

Donald Trump's Greatest Allies Are the Liberal Elites

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The liberal elites, who bear significant responsibility for the death of our democracy, now hold themselves up as the saviors of the republic. They have embarked, despite their own corruption and their complicity in [neoliberalism](#) and the crimes of empire, on a self-righteous moral crusade to topple Donald Trump. It is quite a show. They attack Trump's "lies," denounce executive orders such as his travel ban as un-American and blame Trump's election on Russia or FBI Director James Comey rather than the failed neoliberal policies they themselves advanced.

Where was this moral outrage when our privacy was taken from us by the security and surveillance state, the criminals on Wall Street were bailed out, we were stripped of our civil liberties and 2.3 million men and women were packed into our prisons, most of them poor people of color? Why did they not thunder with indignation as money replaced the vote and elected officials and corporate lobbyists instituted our system of legalized bribery? Where were the impassioned critiques of the absurd idea of allowing a nation to be governed by the dictates of corporations, banks and hedge fund managers? Why did they cater to the foibles and utterings of fellow elites, all the while blacklisting critics of the corporate state and ignoring the misery of the poor and the working class? Where was their moral righteousness when the United States committed war crimes in the Middle East and our militarized police carried out murderous rampages? What the liberal elites do now is not moral. It is self-exaltation disguised as piety. It is part of the carnival act.

The liberal class, ranging from Hollywood and the Democratic leadership to The New York Times and CNN, refuses to acknowledge that it sold the Democratic Party to corporate bidders; collaborated in the evisceration of our civil liberties; helped destroy programs such as welfare, orchestrate the job-killing North American Free Trade Agreement and Trans-Pacific Partnership deal, wage endless war, debase our public institutions including the press and build the world's largest prison system.

"The truth is hard to find. The truth is hard to know. The truth is more important than ever," reads a television ad for The New York Times. What the paper fails to add is that the hardest place to find the truth about the forces affecting the life of the average American and the truth about empire is in The New York Times itself. News organizations, from the Times to the tawdry forms of entertainment masquerading as news on television, have rendered most people and their concerns invisible. Liberal institutions, especially the press, function, as the journalist and author Matt Taibbi says, as "the guardians" of the neoliberal and imperial orthodoxy.

It is the job of the guardians of orthodoxy to plaster over the brutal reality and cruelty of

neoliberalism and empire with a patina of civility or entertainment. They pay homage to a nonexistent democracy and nonexistent American virtues. The elites, who live in enclaves of privilege in cities such as New York, Washington and San Francisco, scold an enraged population. They tell those they dismiss as inferiors to calm down, be reasonable and patient and trust in the goodness of the old ruling class and the American system. African-Americans have heard this kind of cant preached by the white ruling class for a couple of centuries.

Because the system works for the elites, and because the elites interact only with other elites, they are mystified about the revolt rising up from the decayed cities they fly over in the middle of the country. They think they can stuff this inexplicable rage back in the box. They continue to offer up absurd solutions to deindustrialization and despair, such as [Thomas Friedman's endorsement](#) of "a culture of entrepreneurship" and "an ethic of pluralism." These kinds of bromides are advertising jingles. They bear no more connection to reality than Trump promising to make America great again.

I walked into the Harvard Club in New York City after midnight on election night. The well-heeled New York elites stood, their mouths agape, looking up at the television screens in the oak-paneled bar while wearing their Clinton campaign straw hats. They could not speak. They were in shock. The system they funded to prevent anyone from outside their circle, Republican or Democrat, from achieving the presidency had inexplicably collapsed.

Taibbi, when I interviewed him in New York, said political power in our corporate state is controlled by "a tripartite system." "You have to have the assent of the press, the donor class, and one of the two [major] political parties to get in," said Taibbi, author of "[Insane Clown President](#): Dispatches From the 2016 Circus."

"It's an exclusive club. It's like a membership system. They all have to agree and confer their blessing on the candidate. Trump somehow managed to get past all three of those obstacles. And he did it essentially by putting all of them on trial. He put the press on trial and villainized them with the public. I think it was a brilliant masterstroke that nobody saw coming. But it wouldn't have been possible if their unpopularity hadn't been building for years and years and years."

"It's a kind of [Stockholm syndrome](#)," he said of the press.

"The reporters, candidates, and candidates' aides are all thrown together. They're stuck in the same environment with each other day after day, month after month. After a while, they start to unconsciously adopt each other's values. Then they start to live in the same neighborhoods. They go to the same parties. Then it becomes a year-after-year kind of thing. Then after that, they're the same people. It's a total perversion of what's supposed to happen. We're [the press] supposed to be on the outside, not identifying with these people. But now, it's a club. Journalists enjoy the experience of being close to power."

At first the press, especially the television press, could not get enough of Trump. He received [23 times the coverage](#) of Sen. Bernie Sanders, who spoke about things that do not make for great television—inequality and corporate corruption. Trump brought in the advertising dollars. 2016 was [CNN's most profitable year](#). Then, alarmed at Trump's

ascendancy, the press set out to destroy him. The press applied its Darth Vader Force choke. It did not work. They tried it again and again. The Force had deserted them.

“When a candidate makes a mistake and steps in it—[2004 presidential hopeful] Howard Dean is the classic example, [the scream](#)—then they [TV news shows] replay it every hour, 100 times a day,” Taibbi said.

“The critical part is that Dean was already in violation leading up to that moment. He was not the right person because he was anti-war. He got his donations from the wrong people. He makes the mistake. The press pig-piles on the person just instinctively. All this negative attention. The candidate freaks out and apologizes. He disappears for a while. He tries to soldier on. The next thing you know, there’s a Page 16 story: Candidate exits the race. It’s a script. But it didn’t work with Trump.”

The press, like the Democratic Party, is an appendage of the consumer society. These institutions are not about politics or news. They are about imparting an experience. They create political personalities, marketed as celebrities, to make us feel good about candidates. These manufactured emotions, the product of the dark arts of the public relations industry, determine how we vote. Issues and policies are irrelevant. It is marketing and entertainment. Trump is a skillful marketer of his fictitious self.

“When you work in that environment long enough you unconsciously become an agent for whatever that commercial strategy is,” Taibbi said of the press in our corporate-run political theater.

“What we call right-wing and liberal media in this country are really just two different strategies of the same kind of nihilistic lizard-brain sensationalism,” Taibbi wrote in “Insane Clown President.” “The ideal CNN story is a baby down a well, while the ideal Fox story is probably a baby thrown down a well by a Muslim terrorist or an [ACORN](#) activist. Both companies offer the same service, it’s just that the Fox version is a little kinkier.”

The pseudo-events on television displace reality. This is how a reality star becomes president. Sixty million people think Trump’s manufactured persona—the predominate tycoon—on “The Apprentice” is real. Our perception of the truth is determined by what appears on the screen. If an event is never broadcast, it somehow never happened. The electronic image is the word of God. The corporate state controls most of what is seen and heard on television, what ideas and events can be discussed in the mainstream media and what orthodoxies, including neoliberalism and the war industry, must never be questioned. We suffer an intellectual tyranny as pervasive as that imposed by fascism and communism. Trump, who is as gullible as the most habitual television viewer, exemplifies our cultural and political death. He is no more “authentic” than Hillary Clinton. But he appears on our screens as more authentic because he is more deeply embedded in the medium that controls our thoughts. He is what is vomited up from the perverted zeitgeist of a nation entranced and dominated by electronic hallucinations.

“People have this idea that Trump has no connection with the ‘common man,’ but he does,” Taibbi said. “He has exactly the same media habits that ordinary people have. He believes the stuff that he reads on the internet and watches on television implicitly and unquestioningly. That is what gives him that connection with people. He thinks like they do. He has the same habits they

have. A classic example is the thing with the so-called 3 million [illegal ... voters](#). He reads that, probably in an [Infowars](#) story, it's policy like two minutes later. He doesn't go through the process of asking himself if it's untrue. He's a perfect consumer in that respect. That's what makes him so dangerous."

"[George W.] Bush was child's play compared to what we're dealing with now," Taibbi said. "Bush was a puppet. He was a vehicle for a very familiar form of right-wing capitalist politics. This Trump thing is totally different. Trump really is the actual engine behind this phenomenon during the entire campaign. There were no people behind the man, I don't think. The presidential campaign has no relation to the issue of whether or not you can govern effectively. The campaign is a television show. The values that decide whether a person becomes a candidate or can't become a candidate are more or less arbitrary. It has a lot to do with the commercial value of the candidate. You can't have an unentertaining candidate because the press needs to make money. They will unconsciously gravitate towards someone who does what Trump does, which is get [website] hits and eyeballs and ratings."

Trump's popularity increased the more the establishment condemned him. This would have sent a profound and disturbing message to anyone not as clueless as our liberal elites. They did not get it. They thought they could trot out Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and Hollywood celebrities and get the rubes to fall for their routine one more time. They thought the country would again obey.

The liberal class, by embracing neoliberalism and refusing to challenge the imperial wars, empowered the economic and political structures that destroyed our democracy and gave rise to Trump. Multiculturalism, when it means, to use the words of [Cornel West](#), nothing more than having a president who is a "black mascot for Wall Street," betrays the disenfranchised and endows the ruling elites with a false progressivism, a false humanism and a false inclusiveness.

Hillary and Bill Clinton, Joe Biden and the current Democratic Party leadership designed and built the massive system of imprisonment, essentially ended welfare, expanded our wars and pushed through NAFTA. They destroyed the lives of hundreds of thousands of poor and working-class families and are responsible for the mounds of corpses in the Middle East. Yet these liberal elites speak as if they are champions of racial and economic justice. They appear in choreographed pseudo-events to demonstrate a faux compassion. Now they have been exposed as fakes.

A genuine populism, one defined and often articulated by Bernie Sanders, could sweep the Democratic Party back into power. Regulating Wall Street, publicly financing campaigns, forgiving student debt, demanding universal health care, bailing out homeowners victimized by the banks, ending the wars in the Middle East, instituting a jobs program to repair our decaying infrastructure, dismantling the prison system, restoring the rule of law on the streets of our cities, making college education free and protecting programs such as Social Security would see election victory after election victory.

But this will never happen within the Democratic Party. It refuses to prohibit corporate money. The party elites know that if corporate money disappears, so do they. The party's hierarchy, pressured by Obama and the Clintons, elevated Tom Perez over Keith Ellison—whom a major donor to the party, Haim Saban, [condemns as an "anti-Semite"](#) because of Ellison's criticism of the Israeli government—to head the Democratic National Committee. They will press forward repeating the same silly slogans and trying to

use the now ineffective Force choke on their political enemies. They may have lost control of the Congress and the White House and hold only 16 governorships and majorities in only 31 of the states' 99 legislative chambers, but they are incapable of offering any meaningful alternative to neoliberalism and empire. They are devoid of a vision. They can only moralize. They will continue to atrophy and enable the consolidation of an American fascism.

[Fyodor Dostoevsky](#) excoriated Russia's bankrupt liberal class at the end of the 19th century. Russian liberals mouthed values they did not defend. Their stated ideals bore no relationship to their actions. They were filled with a suffocating narcissism.

In "Notes From Underground," Dostoevsky lampooned the defeated dreamers of the liberal class, those who preached goodness but lived in moral squalor. These defeated dreamers denounced the social and cultural depravity they had largely created. They had an open disdain for the uneducated, the poor, the working class, the lesser breeds beneath them. And in the end they ushered in a moral nihilism to empower a dangerous class of demagogues, killers and fools.

"I never even managed to become anything: neither wicked nor good, neither a scoundrel nor an honest man, neither a hero nor an insect," the Underground Man wrote.

"And now I am living out my life in my corner, taunting myself with the spiteful and utterly futile consolation that it is even impossible for an intelligent man seriously to become anything, and only fools become something. Yes, sir, an intelligent man of the nineteenth century must be and is morally obliged to be primarily a characterless being; and a man of character, an active figure—primarily a limited being."

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