

Russia-gate Flops as Democrats' Golden Ticket

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The national Democratic Party and many liberals have bet heavily on the Russia-gate investigation as a way to oust President Trump from office and to catapult Democrats to victories this year and in 2018, but the gamble appears not to be paying off.

The Democrats' disappointing loss in a special election to fill a congressional seat in an affluent Atlanta suburb is just the latest indication that the strategy of demonizing Trump and blaming Russia for Hillary Clinton's 2016 defeat may not be the golden ticket that some Democrats had hoped.

Though it's still early to draw conclusive lessons from Karen Handel's victory over Jon Ossoff – despite his raising \$25 million – one lesson may be that a Middle America backlash is forming against the over-the-top quality of the Trump-accusations and the Russia-bashing, with Republicans rallying against the image of Official Washington's “deep state” collaborating with Democrats and the mainstream news media to reverse a presidential election.



A sign at the Women's March on Washington points out that the demonstration attracted a larger crowd than Donald Trump's inauguration. Jan. 21, 2017. (Photo: Chelsea Gilmour)

Indeed, the Democrats may be digging a deeper hole for themselves in terms of reaching out to white working-class voters who abandoned the party in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin to put Trump over the top in the Electoral College even though Clinton's landslide win in California gave her almost three million more votes nationwide.

Clinton's popular-vote plurality and the #Resistance, which manifested itself in massive protests against Trump's presidency, gave hope to the Democrats that they didn't need to undertake a serious self-examination into why the party is in decline across the nation's heartland. Instead, they decided to stoke the hysteria over alleged Russian “meddling” in the election as the short-cut to bring down Trump and his populist movement.

A Party of Snobs?

From conversations that I've had with some Trump voters in recent weeks, I was struck by

how they viewed the Democratic Party as snobbish, elitist and looking down its nose at “average Americans.” And in conversations with some Clinton voters, I found confirmation for that view in the open disdain that the Clinton backers expressed toward the stupidity of anyone who voted for Trump. In other words, the Trump voters were not wrong to feel “dissed.”

It seems the Republicans – and Trump in particular – have done a better job in presenting themselves to these Middle Americans as respecting their opinions and representing their fears, even though the policies being pushed by Trump and the GOP still favor the rich and will do little good – and significant harm – to the middle and working classes.

By contrast, many of Hillary Clinton’s domestic proposals might well have benefited average Americans but she alienated many of them by telling a group of her supporters that half of Trump’s backers belonged in a “basket of deplorables.” Although she later reduced the percentage, she had committed a cardinal political sin: she had put the liberal disdain for millions of Americans into words – and easily remembered words at that.



Hillary Clinton at the Code 2017 conference
on May 31, 2017. (Source: Consortiumnews)

By insisting that Hillary Clinton be the Democratic nominee – after leftist populist Bernie Sanders was pushed aside – the party also ignored the fact that many Americans, including many Democrats, viewed Clinton as the perfectly imperfect candidate for an anti-Establishment year with many Americans still fuming over the Wall Street bailouts and amid the growing sense that the system was rigged for the well-connected and against the average guy or gal.

In the face of those sentiments, the Democrats nominated a candidate who personified how a relatively small number of lucky Americans can play the system and make tons of money while the masses have seen their dreams crushed and their bank accounts drained. And Clinton apparently still hasn’t learned that lesson.

Citing Women’s Rights

Last month, when asked why she accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars for speaking to Goldman Sachs, Clinton [rationalized her greed](#) as a women’s rights issue, saying:

“you know, men got paid for the speeches they made. I got paid for the speeches I made.”

Her excuse captured much of what has gone wrong with the Democratic Party as it moved from its working-class roots and New Deal traditions to becoming a party that places “identity politics” ahead of a duty to fight for the common men and women of America.

Demonstrating her political cluelessness, Clinton used the serious issue of women not getting fair treatment in the workplace to justify taking her turn at the Wall Street money trough, gobbling up in one half-hour speech what it would take many American families a decade to earn.

While it's a bit unfair to personalize the Democratic Party's problems, Hillary and Bill Clinton have come to represent how the party is viewed by many Americans. Instead of the FDR Democrats, we have the Davos Democrats, the Wall Street Democrats, the Hollywood Democrats, the Silicon Valley Democrats, and now increasingly the Military-Industrial Complex Democrats.

To many Americans struggling to make ends meet, the national Democrats seem committed to the interests of the worldwide elites: global trade, financialization of the economy, robotization of the workplace, and endless war against endless enemies.

Now, the national Democrats are clambering onto the bandwagon for a costly and dangerous New Cold War with nuclear-armed Russia. Indeed, it is hard to distinguish their foreign policy from that of neoconservatives, although these Democrats view themselves as liberal interventionists citing humanitarian impulses to justify the endless slaughter.

Earlier this year, a Washington Post/ABC News poll found only 28 percent of Americans saying that the Democrats were "in touch with the concerns of most people" – an astounding result given the Democrats' long tradition as the party of the American working class and the party's post-Vietnam War reputation as favoring butter over guns.

Yet rather than rethink the recent policies, the Democrats prefer to fantasize about impeaching President Trump and continuing a blame-game about who – other than Hillary Clinton, her campaign and the Democratic National Committee – is responsible for Trump's election. Of course, it's the Russians, Russians, Russians!

A Problem's Deep Roots

Without doubt, some of the party's problems have deep roots that correspond to the shrinking of the labor movement since the 1970s and the growing reliance on big-money donors to finance expensive television-ad-driven campaigns. Over the years, the Democrats also got pounded for being "weak" on national security.

Further, faced with Republican "weaponization" of attack ads in the 1980s, many old-time Democrats lost out to the Reagan Revolution, clearing the way for a new breed of Democrats who realized that they could compete for a slice of the big money by cultivating the emerging coastal elites: Wall Street, Silicon Valley, Hollywood and even elements of the National Security State.



President Bill Clinton, First Lady Hillary Clinton and daughter Chelsea parade down

Pennsylvania Avenue on Inauguration Day,
Jan. 20, 1997. (White House photo)

By the 1990s, President Bill Clinton and the Democratic Leadership Council defined this New Democrat, politicians who reflected the interests of well-heeled coastal elites, especially on free trade; streamlined financial regulations; commitment to technology; and an activist foreign policy built around spreading “liberal values” across the globe.

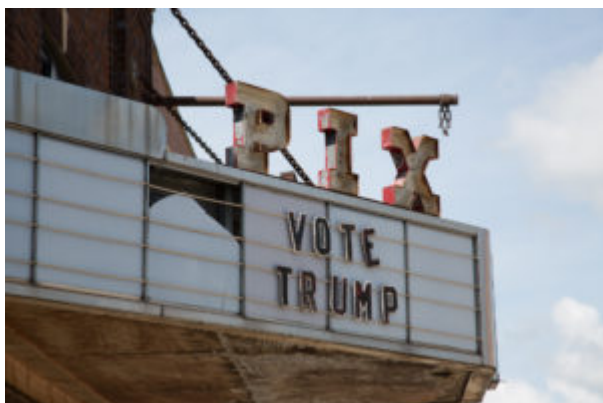
Mixed in was a commitment to the rights of various identity groups, a worthy goal although this tolerance paradoxically contributed to a new form of prejudice among some liberals who came to view many white working-class people as fat, stupid and bigoted, society’s “losers.”

So, while President Clinton hobnobbed with the modern economy’s “winners” – with sleepovers in the Lincoln bedroom and parties in the Hamptons – much of Middle America felt neglected if not disdained. The “losers” were left to rot in “flyover America” with towns and cities that had lost their manufacturing base and, with it, their vitality and even their purpose for existing.

Republican Fraud

It wasn’t as if the Republicans were offering anything better. True, they were more comfortable talking to these “forgotten Americans” – advocating “gun rights” and “traditional values” and playing on white resentments over racial integration and civil rights – but, in office, the Republicans aggressively favored the interests of the rich, cutting their taxes and slashing regulations even more than the Democrats.

The Republicans paid lip service to the struggling blue-collar workers but control of GOP policies was left in the hands of corporations and their lobbyists.



The run-down PIX Theatre sign reads “Vote Trump” on Main Street in Sleepy Eye, Minnesota. July 15, 2016. (Photo by Tony Webster Flickr)

Though the election of Barack Obama, the first African-American president, raised hopes that the nation might finally bind its deep racial wounds, it turned out to have a nearly opposite effect. Tea Party Republicans rallied many white working-class Americans to resist Obama and the hip urban future that he represented. They found an unlikely champion in real-estate mogul and reality TV star Donald Trump, who sensed how to tap into their fears

and anger with his demagogic appeals and false populism.

Meanwhile, the national Democrats were falling in love with data predicting that demographics would magically turn Republican red states blue. So the party blithely ignored the warning signs of a cataclysmic break with the Democrats' old-time base.

Despite all the data on opioid addiction and declining life expectancy among the white working class, Hillary Clinton was politically tone-deaf to the rumbles of discontent echoing across the Rust Belt. She assumed the traditionally Democratic white working-class precincts would stick with her and she tried to appeal to the "security moms" in typically Republican suburbs by touting her neoconservative foreign policy thinking. And she ran a relentlessly negative campaign against Trump while offering voters few positive reasons to vote for her.

Ignoring Reality

When her stunning loss became clear on Election Night – as the crude and unqualified Trump pocketed the electoral votes of Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin – the Democrats refused to recognize what the elections results were telling them, that they had lost touch with a still important voting bloc, working-class whites.

Rather than face these facts, the national Democrats – led by President Obama and his intelligence chiefs – decided on a different approach, to seek to reverse the election by blaming the result on the Russians. Obama, his intelligence chiefs and a collaborative mainstream media insisted without presenting any real evidence that the Russians had hacked into Democratic emails and released them to the devastating advantage of Trump, as if the minor controversies from leaked emails of the Democratic National Committee and Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta explained Trump's surprising victory.

As part of this strategy, any Trump link to Russia – no matter how inconsequential, whether from his businesses or through his advisers – became the focus of Woodward-and-Bernstein/Watergate-style investigations. The obvious goal was to impeach Trump and ride the wave of Trump-hating enthusiasm to a Democratic political revival.

In other words, there was no reason to look in the mirror and rethink how the Democratic Party might begin rebuilding its relationships with the white working-class, just hold hearings featuring Obama's intelligence chieftains and leak damaging Russia-gate stuff to the media.

But the result of this strategy has been to deepen the Democratic Party's reliance on the elites, particularly the self-reverential mavens of the mainstream media and the denizens of the so-called "deep state." From my conversations with Trump voters, they "get" what's going on, how the powers-that-be are trying to negate the 63 million Americans who voted for Trump by reversing a presidential election carried out under the U.S. constitutional process.

A Letter from 'Deplorable' Land

Some Trump supporters are even making this point publicly. Earlier this month, a "proud deplorable" named Kenton Woodhead from Brunswick, Ohio, wrote to The New York Times informing the "newspaper of record" that he and other "deplorables" were onto the scheme.

"I wanted to provide you with an unsophisticated synopsis of The New York Times and the media's quest for the implosion of Donald Trump's presidency from out here in the real world, in 'deplorable' country. ... Every time you and your brethren at other news organizations dream up a new scheme to get Mr. Trump, we out here in deplorable land increase our support for him. ...

"Regardless of what you dream up every day, we refuse to be sucked into your narrative. And even more humorously, there isn't anything you can do about it! And I love it that you are having the exact opposite effect on those of us you are trying to persuade to think otherwise.

"I mean it is seriously an enjoyable part of my day knowing you are failing. And badly! I haven't had this much fun watching the media stumble, bumble and fumble in years. I wonder what will happen on the day you wake up and realize how disconnected you've become."

So, despite Trump's narcissism and incompetence – and despite how his policies will surely hurt many of his working-class supporters – the national Democrats are further driving a wedge between themselves and this crucial voting bloc. By whipping up a New Cold War with Russia and hurling McCarthyistic slurs at people who won't join in the Russia-bashing, the Democratic Party's tactics also are alienating many peace voters who view both the Republicans and Democrats as warmongers of almost equal measures of guilt.



The crowd at President Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20, 2017. (Screen shot from Whitehouse.gov)

While it's certainly not my job to give advice to the Democrats – or any other political group – I can't help but thinking that this Russia-gate "scandal" is not only lacking in logic and evidence, but it doesn't even make any long-term political sense.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, America's Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

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