

A New Politics in America - Part 8 - Hillary and the Donald

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Hillary—Establishment and Dynasty

The tremendous success of the Bernie Sanders campaign—in turning out tens of thousands to his rallies, getting millions to contribute to his campaign, and winning an impressive number of states and delegates—is primarily due to his clear message: his call for a progressive economic program to provide jobs, universal health care, and free higher education, as well as an end to the role of money in politics, and an insistence on an end to structural racism, in particular racist police violence. Yet there is also no doubt that many have turned to Sanders because they do not want the Democrats’ presidential candidate to be Hillary Clinton, whom they see as embodying all that they despise about the American political system.

Hillary Clinton entered the Democratic Presidential primary as the extreme front-runner. She was seen from the beginning as the Democratic establishment’s candidate with all of the credentials one could ask for: former First Lady, former Senator, former Secretary of State. Wall Street provided her with tens of millions for her campaign war chest, and she had connections to the entire Democratic Party organization, to its think-tanks, to its Madison Avenue advertising firms, and to its loyal labor unions, Black and Latino civil rights and women’s organizations that lend credence to candidates and get out the vote on election day. Though she had been surprised and defeated by Barack Obama in 2008, this time, she thought and virtually everyone else thought, she would be a shoo-in.

Hillary, however, also had the Bill Clinton legacy to deal with, and that proved to be problematic, especially since she had been a full partner in the Clinton team since she and Bill married. So she has to bear responsibility for her husband’s attacks on teachers unions in Arkansas, for his “three strikes” and other destructive criminal justice policies, and for his welfare-to-work program that had a devastating impact on hundreds of thousands of women and children.[i] Throughout Bill Clinton’s political career, from Arkansas governor to President of the United States, Hillary had backed her husband’s policies 100 percent, and as a candidate she would have to either defend them or explain them away.

Then there is the problem of her international positions. Hillary Clinton’s foreign policy as Senator and Secretary of State had been hawkish, an advocate of regime change for nations in the Middle East, and personally responsible for the disastrous collapse of government and civil war in Libya following the overthrow of Gadhafi. She may have helped to organize and certainly worked to cover up the coup that overthrew then-Honduran President Manuel Zelaya in 2009.

She can also be credited with helping to bring to power in Haiti, through fraudulent elections, the pop singer-turned-candidate Michel Martelly, linked to Duvalier family gangsters. The Clintons' foundation, family, and friends also became involved in business deals in Haiti; Hillary's brother Tony Rodham, for example, became involved in a Haitian gold mine. If the Haitians remained poor, some of the Clinton clan and camp followers got rich building shopping centers and shabby housing.

Secretary of State Clinton's use of her own personal server for her emails and lies about that issue made her the center of both a House and an FBI investigation and led people to question her integrity. And well they should, though it goes far beyond her emails. Thanks to Secretary of State Clinton's work Libya, Honduras, and Haiti became political and social disasters.[ii] Clinton is a believer in the American empire, its economic interests and geopolitical commitments, and in the military might and bellicose behavior necessary to defend them.

Clinton's biggest political problem however, was herself. Many Americans rejected the idea of a political dynasty, whether another Bush or another Clinton. The American people were fed up with the Washington-Wall St. establishment, which she so clearly represented. And, even if they didn't all understand the role of the Democratic Leadership Council in designing the corporate and conservative Clinton politics, they knew they didn't like them.

People didn't like her assumption that she was entitled to the presidency, that it was her turn. Without a doubt the Republican campaign against Clinton, often mean and misogynistic, had had an impact, and some Americans both men and women still rejected the idea of a woman president, but that was not why most rejected her. Many Americans found Clinton—despite her occasional just-folks posture and sparkling smile—to be another Clinton but without the charm. People found her insincere, believed her to be a liar, didn't trust her.[iii]

The rejection of Clinton by a large group of current or former Democrats tended to many drive voters toward Sanders or Trump. Working class voters especially have both been attracted to Trump or Sanders both they attacked the international trade agreements that had been at the center of the Clintons' foreign and economic policy programs. With quite different plans, both Sander and Trump promised to create jobs and improve the lives of ordinary Americans. Their message mobilized voters who otherwise might have sat out the primary. As voters pulled away from the center and gravitated toward the poles of the political spectrum Hillary's support diminished. Some Democrats dislike Clinton so much that they contemplate voting for Trump should she be the nominee.[iv]

Clinton's success in winning several of the key primary elections and caucuses was due in large measure to the corporate money that funded her, the Black organizations that supported her, and the union officials who endorsed her and sent their members out to knock on doors and make phone calls. And, of course, Clinton's success was also due in large measure to the votes of many women who believed that her election would be a victory for women and feminism, much as Black voters had believed that Obama would be a victory for Black people and the civil rights movement.

The Trump

When the Republican Party primaries began there were nearly a dozen candidates competing in the debates, all of them very conservative.[v] Many expected the contest to be between, on the one hand, Republican establishment candidate Jeb Bush, son and brother of two former presidents, whose pockets were filled with corporate cash, and, on the other, one of the more extreme rightwing candidates backed by the religious right such as Ted Cruz. Billionaire businessman and TV reality show host Donald Trump was seen as an amusing sideshow spectacle.

Yet through the debates Trump, who had little support from the Republican Party and virtually no

on-the-ground campaign organization, emerged as the frontrunner. How to explain Trump's surprising success? The economic recessions from the 1970s to 2008, the changing demographic balance, and the decline of American economic and political weight in the world all contributed to the creation of contemporary American conservatism, as described earlier. While Cruz and most of the conservative candidates appealed to conservative principles in an attempt to mobilize the party's core conservative voters, Trump appealed to middle class and working class white angst and resentment against the political elite and against immigrants, Muslims and—without saying so explicitly—against Blacks.

Ted Cruz might well claim that history and his personal biography entitle him to the Republican nomination. The junior senator from Texas and candidate for the Republican nomination is virtually the embodiment of conservative developments since the 1960s. Cruz was born in Calgary, Alberta to middle class parents, his father a Cuban immigrant and his mother a native-born American from Delaware (making a Cruz a U.S. citizen). Both were computer programmers who worked for the oil industry. His father was also an Evangelical preacher and the young Ted became a born-again Christian and a Southern Baptist.^[vi] Educated in private and religious schools, already in high school Cruz had joined the Free Market Education Foundation of Houston and studied Milton Friedman. He went on to graduate from Princeton and Harvard Law School, and became a prize-winning debater. After Law School he became an editor of the Harvard Law Review and then a clerk to Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist.

As a lawyer in private practice he represented conservative causes: he was a lawyer for the National Rifle Association, he prepared testimony for the impeachment of President Bill Clinton and he represented Congressman (later Republican majority speaker) John Boehner. Cruz worked on the George W Bush campaign in 1999 and then became part of the Bush legal team in *Bush v. Gore*, the case that won Bush the presidency after the contested counting in the Florida election. As Texas Solicitor General and then once again in private practice he fought a number of cases, 70 of which went to the Supreme Court, and won a good number of them, including cases to stop hand-gun bans, to deny immigrant prisoners the right to see their national consuls, to allow Texas to carry out dubious electoral redistricting, and to protect drug companies that allegedly over-charged. Elected to the Senate in 2012 with loans via his wife from Goldman Sachs and Citibank and with backing from the Koch brothers' FreedomWorks and from the Club for Growth, Senator Cruz sponsored 25 bills to forward a variety of rightwing causes from repealing Obamacare to advancing the Keystone XL Pipeline. He fiercely attacked both President Obama and Republican senate majority leader Mitch McConnell and played a key role in the Republican shutdown of the government in 2013.

As this brief overview makes clear, Cruz—Evangelical Christian and rightwing economic conservative, trained in elite schools and financed by Goldman Sachs and the Koch brothers—represents the chemically pure version of the American right—and yet in the primaries he, like the dozen other Republican would-be presidential candidates, was overshadowed by Donald J. Trump. Why?

If Cruz had God on his side, Trump proved to be the candidate from Hell. His father Fred Trump, a successful and prosperous (\$200 million net worth) real estate developer, launched Donald into the world of New York business. Trump, who had studied at private schools and then because of behavior problems at a military school, went on to Fordham University and then the Wharton School where he studied estate business. He walked right out of graduate school into his father's real estate business and began to transform it.

Trump created The Trump Organization and threw himself into large scale and sometimes grandiose projects: office buildings, hotels, golf courses, and casinos both in the United States and abroad, and even the dubious Trump University, now being sued by former students. *Forbes* magazine in 2015

estimated his complicated finances at \$4 billion. Not happy with wealth alone, Trump became the producer and host of the NBC reality show *The Apprentice*, in which contestants competed for jobs and he “fired” those who failed. It was his role as boss in *The Apprentice* that made Trump’s reputation among tens of millions of Americans as he came into their homes to belittle and humiliate the failures whom he fired, people perhaps much like themselves.

Trump launched his first serious political venture in 2000 when, inspired by businessman Ross Perot’s independent bid for president in 1996 and wrestler Jesse Ventura’s 1998 victory in the Minnesota governor’s race, Trump put himself forward for the Reform Party presidential candidate. The Reform Party, as Trump himself acknowledged, had become a magnet for far rightwing ideologues, conspiracy theorists, anti-Semites, and white racists, and he left, saying, “I leave the Reform Party to David Duke, Pat Buchanan and Lenora Fulani. That is not company I wish to keep.” Though perhaps the real reason that he left is that he realized it would not be easy to defeat Pat Buchanan for the nomination and that even if he did the Reform Party was not a realistic vehicle for his political ambitions.

It was rather strange that he had gone there. He had been a Democrat from his youth in the 1960s until 1987, but then a Republican from 1987 to 1989; after the two-year spell in the Reform Party, he was a Democrat again from 2001 to 2009; then a Republican again from 2009 to 2011, then an independent in 2011, only finally returned to the Republican fold again in 2012. His financing of campaigns resembled his political affiliations. Throughout his adult life, like many wealthy people, Trump hedged his bets, making campaign contributions to both major parties, but until five years ago giving more to the Democrats—including Hillary Clinton. His largest beneficiary was New York’s Democratic Party Representative Charles Rangel, though he also gave a lot of money to Rahm Emanuel’s successful campaign to be Mayor of Chicago.[vii]

As early as the mid-1980s and throughout the 2000s Trump raised the idea that he might become a candidate either for New York governor or president. While he had once held liberal views[viii], as a contender for the Republican nomination in 2016, Trump redefined himself, adopting all of the standard conservative positions: opposition to abortion, opposition to regulation of firearms, support for “school choice” (code word for school vouchers and charter schools), opposition to birthright citizenship, and denial of human influence on climate change.

Most important, however,—and showing he had not wasted his time in the ultra-right and racist Reform Party, but had rather learned something there about demagoguery—Trump put forward in his outspoken and bombastic style an authoritarian, nationalist economic position aimed at winning white working class voters. Trump appealed to those who rejected politicians, their parties, and the political system and called to those—especially whites—who blamed the government, Blacks and Latinos for their problems. He argued that as a businessman he not part of the system and was beholden to no special interests; therefore he could bring economic prosperity to the United States as he had to his own real estate empire. He would do so, he said,—and this was at the heart of his program—by rejecting trade agreements that cost American jobs. But he also promised to build a wall between Mexico and the United States (he proposed to call it “The Great Wall of Trump”) to keep out the Mexicans whom he called “rapists.” To protect the new prosperous America he would also refuse to accept Muslim immigrants, since, as he said, “Islam hates us.” Trump, always a macho type, also engaged in misogynistic remarks, including suggestions that Fox News reporter Megyn Kelly who asked some hard questions “had blood coming out of her wherever.”

By late February 2016 Trump seemed to be flirting with fascism. He quoted Benito Mussolini, the founder of Italian fascism, and when asked about David Duke, a leader of the Ku Klux Klan, pretended not to know who he was and then took days to dissociate himself from Duke’s endorsement. At one rally he asked his followers to raise their arms and pledge to support him, a

moment that some likened to the Nazi salute to Hitler.[ix] Trump encouraged violent attacks on protestors who appeared at his rallies saying, “I’d like to punch him in the face,” or telling his followers to “beat the crap out of them,” and praising those who did, as well as saying he’d pay the legal bills for those who engaged in violence.[x] Nor surprisingly, given Trump’s racist rhetoric and encouragement of violence, larger number of protestors began to appear at his rallies, leading to the cancellation of one in Chicago in March. Trump followers began to organize the Lion Guard to keep protestors out of Trump’s rallies, a group that could easily become shock troops to fight political opponents.[xi] Finally, Trump predicted that if he did not win the Republican election, there would be riots.[xii]

Trump’s style and his “platform,” as can be interpreted from his various one-liners, threats, and promises, represents a powerful appeal to white working-class and middle-class men, though he also has won support from some people of color and many women.[xiii] The results of the primary indicate that Trump has increased the number of Republican voters in the primaries by tens of thousands and perhaps by the end will have brought in hundreds of thousands. Democrats, meanwhile, have lost thousands of voters since the last election, and in some states former Democrats have dropped their party registration and become independents.[xiv]

What this suggests, as many have noted, is that Trump is appealing to the same white working class voters as Sanders, and doing as well or better in winning their votes—though it seems that Trump is winning many of the racists in the working class, while Sanders is winning those who are more racially tolerant. It has been suggested that Trump’s racism and sexism may drive some into the Sanders camp.

The presidential primary campaign has made clear that it is Hillary Clinton who represents the establishment, the financial and corporate status quo, and it is Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders who represent the new politics in America, right and left.

[i] Journalist Doug Henwood, *My Turn: Hillary Clinton Take Aim at the Presidency*, provides damning details of all aspects of her career.

[ii] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2016/03/10/hillary-clinton-needs-to-answer-for-her-actions-in-honduras-and-haiti/>

[iii] <http://www.allenbwest.com/2016/01/shock-poll-shows-how-far-hillary-has-fallen-with-democrats/>

[iv] <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/mar/13/bernie-sanders-supporters-consider-donald-trump-no-hillary-clinton>

[v] Eleven candidates in first debate: millionaire businessman Donald Trump; Texas Senator Ted Cruz; Florida Senator Marco Rubio; the retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson, the party’s only Black candidate; New Jersey Governor Chris Christie; former Florida Governor Jeb Bush; Ohio Governor John Kasich; Kentucky Senator Rand Paul; former Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina; former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee; and former Pennsylvania Senator Rich Santorum.

[vi]

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/03/22/heres-what-we-know-about-the-faith-of-sen-ted-cruz-whos-set-to-announce-his-2016-bid-at-liberty-university/>

[vii]

<http://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2015/07/28/426888268/donald-trumps-flipping-political-donations-and>

<http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/data-mine/articles/2016-01-14/donald-trump-donated-to-democrats-until-2008> and

<http://illinoisreview.typepad.com/illinoisreview/2011/04/trump-donated-50000-to-rahm-emanuels-mayoral-bid.html>

[viii]

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/07/09/these-many-ways-in-which-donald-trump-was-once-a-liberal-liberal/> and

<https://www.conservativereview.com/commentary/2016/01/deceit-donald-trump-a-typical-new-york-city-liberal-then-and-now>

[ix]

<http://www.jta.org/2016/03/08/news-opinion/politics/trump-says-he-will-look-into-whether-pledge-causes-offense>

[x]

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/03/13/trump-looking-into-paying-legal-fees-for-man-charged-with-assault-at-rally/>

[xi] http://www.salon.com/2016/03/18/exposing_plots_to_attack_mr_trump_the_lion_guard_a_pro_trump_group_is_tracking_protesters_online/

[xii]

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/03/16/trump-you-d-have-riots-if-contested-convention-results-in-a-different-nominee/>

[xiii] <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/07/donald-trump-why-americans-support>

[xiv]

<http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/data-mine/2016/02/24/a-political-revolution-is-happening-among-republicans;>

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/02/23/donald-trump-may-be-right-when-he-takes-credit-for-growing-the-republican-party/;](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/02/23/donald-trump-may-be-right-when-he-takes-credit-for-growing-the-republican-party/)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/03/05/donald-trump-has-not-brought-millions-and-millions-of-people-to-the-republican-party/>