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The McCain and Bush Death Tours: Establishment Rituals in How to be a Proper Ruler



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The prolonged nationally televised commemorations of the racist, corporatist, and imperialist killers John McCain and George H.W. Bush – both privileged sons of the United States military industrial complex – have been nauseating for any decent and historically knowledgeable human being to behold. But the national rituals attached to the deaths of these monstrous butchers have also been very instructive in the age of Trump.

Following the nation's so-called mainstream media during the Trump years, you might almost think it has become anti-establishment and anti-authoritarian. Outside FOX and

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other right-wing outlets that function as de facto Trump state media, the reigning U.S. news and public affairs complex has been consistently skeptical, critical, and even mocking in its coverage of and commentary on Donald Trump.

What is wrong with Trump in the minds of the corporate and financial establishment that owns the corporate media oligopoly? Is it that he's a product and tool of a corporate and financial oligarchy so extreme that three absurdly rich people (Jeff Bezos, Warren Buffett and Bill Gates) now possess as much wealth between them as the bottom half of the nation – this while the upper tenth of the One Percent holds the same net worth as the bottom 90 percent?

Is it that he has helped feed a Pentagon System that eats up more than half the federal government's discretionary spending while tens of millions of U.S. children live below the federal government's notoriously inadequate poverty level?

Is it that the ruination of livable ecology has continued unabated (to say the least) under his watch?

Or that the nation remains savagely segregated and unequal along lines of class and race with no protest or counter-action from the White House under Trump?

No. Those are NOT the problems that the wealth and power elite and its media have with Trump. All those things were true of previous presidents, including both Bushes and the neoliberal Democrats Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. The major parties, the Democrats included, have signed off on record military budgets for Trump.

No, the main problem with Trump for the establishment and its corporate news empire is that he has not been properly cloaking the regressive and imperial American System in the false clothes of compassion, smarts, democracy, and "public service."

Recall that the silver-tongued Harvard Law star Obama was the "Empire's New Clothes." He gave the United States a professional class multi-cultural and pseudo-democratic image makeover the American ruling class desperately needed in the wake of George W. Bush's clumsy reign.

The uncouth and outwardly abusive, openly atavistic Trump is the opposite. The anti-intellectual orange monstrosity has been stripping the American system of its outward veneer of decency, democracy, and sophistication. The vulgar pussy-grabber yanks the elegant, fake-friendly, multilateral shroud off the avaricious national[ist] beast of class rule and Empire. The malignant mobster-like mogul exposes that malevolent beast in too much of its selfish, racist, oligarchic, and otherwise ugly nakedness for it to elicit love and admiration at home or abroad.

Man-Child Trump couldn't care less about the bigger profits and world-imperial system that made him into a billionaire plutocrat. He's all about one thing – himself.

Along the way, Bad Grandpa Trump has turned the White House into just another putrid and corrupt mechanism for the immediate enhancement of his own fortune and that of his family and has mucked up global trade and foreign policy.

The neo-Hamiltonian Robert Rubin-sponsored professional-class superstar Obama had the decency to wait until after leaving office to cash in on a presidency spent advancing the multinational corporate and financial agenda of Citigroup and Goldman Sachs.

The thuggish oligarch and showman Trump – a fan of authoritarian strongmen like Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, Rodrigo Duterte, Jar Bolsanaro, Mohammad bin-Salman (the vivisectionist Saudi Crown Prince), and even the “communist” monarch Kim Jong Un – is a giant embarrassment as well as a policy problem for the ruling class. The moronic uber-narcissist Trump is bad for business and public relations. He's bad for the nation's legitimacy, and that of its so-called elite- it's oligarchy, that is.

He's not a proper American ruler.

That's where the grand Orwellian, state television-like McCain and Bush41 commemorations have come in. To be sure, they would have occurred if Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders or Jeb Bush had been Collegiately Elected in 2016. With the obscene, tangerine-tinted ogre fouling the Oval Office with a rank stench beyond even the foul emissions of Richard Nixon and Andrew Johnson [1], the great history-liquidating send-offs afforded the “wonderful” departed “statesmen” have taken on a special role in the construction of ruling-class ideological hegemony. They have been grand moral fables on what it means to be a proper bourgeois ruler. Antonio Gramsci would have found them fascinating [2].

It has been educational to see the farcically “left” MSNBC team and their “liberal” CNN counterparts gush over the supposed grand virtues of pitiless capitalist warmongers like Mad Bomber McCain and George H. “What We Say Goes” Bush. The media functionaries are not anti-establishment or anti-authority at all, just anti-Trump, in accord with their commitment to the establishment. The purportedly portside telescreen chatterboxes are perfectly happy to whitewash the records of the two dead “heroes.” They dutifully venerate a president, Senator or other power elite figure [3]who knows how to be a proper ruler. They are willing to deftly delete from the historical record any number of sins on the part of top office-holders who play by the rules of appropriately dignified class rule.

Office-holders not like Trump, who just doesn't get it. It's not that he's some kind of working-class hero and anti-imperialist "peace president" and authentic man of the people – a truly moronic TrumpenLeft fantasy that has become shockingly widespread in online "left" circles of the Sputnik "geopolitics" variety. The "elite's" problem with Trump isn't that he's a "populist" or an ant-imperialist (he is, of course, neither of those). It's that he doesn't get the role U.S. presidents are assigned in the articulation of capitalist and imperialist hegemony. He doesn't understand his functional part in a capitalist state bigger than his own Twitter-addicted "stable genius" self.

Obama⁴⁴, Bush⁴¹, Bill Clinton⁴², and Jimmy Carter³⁹ all obediently understood their limited roles. They provided both substantive and symbolic service to the reigning institutional hierarchies and oppression structures. So did John McCain [4], who took his 2008 defeat in the same sort of humble way that Bush⁴¹ accepted his 1992 loss. So did the morons Ronald Reagan⁴⁰ and Shrubya⁴¹, in their own special and idiotic ways. (If they didn't fully grasp it all, they at least knew enough to let others who did get it steer them in the right hegemonic direction.)

Don't mistake the establishment's hatred of Trump with yours. The establishment is not wrong to loathe him. Neither are you, as you should– without forgetting that he is the product and epitome of an evil system – from the left [5]. Trump is a demented, racist, sexist and eco-cidal creeping-fascist fiend. (If you are on the portside and don't abhor and oppose him, then you are in dire need of a check-up from the neck-up). But, as I have said from the beginning, the ruling class's fear and hatred of Donald Trump is different from yours (crack-smoking TrumpenLefties exempted) and mine. We rightly see both him and his hypocritical establishment critics as symptoms and products of American empire, inequality, and eco-cide, incorporated. The establishment, by contrast, is fine with that regime but sees Trump as a dysfunctional office-holder who helps de-legitimize the system and empire they love and respect.

The trick is for us to force the removal of the tangerine totalitarian in a way that doesn't let the establishment re-legitimize both itself and the terrible system it upholds. Here we must remind people that the bipartisan corporate-imperial establishment itself put Trump in the White House. It will put something/someone worse – a real as opposed to a wannabe white Amerikaner strongman– in the future unless the neoliberal establishment is defeated by an authentic people's opposition movement and party.

Endnotes

1) The Twitter- and cable news-weaponized awfulness of Trump should not make us forget how batshit nutty things were with the drunken madman Nixon, the mentally deranged Reagan, and the buffoonish Dubya (who seriously thought that God told him to invade Iraq). I recently ran across this line on Reagan (and Bob Hope) in Studs Terkel's 1983 introduction to Nelson Algren, *Chicago: City on the Make (1951)*: "At a time where our values are unprecedentedly upside down [sound familiar? – P.S.] – when Bob Hope, a humorless multi-millionaire, is regarded as a funny man while a genuinely funny man, a tent show Toby [Ronald Reagan – P.S.] is regarded as our president – Algren may be remembered as...the gamin who saw through it all...."

2) An interesting and perceptive comment from the left journalist and historian Terry Thomas: "MSNBC/CNN...I don't watch them to get factual information. I also don't expect them to turn radical anytime soon. But I do think it's important to know what they are saying because they are providing information to millions of viewers, and these viewers tend to be more politically active than average (that's why they are watching). I used to watch some Fox as well, but that stuff is so offensive that I now just glance at their website to get their general point. It seems to me we need to know the contexts we are operating in, and unfortunately these are places where millions of people get their information and it contributes to shaping their view of the world. I see a lot of 'Under the circumstances, I don't understand why people don't rise up' posts on the Internet. Watching Maddow and Anderson Cooper helps explain why. I don't usually speculate about how past Marxists might operate today, but I think Gramsci would have been a regular viewer."

3) If you think the McCain and Bush41 funerals were nauseating, just wait until the epic imperial butchers Henry Kissinger and Dick Cheney die.

4) Curiously enough, McCain's death and funerals were probably more publicized and viewed than Bush 41's. McCain's death would have been a smaller deal than it was but for Trump's presence in the White House. The rolling McCain death tour got inflated as a more explicit opportunity for the establishment to stick it to Trump, who had an intense and ongoing feud with the dead Arizona Senator. McCain specifically crafted his commemoration as a repudiation of Trump, who he hated, and of course Trump wasn't even invited to the McCain funeral in Washington – the one where Bush43 warmed the hearts of MSNBC and CNN anchors by passing a bipartisan ruling class cough drop to Michelle Obama.

5) Assuming you have not fallen prey to TrumpenLeftism, which has replaced Trutherism as the predominant strain of moral and intellectual syphilis on the nation's portside. Perhaps I should add this: don't Left online TrumpenLeft nudniks falsely conflate your proper loathing of Trump with the establishment's loathing of Trump. They are, to repeat, two very different hates.