

# 'Progressive' Journalists Jump the Shark on Russiagate

A lack of skepticism has characterized much of the reporting on Russiagate, with undue credibility being given to questionable sources like the Steele dossier, and now progressives like Jane Mayer and Cenk Uygur are joining the bandwagon, Ray McGovern observes.

By Ray McGovern

Jane Mayer of *The New Yorker* and Cenk Uygur of The Young Turks are the latest progressives to jump on the anti-Trump, pro-Russiagate bandwagon. They have made it crystal clear that, in Mayer's words, they are not going to let Republicans, or anyone else, "take down the whole intelligence community," by God.

Odd? Nothing is too odd when it comes to spinning and dyeing the yarn of Russiagate; especially now that some strands are unraveling from the thin material of the "Steele dossier."

Before the 2016 election, British ex-spy Christopher Steele was contracted (through a couple of cutouts) by the Clinton campaign and Democratic National Committee to dig up dirt on candidate Donald Trump. They paid him \$168,000. They should ask for their money back.

Mayer and Uygur have now joined with other Trump-despisers and new "progressive" fans of the FBI and CIA – among them Amy Goodman and her go-to, lost-in-the-trees journalist, Marcy Wheeler of Emptywheel.net. All of them (well, maybe not Cenk) are staying up nights with needle and thread trying to sew a silk purse out of the sow's-ear dossier of Steele allegations and then dye it red for danger.

Monday brought a new low, with a truly extraordinary one-two punch by Mayer and Uygur.

## A Damning Picture?

Mayer does her part in a *New Yorker* article, in which she – intentionally or not – cannot seem to see the forest for the trees.

In her article, Mayer explains up front that the Steele dossier "painted a damning picture of collusion between Trump and Russia," and then goes on to portray him as a paragon of virtue with praise that is fulsome, in the full meaning of that word. For example, a friend of Steele told Mayer that regarding Steele, "Fairness, integrity, and truth, for him, trump any ideology."

Now, if one refuses to accept this portrait on faith, then you are what Mayer describes as a “Trump defender.” According to Mayer, Trump defenders argue that Steele is “a dishonest Clinton apparatchik who had collaborated with American intelligence and law enforcement officials to fabricate false charges against Trump and his associates, in a dastardly (sic) attempt to nullify the 2016 election. According to this story line, it was not the President who needed to be investigated, but the investigators themselves.”

Can you imagine!

I could not help but think that Mayer wrote her piece some months ago and that she and her editors might have missed more recent documentary evidence that gives considerable support to that “dastardly” story line. But seriously, it should be possible to suspect Steele of misfeasance or malfeasance – or simply telling his contractors what he knows they want to hear – without being labeled a “Trump supporter.” I, for example, am no Trump supporter. I am, however, a former intelligence officer and I have long since concluded that what Steele served up is garbage.

### **Character References**

Mayer reports that Richard Dearlove, head of MI6 from 1999 to 2004, described Steele as “superb.” Personally, I would shun any “recommendation” from that charlatan. Are memories so short? Dearlove was the intelligence chief who briefed Prime Minister Tony Blair on July 23, 2002 after a quick trip to Washington. The official minutes of that meeting were leaked to the London Times and published on May 1, 2005.

Dearlove explained to Blair that President George W. Bush had decided to attack Iraq for regime change and that the war was to be “justified by the conjunction of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.” Dearlove added matter-of-factly, “The intelligence and facts are being fixed around the policy.”

Another character reference Mayer gives for Steele is former CIA Deputy Director John McLaughlin (from 2000 to 2004) who, with his boss George Tenet, did the fixing of intelligence to “justify” the war on Iraq. State Department intelligence director at the time, Carl Ford, told the authors of “Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War” that both McLaughlin and Tenet “should have been shot” for what they did.

And then there is CIA veteran spy John Sipher who, Mayer says, “ran the Agency’s Russia program before retiring, in 2014.” Sipher tells her he thinks the Steele dossier is “generally credible” in “saying what Russia might be up to.” Sipher may be a good case officer but he has shown himself to be something of a cipher

on substance.

Worse still, he displays a distinct inclination toward the remarkable view of former National Intelligence Director James Clapper, who has said that Russians are “typically, almost genetically driven to co-opt, penetrate, gain favor, whatever.” If Mayer wanted to find some ostensibly authoritative figure to endorse the kind of material in Steele’s dossier, she surely picked a good one in Sipher.

Mayer notes, “It’s too early to make a final judgment about how much of Steele’s dossier will be proved wrong, but a number of Steele’s major claims have been backed up by subsequent disclosures. She includes, as flat fact, his claim that the Kremlin and WikiLeaks were working together to release the DNC’s emails, but provides no evidence.

### **Major Holes**

Mayer, however, should know better. There have been lots of holes in the accusation that the Russians hacked the DNC and gave the material to WikiLeaks to publish. Here’s one major gap we reported on Jan. 20, 2017: President Barack Obama told his last press conference on Jan. 18, that the U.S. intelligence community had no idea how the Democratic emails reached WikiLeaks.

Using lawyerly language, Obama admitted that “the conclusions of the intelligence community with respect to the Russian hacking were not conclusive as to whether WikiLeaks was witting or not in being the conduit through which we heard about the DNC e-mails that were leaked.”

It is necessary to carefully parse Obama’s words since he prides himself in his oratorical constructs. He offered a similarly designed comment at a Dec. 16, 2016 press conference when he said: “based on uniform intelligence assessments, the Russians were responsible for hacking the DNC. ... the information was in the hands of WikiLeaks.”

Note the disconnect between the confidence about hacking and the stark declarative sentence about the information ending up at WikiLeaks. Obama does not bridge the gap because to do so would be a bald-faced lie, which some honest intelligence officer might call him on. So, he simply presented the two sides of the chasm – implies a connection – but leaves it to the listener to make the leap.

It was, of course, WikiLeaks that published the very damaging Democratic information, for example, on the DNC’s dirty tricks that marginalized Sen. Bernie Sanders and ensured that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton would win the Democratic nomination. What remained to be demonstrated was that it was “the

Russians” who gave those emails to WikiLeaks. And that is what the U.S. intelligence community could not honestly say.

Saying it now, without evidence, does not make it true.

### **Cenk Also in Sync**

Cenk Uygur of The Young Turks at once picked up, big time, on the part of Mayer’s article that homes in on an “astonishing” report from Steele in late November 2016 quoting one “senior Russian official.” According to that official, “The Kremlin had intervened to block Trump’s initial choice for secretary of state, Mitt Romney.” Steele’s late November memo alleged that the Kremlin had asked Trump to appoint someone who would be prepared to lift Ukraine-related sanctions and cooperate on security issues like Syria.

Mayer commented, “As fantastical as the memo sounds, subsequent events could be said to support it.” Fantastical or not, Uygur decided to run with it. His amazing 12-minute video is titled: “New Steele Dossier: Putin PICKED Trump’s Secretary of State.” Uygur asks: “Who does Tillerson work for; and that also goes for the President.”

### **Return to Sanity**

As an antidote to all the above, let me offer this cogent piece on the views of Joseph E. diGenova, who speaks out of his unique experience, including as Counsel to the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (the Church Committee). The article is entitled: “The Politicization of the FBI.”

“Over the past year,” diGenova wrote, “facts have emerged that suggest there was a plot by high-ranking FBI and Department of Justice (DOJ) officials in the Obama administration, acting under color of law, to exonerate Hillary Clinton of federal crimes and then, if she lost the election, to frame Donald Trump and his campaign for colluding with Russia to steal the presidency.”

He pointed out that nearly half of Americans, according to a CBS poll, believe that Mueller’s Trump-Russia collusion probe is “politically motivated.” And, he noted, 63 percent of polled voters in a Harvard CAPS-Harris Poll believe that the FBI withheld vital information from Congress about the Clinton and Russia collusion investigations.

This skepticism is entirely warranted, as diGenova explains, with the Russiagate probe being characterized by overreach from the beginning.

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## Democrats Chase Red Herring of Russia-gate

The Democrats' demagogic use of Russia-gate to "resist" President Trump is putting progressives in league with warmongers and war contractors while postponing a serious assessment of the party's political problems, warns Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

The Trump administration has already done enormous harm to the United States and the planet. Along the way, President Trump has also caused many prominent progressives to degrade their own political discourse. It's up to us to challenge the corrosive effects of routine hyperbole and outright demagoguery.

Consider the rhetoric from one of the most promising new House members, Democrat Jamie Raskin, at a rally near the Washington Monument over the weekend. Reading from a prepared text, Raskin warmed up by declaring that "Donald Trump is the hoax perpetrated on the Americans by the Russians."

Soon the congressman named such varied countries as Hungary, the Philippines, Syria and Venezuela, and immediately proclaimed: "All the despots, dictators and kleptocrats have found each other, and Vladimir Putin is the ringleader of the unfree world."

Later, asked about factual errors in his speech, Raskin floundered during a filmed interview with The Real News. What is now boilerplate Democratic Party bombast about Russia has little to do with confirmed facts and much to do with partisan talking points.

The same day that Raskin spoke, the progressive former Labor Secretary Robert Reich featured at the top of his website an article he'd written with the headline "The Art of the Trump-Putin Deal." The piece had striking similarities to what progressives have detested over the years when coming from right-wing commentators and witch-hunters. The timeworn technique was dual track, in effect: *I can't prove it's true, but let's proceed as though it is.*

The lead of Reich's piece was clever. Way too clever: "Say you're Vladimir

Putin, and you did a deal with Trump last year. I'm not suggesting there was any such deal, mind you. But if you are Putin and you *did* do a deal, what did Trump agree to do?" From there, Reich's piece was off to the conjectural races.

## **Propaganda Techniques**

Progressives routinely deplore such propaganda techniques from right-wingers, not only because the Left is being targeted but also because we seek a political culture based on facts and fairness rather than innuendos and smears. It's painful now to see numerous progressives engaging in hollow propaganda.

Likewise, it's sad to see so much eagerness to trust in the absolute credibility of institutions like the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency – institutions that previously earned wise distrust. Over the last few decades, millions of Americans have gained keen awareness of the power of media manipulation and deception by the U.S. foreign-policy establishment. Yet now, faced with an ascendant extreme right wing, some progressives have yielded to the temptation of blaming our political predicament more on a foreign "enemy" than on powerful corporate forces at home.

The over-the-top scapegoating of Russia serves many purposes for the military-industrial complex, Republican neocons, and kindred "liberal interventionist" Democrats. Along the way, the blame-Russia-first rhetoric is of enormous help to the Clinton wing of the Democratic Party – a huge diversion lest its elitism and entwinement with corporate power come under greater scrutiny and stronger challenge from the grassroots.

In this context, the inducements and encouragements to buy into an extreme anti-Russia frenzy have become pervasive. A remarkable number of people claim certainty about hacking and even "collusion" – events that they cannot, at this time, truly be certain about. In part that's because of deceptive claims endlessly repeated by Democratic politicians and news media.

One example is the rote and highly misleading claim that "17 U.S. intelligence agencies" reached the same conclusion about Russian hacking of the Democratic National Committee – a claim that journalist Robert Parry effectively debunked in an [article](#) last week.

## **What Americans Want**

During a recent appearance on CNN, former Ohio State Senator Nina Turner offered a badly needed perspective on the subject of Russia's alleged intrusion into the U.S. election. People in Flint, Michigan, "wouldn't ask you about Russia and Jared Kushner," she said. "They want to know how they're gonna get some clean water and why 8,000 people are about to lose their homes."

Turner noted that “we definitely have to deal with” allegations of Russian interference in the election, “it’s on the minds of American people, but if you want to know what people in Ohio – they want to know about jobs, they want to know about their children.” As for Russia, she said, “We are preoccupied with this, it’s not that this is not important, but every day Americans are being left behind because it’s Russia, Russia, Russia.”

Like corporate CEOs whose vision extends only to the next quarter or two, many Democratic politicians have been willing to inject their toxic discourse into the body politic on the theory that it will be politically profitable in the next election or two. But even on its own terms, the approach is apt to fail. Most Americans are far more worried about their economic futures than about the Kremlin. A party that makes itself more known as anti-Russian than pro-working-people has a problematic future.

Today, 15 years after George W. Bush’s “axis of evil” oratory set the stage for ongoing military carnage, politicians who traffic in unhinged rhetoric like “Putin is the ringleader of the unfree world” are helping to fuel the warfare state – and, in the process, increasing the chances of direct military conflict between the United States and Russia that could go nuclear and destroy us all.

But such concerns can seem like abstractions compared to possibly winning some short-term political gains. That’s the difference between leadership and demagoguery.

**Norman Solomon is the coordinator of the online activist group [RootsAction.org](https://www.rootsaction.org) and the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. He is the author of a dozen books including *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*.**

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## Fleeing a Trump Presidency Not an Option

For many Americans, the idea of a Trump presidency and a Republican-controlled Congress is frightening, with the prospect of right-wing legislation and judicial appointments sailing through, but quitting is not an option, says Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon

A lot of U.S. citizens are now talking about leaving the country. Canada, Europe and New Zealand are popular scenarios. Moving abroad might be an individual

solution. But the social solution is to stay and put up a fight.

The most right-wing U.S. government in our lifetimes will soon have its executive and legislative branches under reactionary control, with major ripple effects on the judiciary. All the fixings for a dystopian future will be on the table.

In a realistic light, the outlook is awfully grim. No wonder a huge number of people in the United States are struggling with mixtures of grief, anger, frustration, fear.

If Donald Trump and major forces backing him get their way, the conditions described by Frederick Douglass – still all too prevalent now – will worsen in the years ahead: “Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob, and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe.”

As James Baldwin wrote, “People who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a state of innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a monster.”

Those quotes from Douglass and Baldwin are in a book of paintings by Robert Shetterly, *Americans Who Tell the Truth*. Another portrait in the collection appears under these words from Helen Keller: “When one comes to think of it, there are no such things as divine, immutable, or inalienable rights. Rights are things we get when we are strong enough to make good our claim on them.”

That statement from Keller aptly describes our current predicament and possibilities. The impending Trump presidency is a direct threat to basic human rights. To make good our claim on those rights will require that we become “strong enough,” individually and collectively.

Gaining such strength will require that we provide much more support for independent progressive institutions – the array of organizations that can serve as collective bulwarks against the momentum of systemic greed, bigotry, massive violence, economic exploitation and environmental destruction.

We’re now being flung into a new era that will intensify many of the oppressive aspects of the U.S. governmental apparatus and political economy. An ongoing imperative will be to mitigate serious-to-catastrophic damage in many realms. We need a united front – against the very real threat of severe repression that could morph into some form of fascism.

At this highly precarious time, progressives certainly don’t need the tempests

of factional disputes and ideological battles. And we certainly don't need the kind of reflexive capitulation that so often comes from the upper reaches of the Democratic Party. We're at the start of a protracted crisis that could become cataclysmic. We need progressive unity and unrelenting determination.

Only with eyes wide open do we have a real chance to understand clearly and organize effectively against the Trump regime. Failure to put up a fight should be unthinkable.

**Norman Solomon is co-founder of the online activist group [RootsAction.org](https://www.rootsaction.org). His books include *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*. He is the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy.**

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## Democrats Adopt a More Progressive Tone

At the Democratic National Convention, some tough-guy/gal militaristic talk has prompted floor shouts of "no more war," while most domestic policy rhetoric has been markedly progressive, say Bill Moyers and Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

Shoot if you must these old grey heads, but these two semi-qualified observers of the passing political scene watched Monday night's proceedings at the Democratic National Convention and saw past the heckles and opprobrium of the leather-lunged few.

Instead, we witnessed an evening of progressive rhetoric and thoughtfulness unseen on a big political stage since the days of William Jennings Bryan, Wisconsin's Fighting Bob La Follette, the Happy Warrior Al Smith and the crusaders of FDR's New Deal. Not to mention Hubert Humphrey, Jesse Jackson, Shirley Chisholm, and a host of others who though history kept beating the drums for ordinary people against the organized might of Big Money.

Progressive big hitters were out on the field Monday and they successfully swung for the fences. Michelle Obama, Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders were batting like the Yankees' legendary Murderers Row, aided and abetted by such powerful players as Representatives Keith Ellison and Raúl Grijalva, Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney and U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley.

Michelle Obama was elegant and forceful as she looked back at her family's years in the White House and endorsed Hillary Clinton.

"I want someone with the proven strength to persevere," she said. "Someone who knows this job and takes it seriously. Someone who understands that the issues a president faces are not black and white and cannot be boiled down to 140 characters. Because when you have the nuclear codes at your fingertips and the military in your command, you can't make snap decisions. You can't have a thin skin or a tendency to lash out. You need to be steady, and measured, and well-informed."

Could anyone watching not feel a tingle down the spine as this remarkable woman traced the great arc of American history? We only prayed grandchildren were listening as she said that the story of America is "the story of generations of people who felt the lash of bondage, the shame of servitude, the sting of segregation, but who kept on striving and hoping and doing what needed to be done so that today, I wake up every morning in a house that was built by slaves? –? and I watch my daughters?– ?two beautiful, intelligent, black young women?– ?playing with their dogs on the White House lawn. And because of Hillary Clinton, my daughters ?– and all our sons and daughters? –?now take for granted that a woman can be president of the United States."

Elizabeth Warren did what only she can do, deconstructing the charade that is Donald Trump.

"Trump thinks he can win votes by fanning the flames of fear and hatred," she said. "By turning neighbor against neighbor. By persuading you that the real problem in America is your fellow Americans – people who don't look like you, or don't talk like you, or don't worship like you... That's Donald Trump's America. An America of fear and hate. An America where we all break apart..."

"When we turn on each other, bankers can run our economy for Wall Street, oil companies can fight off clean energy, and giant corporations can ship the last good jobs overseas. When we turn on each other, we can't unite to fight back against a rigged system. Well, I've got news for Donald Trump. The American people are not falling for it."

And then the hour belonged to Bernie Sanders. As he endorsed Clinton, he was gracious in defeat: "I understand that many people here in this convention hall and around the country are disappointed about the final results of the nominating process. I think it's fair to say that no one is more disappointed than I am. But to all of our supporters – here and around the country – I hope you take enormous pride in the historical accomplishments we have achieved."

"Together, my friends, we have begun a political revolution to transform America and that revolution – Our Revolution – continues. Election days come and go. But the struggle of the people to create a government which represents all of us and

not just the 1 percent – a government based on the principles of economic, social, racial and environmental justice – that struggle continues. And I look forward to being part of that struggle with you.”

Then and there, the old socialist from Vermont liberated Democrats to be the champions of everyday people again.

### **Choking on Big Money**

If only – and it’s a big if – if only the party can liberate itself from the stranglehold of Big Money. For off camera, out of sight and (for the moment) out of mind, one could sense the corrupting presence of the lobbyists of corporate America, the bag men of special interests, and the mercenaries there in Philadelphia with hefty infusions of campaign cash eager to bring the Democrats down from the ramparts of *Les Mis* and back to cold, cynical earth.

Monday, we saw spirit and passion, ideas and aspirations, inspiring language, diversity (1,182 black delegates – as opposed to the GOP’s 18 – and 2,887 women), values, even the tears of Bernie’s supporters and yes, the willingness to join forces to defeat Trump.

But those progressive voices ringing out so beautifully that night are the very ones fighting to free their party from the grip of millionaires and billionaires while at the same time the Clinton forces embrace the one-tenth of one percent represented by the multi-billionaire and former Republican Mayor of New York Mike Bloomberg. He spoke at the convention on Wednesday night, part of the Clinton effort to give moderate members of the GOP another reason to dump Trump. Nonetheless, the optics are less than great.

We took time from the grace notes of unity and collaboration sounded at the convention to look over those Democratic National Committee emails dumped on the eve of the convention by WikiLeaks, communications that reveal just how low party fundraisers will stoop for cash, promising contributors access to the White House and other higher-ups in exchange for their donations.

In *The Washington Post* this week, Matea Gold wrote, “The leaked emails reveal the relentless art of donor maintenance that undergirds the system: the flattery, cajoling and favor-bestowing that goes into winning rich supporters. It’s a practice that the party fundraisers themselves often find dispiriting.”

To which Nicholas Confessore and Steve Eder at *The New York Times* added, “As is common in national politics, Democratic staff members kept detailed track of every dollar contributed by targeted donors, aiming to get each of the wealthiest givers to ‘max out,’ or contribute the maximum legal amount to each party account. The biggest national donors were the subject of entire dossiers,

as fund-raisers tried to gauge their interests, annoyances and passions.”

Avarice is bipartisan, as has been seen at both this year’s Republican and Democratic conventions. For the first time, both parties received no public money for their conventions so they were completely beholden to private funding. What’s more, Democrats reversed previous policy and lifted a ban on corporate and lobbying dollars to pay for their big soiree.

“After those limits were lifted,” Matea Gold noted, soon-to-be-former DNC Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz “and other top party officials showered corporate lobbyists with calls, emails and personal meetings seeking convention support and PAC contributions to the party, according to a spreadsheet logging the contacts.” This year’s sponsors include Lockheed Martin, Home Depot, AT&T, Xerox, Twitter, Microsoft and Facebook.

While in Philadelphia, according to Confessore and Eder, “Donors who raise \$1.25 million for the party – or who give \$467,000 – are entitled to priority booking in a top hotel, nightly access to V.I.P. lounges and an ‘exclusive roundtable and campaign briefing with high-level Democratic officials,’ according to a promotional brochure obtained by The Times.”

And then there’s this report by Megan R. Wilson at the Washington paper, The Hill: “Presumptive Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton has accepted more than \$9 million in bundled donations from registered lobbyists, while the DNC has rolled back the lobbyist bans that Obama put into place.

“‘In 2008 and 2012, there was no integration with the [Obama] campaign,’ said Al Mottur, a senior Democratic lobbyist at Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, adding that he would have liked to have helped. ‘Now, the campaign is welcoming – they’re open to us. That’s why I’ve done as much work for her as I’ve done on her behalf.’”

It’s an old story. Candidates seek the votes of citizens only to turn around and promise the only real access to donors. And once again representative government is disrupted because the winners so rarely govern as they campaigned. They can’t, because they are tethered to the demands, claims and tendered IOUs of the rich and privileged.

That the system is so rigged has been a major theme of the Sanders campaign, and on Monday, it was reiterated by both Sanders and Warren as each called for the overturning of *Citizens United* and other court decisions that have flooded politics with money at a level beyond imagination.

In her acceptance speech Thursday night, Hillary Clinton doubtless will say similar things and praise the progressive gospel of campaign finance reform,

professing to shun the appeasement of Wall Street – the big banks, hedge fund managers, and private equity oligarchs.

All well and good, but if her actions and her party's continue to prove otherwise, the rousing rhetoric of this week – and the historic nomination of the first woman as a presidential nominee – may fade to insignificance as an angry, disillusioned, and despairing public opens the door wide for the phony “I’m so rich I can’t be bought off” gospel of Donald J. Trump. Caveat emptor.

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## CNN’s Double-Standards on Debates

For decades, mainstream U.S. news outlets have bent over backwards to appease conservatives and avoid the stigma “liberal media,” but there has been no similar accommodation for progressives, as Jeff Cohen notes about CNN’s handling of the upcoming Democratic debate.

By Jeff Cohen

At the CNN-sponsored Republican Party debate last month at the Reagan presidential library, one of the three panelists CNN selected to question the candidates was conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt, affiliated with the proudly right-wing Salem Radio Network. But at Tuesday’s upcoming Democratic Party debate, CNN is not planning to include a single progressive advocate among its panel of four questioners.

It’s clear that who gets to pose questions has impact on the tenor of the debate. For example, Hewitt used September’s Republican debate to declare that President Obama’s “knees buckled” over Syria and that every Republican candidate was “more qualified than” Hillary Clinton. Hewitt pressed Jeb Bush from the right over his comment about making sure guns are not in the hands of the mentally ill: “Where does it go from what you said last week, how far into people’s lives to take guns away from them?”



Along with Hewitt, the panel at CNN's GOP debate was composed of two journalists CNN presents as neutral or objective: CNN anchor Jake Tapper and CNN correspondent Dana Bash. (Hewitt's appearance was reportedly part of an agreement by which CNN and the right-wing Salem Media company are teaming up on three GOP presidential debates.)

At CNN's upcoming Democratic debate, the panel is to be composed of four journalists CNN presents as neutral: CNN's Bash and three CNN anchors (Anderson Cooper, Don Lemon, and Juan Carlos Lopez of CNN en Espanol.) Glaringly missing from this proposed lineup is an unabashed progressive advocate.

There are many qualified journalists for this seat – from respected progressive media institutions that haven't taken sides in the Democratic primaries (like The Nation or Mother Jones, to name just two).

Today, the online activism group RootsAction.org (which I cofounded) launched a one-sentence petition to CNN: "For the sake of basic fairness and balance, you should add to your panel an unapologetic progressive for Tuesday's debate."

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## Running from Right-Wing Clowns

By the late 1970s, there was a serious national debate about the blood-soaked Vietnam War, but then came Ronald Reagan rebranding it a "noble cause" and right-wing accusations against critics who "blame America first," followed by the panicked retreat of everyone wanting to be part of the mainstream, as Phil Rockstroh observes.

By Phil Rockstroh

Why is it that self-termed progressives are in full retreat (and have been for decades) from the witless army of angry clowns and hack illusionists of the U.S.

right-wing?

One contributing factor involves the sterile cultivation of the persona of the "reasonable liberal," a type favored and rewarded by the status quo-protective power brokers of the Democratic Party and by corporate media organizations that find useful his trait of rendering himself feckless (e.g., the current occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue) by the passion-annihilating (but self-serving) device of his preening amiability?

But in so doing, the self-gelded liberal has sacrificed libido and discarded sacred vehemence for careerist privilege. Worse, the rest of us are advised to follow suit that, in order to gain credibility, one must slouch towards center-hugging irrelevance.

We are counseled that in order to navigate this age of corporate dominance that one's irascible apprehensions and unruly aspirations must be suppressed, for such passions are deemed too radical for mainstream sensibilities, and are therefore regarded as impractical as they are untoward by the crackpot realists of the corporate bottom line whose dictates dominate the political discourse and economic arrangements of our time.

"Prune down [a human being's] extravagance, sober him, and you undo him."

—William James

Yet these self-termed "realists," by means of their ad hoc machinations and hidden-in-plain-sight schemes, are responsible for the creation, promotion and maintenance of a financial system (and its attendant economic, political and ecological consequences) that is as sound as the flight plan of Icarus.

When a nation displays this degree of a noxious mixture of mass ignorance and official mendacity, an age of peace and plenty becomes as possible as holding a tea dance in a tsunami.

Yet facing folly is difficult. Stunned by the implications of one's mistakes and misapprehensions, initially, one will reel in the direction of a familiar road — or be seized by an impulse to retreat from the casuistry-sundering fury of the larger world.

Yet, as Thomas Paine averred, "A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong gives it a superficial appearance of being right." And as Albert Camus counseled, "Freedom is the right not to lie."

With this in mind, shall we blunder off-road into the landscape of unquestioned narratives?

For example, the following is a topic, when broached, that rarely fails to incur the manipulative rage of the perpetually adrenaline intoxicated right and causes liberals to drop to their knees in penance for sins never committed:

The questioning of this culture's reverential, unflagging "support of our troops" blunderbuss and attendant comic book hero-level palaver, such as, "all good Americans stand firm in our support of our troops and our war against the forces of international terrorism."

A bit of personal perspective as to why I demur: Forty-eight years ago, this month, four young girls were murdered in the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham Alabama. At the time of the tragedy, I was a child living in Birmingham.

I remember the event to this day. My father, freelancing as a photojournalist at the time, arrived on the scene not long after the blast. I remember him coming home shaken and pale. The event is seared into my memory ... how the blind hatred of the vicious can erupt into daily life and inflict irreparable harm and abiding sorrow.

Accordingly, this is why I cannot abide U.S. wars of imperium e.g., its Shock and Awe bombing campaigns the same modus operandi of those despicable, redneck bombers .

The dead of Iraq, Central Asia and Libya were no more responsible for committing acts of terrorism against the people of the U.S. than those little girls, readying for a choir performance in the basement of that church in Alabama, were guilty of any crime perpetrated against the "white race."

Moreover, the attacks staged on 9/11/2001 did not "change everything." The event merely sped up the trajectory of the national security state/military industrial complex towards the landfill of history.

For more than a century, whether the propagandists of U.S. Empire promulgate the subterfuge of fighting "to make the world safe for democracy" or defending against "the evil empire," or waging a "war on terror" – the objective remains, to secure resources for the U.S. homeland.

And that is what we, the populace of empire, can "thank a veteran" for providing.

From the Blue Coats at Wounded Knee to the baby-faced tools of imperium at My Lai and Fallujah to the predator drones scouring Central Asia, the U.S. is the single largest perpetrator of terrorism worldwide.

As all the while, guilty by their complicity citizens of the U.S. sit on their sofas, oblivious or unmoved by any event transpiring beyond their self-circumscribed field of reference.

There should be a monument erected to the tragic legacy wrought by the acts of terrorism at "Ground Zero" – and it should be a statue representing a willfully ignorant fat-ass sitting on his couch, TV remote in hand, Cheetos crumbs stippled in the folds of his mouth.

Granted, Lower Manhattan took a tragic hit, a decade ago, and many people suffered as a result (I know I live a couple of neighborhoods upwind) but none worse than the people of Iraq and Central Asia.

Somehow, I suspected (and was proven sadly correct) that their experiences would not be evoked, as part of the 9/11 hagiography foisted and verbal monuments cast to sacred victimhood, as part of the official ceremony commemorating the event.

Moreover, not long after 9/11, an attack was launched from Lower Manhattan that collapsed the global economy. I, for one, would like to hear a bit more about that.

By parroting the self-serving hagiography of 9/11/01, as well as, "I support the warrior, but not the war" type fallacies, liberals continue to play right into the sustaining narratives of the national security state.

Case in point, the empty, oft-heard, liberal pundit assertion, "My idea for a 9/11 tribute would involve bringing our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan home, with proper benefits."

Nonsense. Worse than nonsense: Precious, cloying, self-congratulatory piffle. The statement is axiomatic of the feckless calls and specious cries common to that species of walking cliché known as "troop-supporting" liberals.

As far as I'm concerned, "our troops" human delivery systems of U.S. government sanctified terrorism can walk home that way, maybe, they might learn something about the larger world, other than their mission to kill the people they happen upon without question, and then share with their fellow belligerently ignorant countrymen what they learned about life (its sacred quality) on their long, Odysseusian journey home.

Apropos, reasonable liberals counsel such declarations serve as "bad public relation" tactics. "Don't you realize that you risk alienating Middle America? Remember, the reactionary fallout created by the radicalism of the 1960s?"

The fact is: The passionate questioning of the entire war effort in Southeast

Asia, the role of soldiers included, helped to bring an end to the war and factored into the soldiers' rebellion at the later stages of the protracted conflict.

In increasing numbers, the conscripts began to refuse to kill and die for a dubious cause ... they went hippie on the ass of the military state.

The activist Left ended the war; self-serving liberals blew the peace.

The "bad PR" involving "spitting on the troops" was after the fact, rightwing confabulation promulgated to intimidate liberals into shamed silence, and, of course, liberals being liberals, it worked.

True to form, they "distanced" themselves from the "troop-demoralizing radicals of the irrational left." In reality, they fled in fear from arrays of rightwing created straw men.

PR itself is the dubious craft of professional lying corporate-era legerdemain. In fact, the craft is the opposite of the resonate truth carried by deepening poetry, poignant prose and challenging political speech the near exclusive domain of the Left in the 1960s.

You ask what makes me sigh, old friend

What makes me shudder so

I shudder and I sigh to think

That even Cicero

And many-minded Homer were

Mad as the mist and snow.

—William Bulter Yeats, except from Mad As The Mist And Snow

The inspired, enduring (very threatening to some) art, music and political action of the era were not the result of liberal accommodation and compromise. Antithetically, the cause of peace and justice (briefly) made some headway despite liberals not because of them.

As a famous literary drunk once quipped, "Rome wasn't burned in a day." Change will not come with a victim-centered view of the world ... including viewing the nation's toxically innocent, economic conscripts as mere victims of circumstance.

Yes, young people make stupid choices but treating them as victims does not serve them or the nation well.

"Liberal compassion" should not be extended to countenancing acts of mass murderer. Time and time again, liberals play into rightist propaganda, by

allowing the discussion of U.S. militarism to be framed as exclusively pertaining to the sacrifices of individual soldiers, whose fates, in the larger context of events, have been appropriated a device of imperial plunder.

By truckling to this narrative, liberals play into the propaganda of those who prosper by the homicidal designs of the present day U.S. military state.

Instead, let us endeavor to disabuse the culture of the delusion that there exists noble sacrifice in the act of killing and dying for the agendas of empire.

When an individual U.S. soldier begins to stagger in the direction of his own humanity (renouncing his complicity in the death-sustained system, as many did during the Vietnam era) then we should open our arms and embrace him with a fierce compassion.

On a personal basis, my family had little money. And I made many self-destructive choices, but I also had tenacious mentors who challenged me ... called me on my destructive nonsense pointing out the bulwark of denial and hubris that sustained its shabby, ad hoc structure.

Making a home in being lost, I took up residence in the enduring structure of poetry, literature and music Whitman, Kerouac, Rilke, Dylan, the Allman Brothers, Leonard Cohen, Iggy Pop, Joe Strummer, and others too numerous to name taught me to question, as the expression went, "everything."

This is not rocket science; this is far more important; this is the essential subject matter that informs the propulsion and guidance systems of the human heart. Withal, instruct the young how to build and inhabit the structure of a cogent argument and to navigate a soul-suffused landscape of poignant verse, lyric, and insight.

To do so, one must not shy away from confrontation. During the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War era, before the Left was manipulated into fearing the libido borne of sacred vehemence, stupid opinions were not coddled; they were challenged.

Feelings were hurt. Egos were bruised. But an illegal war was shortened and a number of (long-overdue) rights were granted.

[]Having come  
the bitter way to better prayer, we have  
the sweetness of ripening. How sweet  
to know you by the signs of this world!  
–Wendel Berry, excerpt from "Ripening"

At present, among the things we can ill afford are fantasy-prone kids, duped into believing modern soldiering bestows nobility and involves heroic sacrifice.

Instead, the times call for brave misfits, encouraged to embrace rejection by a dysfunctional society and primed to endure the inherent bumps and buffeting inflicted from a culture that has gathered into the formation of a flying wedge of self-destructive, crash-fated crazy.

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