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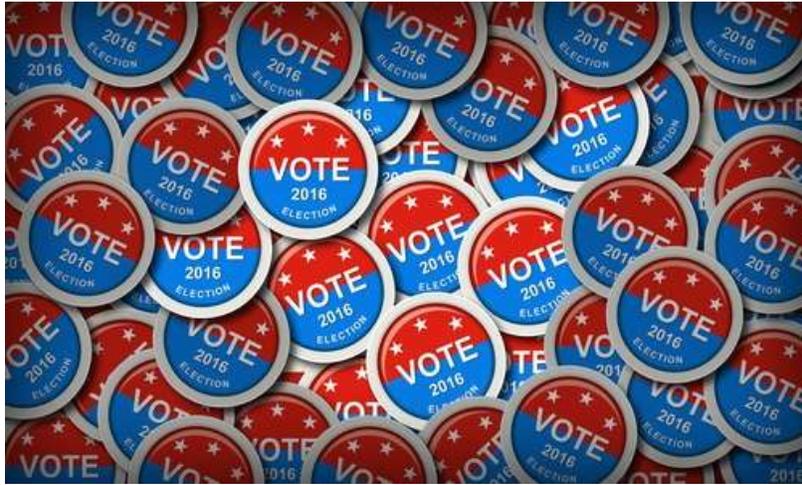
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The US Election: an Exercise in Mendacity

By Gary Leupp
September 6, 2016



What's that smell in this room? Didn't you notice it, Brick? Didn't you notice a powerful and obnoxious odor of mendacity in this room?... There ain't nothin' more powerful than the odor of mendacity... You can smell it. It smells like death.

— Big Daddy to son Brick in Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Big Daddy might have been talking about the current U.S. presidential election, which currently wraps the nation in a putrid bubble that can be smelled around the planet. To call it a democratic process would surely be mendacious.

Leave aside the fact that bourgeois elections are generally structured in such a way as to screw over the 99%. Polls during the primaries consistently indicated that Bernie Sanders led either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump in voter support. But devious rules and manipulations, and the now-revealed skewing of the primary process by the DNC, and the solid backing of the news networks deliberately downplaying Clinton's negatives while belittling Sanders, delivered the convention vote to the former secretary of state.

Meanwhile Trump became Republican nominee because the mainstream media for months followed a strategy of simultaneously treating his candidacy as a joke but then cutting to coverage of his every utterance (as "breaking news") even though he just repeated his same old tired, vapid, solipsistic rant that was anything but news. At the same time, they ignored Sanders' speeches, or at least failed to convey their content, as reporters merely covered Sanders events as curious gatherings of enthusiastic youth. In that way Trump was able to reach his base; pick off, one by one, his GOP rivals; and gradually win polite treatment as a respectable candidate.

This was not a case of Wall Street pouring money into the candidate's coffers thus determining the outcome. (Look how little good Jeb Bush's war chest did him!) It was a case of the bourgeois media determining that the broadcast of Trump's flow-of-conscious narcissistic diatribes drew in viewers and of course sold the products advertised one out of every four minutes you watch TV. (Ultimately in this system the advertisers decide what constitutes "truth" on TV.)

We know that Hillary Clinton lied. She obviously did when she told Congress she had never forwarded emails marked classified from her personal email through her personal, unauthorized server. The FBI has made this very clear. While this particular sin is not a concern for me (I am perfectly happy when officials of mendacious governments reveal their dishonesty through lack of caution) it's a clear that the candidate is (as her rival charges) "crooked." And she didn't, as she told Congress, just have *one* cell phone; she had 13 while secretary of state and had her minions smash at least two with hammers for some reason. And she did email her daughter Chelsea the very day of the Benghazi attack in 2012 that the attackers were "an Al Queda-like group" (notice the misspelling) while the State Department was instructed to blame the attack on a mob enraged over a dumb Islamophobic Youtube video.

Trump on the other hand lies so continuously and naturally, making stuff up as he goes along, that his mendacity is truly unmeasurable. He has never recanted his claims that Obama was born in Kenya and did poorly at Harvard. (He now just tells CNN, "I'm not talking about that anymore.") The lie served its purpose in bringing Trump into Republican politics, helping to rally the racist base that propelled him to the party's nomination. So the purpose of the lie has been served. What talk about it anymore?) He tells us thousands of Muslims in New Jersey cheered the fall of the World Trade Center; that he knows Vladimir Putin "very well" and that the Russian leader has called him a "genius;" that he opposed the war on Iraq in 2003. Made-up statistics so roll from his tongue that fact-checkers weary of their refutation. Everybody knows

he doesn't care about facts. That is, for many of his fans, who like Karl Rove disdain the "reality-based community," part of his outsider appeal.

The Trump supporter thinks, what difference does it make if he makes up stories about Muslims? The Clinton supporter asks (with increasing indignation towards the questioner), what difference does it make if she lied about her emails, and about Benghazi, and got her party's nomination through the machinations of mendacious people like Debbie Wasserman Schultz?

Both say, look, we have a two-party system. *You have to choose one.*

In other words, so what that the whole system is soaked in shit? It's the best system in the *world*, damn it, so just wade through it and enjoy the stench for the duration.

The whole presidential race is a farce, but perhaps the most mendacious part of it is the alleged role of *Russia* in the process. Major newspapers run editorials blithely asserting with zero evidence that Trump is an "agent" (if maybe an unwitting one) of Putin. Clinton's key foreign policy speech the other day targeted Putin as the "godfather" of Europe's right-wing anti-migrant parties, a truly ridiculous proposition. The DNC, having been exposed by the leaked emails as an *undemocratic* operation from start to finish, has avoided discussion of the obvious corruption and—with astonishing success—gotten the entire mainstream media to blame Russia for the leak and to claim that Russia is trying to influence the U.S. elections.

Meanwhile the press daily, successfully, promotes the lie that Russia is threatening its neighbors, and invading Ukraine, while in fact the record of U.S. expansion and aggression since the end of the Cold War—Gulf War, 1991; strikes on Iraq, 1991-2003; NATO bombing of Bosnia, 1993-95; NATO bombing of Serbia, 1999; invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, 2001-present; invasion and occupation of Iraq, 2003-present; NATO destruction of Libya, 2011; intervention in Syria, 2011-present—so far exceeds the paltry Russian record of significant military actions since 1991 (the 6-day war with neighboring Georgia after the Georgian attack on South Ossetia, 2008 and the peaceful re-annexation of Crimea in 2014 after the U.S.-funded coup in Kiev) that any comparison is ludicrous. Yet everyday, by news directors' policy, the pot calls the kettle black.

Lies (in which Clinton was deeply complicit) led to the U.S.-led destruction of Iraq and Libya. Lies underlie U.S. policy on Syria. Some of the biggest liars in past efforts to hoodwink the people into supporting more war (Robert Kagan, Bill Kristol, Paul Wolfowitz) are backing Hillary, whose *Washington Post* Pinocchio count is "sky-high," for president.

In Tennessee Williams' play *Big Daddy* tells his son Brick, "I've lived with mendacity. Why can't you live with it? You've got to live with it. There's nothing to live with but mendacity."

We've got to live with the mendacity for awhile. But the silver lining of this mendacious election is that come November the U.S. will have its least popular, most discredited president ever. He or she will face mass, visceral opposition from day one. Youth who have organized around the Bernie banner against Wall Street will join with the Black Lives Matter movement and rally

against Hillary as she prepares for another Libya-type regime change war, or against Trump as he tries to implement his racist proposals.

The worst thing a system based on lies should have as its window-dressing a leader with mass support. We will not, thankfully, have one in the near future. Rather than a rigged election, we need *real* regime change.