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Trump and False Consciousness

Pres. Donald Trump is a media magician, able to artfully distort and/or deny the factual “truth” of an event or news report that exposes his failings or falsehoods. He is currently playing his grand political fan dance over information revealed in the redacted Mueller report.

In late-March, his loyal-henchman, AG Bill Barr, first spun the hokum that the report found no collusion between Trump (and his team) and Russia in the 2016 election. Trump declared victory, proclaiming to all his “complete and total exoneration,” parading around the political ring with the glee of an aging and overweight prize-fighter over an unexpected big win.

As more and more people read the still-redacted version of the report, Trump’s claim at total exoneration is eroding. Political news outlets are digging in and finding disturbing falsehoods. [PolitiFacts](#) details eight incidents in which the Mueller report undermines Trump’s assertion. [CNN focuses](#) its analysis on two 2016 Russia-related meetings that Trump denied but Mueller’s investigation documented. And [The Washington Post](#) offers numerous revelations as to inconsistencies on Trump’s part. Still more revelations are likely to follow.

Denial is a critical part of Trump media magic. It’s the fairy dust he sprays about to distract and mislead those confronting him. Only a couple of months ago he played the same three-card monte shell game over the Border Wall.

“I wish people would read or listen to my words on the Border Wall. This was in no way a concession,” Trump Tweeted on January 25th following his signing a bill ending the 35-day U.S. government shut-down. “It was taking care of millions of people who were getting badly

hurt by the Shutdown with the understanding that in 21 days, if no deal is done, it's off to the races!"

Trump then went on, warning the nation like a little kid stamping his feet after a teacher found that he cheated on a test: "If we don't get a fair deal from Congress, the government will either shut down on February 15 again, or I will use the powers afforded to me under the laws and the Constitution of the United States to address this emergency." As if waking from a trance, he exclaimed, "We will have great security."

It's now almost three months after Trump's Border War tweet. Remember the Wall, his major campaign promise, what happened to it? In June or July, will people be asking the same question about the Mueller report?

Freud understood denial as a psychological process of rejection, a defense mechanism. Denial is one of a number of defenses the "ego" uses against internal feelings perceived as unacceptable. The primary unacceptable feelings involve sexual or aggressive desires, especially desires directed by a child toward its parents. Self-consciousness employs denial to avoid recognizing its own truth and can function throughout a person's entire life.

Many people, when presented with an unacceptable fact, will insist that it is not true despite the evidence. Such a practice is like – in the postmodern world – a person still believing the world is flat. Or, as the popular expression goes, "Da-Nile is not only a river in Egypt." Trump embodies this proclivity.

Trump is president and denier-in-chief, a walking Da-Nile. He probably looks in the mirror and sees not an overweight, out-of-shape aging hustler but a fit, sexy, macho man embodying his full masculine potency.

The tango between Trump and Bell over the pre-release of the redacted Mueller report was brilliantly executed. Together, they turned what could likely have been major revelations about Trump's unfitness for office into a publicity victory.

This is not dissimilar to how Trump tried to play the Border Wall shut down. However, Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and the House Democrats captured the high-ground and defeated his principle campaign promise, "The Wall." Worse still, Pelosi not only stood-up to Mr. Macho, but as a woman with power – politically speaking – emasculated him. The false bluster, false *machismo*, that characterized his career as a real-estate con man and host of a popular, if pathetic, TV show, *The Apprentice*, was finally exposed for what it always was, a hollow posture.

[PolitiFact](#) awarded Trump the “Lie of the Year” trophy for 2015 and 2017. Assessing 644 statements or assertions that he made, it found that 15 percent were true/mostly true, 35 percent were half true/mostly false and 49 percent were false or “pants on fire”.

[The Washington Post](#) reported that, based on data from The Fact Checker, Trump made 8,158 false or misleading claims in his first two years in office. And the Canadian paper, [The Star](#), reports that he made 78 false claims in the first week of 2019.

Among the innumerable denials that define Trump’s first two years in office, a few suggest just how deceitful he can be. These denials include: the comical, denying paying Stormy Daniels \$130,000; the malevolent, denying Saudi Arabia’s Mohammed bin Salman was responsible for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi; and the possibly criminal, denying that 3,000 people died in Puerto Rico as a result of Hurricane Maria.

Trump has raised denial to an historical new level. It functions both as a psychopathological symptom of a serious troubled man (i.e., abusive stud) and an ideological means to deny reality (i.e., false news). Combined, these two dimensions of denial foster arrogance and bluster. With Trump, denial has been raised from a psychological condition to a social category, false consciousness.

The concept of “false consciousness” was initially conceived by Marx but named by Engels. It is central to Marxist and critical-theory thought that postulates its purpose is to obscure — and justify! — capitalist social relations of dominance and oppression. False consciousness is inculcated by religion, education, popular culture, the media and political and economic institutions. It falsely conflates the ruler’s self-interests as the interests of the ruled. For Marx, revolutionary social crisis can expose the tyranny of false consciousness.

Trump’s false statements are but one expression of good-old American Da-Nile. Much of the popular media presents denial like a game of pick-your-poison — then drink the Cool-Aid. More troubling, denial bespeaks the ongoing battle over popular consciousness. It is a critical aspect of the struggle for political power, of who knows, and who rules and who is ruled.

Denial defines much of American consciousness whether considering issues of racism or inequality, climate change, evolution or vaccines. Last year [Time](#) magazine reported that 42 percent of Americans believed in ghosts, 41 percent in extrasensory perception, the moon landings were faked and 20 percent that there’s a link between vaccines and autism.

[Gallup reports](#) that in the three decades between 1982 and 2014, four in 10 Americans continue to believe that God created humans in their present form 10,000 years ago and,

scarier still, half of Americans believe humans evolved but that God guided the evolutionary process.

Trump's denials reflect his pathetic sense of self-hood and his shallow political understanding. Sadly, they embody the false consciousness shared by too many Americans.

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