

Donald Trump Is Us

Pundits like to pretend that Donald Trump is some strange aberration in the American political-media process, but he is more like the illogical but logical result of a repudiation of rational thought, writes ethics professor Daniel C. Maguire.

By Daniel C. Maguire

Modern presidential election campaigns are exercises in mind-shrinkage. The failings and mischiefs of the candidates monopolize our attention and lies flourish like a toxic algae bloom. We start looking through the wrong end of the telescope and miss the big picture of what our human situation is.

Dare to take a reality break and face just two big lies beclouding this campaign. First the *big Republican lie*; then the *big Democratic lie*.

The first big lie grips both political parties but Republicans billow it into a delusion of epic and existential proportions. It is that “all is well with our planet; there is nothing that is wrong that a little of our technical grit and genius cannot take care of.” Science demurs.

To avoid nearly unimaginable catastrophe on this fragile planet even the most hopeful scientists, like the Swedish Johann Rockstrom, say that we have “no more than 25-30 years to transition away from a fossil-fuel world economy.” What are the odds of that?

Clive Hamilton reports that “the reluctant conclusion of the most eminent climate scientists is that the world is now on a path to a very unpleasant future and it is too late to stop it,” as he writes this in his tellingly entitled book, *Requiem For a Species*.

We cannot look at the sun for long. When reality gets too painful and unbearably bright, we avert our eyes. But let’s hear it for the military, the same military that counseled caution before our mad, destabilizing plunge into Iraq and Afghanistan arranged by George W. Bush’s coterie of erstwhile draft-dodgers.

Military analysts are talking climate change as a prime “national security” issue. Small wonder; a lot of their island and coastal naval bases are on the brink of inundation. Also, the military appreciate “the chain of causation” from climate change disasters to the destabilization of nation states and the rise of new forms of terrorism.

The DOD’s 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review called climate change an “accelerant

of instability” and a “threat multiplier.” The National Academy of Sciences in 2015 noted that climate change fueled the beginning of Syria’s civil war. Longer-lasting and more severe droughts, combined with government refusal to deal with crop failures and livestock deaths, set the stage for the current chaos.

As noted in *Scientific American* (June 2016), all of this “pushed hundreds of thousands of people to migrate from their farms into cities like Aleppo and Raqqa.” The resultant turmoil “turned to civil war” and “that civil war allowed ISIS to rise terrorizing the world.”

Similarly in northern Nigeria “deforestation, overgrazing and increased heat from global warming have turned what was once productive farmland and savanna into an extension of the Sahara Desert.” Again *Scientific American*: “The chain of causation from climate change to desertification, to food insecurity, to migration and then to conflict fueled Boko Haram’s rise.”

The Republicans boast of their “national security” credentials. But many of these same Republicans and all climate-change deniers are the descendants of “Flat Earth” insanity; they ignore, in a feat of denial tinged with psychosis, the greatest threat to national and global security in the recent history of the planet.

The Long View

A little bit of history cleanses the mind. Ten thousand years ago, after the 2½ million years of the Pleistocene era, which was dominated by spreading glaciers, the earth’s orbital pattern, which wobbles and tilts erratically, took a happy turn and we entered into the milder Holocene epoch. This was like leaving Purgatory and entering into the Garden of Eden.

Our species first appeared around 200,000 years ago during the unfriendly Pleistocene age. However, 65,000 years before the Pleistocene ended, humans had been reduced by Pleistocene’s hostile climate to just 15,000 fertile adults huddled together in the hills of what we now call Ethiopia. But, enter the gentler Holocene and we had liberating alternatives to the rigors of hunting and gathering. Agriculture was born.

The arrival of the Holocene was welcome relief but it was also a time bomb. In the glow of primeval affluence, we became more fertile. From an original few hundred of our species, we have passed the seven billion mark and put stresses on the planet that it cannot bear.

We have trashed the Holocene epoch and have entered what is now called the Anthropocene (from the Greek *anthropoi*, people), i.e., a new era in which humans

are directly affecting and changing the earth's climate. In other words, people-power is now wrecking the environmental security created by the Holocene's climate and rushing us to disaster.

At this crucial moment, the Republican Party is the only party in the "developed" world that consists mainly of climate-change deniers – chief among them, Donald Trump, its presidential candidate.

But he is far from alone. Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma became the symbol and spokesman for the party when in the winter of 2015 he brought a snowball into the Senate chamber to illustrate the hoax of climate change.

Because Inhofe could see so much in a snowball, the Republicans made him chairman of the U.S. Senate's Committee on the Environment.

Now, the Republican Party has put global-warming denial at the top of their presidential ticket. President Obama may say the effects of global warming are "terrifying," but Trump says anthropogenic global warming is a hoax.

Though these head-in-the-sand denials may leave scientists shaking their heads in dismay, the denials have had an effect on the political thinking of many Americans who have pushed global warming down the list of priorities. Even at the 2015 Paris conference on climate change, we and the rest of the world could not agree on *enforceable* ways of doing anything realistic about the problem.

The Democratic Dodge

So, in fairness, let it be said, many Democrats are anything but enlightened and alert on ecological needs. But on top of that they are indulging in a specialized lie. The Democratic liberal narrative is that Donald Trump is the crude and explicit incarnation of what the Republicans have become since xenophobia and racism were ushered into Republicanism by Richard Nixon with his "Southern strategy."

But that suggests that the rest of us have a kind of moral purity that distances us from Trumpism, which is not really true. *Trump is also us*. No alien is he in this America. Our soil is receptive to the wild seeds he sows. That's why nervous Democrats fear a silent majority out there who won't put Trump signs on their lawns but will vote him into the White House.

List Trumps brazen sins and we have a mirror image of ourselves:

–Xenophobia and racism? Don't miss the message sent by all our wars of choice over the past half century or so in which kill-power held primacy of place among the power options. From conventional war to convenient drones (the dream weapon

of risk-avoidance warriors), we wreak death and destruction on non-white people from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia all the way to Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Libya, Pakistan, and Syria.

We would not inflict such indiscriminate “shock and awe” on Sweden no matter what tensions arose. Laos, Iraq? No problem.

For a quick check on our xenophobic racism, just ask African-Americans, the perennial orphans of American conscience, how out-of-step Donald Trump’s “whiteness crusade” is in this brutally divided and color-coded nation.

–Sexism? Trump doesn’t trump us there. If salaries signal socially assigned worth, we treat women as of lesser value just as he does. In a presidential race, put an intelligent woman up against an ignorant male buffoon who is also a crooked, bankruptcy-prone businessman, and you’ve got a cliff-hanger.

Trump has a particular pick on Muslims, but our moral concern for occupied and oppressed Muslims in Palestine/Israel is not in evidence even in the liberal press, although we help finance and arm Israel’s occupation. That criminal occupation, metastasizing under the euphemism of “settlements,” is more vicious than simply “banning Muslims;” it imprisons them and their children on site.

–Trump’s penchant for blunt military solutions to delicate problems is reflected in our embarking on repeated killing missions without the constitutionally required formal declaration of war, which hasn’t happened since December 1941. In its stead, we get cowardly resolutions to transfer war-making decisions to the imperial president. Will it take an erratic impulsive President Trump to show the stupidity of that congressional defection?

Remember, too, that budgets are windows into the soul. With all military-related expenses factored in, our budget pours around \$30,000 a second into military maintenance, preparations, debt and research while our infrastructure and schools crumble. (Professor Robert McChesney reports that actual military spending is over \$1 trillion a year.)

Trump specializes in embarrassingly fact-free pronouncements but the disgraceful political illiteracy of our electorate is unmatched among other democracies. That’s why his lies and falsehoods pass muster with large segments of the population.

No, Trump is not some alien being that somehow took over the Republican Party and now is running even in polls predicting who will be the next U.S. president. He is just the newest avatar of the famous saying by Walt Kelly’s Pogo character, “we have met the enemy and he is us.”

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