-system within which it occurs.Cheap emotive satisfaction (be it a calming flood of serotonin or a tantalizing dopamine rush) is the only thing that the current social-media-environment

offers.This brings us to something Trump and political correct-ness have in common.Both have offered cheep stimulation in spades.And both have flourished in the milieu of social-media mania.Too many smart phones; not enough smart people.

Most Americans now think in Tweets; and so THAT (quick, brief snippets of over-simplified, titillating information) is the only mode of communication an aspiring demagogue need employ; and–as it happens–it is the ONLY mode of communication to which any countervailing speech has recourse.Nobody has ever procured erudition via social media devices; as erudition requires long-form disquisition and substantive exchanges (deep conversation.)In a world where nobody reads serious books anymore, it is little wonder that a man who's never read a book in his life is seated in the Oval Office.

In a way, it was the novelty of Trump's bullshit that was refreshing–especially to those unable to discern hokum from sapient disquisition.In an age of ultra-short attention-spans, in which everyone is addicted to transient amusements, the former wins every time.It's almost as of Trump had been custom-made for a world defined by mental lethargy (that is: epidemic ADD and the constant expectation of immediate gratification).In such a climate, Trump's bumper-sticker imprecations were taken as the soaring oratory of a no-nonsense, stalwart Randian hero–a bold leader "telling it like it is" and "sticking it to the man".

Social media's role in the degeneration of the public discourse is already well-established.Its addictive accoutrements provide immediate–though fleeting–gratification, not edification.This medium of interaction fosters a chronic mercurialism while glamorizing superficiality.The virtual eco-system in which many now spend their time effectively DEMANDS inauthenticity as a means of survival. (Are we using Facebook, or is Facebook using us?)

This riveting new virtual world is comprised of customized information silos–each designed to validate pre-established views.Consequently, those who are addicted to social-media-technology find themselves shopping in a marketplace of echo-chambers–a dogma-shopping-spree mediated by an incessant stream of ephemeral, superficial communication.Within this flashy virtual bazaar, political views are treated as consumer products rather than what they need to be: sincere attempts to apprehend Reality. {11}

Invariably, all the gratification it offers is confused for edification.

The vast majority of the echo-chambers are specially-designed to accommodate mentally-lethargy–thereby replacing patient, critical reflection with fleeting bouts of instant gratification as the most coveted premium.Just like p.c., social media provides a short-term “fix”…at the expense of long-term learning.It affords us a chance to exhibit goodness without actually needing to be good.Meanwhile, it satiates our craving for validation; thereby affording us an opportunity to show everyone else how “with it” we are…even if it’s all just a put-on.Putting on airs is the name of the game.

Here, two behaviors are salient:

- Installing oneself in one’s echo-chamber-of-choice, thereby receiving validation without needing to be concerned with credibility.
- Demanding that everyone else be politically correct (e.g. dutifully recite the prescribed pieties du jour), thereby virtue-signaling to one’s brethren that one is with the program.

These behaviors end up having the exact same effect.Both enable denizens of the agora to remain comfortably cloistered within their own memetic cocoon; exposed only to dogmas that sit well with their incumbent sensibilities.

In this milieu, everyone expects Reality to be tailored to suit their own dispositions; to hell with anyone else.All of us are enjoined to adopt opinions in what is effectively an epistemic free-for-all.Our own personal “truths” are all that end up mattering; to heck with Truth.One party’s subjective state can thus be wielded to mandate obligations for (and/or restrictions on) everyone else.In a world where people cannot discern the difference between Reality TV and Reality, we should expect all that has happened–including the preposterous ascension of a Reality TV star to the Oval Office.

There are lessons to learn here.The last thing the world needs is a cognitive soporific–applied simply to ensure that nobody gets jolted out of their comfort zones.There is no CIVIL RIGHT to be eternally quarantined from discomfiting encounters.

In the midst of all this Tom-foolery, it’s hard to tell who had more of a sense of entitlement–Clinton or Trump.What made Trump slightly less abhorrent on this score was that he was so open about his contempt for propriety.He was UNABASHEDLY

into himself; in a way that almost seemed honest.As an unapologetic panjandrum, rather than mask his avarice, he flaunted it.Trump basked in his megalomania as if it were conclusive verification of his unimpeachable greatness.

At the end of the day, faux populism (i.e. right-wing populism) is about stirring up mass-mania (when concerning the nation: super-patriotism) whilst stoking mass hysteria (collective neuroses).Over and over and over again, the world has learned that this invidious methodology is stupendously effective.

In the intellectually barren landscape that is the American agora, Trump's proudly dumbed-down worldview worked to his advantage.To a polis afflicted with discursive sclerosis, even the most sophomoric of blather can come off as awe-inspiring straight-forward-ness…so long as it is snappy and delivered with confidence.

And so it went that the audaciously unscripted Trump tapped into frustrations that had reached a boiling point in America's dejected heartland.Meanwhile, Clinton's obviously stage-managed performances only stoked the flames of resentment.When the audience is hankering for a straight-shooter, the APPEARANCE OF a straight-shooter is often all that matters.While Hillary was fake in a way that exuded carefully-choreographed equivocation and maudlin phoniness, Trump was fake in a way that exuded brute candor and resolute conviction.

Polished and scripted vs. raw and unscripted.Predictably, many swarmed toward the latter like moths to a flame. {9}For the disaffected voter, a choice between having no place to channel vexation and a fiery conduit designed ESPECIALLY FOR the channeling of vexation, the choice was a no-brainer.

In the current social-media environs, we are incessantly inundated with imbecilic-yet-beguiling spectacle…designed to capture our attention while ensuring we remain intellectually inert.By participating in this Carnival of Distractions, we are constantly encouraged to be amusement-junkies; and relentlessly coaxed into having ever-shorter attention spans.It is no wonder that intellectual curiosity has become anathema.Consequently, the American polis is afflicted with a inexorable craving for mindless titillation.This is a habitat in which charlatans thrive.

An environment so inhospitable to critical thinking can't possibly foster a well-informed citizenry.In other words: It is an environment that precludes the possibility of deliberative democracy.Mired in such intellectual impoverishment (and in the

midst of such fascination with celebrity), we should have been EXPECTING a hyper-sensationalized, illiterate nincompoop to eventually triumph in America's intellectually-bankrupt political arena.

And so it went: The stage was set for a Trump-like figure to rise to prominence.If anything, it's surprising that it took as long as it did.

CONCLUSION:

Progressives neglect rural voters at their own peril.Worse than simply dismissing them, there are surefire ways to alienate voters who are "on the fence".Chief among them is p.c. and being the face of the dreaded Establishment.

Rural voters tend Republican not because Republican politicians ACTUALLY help them, but because Democrats often DISREGARD them.There is a nascent Progressivism in provincial America–especially as it pertains to healthcare.Blue collar workers know the value of organized labor; and are against corporate power then the malfeasance of the investment banks.Farmers are well aware of the problems of climate change.They are not looking for "moderate" solutions to serious problems.People are not impressed with half-measures and hollow congeniality; they admire BOLD-ness.

Upon adopting a p.c. mindset, one can't help but enter into an exchange with a chip on one's shoulder.Nobody likes people who put on airs.Want to stop turning away swing-voters?Get off the high horse and just speak like a regular person.People want to be noticed; to feel as though they're being heard; not have to contend with condescending interlocutors who are busy patting themselves on the back for being "woke".

Recognizing how off-putting p.c. can be is just as important as recognizing how off-putting corporatist ("Establishment") Democrats are to both Progressives and well-meaning conservatives.Only through such recognition can we understand what drove crucial swing-voters toward Trump in 2016; and what would do it again in 2020.Such voters–all of them impelled by spite–were a stern rebuke of both p.c. and the corporate wing (that is: the right wing) of the Democratic party.

Moral of the story number one: Supporting the incumbent power structure was NOT the way to go in 2016; yet that's exactly what Democrats did in selecting Hillary Clinton as the party's standard bearer.It wasn't the way to go then; it isn't the way to go now.As should now be clear, corporatist Democrats represent no worthwhile alternative to the G.O.P.

Moral of the story number two: Political correctness is a turn-off.It was off-putting four years ago; and it STILL IS off-putting.

All this becomes plain to see once we recognize that a vote for Donald Trump in 2016–just as it would be in 2020–was an act of defiance: a giant "fuck you" to the Establishment and to risible shenanigans of p.c.

Meanwhile, those who base their vote explicitly on support for right-wing policy are not the crucial swing-voters that determine elections; as they were never going to vote for anyone but the G.O.P. nominee anyway.

The conclusion is straight-forward.If one wants to guarantee the (re-)election of someone like Donald Trump, simply put forth–as the only alternative–an Establishmentarian who can be linked to the unscrupulous actors mandating p.c.

To reiterate: Eschewing the contrived protocols of p.c. is not enough.Just as any idiot can be politically correct, any idiot can be politically incorrect (as Donald Trump has reminded us).Probity, not propriety, is what matters; meaning that p.c. plays no more a role in Progressivism than does supporting corporate interests.After seeing the repercussions of not advocating for a genuinely Progressive candidate, hopefully now–at long last–American Progressives have finally learned their lesson.

Footnotes:

{1As to the viability of Bernie Sanders as a Presidential candidate, the jury is no longer out. It is now incontrovertible that Sanders would have triumphed in the general election–by a landslide–had the DNC not engaged in its shenanigans. As revealed in the Panama Papers and many other revelations since 2016, we now know that the Democratic primary was rigged by Hillary's surrogates (spec. by her plutocratic cronies in the DNC and the cadre of unabashed corporatists that operate the DLC).Such duplicity should come as little surprise; as it was done to ensure the Party Establishment–beholden as it was to moneyed interests–remained fully intact (that is: un-thwarted by Progressives).The fact that Hillary did not campaign sufficiently in the Rust Belt was a key factor in her loss; as that is where most of the pivotal (disenchanted) swing voters were located–all of whom were fed up with the Establishment.(See Appendix 2.)That Clinton embodied the Establishment did not bode well for her prospects in Middle America.It was NOT the case the the Green Party candidate was a "spoiler".Even though Jill Stein received more votes in some of the swing states than the margin of victory for Trump, the alternate RIGHT-wing candidate (i.e. the Republican "spoiler": the "Libertarian" candidate) received EVEN MORE votes–thereby siphoning more votes from Trump than Stein did from Clinton.It might also be noted that had the DNC not rigged the Democratic primary against Bernie Sanders, he would have gotten the nomination; and–it has been conclusively

proven–would have won the general election; possibly in a landslide.So the blame for Trump's election also lay at the feet of the (incredibly corrupt, unabashedly anti-Progressive) DNC and its (pathologically sycophantic) surrogates.}

{2Want to further incense a Reactionary?Simply insist that he be politically correct when articulating his grievances.The lesson every p.c. aficionado must learn: One needn't be patronizing to be Progressive.The Reactionary's problem is not that he is being impolite; it's that his views are demonstrably errant.Demands for p.c. can only succeed in distracting from the crux of the matter.}

{3Of course, Hillary routinely played to her target audience as well–in her own self-serving ways.More accurately, she played to VARIOUS target audiences, revamping her sales-pitch depending on which way the wind was blowing.(Note her shameless appearances at AIPAC, for example.)The situation was quite different for Hillary than it was for Trump.Progressives–by nature–tend to be far more discerning than Reactionaries; so most of Hillary's base didn't fall for her artificially-flavored masquerade.It wasn't difficult to ascertain the true fealties of a woman who spent far more time at Goldman Sachs than in soup kitchens.}

{4Imagine: Not once during her long, impeccably stage-managed campaign did Clinton make an honest effort to acknowledge people's concerns about her cronyism, or about her glaring disingenuousness…let alone make a concerted attempt to address those concerns.When confronted with people's doubts about her (purportedly) noble intentions, not once did she say anything to the effect: "I hear you.I understand what you're saying about my record (of cronyism).Here is my response: …"Instead of addressing these (eminently valid) concerns, she–and her fawning supporters–simply scoffed at those who wondered how genuine she was being, and summarily accused them of misogyny.(See footnote 12 below.)Unsurprisingly, non-Hillary fans found this tac infuriating.While Trump's puerile ramblings resonated with the most credulous members of the electorate, Hillary treated the electorate as if they were all suckers.It's hard to say which scenario is worse.(See footnote 3 above.)}

{5This appeal existed independently of the incipient bigotry / nativism that Trump was able to exploit.That he managed to tap into–and stoke–both incipient sexism and incipient racism simply bolstered the quasi-fascistic surge he rode to victory.Another point: Anti-Muslim bigotry is not racism; it is a hostility toward those who hold beliefs that are seen as incompatible with (what is seen as) "American"

culture.That is to say: Pace ethnic stereotyping, anti-Muslim bigotry directs antipathy for a creed against an entire (multi-ethnic) community of people.For more on this point, see Appendix 2.}

{6Each candidate (qua candidate) was more a calibrated persona than a genuine person.While Trump believed his own bullshit; Hillary knew her bullshit to be bullshit.While Trump sold his fatuous talking-points with swagger, Hillary's phoniness was obvious to everyone but her most delusive acolytes.After having gone through the looking glass, this disparity enabled Trump to come off as the more authentic of the two.}

{7We might also bear in mind that 2016 was the SECOND time that Trump ran for the U.S. presidency.When he opted to declare his candidacy on the G.O.P. ticket, his high opinion of himself was nothing new.His short-lived candidacy in the 2000 election fizzled simply because the time was not yet ripe for his brash brand of demagogy.We were not yet a Reality-TV nation; and social media did not yet dictate the terms of discourse.}

{8The political version of Stockholm Syndrome was addressed in Thomas Frank's "What's the Matter With Kansas?"A sad irony was that Trump was just as ignorant (and anti-intellectual) as many of his most ardent fans.As usual, this syndrome is at the root of right-wing populism.(It had been right-wing policy that was responsible for the country's ills; yet the solution touted by the G.O.P. was to legislate even FARTHER to the right.)The syndrome persists because large swaths of the electorate are STILL fed up with "business as usual".The trick is to persuade people that the reason right-wing policy doesn't work (as promised) is because the policies haven't been FAR ENOUGH to the right. (See Appendix 3.)The promised "trickle-down" effects of tax-breaks for the super-affluent and large corporations will someday, somehow, magically materialize.Of course, it is never the case that such mythical benefits eventually trickle down to the rabble.And a steeply progressive marginal tax-rate does NOT stymie entrepreneurial zeal or deter innovation.Severe socio-economic inequality hurts everybody.}

{9By "insiders", it is meant: Those who seemed to serve a menacing abstraction known as the "Establishment".While Trump's more truculent version of proto-fascism was slightly more jarring than the usual G.O.P. version, he was technically no more fascistic than most Republican icons since Reagan's ascendency in 1980.Hyper-nationalism is hyper-nationalism–and corporatism is corporatism–regardless of the packaging. (See Appendix 3.)Be that as it may, Trump's ersatz authenticity appeared

positively genuine next to Hillary's glaring inauthenticity. (See footnote 3 above.)It's tough to say which kind of posturing is more mendacious.Both candidates were craven opportunists: One flaunted it; the other pretended to be something other than who she really was.One tapped into the irritation of the electorate; the other came off as condescending.As it turned out: pomposity triumphed over disingenuousness.(In politics, the latter is far more of a turn-off than the former.And there is nothing so preachy and sanctimonious as p.c.)Moreover, sentiment tends to trump critical thinking whenever dialogue becomes over-heated.In the uber-sensationalized media climate of the U.S., where info-tainment defines mainstream (corporate) media's business model, political commentary is all heat, no light.}

{10This fact was demonstrated in the Democrat party's primaries, where such regions actively opposed Hillary FROM THE LEFT (and went for Bernie).Just prior to the main election, almost 4 in 10 young voters (ages 18-29) said they were planning on voting for a third-party candidate (in other words: never-Trumpers who couldn't bring themselves to vote for Clinton).Within a demographic that was typically overwhelmingly liberal, many were turned off by Clinton's stagecraft as much as by the glaring fact that she was far from genuinely Progressive.See Appendix 1.}

{11Pursuant to the augmenting obsession with these handy communication prosthetics, Americans' communicative acuity has drastically deteriorated.With severely stunted attention spans, gross mental lethargy, as well as a glib inability (and unwillingness) to engage in prolonged discourse, it is no wonder so few people know much about anything.The Trumpian echo-chamber was very much like a lobster trap: It had tasty bait for those hungering for SOMETHING; and once (obtuse) people staggered into that trap, they were not apt to come back out (even after Trump was exposed as a con-man over and over and over again).All that those in the trap could hear from the outside were grumblings that everyone inside it was irredeemably "deplorable".Suffice to say: Such a harangue was not an incentive for anyone to clamber out.The p.c.-monger's message to Trump supporters: "Don't emerge from your redoubts lest you be pilloried for bigotry!"So instead of engaging in open conversation, they circled the wagons and stood their ground.As usual, p.c. exacerbated the incipient problem.}

{12The obnoxiously misandrist epithet, "Bernie Bros" was a redux of Clinton-surrogates' pejorative for Obama supporters eight years earlier: "Obama Boys".Such tropes are invidious…not to mention erroneous.In 2020, young women make up more of Sanders' base than men; and account for most of his financial contributions.In terms of race: Sanders polls especially high with Latino voters–far

MORE so than with white voters.Latinos also donated more money to Sanders than to any other candidate.Polls consistently show that non-white voters prefer Sanders.**In fact, the demographic that likes Sanders the LEAST is white men.**The fact that unscrupulous–nay, perfidious–actors perpetuate the patently-false “Bernie Bro” narrative is endlessly galling not just because it is sexist and statistically inaccurate, it erases THE MOST PROGRESSIVE women from the electorate.}

{13In a climate such as the one p.c. has fostered, it is no wonder that Trump’s brashness was construed as an indication of courageous truth-telling.Those cajoled into supporting Trump were almost all suckers; as what he REALLY planned on doing was putting together the sort of ultra-right-wing cadre found in ANY past Republican administration–entailing economic policies that were HORRIFIC for the rank and file.After railing against plutocrats throughout the campaign, Trump promptly created a cabinet of uber-plutocrats.Trump’s economic policy is indistinguishable from the policy of the any G.O.P. politician since 1980.(See footnote 9 above.)The difference is that he SEEMS like something new; and in politics, perception is everything.}

{14As a point of comparison: Try pointing out to a Revisionist Zionist that he is supporting a racist agenda, and see how far it gets you.One does not expurgate a racist’s racism by notifying him that he’s a racist.Doing so only causes him to dig in his heels (as with, say, the obdurate Judeo-Supremacy that is endemic to non-Christian strains of Revisionist Zionism).Telling a racist that he is a racist is almost always pointless.For either one of two scenarios will ensue–depending on the verity of the charge.Either A: He is a racist, yet doesn’t admit–to others, or even to himself–that he is racist.In that case, he will deny your indictment applies to him; and resent you for the accusation.Or B: He is aware–on some level–that he is, indeed, a racist; and obviously doesn’t see it as problematic.In that case, he won’t care that you’ve called him out on it.Never in history has an unabashed racist been called a racist, and responded: “Well, gee-wiz, now that you mention it, I guess I am.Now that it’s been brought to my attention, I shall change my ways!”In either case, the accusation backfires.What many fail to appreciate is that both sexism and racism are symptoms of underlying psychical and/or social problems (e.g. deep-seated insecurity; ignorance; etc.)Therefore it is the underlying (psychological / sociological) issues that must be addressed.Attacking the symptom head-on will only elicit defiance.}

{15Some people simply vote for the most economically right-wing person who runs.Others simply vote for whoever is anti-abortion or anti-immigrant.Some don't want their ability to carry firearms to be curtailed.And some wealthy people just don't want to pay any taxes.When it comes to single-issue voters, all other considerations are immaterial.There's no getting through to them.There's no arguing with someone who is convinced that a zygote is a full-fledged human being; but EVERYONE wants clean air and clean water…and a good education for their kids… and not to go bankrupt trying to pay bloated medical bills.And THAT is where swing-voters can be won.}

{16Bear in mind, party conventions are more coronations than serious processes for selecting a nominee.They are part week-long info-mercials, part week-long pep-rallies, and entirely about back-room horse-trading.}

APPENDIX 1:

In 2016, as each G.O.P. candidate dropped out of the Republican primary, many of their odious patrons switched their support to none other than…Hillary Clinton.This should have surprised nobody.The list of Clinton's right-wing positions is far too long to enumerate in this brief Appendix.In terms of economic policy, she is a neoliberal through and through–consistently (and unapologetically) backing corporate-friendly

legislation.This was done while paying lip-service to liberal ideals ("economic / social justice") such as equal access to quality education; healthcare as a universal right; the need to reign in Wall Street; etc.In Reality, she did little to support any of these things.

Clinton was a shill for corporate power–paid for, bought and sold by oil companies, the pharmaceutical industry (PhRMA), the for-profit sickness treatment industry (AHIP and AMA), the military-industrial complex, and–most of all–the big investment banks.She is close friends with the most odious plutocrats–including Lloyd Blankfein, Thomas Nides, Jacob Lew, Timothy Geithner, Jamie Dimon, et. al.These are relationships that should set off alarms for any level-headed person.(Also recall her taking bribes from Goldman Sachs, under the auspices of speaking engagements.) A proponent of Neoliberalism (free market fundamentalism with a wink and a nudge); Clinton touted supply-side bromides–paving the way for corporate-friendly policies.

An illustration that her interests and those of Wall Street were consummate is the position of her dear friend, Lloyd Blankfein in the 2020 election. After enthusiastically gunning for Clinton four years earlier, Lloyd declared that he would gladly vote for Donald Trump over Bernie Sanders. Translation: He considers Trump and a corporatist Democrat more comparable than a Progressive and a corporatist Democrat.

Add to that the fact that Clinton was certainly no friend of organized labor; and was hardly willing to challenge the will of her corporate paymasters.

In terms of foreign policy, Clinton was a tempered Neocon.Never mind that she made the horrible decision to endorse the military incursion into Iraq under the Bush-Cheney regime.To this day, she openly reveres Henry Kissinger–one of the most despicable people on the planet–and arguably the biggest war-criminal of the post-War era.That fact alone is a very bright, red flag.

Clinton routinely plays along with the right wing's jingoistic posturing against Russia; and endorses continued support for the House of Saud.She supported the 2009 coup in Honduras, which overthrew a democratically-elected leader.And–most despicably–she is an ardent supporter of Revisionist Zionism.She eagerly supports Israel's Judeo-fascist regime, including its on-going crimes against humanity (in a craven pander to AIPAC), and has held Benjamin Netanyahu (an unabashed Judeo-supremacist, guilty of significant war crimes) in high esteem.To add insult to injury,

Clinton participates in the ultra-right's insidious vilification of the global Palestinian solidarity movement.(She has denounced the BDS movement–something every decent person supports.)

It is also plain to see that Clinton was never a Progressive on tax policy, on oversight / regulation of the financial services industry, or on mitigating money in politics (e.g. the revolving door between the public and private sectors).During her campaign, her lofty perorations about investment in public infrastructure were less than sincere, given her dismaying recitation of supply-side pieties.Pace her advocacy of spurious 2nd-Amendment apologetics (a pander to America's abiding gun fetishism), she is somewhat moderate on domestic social policy–hitting the right notes on such touchstones as reproductive rights, gay rights, feminism, and a few other token gestures…so as to keep Progressives placated.Yet her quasi-Progressive lip-service is so obviously scripted, it has always been difficult to take her seriously on much of what she says.

Memo to self-proclaimed "Progressives": Voting for someone with a vagina does not make you a feminist.Token gestures mean nothing.It is policy that matters most; not the anatomical features of the person who happens to be promoting the policy.And in terms of policy, Bernie Sanders–replete with penis–was far more of a feminist than Hillary Clinton ever was.One might ask avid Hillary-supporters who fashioned themselves as "feminists" in 2016: Where were you when Carol Moseley Braun was running for president in 2004 (before it was en vogue for Democrats to support females OR African Americans aspiring to the Oval Office)?When a woman–a black woman, nevertheless–actually was the best candidate (pace vestiges of the corrupt Chicago political machine), these stalwarts of female empowerment were nowhere to be found.

Once a cause becomes fashionable, it takes no courage to be an advocate.The prototypical opportunist, Hillary only signed on to the gay-rights cause once it had become a politically-safe bandwagon to ride.She never stuck her neck out for ANY marginalized community; as such a bold maneuver would have jeopardized her standing with the power-brokers who sustained her.

Of course, Hillary only ever rode bandwagons.As her record showed, she was averse to going out on a limb, or doing anything that may have compromised her career prospects.As for compromising on principle whenever it suited her: that defined much of her career.

To suggest that it was difficult for GENUINE Progressives to get excited about candidate Hillary would be an understatement.The lack of enthusiasm for the ONLY viable alternative to Trump could be attributed, then, to a repudiation of the ersatz Progressivism of the checkered legacy of corporatist Democrats.That…and, well, it was clear to everyone with sober eyes that Hillary Clinton was clearly not a good person (and almost as narcissistic as Donald Trump).

APPENDIX 2:

As usual, the queer calculus of the Electoral College hinged on voter turn-out in the swing-states.This primarily being a function of enthusiasm, Trump prevailed in what was little more than a hype-generation contest.

The indictment that bigotry–whether in the form of sexism or racism–undergirded much of Trump's support was factually correct; yet voicing this (eminently valid) concern did nothing in the way of enlightening his nativist supporters.The misogynist tends not to care that he is–in fact–a misogynist; and is usually unswayed when his male chauvinism is pointed out to him.(He will likely respond to the assault on his character by doubling down–thereby further ingratiating him with the good ol' boys club that he so covets.)

The well-founded stigma of Hillary Clinton as the quintessential "establishment figure" was only the beginning.Her espousal of p.c. protocols (especially her tendentious resort to "identity politics") was especially off-putting to the rank and file (especially white workers who felt short-changed).Telling someone who is disenfranchised that they will not receive sympathy due to being born into the wrong demographic is NOT a winning strategy.

In Appalachia and the Rust Belt, votes for Trump over Clinton by provincial, blue-collar WASPs were more out of antipathy toward the latter than an affinity for the former.Such antipathy may have been in part attributable to nascent misogynistic tendencies; yet the majority of it was due to Clinton's obvious phoniness, and incessant condescension.In such cases, a vote for Trump was a defiant "fuck you" to an Establishment of which the christened Democratic nominee was a maudlin personification.

The numbers bear this out.

It is well-documented that Bernie Sanders would have won the Democratic primary had it been fairly conducted (i.e. not rigged by the DNC); and that he indubitably would have prevailed over Trump in the general election.This is made clear by the fact that during the primaries, Sanders fared far better than Clinton in the key swing states (the “rust-belt” states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin that clinched Trump’s victory).Trump’s victory was narrower than many realize.He eked out wins in rust-belt states by the tiniest of margins:

- 0.7% in Pennsylvania (44,292 votes)
- 0.7% in Wisconsin (22,748 votes)
- And only 0.3% in Michigan (10,704 votes)

Those three states cumulatively accounted for enough electoral votes to determine the election.Tellingly, in each of these states, Clinton won far fewer votes than the Democratic contender (Obama) had in the previous election. (!)In fact, in Wisconsin, she received roughly 240,000 fewer votes than Obama had just four years earlier.In Milwaukee alone, a Democratic strong-hold, voter turn-out declined by over 41,000 from the previous election.In the state of Michigan, over 98,000 Democratic voters selected a candidate on every down-ticket position, leaving the option for U.S. president BLANK.(Again, Clinton’s final tally was only 10,704 below that of Trump’s; meaning that Trump didn’t win because of a surfeit of support, but because so many Democrats couldn’t stomach Hillary.Meanwhile, numbers make clear that had Sanders been on the ballot, he would have won the crucial swing-state state IN A LANDSLIDE.)

Once we consider that under 39,000 votes (due to a less-than 78,000-vote margin) ended up determining the election (cumulative, between the three aforementioned swing-states), we see that it was a drastic waning of galvanization amongst Progressively-inclined voters that accounted for the dreadful outcome.

Even more tellingly, Trump–who WON the state–received even fewer votes in Wisconsin than had Romney–who LOST the state four years earlier. (!)In that pivotal swing state, Clinton lost numerous counties that Democrats had been winning for decades…even as down-ticket Democrats there were victorious that same day.Nationwide, there were roughly 3 million people who’d voted for Obama four years earlier that did not even bother to vote in 2016.This drastic diminution of participation is telling.This was NOT because Clinton was too PROGRESSIVE.Not only was a key part of the electorate not galvanized, many were turned off.Astonishingly,

roughly 9% of voters who had backed Obama four years earlier voted for Trump.Another 7% of (former) Obama voters simply opted not to vote at all.3% opted for a third alternative, as they just couldn't stomach a corporatist like Clinton.

Most Progressives who DID opt to hold their nose and vote for Clinton did so begrudgingly; and primarily due to being terrified by the alternative.Another indication that Clinton turned off a substantial segment of Progressively-inclined voters: In Kentucky's (historically Democratic) Elliott County, Clinton lost by a staggering 45 points…even as (openly gay) Senate candidate Jim Gray EASILY won.

All this shows that the outcome could be attributed to a severe dearth of mobilization on the "Left" (the Progressively-inclined) and the "center" (read: crucial swing-voters) around Clinton.In other words: Trump was victorious not because he was so appealing; but because the alternative was so unpalatable.

The DNC (effectively working for Clinton's campaign, as it was overtly scornful of Progressivism) had shifted drastically rightward (especially toward Neoliberal economic policy and Neocon foreign policy) while countenancing the toxic creed of "political correctness".And it all backfired spectacularly.Meanwhile, it is clear that (the far more Progressive) Bernie Sanders, who eschewed the off-putting shenanigans of "identity politics", would have swept ALL of the crucial swing states in the general election.(In 2020, the DNC continues to show unmitigated contempt for Progressivism in general, and absolute disdain for Bernie Sanders in particular.)

To reiterate: In 2016, the Democratic nominee was far from Progressive, out of touch with the common-man, and–to top it all off–blatantly phony.Trump, on the other hand, pretended to be against the corporate-friendly NAFTA (which had the Clinton brand all over it): a compunction that resonated with the working-class of middle America.It is no wonder, then, that there was such a drastic paucity of excitement from the segments of the electorate with a (nascent) proclivity for Progressive thinking.(It is also telling that votes for the Green Party candidate more than made up for the margin in each of the aforesaid swing states.)

Couple THAT problem (the failure to galvanize Progressive sectors) with the aggressive voter-suppression hijinks perpetrated by the G.O.P., and it is clear how Trump won THEN, and how he would win AGAIN.

In focusing on misogyny, racism, Christian fundamentalism, and other accoutrements of ultra-right-wing ideology to explain the outcome of America's 2016 presidential election, we are only accounting for those who were never going

to vote for a non-Republican anyway.Rather, the explanation lay with the NON-far-right-wing base: swing-voters (esp. those in the “rust belt”) who were turned off by Clinton’s obvious pandering, her glaring inauthenticity, and her countenancing of officious p.c. ordinances.

APPENDIX 3:

The list of tyrants who came to power promising to “make X great again” (where X is the nation) is very long.It was literally the campaign slogan of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines.

The mission should not be to “make America GREAT again” (technically, a meaningless slogan).Rather, the mission should be to make America SMART again. (By “smart”, it is simply meant: honest, discerning, intellectually curious, and well-informed.)Making a nation “great” is little more than a jingoistic cliche.(Guess who said that he would make Germany great again c. 1930.Hint: The same guy who promised to put Germany first; to hell with everyone else.Every demagogue is inclined to fetishize whoever he sees as THE VOLK, which is his target audience.)It should come as little surprise that an Austrian psychopath employed the same rhetoric during the waning days of the beleaguered Weimar Republic.

To this day, a sinking feeling of existential despondency–a sense of lost greatness–is responsible for many Americans blaming all their woes on such perennial hobgoblins as “big government”, a waning military, a paucity of “law and order”, new ethnic incursions, the super-rich being over-taxed, and corporate centers having insufficient power…none of which makes any sense.It is tempting to harken back to a mythical “golden age” that never really existed; and to scapegoat a chimerical nemesis to account for all of one’s woes.

In a state of what Durkheim called “anomie”, people are susceptible to demagogy.But rather than nihilism, this kind of anomie” drives fanaticism.It is not based on resignation, but on indignation.So instead of engendering melancholy, it engenders zealotry.

Make our country “great” like it used to be?Ridiculous as it is, the idea seems to be that IF ONLY we were more “patriotic” (whatever that means)…and we privatized everything under the sun…and we stopped protecting the environment…and the military-industrial complex was even further bloated…and Big Business was allowed to have free reign…and the financial services industry was unencumbered by pesky

regulations…and healthcare were treated as a consumer product rather than as a public service…and corporations were treated as citizens…and police were afforded more license…and people had more guns stockpiled in their homes…and there were fewer brown people taking “our” jobs…then America could somehow be “great again”.

Here, “great” is undefined.(What are the metrics for “greatness” that Trump was using?How did he propose those measurements be increased?)Meanwhile, “again” insinuates a LOST greatness.Trump’s slogan conjures visions of an imagined halcyon era before civil rights: bygone days when the country was a free-market utopia unperturbed by a meddling Federal government.Zany as it may be, this candy-coated delusion holds tremendous appeal for an astonishing number of Americans.

Faux (right-wing) populism is what Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson dubbed “plutocratic populism”: duping the masses into endorsing their own subjugation.This is done by giving oligarchic designs the illusion of mass appeal–passing off corporate interests as conducive to the commonweal, for example.(Note that Ivan T. Berend did a survey of “Populist Demagogues” around the world.)

Those hoodwinked into playing along with right-wing populism fail to realize that the meritocracy they exalt is a mirage.For it escapes them that we live not only in a plutocracy (government by moneyed power), but in a KAKISTOCRACY (government by society’s least competent; least worthy).Since the U.S. is ruled by financial interests, it is CONSTITUTIONALLY plutocratic; and since the U.S. is an inverse meritocracy, it is–for the time being–kakistocratic.To not understand this is to not have even a rudimentary grasp of American politics…or of the flagrant socio-economic inequities that addle our pseudo-democracy.

What is often overlooked is the obsequiousness of Progressive meliorism (a.k.a. “incrementalism”, “realism”, “moderation”, “bi-partisanship”, and various other Orwellian euphemisms).Corporatist Democrats scoff at any prospect for structural transformation as if any call for bold change was–by its very nature, quixotic.They proceed as if the only practical way of making things better were deferring to the status quo.Such self-imposed limitation brings about the very conditions they blame for said limitation.After all, what is and isn’t realistic is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

These apologists for incumbent power structures dismiss rectitude as “purity”, as if being principled was the same as being bull-headed or ideological.For them, compromising on principle (and pandering) is being “conciliatory” and “pragmatic”.

The grave misconceptions proliferating amongst Trumpian crowds are familiar ones; as they are misconceptions that are common in right-wing precincts.

APPENDIX 4:

The reason ostensive "Left-ism" has proven as ineffectual as it has is because it is not genuine Progressivism; it is merely a mitigation of how far-right the prevailing policy ends up being.(Another hint: If one is a p.c. aficionado, one is not a Progressive.Puritanism and authoritarianism are hallmarks of Reactionary thinking.)

Recall that the U.S. has a right-wing political party: the corporate wing of the Democratic party.The only MAJOR alternative is a proto-fascist party, which is even farther to the right: the G.O.P.This is illustrated by the fact that corporate media outlets like MSNBC and CNN despise Progressivism and Progressive figures; yet they are–preposterously–considered left-of-center.

This enables right-wing ideologues to routinely complain about problems for which right-wing policy is to blame.It's like the arsonist blaming the fire-department for not putting out the conflagration fast enough…after the arsonist himself erected road blocks in between the station and the burning building.

In mainstream discourse, the "Left" simply means on the left side of the Overton Window.Since the late 70's, the Overton Window has been shifting to the right of the center of (what might be considered) the absolute political spectrum.Today, even the left side of that window is slightly right-of-center on that spectrum.So a panoply of euphemisms have emerged to describe positions.In a kind of Orwellian Doublespeak, corporate-friendly Democrats are called "moderates".Thus corporatist Democrats (along with corporate media outlets) are often referred to as "centrist" Democrats; and they fashion themselves as "liberal" due to rather timid stances on a few social issues (women's rights, gay rights, and civil rights for racial minorities)…often more token gestures than serious efforts to ameliorate structural inequality.And when it comes to economic matters, they are patently anti-Progressive.

Over the past four decades, the rightward phase-shift of the Overton Window is impossible to miss; yet it has drastically skewed perceptions of "left" vis a vis "right" (and thus the definition of "centrist") on the political spectrum.If one party claims that 2+2 equals 4, another that it equals 7, and yet another that it equals 16, that

doesn't make the "2+2=10" position a prudent compromise.That's not how objective Truth works; and–as much as many would like to think otherwise–the most important political issues are a matter of objective Truth.

It is sheer folly to ascertain Truth via plebiscite (call it "Reality by referendum").There are dire consequences to this myopic thinking (treating the Overton Window as a gauge for the limits of viable political positions; and thus the bounds of acceptable political discourse).We find ourselves assaying right- and ultra-right positions and simply splitting the difference…then calling the result "centrist". (The middle of kinda wrong and extremely wrong is still wrong.)Yet this is the kind of obtuse thinking that now informs the farcical categories of "left" and "right" in the U.S.

The right continues to move farther to the right, and the corporate Democrats are more than happy to always meet them "halfway". Consequently, in the argot of American politics, insufficiently right-wing is now dubbed "Left-ist"; which is why corporatist Democrats are not recognized–by themselves OR by the ultra-right–as a right-wing phenomenon.It's also why corporatist Democrats consider Progressives "too far left"…even though Progressives are the ones pointing out that 2+2 does, indeed, equal 4.Meanwhile, self-styled "centrists" will stick with the "equals 7 or 8 or thereabouts" position…while congratulating themselves for castigating the "equals 16" lobby for being too far to the right.

This is analogous to 10 being considered the "moderate" answer to 2+2; putting the "equals 7" lobby left-of-center…even though it is still way off-base. Case in point:In the advent of the 2008 economic crash, the infusion of public funds into the economy (the "stimulus") would have been much more effective had it been much larger.The ploy, though, was to blame the stimulus' shortcomings on it having been done at all.To the degree that policy is insufficiently to the right, the thinking goes, the fault must lie with the antithesis of right-wing policy: that dreaded bogeyman known as Progressivism. So take wherever the corporate Democrats are, take however far to the right the G.O.P. happens to be, and simply split the difference… then call that "centrist".

Why is this wrong? Reality is not established via plebiscite.

Reality is as follows: The financial services industry hadn't been regulated nearly enough; and it continues to cause systemic problems to the present day–including spiraling socio-economic inequality and ever-more-highly-concentrated wealth /

power.Absurdly, the contention–by Republican AND corporatist Democrats–is that regulation PER SE must be to blame for all economic woes; so what the economy needed was more of a (unaccountable, unhindered) “free market”…as if, upon being poisoned by diluted arsenic, one were to contend that it was the paucity of arsenic that accounted for the sickness.Once the nausea set in, the misguided inclination was to blame the water in the elixir rather than the toxin.(“If only the arsenic weren’t so watered down, you’d now be much healthier!”)

Such is the contorted reasoning of kleptocratic malefactors like Gary Cohn, Steve Schwarzman, Carl Icahn, Paul Singer, the Mercers, the Koch brothers, and–yes–corporatist Democrats like Jamie Dimon.These figures, who consistently vote for right-wing economic policies, are far more reprehensible–and do far more harm to society–than even the most virulent racists / sexists with whom most of us are justifiably concerned.

A party where one can find the likes of Chuck Schumer, Lloyd Blankfein, Thomas Nides, Jacob Lew, Joe Manchin, Steny Hoyer, Timothy Geithner, Rahm Emanuel, and Michael Bloomberg is not a party that any Progressive could ever call home. (Emanuel, we might recall, openly referred to Progressives as “fucking idiots”.The irony is deafening.)To suggest that someone who supports such opprobrious figures could be characterized as remotely “Progressive” is a sick joke.

The Democratic Party’s strategy vis a vis Progressives is to co-opt their popularity (and thus their segment of the electorate) without having to co-opt their IDEAS.This is done by paying oodles of lip-service to Progressive ideals without actually having to implement Progressive policies.It’s about placating, not about heeding.Listening without really hearing.We might bear in mind that the smoothest of tongues are also often forked tongues.

Being against Trump (or against the ultra-right wing in general) isn’t enough.One has to be FOR something inspiring.(“Well, hey!At least he/she isn’t TRUMP” is not an inspiring rallying cry.A potted plant isn’t Trump either.)Slightly-less-awful-than-Trump is a very low bar to clear; and is hardly a Progressive aspiration.Too many corporate Democrats congratulate themselves for being anti-Trump–as if refusing to support a sociopathic buffoon were somehow a monumental accomplishment.

Such a shoddy criterion for endorsement bodes ill for Progressivism.

Another case in point: In one of the 2020 congressional races, the Democratic Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi is backing a Koch-backed Texan named Henry Cuellar (a shill for investment bankers and other corporate interests, who votes with Trump 70% of the time) over his Progressive challenger (a Mexicana human rights attorney named Jessica Cisneros).Cuellar is anti-choice AND vociferously pro-NRA.Referring to someone so flagrantly right wing as anything other than “right wing” is a twisted joke.

If our political taxonomy were not so skewed, the ostensibly “Left” political party would not honor Potemkin Progressives like Dianne Feinstein, Chris Coons, Joe Manchin, Josh Gottheimer, and Neera Tanden: figures who have nothing but contempt for ACTUAL Progressives.Such politicians are corporatists who operate within the Democratic Party. They are less overtly fascistic as Republicans, so they are able to pass as viable alternatives.

The kicker is that even the most flagrant of the corporate Democrats are referred to as “moderates” in the argot of the corporate media—a contorted taxonomy that makes genuine Progressives wince; but which dupes just about everyone else. (During her heyday, one might have considered Hillary Clinton the high priestess of Potemkin Progressivism.)This misnomer is due to the fact that a corporatism is considered “centrist”.This skewing of the Overton Window shifts public perceptions—and thus public discourse—to the right.Anyone who is NON-corporatist, then, is seen as a “radical Leftist”.

By characterizing corporatists as “moderates”, the message is that corporatism is the norm—nay: the IDEAL.Let’s be clear: If one abides corporate influence (i.e. MONEY) in politics, if one does not support universal healthcare, if one is a lackey for Big Business (from the financial sector to the military-industrial complex), if one does not consistently champion human rights around the world, and if one routinely countenances unabashed disdain for genuine Progressives, then one is decidedly not a Progressive.It should go without saying, but let’s say it anyway: If one is for highly-concentrated (socio-economic) power, if one is for top-down control, if one serves corporate interests over the public interest, then one is the opposite of a Progressive; and—more to the point—is against democracy.

For corporate Democrats, this isn’t merely a matter of being feckless; it is a matter of perfidy.Even as they pretend to be quasi-Progressive, there is nothing remotely Progressive about them.

The strategy of corporatist Democrats is to support candidates that resemble Republicans when it comes to economic and foreign policy.Meanwhile, a flurry of virtue signaling makes them feel less bad about being corporatists…and plays well to an easily hoodwinked electorate.

For anyone other than a right-wing hack, choosing Cisneros would be a no-brainer. In a saner world, she–like Bernie Sanders, Nina Turner, Ilhan Omar, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Talib, et. al.–would be considered middle-of-the-road; as their policy positions actually reflect the interests of the vast majority of the general populace. Meanwhile, the likes of Chuck Schumer et. al. would be so far to the right, they'd almost be off the chart.

The execrable roster of corporatist Democrats is disturbingly long; and–tragically–dictates how power is allocated. Only with the Overton Window shifted so far rightward can such perfidious actors call themselves "Democrats" with a straight face.In a saner world, this would be inconceivable.That so many "Democrats" go along with this charade demonstrates how deranged the political taxonomy has become.

The fact remains: A fake populist can only be beat by a REAL populist. Why? Because both are based on comparable appeal…even as their actual policies are diametrically opposed. The former is utterly disastrous for the commonweal; the latter is based entirely on the commonweal. Yet BOTH resonate with pedestrian sensibilities; as they "speak to" the common-man. Demagogues have understood this since time immemorial.

And this brings us back to the 2016 election.Had the DNC really wanted to defeat Trump, it would have allowed the genuinely Progressive candidate (Bernie Sanders) to be elected the party's nominee…as he would have been if the Democratic primaries had been conducted on the level.Alas, being a right-of-center (corporatist) operation, the DNC was not about to let an ACTUAL Progressive secure the Democratic nomination.

Meanwhile, being a proto-fascist party, the majority of the G.O.P. was fine with having a proto-fascist as their nominee.So the choice was between ultra-right-wing yet INTRIGUINGLY DIFFERENT vs. kinda-right-wing yet business-as-usual.

Tellingly, once Trump secured the nomination, the only right-wing outlets to call foul (notably: “The National Review” and the “Weekly Standard”) were run by career G.O.P. insiders who didn’t appreciate having an “outsider” (i.e. someone they suspected they may not be able to control) crash their party.The joke, it seems, was on both the DNC and RNC.

Of Trump, Clinton, and Sanders, only Sanders REALLY WAS anti-Establishment.This fact was lost on legions of misinformed voters–who’s choices were guided more by the amygdala than by the prefrontal cortex.(Alas, when parlayed into drastic action, anger rarely leads to prudent choices.)There are, of course, different ways that one can be “anti-Establishment”–some right-wing, some left-wing.The “catch” is that right-wing populism is an oxymoron.In other words: It’s an excuse to implement fascist policies by passing them off as good for the common-man.Nothing could be further from the truth.Alas, the intellectually moribund American polis continues to be afflicted by the political version of Stockholm Syndrome–whereby the working class becomes the architect of its own subjugation.

EPILOGUE 1:

Another word on demagogy is in order.Frustration and confusion are the optimal conditions in which dogmatism–and thus propaganda–flourishes.Hence agit-prop tends to gain currency when people are insecure and/or disoriented.The existentially moribund are especially susceptible to the wiles of a savvy demagogue.

Such people are groping around in the dark–often in a state of desperation–for something to latch onto.Provide them with something sturdy, and they will grasp it and–having committed themselves, and asserted themselves–not let go.Anyone who has experienced the disconcerting state of existential vertigo will welcome any source of stability.So it makes perfect sense that demagogues prey on existential beleaguerment–which is to say: seething resentment and/or protracted apprehension.If a figurehead can offer a way to effectively channel angst while ameliorating trepidation, he will surely hold sway over the rank and file.

I surveyed the incidence of this phenomenon in my essay on “The History Of Exalted Figures”; where I showed that charismatic figures curry favor with the common-man in ways that are entirely predictable; and almost always perfidious.They pass off subjugation as a form of emancipation (typically by claiming: “Trust me; it’s for your own good.”)To put it bluntly: Neurosis renders one a useful idiot.

Those who are lost at sea are–generally speaking–easy to manipulate.To reiterate: Those who are insecure and/or disoriented are looking for something solid to hold onto.The first person to offer such something solid-seeming is most likely to win their favor.This is especially so when fear / anger (two sides of the same coin) govern public sentiment.

And so it goes that a compelling narrative (read: well-crafted propaganda) works like a charm on those for whom critical thinking is a lost art.Anyone experiencing protracted bouts of existential despondency is especially vulnerable to the formidable powers of suggestion wielded by a highly charismatic leader.

A prerequisite for genuine democracy is a well-informed citizenry (which is to say: an electorate that is more apt to base choices on principle than on flights of fancy).Alas.The United States is a far cry from a deliberative democracy.With the lack of civic engagement and the skein of voter-suppression, the U.S. doesn’t even qualify as a participatory democracy.It is more accurately described as a plutocracy with quasi-democratic pretensions.

It is, of course, no secret that perspicacity is extremely rare in the American agora.The vast majority of voters–mercurial and obsequious–do not base their decisions on anything resembling meticulous deliberation.Rather, they are beholden to vague impressions, emotive outbursts that are ripe for manipulation.

And so it goes: Across the U.S., the electorate is held captive to mis-information campaigns.Day in and day out, America's rank and file are snookered by the trappings of effective branding strategies–gimmicks designed to lure them into a charade that benefits the well-positioned few at everyone else's expense.In other words, most American voters–being as they are a mentally lethargic herd–are dupes.The popular sentiment is invariably at the mercy of whatever hype-generation scheme dominates the meme-o-sphere.

Such systematic manipulation is largely a matter of perception-engineering, which is primarily orchestrated by corporate media outlets that serve the interests of those in power.(As usual, those in power use that power to maintain that power; which is done by persuading everyone else into going along with the program.)In a social milieu where fatuity trumps perspicacity, this boondoggle is easy to pull off.For rudimentary–let alone fastidious–critical analysis is inimical to a polity that is governed by fatuity, inauthenticity, and shallow thinking.Much of American culture–in keeping with the social media zeitgeist–even goes so far as to GLAMORIZE such things.This explains why we find ourselves contending with public discourse characterized by pettiness and superficiality.

Consequently, many will be easily hoodwinked into believing a entirely specious narrative that is nevertheless compelling to the untutored ear.That's how so many Americans are routinely persuaded to vote against their own interests…all the while under the impression that, in doing so, they are being valiant super-patriots standing up for (a comically obtuse conception of) "the American way".Even as they engage in paroxysms of flag-waving, they shoot themselves in the foot.

A brief recap.Trump won in 2016 not because he offered the best ideas (or really meant it when he occasionally paid lip-service to estimable policies).After all, most voters do not make decisions based on a meticulous process of critical deliberation; and so rarely base their vote on the adduced merit of candidates' proposals.(Policy analysis is anathema in an era of market-tested platitudes.)Rather, Trump won because his hyper-jingoistic sales-pitch resonated with most of America's disaffected working class.(In other words, BRAND Trump won more than PERSON Trump.)A bumbling buffoon with prodigious star-power ended up serving as an avatar for people's anger / frustration because he pushed all the right buttons.He SEEMED to be a great way to rebuke "business as usual"…even as he was an amplification of all the dysfunction he stridently derided.

The one who most effectively woos disaffected swing-voter prevails.And so it came to pass that Trump was the victor in a race that is won not by merit but by hype-generation.To reiterate: In 2016, a vote for Trump was–more than anything else–a giant “fuck you” to the despised “Establishment”.This was the case even though he was, in reality, PART OF the very socio-economic elite his fans–understandably–held in contempt.

The remarkable sway that Trump held over the wayward voter would have been–and in 2020, still would be–completely neutralized if he were up against someone who ACTUALLY WAS anti-Establishment.(REAL populism trumps fake populism for those seeking a populist message.)By the same token, Trump is assured another victory if he is–once again–pitted against an Establishment alternative who augers only a slightly more palatable version of business-as-usual.

More to the point: Clinton didn’t lose in 2016 because she was a woman; she lost because she’s a horrible person–a corporatist who was patronizing and–let’s not kid ourselves–cloyingly phony.Her loyalties lay in the boardroom of Goldman Saks, not in the humble homes of the struggling working class–no matter how much hot-sauce she purportedly carried in her designer pocketbook.

And, lest we forget, a surefire way to TURN OFF a crucial segment of the electorate (wayward swing-voters in America’s hinterland) is to be obdurately “woke”–engaging in virtue-signaling shenanigans when it comes to identity politics and other boneheaded ideas culled from the p.c. catechism.

Bewilderingly, there are some who still contend that Hillary was defeated in 2016 because of “sexism”.Such people are deliberately missing the point.In spite of all the evidence that this obsequious consigliere of Goldman Sachs lost due to her glaring phoniness, a slew of awful policy positions, and the fact that she was a complete sell-out to the Establishment, sycophants in the corporate wing of the Democratic Party–especially those bewitched by “identity politics”–persist in their delusion about her VAGINA being the problem (with respect to those who were off-put by her).

Such wanton heedlessness is enough to take one’s breath away.

Had we waved a magic wand and physically transformed Hillary “Kissinger is my friend” Clinton into a dashing young man, she would not have gained a single vote from swing voters.For her electoral deficit lay not with sexists; it lay with all those who found her character flaws intolerable.This is made plain by the fact that so many life-long, highly-dedicated feminists–the author of this essay included–were so

repulsed by her.If anything, her being a woman was a BOON for those of us dreaming of a Progressive in the Oval Office.Many were reticent to support her IN SPITE of the fact that she was female.

One can be certain that Clinton's gender had absolutely nothing to do with her manifest delinquencies.The fact is: Anyone who was sexist enough to not support a woman for public office (that is: FOR BEING a woman) was never going to vote for a non-Republican anyway.The high priestess of corporate Democrats did not lose because of misogyny; she lost because of her opprobrious nature.It wasn't about here genitalia; it was about her scoffing at those fighting against corporate power and the military-industrial complex…even as she castigated anyone who was fighting for universal public healthcare and Palestinian rights.Her POSITIONS made Progressives cringe.And her flagrant establishmentarianism made swing-voters recoil.

The numbers show those who were "none of the above" broke overwhelmingly for Trump; which means that Trump's victory was more due to enmity toward Hillary than affinity for Donald; and that if there had been a viable alternative to a buffoonish Reality TV star, then that alternative would have been elected.In other words, just as with 2020, a potted plant would have triumphed over Trump.Hillary's failure was that she had less appeal than a potted plant (which, after all, would not have castigated proponents of BDS for being "anti-Semitic" while claiming to carry around hot-sauce so as to pander to African Americans).

In sum: Had Hillary been more Progressive (and more genuine), she would almost certainly have prevailed over the bumbling nincompoop that she was running against.

Fast-forward to 2020. The overly conciliatory Sanders was no match for the DNC's machinations.Nor was he any match for the Establishment's perfidious lackeys, who were hell-bent on undermining Progressivism–and thus democracy–at every turn.

Interesting fact: Never-Trump Republicans are cheering on corporate Democrats (e.g. Biden).Why?Because they despise Progressives (e.g. Sanders), and know that the corporate core of the Democratic party is simply Republican-lite.This should tell us everything we need to know about the Overton Window…and how party politics breaks down.

Corporatist Democrats depend on Progressives continuing to cower on the fringes of the agora, apologizing for their rectitude each step of the way (so as not to incur the wrath of Establishment impresarios).The fact that a free-market fundamentalist (a former CNBC drone named Michelle Caruso-Cabrera) is challenging Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in the next primary tells us everything we need to know.(Yes: One can be a free-market fundamentalist and be a “Democrat”.)It’s bewildering how far right-wing one can be and still be in the Democratic party.(But then again, in a country where companies like Goldman Sachs and Halliburton are still allowed to exist, anything’s possible.)

In 2020, the world contended with a highly-contagious biological pathogen (SARS corona-virus-2, cause of “CoViD-[20]19”).Even before that, it was dealing with another kind of pandemic: the memetic pathogen known as idiocy.It’s worth noting that, in the long term, corporatism is more deleterious to the commonweal than even the most severe of acute respiratory syndromes; for it has consequences that plague society long after a pestilence has been subdued.

Lately, elections have been plebiscites on this or that FIGURE (whichever one happened to represent the incumbent power structures; first Hillary, then Trump).In many ways, 2020 is 2016 redux (a matter of begrudgingly selecting the less repulsive of two unpalatable options).Whereby 2016 was Hillary vs. not-Hillary (a vote for Trump was a repudiation of the Establishment), 2020 is Trump vs. not-Trump (after the Obama and the DNC once more ousted the dreaded Bernie Sanders, a vote for Biden became the only viable way to oust Trump).In other words, few vote based on the merit of policy positions.Choices are primarily about who to repudiate.So brand endorsement is the name of the game.

Just as was the case in 2016, outside of his core constituency, Trump garners support BY DEFAULT–that is: by swing-voters (esp. rural, working-class people) being repelled by the absurdities of p.c.-run-amok (read: condescending claptrap that regular people find repellent).In this sense, the election will–once again–be a referendum on “woke” ding-bats caviling about breaches of etiquette, claiming to be “offended” by frivolous transgressions, and castigating any bystander who fails to sufficiently hew to the latest pieties.We are reminded every decree by the impresarios of p.c. culture is extremely off-putting to level-headed people who are looking for actual virtue, not for virtue-signaling.

The lesson in 2020 is the same as it was four years earlier: p.c.-mongers shoot an otherwise noble cause in the foot by peddling their derisive nonsense instead of offering real solutions to real problems.

As it happened, the universe has a sense of irony. The pandemic was a DEAFENING reminder of why the U.S.–or ANY country–needs universal healthcare (that is: universal access to quality, dependable medical services).Alas, due to the terrible messaging of corporate media outlets (including MSNBC, CNN, and the New York Times), most people remain oblivious to the merits of a robust, publicly-funded healthcare system.So at a time when it was most obvious that Bernie Sanders offered the (objectively) best policies; the credulous masses were herded–once again–into the arms of the the Establishment's anointed plenipotentiary.

Amidst the outbreak, lessons could be learned.Predictably, countries with the best healthcare systems (Scandinavia, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Taiwan, South Korea, New Zealand, etc.) handled the corona-virus outbreak the best; and the reasons for this are obvious to anyone who is paying attention.(Italy's faltered for other reasons–notably: an elderly population of smokers caught off-guard.)

Alas, the Democratic party is an establishmentarian party, and so continues to be dedicated to the maintenance of incumbent power structures (that is: beholden to corporate interests).As with Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden offers nothing more than business-as-usual.Both are corporate lackeys who pay lip service to quasi-Progressive ideals.Both are entirely about keeping up appearances without pushing for substantial structural reform. Biden, we might recall, unabashedly supports the military industrial complex and health insurance companies (while deriding proposals for universal public healthcare). The only prospects Biden offers is more of the same.

Epilogue 2:

[November 2020]In the advent of the 2020 election, it is time to take stock.

As I—and most of the rest of the civilized world—breathe a long-awaited, collective sigh of relief, it is worth bearing in mind that the mentally-stunted, bigoted nincompoop that has been ousted from the White House is about to be replaced by a corporatist Democrat who is at the mercy of bankers and the military-industrial complex. While Biden is lightyears better than the alternative, let’s not forget that he does not support the Green New Deal or Universal Public Healthcare or getting money out of politics. And he will likely be reticent to rescind the egregious tax-cuts for the ultra-affluent (and the odious array of deregulations) that were enacted three years ago. In other words, we still have our work cut out for us.

We are right to celebrate the end to an administration that is about to be relegated to an ignominious chapter in America’s history books. What is disconcerting is that, but for the pandemic, Trump would have likely cruised to victory against the (ill-

considered) Democratic nominee.Most of those who opted to pull the lever for Biden did so with middling enthusiasm.The fact of the matter was: Any sane person would have voted for a potted plant over the incumbent.And so they did.

We need to ask ourselves: How in heaven's name is it that over 74 million Americans thought it was a good idea to continue to Donald Trump?Groupthink undoubtedly played a role–especially for the ill-informed, provincial segment of the polis.Here's the thing: Many of those in rural communities have been raised to believe that they are obligated to think in concert with their local brethren.To do otherwise would be to risk ostracism.We find the same phenomenon in any other community wherein a super-charged parochialism is operative (see Hassidim / Haredim).

The delusive, tribalistic mindset that played a role in Trump's support was on full display after the 2020 election had been decided.The insistence—by both the demagogue himself and his most ardent followers—was that he could not have really lost.This was because Trump's brand was WINNING.There was no way that the battalions of bumbling sycophants who went along with Trump's movement could eat crow; as they'd have to admit they'd mis-characterized their loadstar.In being defeated, the very BRAND ITSELF was being brought into question.

Like any cult movement, when their ideology was shown to be spurious, they had no choice but to double down.(Think of apocalyptic cults who's premonitions of the End Days don't come to pass.They often become MORE zealous in the face of disconfirmation.)Trump HAD to have won the election, lest they concede they'd been wrong ALL ALONG, and their entire cosmogony implode.For Trump himself, the obdurate refusal to concede the results of the 2020 election was about saving face.But for his followers it was about more than just that: It was about keeping the ideological fulcrum for their "make America great again" mantra fully in tact.

Rationalizations were needed if the false pride that buoyed their movement was to be sustained.Ergo: The election results needed to be seen as fraudulent.No matter how unfounded, such farce was the only thing that made sense in light of the fact that Trump was BY DEFINITION a winner.

And so it went.The election results couldn't NOT be denied, lest the illusion be exposed.

It is worth emphasizing: The remarkable thing is not that Biden (barely) won; it's that he almost LOST.But for the fallout from CoViD-19, he certainly WOULD have lost.The fact that Sanders (who would have prevailed in the Democratic primary but for the interventions of Barack Obama, James Clyburn, and the gilded pantheon of corporate Democrats) would have won in a landslide (as also would have been the case four years earlier) was—predictably—elided by the corporate media.

As they had with Hillary in the previous election, Progressives begrudgingly helped the establishment favorite (Biden, anointed by default) prevail over the horrifying alternative.Indeed, any sane person would have voted for a potted plant instead of Trump.That an old man exhibiting clear signs of cognitive deterioration prevailed is testament to this fact.

So the question is now: How shall Progressives challenge Biden—and the entrenched corporate Democratic establishment—now that Trump has been successfully vanquished?

The problem, of course, is that the p.c. arm of the so-called "Left" persists, thus continuing to taint the primary alternative to a Republican nominee.The skein of political correct-ness and identity politics will continue to hamstring—nay, sabotage—any Progressive efforts.The knuckle-headed shenanigans of the legion of p.c. aficionados will be held against genuine Progressives by the vast majority of America's rank and file.Of course, the corporatists are perfectly fine with this, as it provides fodder to assail Progressivism wholesale.

There are many dead giveaways when it comes to the true nature of corporatists in the Democratic Party.Many of their largest supporters threatened to support Trump if Bernie Sanders had been the Democratic nominee; which tells us everything we need to know about their true fealties; and the ACTUAL ideology undergirding the corporate Democrats.(They'd rather have the corporate-friendly buffoon than a genuine Progressive in the Oval Office, thank you very much.)

Glenn Greenwald drew an apt parallel to what enabled the fascistic J. Bolsonaro to be elected president in Brasil and what enabled the fascistic D. Trump to be elected president in the U.S.:"As happened in [the U.S.], the failure of [the nation's] Establishment—and particularly its prevailing Neoliberal [corporatist] ideology—had left so many people so angry with the political system that they were willing to gamble on anyone who could successfully pose as an enemy of the political class that the population (rightly) blamed for so much of its suffering and

deprivation.”Like Bolsonaro, Trump was a pompous blowhard who’s tough-guy bluster was seen as a kind of courage; who militancy was seen as intrepidity.Both men used demagogy to exploit the seething resentments of the ill-educated rank and file, who were justifiably aggrieved by the socio-economic injustices plaguing their respective countries.“People confronting such deprivation [are] highly susceptible to scapegoating and easy solutions,” Greenwald noted.He also observed, correctly, that the venting of frustrations typically includes calls for “law and order” and the prosecution of outsiders.

An Austrian megalomaniac used the same schtick in Germany in the 1930’s.

So the thinking went: Anyone whom the despised MACHINE holds in contempt (and who promises to burn it down) “must be on OUR side.”It should come as no surprise that Bolsonaro touted his “Chicago Boys” affiliations, and pledged to follow the Pinochet model of pulverizing civil rights—invoking fundamentalist religion (thanks, Roman Catholic Church), offering militarism on steroids, and privatizing everything under the sun (while slashing social benefits to the poor).In other words: The Republican Party’s platform since Nixon.

Greenwald added that “Bolsonaro’s ascension to power was driven not so much by agreement with his [fascistic] ideology, but rather by a pervasive and justified disgust with ruling institutions and their prevailing orthodoxies.That Bolsonaro had been [rejected by] the mainstream precincts of ‘decency’, and that he was so clearly feared and despised by mainstream institutions, became one of his most powerful political assets.”Greenwald concluded that Bolsonaro was “a gifted demagogue”. *

All this should sound eerily familiar to the political landscape of the U.S. since the economic crash of 2008.Corporatists in BOTH the Democrat and Republican parties understand that being a shill for corporate interests.

This also brings up the distinction between genuine populism (which is “Left-ist”) and faux populism (i.e. right-wing “populism”).ALL populism—both authentic and ersatz—appeals to the rank and file.The crucial difference is that genuine populism ACTUALLY IS good for the rank and file; whereas faux populism is only superficially appealing, yet utterly fraudulent.Put another way, the former is PROGRESSIVE; as it is for civil rights and socio-economic justice (esp. labor rights; see Thomas Frank’s “The People, No”).By stark contrast, the latter is simply Neo-liberalism with pseudo-

populist branding—thereby hoodwinking those who may not know any better into supporting policies that contribute to their own marginalization / disenfranchisement.

Genuine populism is not against scholarship (intellectual elitism); it is against ivory tower-ism (socio-economic elitism).Faux populism, on the other hand, is vehemently anti-intellectual; and serves the interest of the moneyed class (esp. corporate power).It is a way of duping the credulous part of the electorate into voting against their own best interests (that is: against the common good).This is done by couching the corporatist agenda in a populist veneer.

Thus faux populism is the opposite of genuine populism, even as it employs similar rhetoric.

There are two forms that such deceptive branding takes—both of which are designed to distract from what is really being promoted: corporatism / plutocracy.

Trojan Horse ONE (perpetrated by Republicans): Using wedge issues (super-patriotism and nativism; as well as an obsession with religion, abortion, and guns) to bamboozle working class voters who have right-wing social views into supporting right-wing economic policy (policy that they would otherwise be against).This faux populism is what got Donald Trump instead of “establishment” Republicans the nomination in 2016; and what enabled Trumpian fervor to persist even after his defeat in 2020.A Progressive candidate (read: Bernie Sanders) would have trounced Trump in both elections; so it came as no surprise that the alternative (a corporate Democrat in both cases) first lost then ALMOST lost (but for an unexpected factor: the corona-virus pandemic).

Trojan Horse TWO (perpetrated by corporatist Democrats): Using political correctness—replete with identity politics and a flurry of virtue signaling—to bamboozle otherwise Progressive voters into supporting right-wing economic policy (that is: doing the bidding of corporate power), thinking that they are somehow doing something to combat socio-economic injustice.This is what got Hillary Clinton instead of Bernie Sanders the nomination in 2016; and then Joe Biden instead of Bernie Sanders the nomination in 2020.But the rot goes back to Bill Clinton, and on through Barack Obama (whom Cornell West accurately referred to as “the black mascot of Wall Street”). It came as no surprise, then, that professed “Democrat” Lloyd Blankfein admitted that if Bernie Sanders was the Democratic nominee, he’d vote for Trump.

Trump’s economic policies were every plutocrat’s dream.He may have been a mentally-stunted prima donna, but his economic policies were INDISTINGUISHABLE from the policies of any other Republican since Reagan; and—in the midst of his buffoonery—he did nothing to alienate his corporatist base (other than perhaps tarnish their sterling image with his crass antics).

Either way, corporatism wins.Subsequently, hose who were hoodwinked pat themselves on the back for upholding what they suppose is a noble cause.Both are driven by resentments (that is: misdirected ire).Ironically, they feel vindicated for opposite reasons: the former for having successfully staved off the (actual) absurdities of political correctness; the latter for having successfully staved off the (actual) iniquities of conservative social policy.All the while, socio-economic injustices continue, legalized graft persists, and the military industrial complex becomes even more bloated.The rank and file get screwed, and the oligarchs laugh all the way to the bank.

The solution to both hoodwinks is the same: REAL populism, shorn of right-wing ideology.In other words: What is needed is a populism from which social conservatism and political correctness have been expunged.

If the left does not offer decent solutions, the right will (rightly) point out the shortcomings of their proposals; and then offer indecent alternatives…as if those were the ONLY alternatives.Since p.c. is NOT a decent solution to society’s woes, the right prevails.The more the so-called “Left” wastes time on silly games like identity politics, the more fodder then provide for right-wing commentators.

Under such circumstances, it comes as no surprise that people who are confidently proposing abold, quasi-plausible vision end up coming out on top.Juxtaposed against silliness, they are able to seem almost reasonable to the untutored ear.Consequently, they end up commanding appeal amongst the disenchanted / frustrated; especially when the vision-on-offer plays on the false hopes, the resentments, and the insecurities of the target audience.

It is easier to communicate a simple lie (with easily digestible platitudes) than explain a complicated truth (with drawn-out disquisition).The anti-intellectualism of ALL right-wing movements is based on simplistic theories for simple-minded people; often invoking populist vernacular to “sell” the rank and file on policies that will—in reality—only benefit the well-positioned few at the expense of everyone else.Power

is consolidated, cultic thinking is engendered, and the result is often some cult of personality (groupthink, a Reactionary mindset, mass mania, collective neuroses, etc.) with palpably authoritarian features.

Right-wing “populism” is an ersatz populism (as it is effectively authoritarian populism: an oxymoron).Indeed, any purported “populism” that serves the interests of the socio-economic elite is paradoxical.Right-wing “populism” is effectively plutocratic populism–which is, likewise, an oxymoron.It is compelling to credulous segments of the rabble because of its enticing rhetoric–consisting in relentless (though empty) assaults on the “elite”…those with a sleight of hand: transplanting the socio-economic elite (against which it was ostensibly inveighing) with the intellectual elite (the scholars and journalists against whom right-wing impresarios were REALLY against).Thus: railing against those in the halls of power whilst enacting policy that abetted them…whilst screwing over the rank and file.

Biden will not turn the Trumpian tide; he will merely keep it at bay–staving off an EVEN FURTHER rightward surge for the time being.The problem is that he may further taint the Democratic Party by failing to be Progressive, thereby leaving a bad taste in the mouths of the rank and file, and paving they way for Trump redux, even if that not be in the form of Trump himself.

The more the Democratic establishment espouses privatization, deregulation, Wall Street, Big Agri, Big Pharma, for-profit medicine, and the military-industrial complex, the fewer legs they will have to stand on when it comes to combating the far right; and the more the beguiling demagogy of faux populism will gain traction amongst the hoi polloi.

The Democrats lost in 2016 because they failed to offer a genuine political alternative to corporatism (while espousing p.c.); but for the coronavirus pandemic, they would have ALSO lost in 2020 for roughly the same reason; and they will likely lose in 2024 for the same reason…lest the alleged party of the working class get their act together, and stop hating Progressivism.

As things now stand, the U.S. will be going from a (mentally-stunted) proto-fascist nincompoop to a (cognitively addled) shill for corporate power, so all civic-minded people must persist in their frank critique of what will be a less-right-wing government…which will still be in bed with Likud in Israel and the House of Saud in Arabia; and will presumably be willing to capitulate, at every turn, to the G.O.P.—as the corporate Democrats have been doing since the 1970’s.

The incoming administration will likely devote the next four years un-doing some of the damage wrought by the outgoing administration.God willing, Trump will eventually be behind bars; but our endeavor to foster civil society carries on.

{*Demagogues are characterized by their fanfaronade.Some charismatic leaders are very calculating; but some are dunces with a knack for manipulating crowds (that is: riffing off of the audience and “playing the room”).Generally speaking, this consists of mindless bluster, empty catch-phrases, buzz-terms, platitudes, etc.Such bombastic imbeciles are savvy when it comes to stagecraft.The idea is simply to appeal to the masses in superficial (read: disingenuous) ways.When it comes to right-wing (read: faux) populism, such figures are commonplace.Donald Trump (the U.S.) and Jair Bolsonaro (Brasil) are not anomalies.Consider Alexander Lukashenko (Belarus), Recep Ergdogan (Turkey), Kim Jong-Il / -Un (Korea), and Rodrigo Duterte (Philippines).These despots are ALL uneducated thugs who managed to make various strains of fascism (Eastern Orthodox, Islamic, Juche, and Catholic respectively) seem appealing to the rank and file.(The epitome of this phenomenon is Mao Tse-Tung: history’s most malignant moron.)All of these men are bullies; all of them speak to the lowest common denominator; and all of them succeed not IN SPITE OF, but BECAUSE OF their lack of intelligence.(Boris Johnson of the U.K. is a milder version of this phenomenon.)Of course, not all fascistic leaders are idiots (Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel is of moderate intelligence); but most demagogues appeal to the masses because they are relatable, not because they are smart.If there is any doubt that this works, look no further than Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov of Turkmenistan.}

POSTSCRIPT:

Requiem For A Quixotic Endeavor

It is a lamentable truth that the United States has a very powerful right-wing party. It's called the Democratic party. The only other major party is a proto-fascist cult (which currently enjoys even more power). In a political arena where campaigns are hype-generation competitions (fueled by corporate cash), such exigencies do not bode well for the prospects of structural reform.

Varsha Gandikota-Nellutla put it well: "Elections can be moments in which power inverts–times when large swathes of the population, heretofore invisible, are cast into voting blocs that politicians take seriously. To ask voters to pledge their vote before being won over takes away this bargaining power–and, in turn, radically changes the electoral game. It is the candidates' job to win voters over, not voters' to submit to a choice between two evils. So if you feel like shaming someone into

voting for a candidate who actively disregards their demands, consider who [and what] you're really asking; and what's really at stake: Of all the unwanted jobs shouldered by marginalized communities, this should not be one of them."

To give in to the "lesser of two evils" ultimatum is to empower those who benefit most from that ultimatum. This is Machiavellian-ism 101: Those in power will do whatever they are able to get away with. Concession is used as further leverage for a perpetuation of the status quo. Due to the gigantic power asymmetries, this isn't about consensus, mutual cooperation, and (judicious) compromise; it is about those in a disadvantageous position ceding power to those with the most power, so that they can further consolidate that power.

Think of it this way: What does it say about a party that allows fascistic organizations like the DMFI and AIPAC to hold sway? Or a party that is run by a cabal of unabashed corporatists (the DLC)? Behold a party in which genuine Progressives are chronically pleading for concessions—almost always in vain. Indeed, the corporate Democrats are more concerned with appeasing the G.O.P. than being even remotely Progressive. Why? Because they are–effectively–just a watered-down, less brash version of the G.O.P. (It's why the most prominent backers would rather support Trump than see Bernie Sanders as the Democratic nominee.)

Those in the privileged position–be they Republicans or corporate Democrats–FEIGN compromise with Progressives. Their conciliatory gestures is nothing more than posturing. Any purported "concessions" are a RUSE–employed to maintain the incumbent power structures under the pretense of "doing what we can". Such "compromise" on the part of those holding all the cards is a FEINT; used to placate anyone who challenges them. Meanwhile, voters are expected to marshall their voting power ONLY for damage-mitigation. (Support whoever will do the least harm…out of the choices put forth by the Establishment.) Anything else is a "wasted" vote. This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Participants are reduced to a cadre of intellectually-castrated sycophants, who are content to croon about how "Progressive" they are even as they fail to promote any policies that are ACTUALLY Progressive.

It is up to the electorate to refuse to play this game–to say: "Enough's enough." Only then will the perpetuation of this charade be brought to a halt.

When legislation is sold to the highest bidder, democracy itself becomes an illusion. As long as policy is bought and paid for by moneyed interests, little will be done to abet the commonweal. And as long as the government serves only those with financial power, things will continue in the same manner: an orgy of deferred quid pro quos for corporate lackeys–having served their paymasters–enjoying lucrative gigs promptly after leaving office. Careerism and public service are mutually exclusive. Insofar as a politician stands to personally benefit financially for supporting certain legislation, the U.S. will continue as a de facto plutocracy.

This is not so much an obituary for Progressive ideals as it is an elegy for the prospects of the Democratic Party as a dependable vessel for Progressivism. For too long, American Progressives have thought it reasonable to work with those who were nothing but contemptuous of everything they stood for…who mocked them and scoffed at them…who did everything possible to marginalize them.

Memo to Progressives: The Democratic machine DOESN'T LIKE YOU. In fact, it despises you. Why? Because it is a corporatist party to its core. Its ramshackle "tent" is only (begrudgingly) accommodating to a Progressive caucus because the party's mendacious leaders know that Progressives will feel obliged to go along with dubious agendas…simply to have a seat at the table.

In the current scheme, Progressives have nowhere else to go (as the only alternative is even farther to the right). The corporate impresarios of the DNC, DLC, and DCCC are fully aware of this. Hence the Democratic party ends up being Progressives' go-to party BY DEFAULT…only to be blithely dismissed in the rare event they are admitted into the fold. So long as Progressives keep capitulating to corporate Democrats, corporate Democrats will continue to be corporatists. It's very simple: "We don't need to acquiesce to Progressive demands, because–at the end of the day–they're going to vote for us anyway." Why? "Just to keep the Republicans at bay."

The Democratic Party is a place where Progressive aspirations go to die.

Enough's enough. It's time that the U.S. finally–at long last–has a genuinely Progressive political party: a place that Progressives can call home. Whether it's called the CSP (Civil Society Party) or perhaps even the SDP (Social Democracy Party) or something else is beside the point. For now, snazzy labels are the least of

our concerns. What the country desperately needs is an alternative to business-as-usual–that is: an alternative to parties that continue to be (inextricably) governed by corporate interests.

The moment is primed for another major political party in the United States. Progressives should take heart; for this is a pivotal juncture–a chance for the nation's Progressives to mobilize. The time is ripe to create a political mechanism for galvanizing and empowering Progressives so that they will never again be forced to operate within a revanchist political machine that has no respect for them.

In a tournament governed by horse-trading in back rooms, those without the horses will not fare well. By always putting principle over pragmatism, Progressives end up being poorly-positioned in the merciless gauntlet of endless dark money and odious power-brokers. The solution is not remain in this predicament; it's to refuse to play by the dubious rules that have been assigned by those who stand to benefit from the incumbent order.

As Progressives, we are hoping to triumph in a game that is rigged against us. This is a fool's errand. Paying lip service is good for optics; but it only serves to FETTER Progress.

Make no mistake: optics matter. It's why, when looking for an iconic figure for the civil rights movement, the ACLU went with Rosa Parks instead of the pregnant teenager, Claudette Colvin. It's why Reagan's "It's morning in America" shtick worked so well, even as the sun was setting on democratic policies. And it's why people actually thought Rudy Giuliani was anything but a blithering idiot for a brief moment after September 11, 2001.

Perception is everything in politics. Hence: The victor is not who has the most credibility; it's who leaves the best impression. It is no secret that American elections are more about brands than policies. Rarely do voters make decisions based on what candidates will ACTUALLY DO.

Optics are especially important when it comes to American swing voters, who are mercurial and fickle. Most base their choices on IMAGE. Politics is perception; which is why appearances matter more than substance. The average voter is swayed by captivating stories rather than thinking about policy (in any meticulous / serious way). In other words, most voters are highly subject to SENTIMENT sans cognition.

Trump, like Supreme or Oprah or Goop, is just a brand. And like ANY branding scheme, it is a manufactured aura that determines how well it fairs in an interminably fickle marketplace–a marketplace in which superficiality reigns (while merit is largely beside the point). The illusion of participatory democracy is sustained even as participatory mechanisms are dismantled. This amounts to political theater; wherein the APPEARANCE of deliberative democracy is upheld even as it is rendered inert. The polis is not a civically-engaged Demos; it is little more than a constantly amused AUDIENCE. Hence the point is not to SERVE the citizenry; it is to PLACATE the citizenry.

Meanwhile, shorn of their support from the Left, corporate Democrats can migrate to the place where they truly belong: in cahoots with their brethren in the G.O.P. Let the Democratic party disintegrate. And with a truly Progressive party, there will be no more need for a Green party or a Working Families party or a party for democratic socialists. There would be no more need for a black caucus or Latino caucus…or, for that matter, ANY caucus that feels the need to exist simply to uphold civil rights for this or that marginalized community. We have learned over and over again, mere caucusing is not enough in an environment where gargantuan party machines have all the leverage.

As things now stand, the Democratic party is a place for those who are not racist or homophobic or misogynistic, yet are nevertheless fiscally conservative and kow-tow to corporate interests at every turn. It is no surprise, then, that party managers routinely neglect to put forth bold policies that would ACTUALLY help the people they purport to represent. If you want no substantive change yet enjoy tweaking things at the fringes, and you sometimes like to pay lip-service to Progressive ideals, then the Democratic party is a marvelous fit. But is that where our highest aspirations should end? When the mildly liberal Barack Obama is considered magnificently Progressive, we might suspect that something is amiss.

There must be a political party that is dedicated to healthcare as a public service; to a Green New Deal; to publicly-funded elections; to the elimination of the revolving door between public office and lucrative corporate gigs; to dismantling the obscenely bloated military-industrial complex; to truly progressive taxation; to reigning in of the financial services industry; and to implementing DEMAND-side economic policy–which means robust investment in basic public infrastructure and in vital social services. There must be a party dedicated to upholding human rights

around the world–from Palestine and Kurdistan to Xin-jiang and Tibet. It would give voice to these positions, forcing the corporate (a.k.a. “mainstream”) media to pay attention in a way that the Democratic party never would.

No more pandering to corporate interests, to religious fundamentalists, to the gun lobby, to Agri-business, to Wall Street, or to those who want to privatize everything under the sun. It’s high time we bring an end to money in politics; and stymie the more flagrant dysfunctions of unbridled capitalism. After all, the systemic dysfunction we endure comes primarily from conflicts-of-interest–a racket that is enabled by a consecrated system of legalized graft. The country desperately needs a party that is categorically immune to this on-going political sham.

The CSP will unabashedly promote Progressive ideals. It will champion Progressive causes irrespective of how politically inconvenient that might be. It will unwaveringly support Progressive candidates, and ONLY Progressive candidates, regardless of how much push-back it gets. It will do so consistently and effectively; and without apologizing. It will be dauntless rather than craven. It will not shy away from insolence. It will not cower and dissemble in the face of corporate power.

The CSP won’t railroad people like Al Franken out of Congress. It won’t deride the likes of Zephyr Teachout, Pramila Jayapal, Ro Khanna, Kshama Sawant, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, Ayanna Pressley, Cristina Tzintzun Ramirez, Jessica Cisneros, Cori Bush, Mckayla Wilkes, Shahid Buttar, Marie Newman, Jamaal Bowman, Mike Gravel, Kshama Sawant, Shahid Buttar, Alexandra Rojas, Jamie Raskin, Charles Booker, Marquita Bradshaw, or former Georgia Representative, Cynthia Ann McKinney…while singing the praises of Henry Kissinger. It will be more aligned with Progressive advisors like Nina Turner, Briahna Joy Gray, Nazita LaJevardi, and David Sirota; or Progressive commentators like Kyle Kulinsky, Krystal Ball, and Cenk Uygur. It will honor the likes of Bernie Sanders rather than deride him at every turn. In other words: It will be a party for GENUINE PROGRESSIVES.

It won’t castigate those who eschew AIPAC and participate in BDS. It won’t staff cabinets with lackeys from the boardroom of Goldman Sachs. Instead, it will harken back to 20th-century Progressives like, say, Iowa’s Henry Wallace. It will honor the vision of Martin Luther King Jr. and Noam Chomsky…and Naomi Klein and Chris Hedges. It will operate in the tradition of, say, Ralph Nader rather than engage in the “triangulation” of Bill / Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden.

The (rare) victory of Progressive Illinois congresswoman, Marie Newman in March 2020 was–unfortunately–an anomaly. She won not BECAUSE OF the Democratic machine, but IN SPITE OF it. That fact alone speaks volumes. In a truly Progressive party, she would be the norm, not the occasional felicitous aberration.

A truly Progressive party would not be off-putting to wayward swing-voters in America's hinterland in the way that the Democratic party so often is. It would not chastise the non-urbane for not being politically correct; or turn its nose up at the working class for being insufficiently "woke"…or make the white working class feel guilty for not having been born into the right demographic. The credibility of any given figure will be determined exclusively by their policy positions.

Progressives don't need a party that will be congenial and deferential; they need a party that will be irascible and indomitable. Propriety is no surrogate for probity. Progressives need a party that will go to bat for them; and play hardball. But a party truly dedicated to the commonweal will not just go to bat for its supporters; it will go to bat for the rank and file: for everyone who is not a plutocrat.

It's high time to re-envision Progressivism in the vain of Thomas Paine, Eleanor Roosevelt, Henry Wallace, Bayard Rustin, Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern, and Bernie Sanders. A genuinely Progressive party would operate in the tradition of Robert La Follette of Wisconsin and Fiorello La Guardia of New York City (or, looking to England: the legacy of Ralph Miliband and Stuart Hall).

Are there formidable barriers-to-entry for a third party? Of course. It is well-known that even the stupendously popular Teddy Roosevelt couldn't achieve the feat with the Bull Moose party. But that was over a century ago. It's the 21st century now; and the possibilities are limited solely by the magnitude of our determination. As the older generation passes on, a new generation is rising. We can only be thwarted by the dearth of our own resolve.

The American political system is broken, but it doesn't need to be. In 2024, the presidential election needs to have a viable THIRD choice: a non-right-wing alternative that is impossible for the Establishment to ignore. Then, and ONLY then, will Progressives hold sway in the halls of power. 2020 was not a death-knell; it was a wake-up call.