

HOW  
DEMOCRATS  
WIN

RESISTING  
DARK-SIDE  
RADICALISM

*Steven Stoft*

August 2020

*Dedicated to the strategic liberals  
who took back the House in 2018*

*Slow and steady wins the race.*

—Aesop, 600 BC

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## Preface

Mario Savio, fresh from civil-rights work, teaching sharecroppers' children in Mississippi, took his shoes off and climbed on top of a police car in the middle of the U.C. Berkeley campus to lead a sit-in. That was Day One of the free speech movement in 1964, and I was stuck in high school waiting for my freedom. But the next year, I was in Berkeley myself, protesting the Vietnam War, and the year after that I was canvassing to put Ron Dellums on the Berkeley City Council (he would later cofound the Congressional Black Caucus).

Soon after, in 1968, 17-year-old Black Panther Bobby Hutton was killed by the Oakland Police after taking part in an ambush of the police (back then we heard that the police ambushed the Panthers). I was arrested for posting an invitation to his funeral, but they could think of nothing to charge me with.

That year I voted for the Black candidate from Chicago for president — Dick Gregory. He was a wonderful activist-comedian, but the radical left's disdain for liberals, like nominee Hubert Humphrey, probably handed the presidency to Richard Nixon. For the next presidential election (in 1972), McGovern rejiggered the nomination process, which allowed him to unseat Chicago Mayor Richard Daley's working-class delegation, win the nomination and lose the election by a landslide.

**That's when I realized** we had committed revolutionary suicide. How long would it take to clear out all the crazy ideas? I don't mean the goals of peace and equality, but the crazy self-righteous utopian "strategies" that took no account of the real world. Having a math and astronomy background, I tried to calculate what lay ahead. My generation of activists would need to be replaced, and that would take 20 to 25 years.

Biding my time, I taught middle school for a year, did my alternative service as a conscientious objector and wandered around Europe reading Marxist economics and quantum mechanics. I returned to Berkeley for a Ph.D. in economics, launched a newsletter for Berkeley Citizens Action to hold the group together between biennial elections and advised City Councilwoman Ying Lee Kelley regarding the CETA federal job-training program. I had met Ying when we were both arrested at an antiwar demonstration. Fourteen of us won our suit for false arrest against the Alameda County Sheriff's Department.

Bill Clinton did show up 20 years after I made my calculation, but where was the progressive movement?

**Then, after I'd given up hope**, out of the blue, there was Barack Obama. After 36 years. And there was a movement of progressives right behind him. They were not a reflection of the late-'60s radicals. They were a little more like I had imagined the civil rights movement — thoughtful and dedicated, but with a new upbeat sense of humor. I thought I'd died and gone to heaven.

But even before he was elected, I was driving with friends to a movie when the guy in the back seat, an old '60s radical, began ranting about how Obama was just a corporate shill, as bad as the Republicans. My heart sank. I knew what this meant. I went online, and there I found them, the baby-boomer radicals and their political descendants, all foaming at the mouth.

As the election neared, I found myself pacing the floor, asking: *Do I want him to win?* There was no question I'd vote for him. But I knew the radical left. It would take them a while, but they would make life hell for him. I couldn't bear the thought. I had some idea how much support he would need

as our first Black president facing a well-oiled, ultra-right-wing media machine.

At a MoveOn meeting after his first midterm election, the few radicals there were crowing that they had given him a few dollars but had not worked for him — he was “such a disappointment.” Right. In two years, all he’d done was prevent another Great Depression, save the auto industry and pass Obamacare, the first big addition to FDR’s agenda since 1965.

Just before Obama’s second midterm election, Michael Moore summed up the radicals’ view: “Mr. Obama, when the history is written of this era, this is how you’ll be remembered: ‘He was the first Black president.’ Okay, not a bad accomplishment, but that’s it. A big disappointment.” No Republican could have been more damaging than this inside hit job.

As his second term ended, the radicals shifted into overdrive, and after eight years of sabotage, we lost by a hair. And they may well do it again. The remnants of the baby-boomer radicals had passed down to later generations their self-righteousness.

**Watching this unfold**, I did my best to figure out how a small group of dedicated, well-intentioned radicals could repeatedly stymie the very changes they wanted. Yes, it was due to overreach on their part. It was their belief that righteousness beats thinking. But why do they get away with it? Why don’t we dedicated liberals speak up? And most important, how can we stop Trump and get back on track?

There was only one way to find out. I’d done this twice before, once for electricity markets and once for climate policy. I knew it would work and only take about three years. I’d write a book ... and explain it to myself. That book, *Ripped Apart*, made this one possible. I’ve enjoyed all the eye-opening surprises I found along the way. I hope you do, too.

## A Note to the Reader

If you think this book's message needs to reach more people, you can help out by giving me one reason why. In return, I'll have Amazon send you two free copies to give to friends with similar views who would appreciate it.

Do this by leaving a comment on [HowDemocratsWin.org](http://HowDemocratsWin.org) and sending me an email at [HowDemcratsWin@gmail.com](mailto:HowDemcratsWin@gmail.com). Check for "Continuing" or "Offer ended." at the top left of the homepage.



# Introduction

“One thing I worry about among progressives,” said President Obama, is that “we sometimes start creating what’s called a ‘circular firing squad,’ where you start shooting at your allies because one of them has strayed from purity on the issues.” Then he added this strategic insight. “And when that happens, typically the overall effort and [the] movement weaken.”

**Shoot at your allies**, test their purity, and the movement weakens. Somehow, it seems Obama read this book a year before I wrote it. The only quibble I have with his observation is that the firing squad is not exactly circular. Of course, Obama was being characteristically tactful.

In fact, the progressives, who I’ll often refer to as radicals, are shooting at the Democratic Party with the intent of taking it over. The Party itself, most of whose members I will call liberals, tries hard to avoid internal discord but sometimes feels threatened enough to shoot back.

Obama’s strategic concern, my concern and I’m sure yours too, is that any weakening could mean four more years of Trump.

***Stopping Trump — that is the purpose of this book.*** He is the most dangerous president this country has seen.

Although I focus on problems among Democrats, I am only concerned with the problems that weaken us substantially. And if we lose, those will be the things we could have changed.

Unfortunately, Obama's wise words did not put an end to the radicals' sniping, and it continues to weaken the Democrats' efforts to defeat Trump, despite the radicals' outward show of unity that was evident at the convention.

**Fire up Trump's base.** Besides damaging our candidates, the other way to help lose the election is by firing up Trump's base. That's another feature of dark-side radicalism. Growing more concerned, in November 2019, Obama added this to his April remark quoted above:

This is still a country that is less revolutionary than it is interested in improvement ... the average American doesn't think that we have to completely tear down the system and remake it.

Talking about revolution and brandishing revolutionary slogans, like Abolish ICE or Defund the Police, are great ways to fire up Trump's base.

If the radicals don't think these hurt us, they shouldn't complain about Fox News, Rush Limbaugh and the right-wing media, because using left-radical slogans and positions are the main way they attack us. If those attacks don't work, then the right-wing media isn't much of a problem. But it is a problem because what fires up Trump's base is hating left radicalism.

Note, however, that Obama does not criticize the radicals for their goals but only for their revolutionary approach to achieving them.

*That distinction, goals vs. strategy, is the key to unity.*

It's also the key to understanding this book, because 'radicalism' has two completely different meanings. First, it means a desire for fundamental progressive social change. That's the good side of radicalism. Second, it can mean the dark-side belief that a political revolution is necessary. The dark-side belief

was recently articulated by Sean McElwee, the up-and-coming Berniecrat theorist and pollster:

Look, in 2020, mistakes were made ... the progressive movement wasn't yet powerful enough to win a Democratic [presidential] primary. ... Eventually, we will be powerful enough, and we'll ... pass a lot of laws.

By “pass a lot of laws” he means things like the Green New Deal, ending capitalism, defunding the police, and so on. This would do what Obama points out the average American doesn't want. It would “tear down the system and remake it” (if it worked). McElwee also claims the radicals will gain power over the Democratic Party “not by trying to flip red districts but by ousting moderate Democrats in relatively safe blue seats.” So the radicals' plans are to overthrow the Democratic Party and then tear down the system and replace it with a green new utopia.

This kind of talk, which right-wing news outlets love to report, does serious damage to our election prospects. In fact, without this albatross, I believe we would win easily, just as it has always seemed we should, against such a villainous buffoon. The trouble is that the Republicans know all about the radicals' plans. They believe the radicals will take over the Democratic Party and that they pretty much already have.

**The path to unity.** Surprisingly, the positive side of Democratic (not Marxist) radicalism aligns almost perfectly with liberal aspirations. As I'll show in Chapter 5, this is because Sanders has sold his radicals on FDR's liberalism (!) by mislabeling it “democratic socialism.” And FDR would be the Democrats patron saint if we had one.

Once this near-perfect alignment between the goals of present-day radicals and present-day liberal Democrats is understood, the only remaining disagreement is over tactics. And

tactics aren't worth shedding blood over. Even the radicals know that. They're shooting at us because they mistakenly think we are corporate shills or controlled by the party establishment which they believe is entirely corrupt. This mistaken view is what causes all the trouble.

So we must convince them that we share their goals, so we are not evil. We simply believe we have a better way of achieving these shared goals.

Our belief in "improvement," as Obama calls it, rather than in revolution, rests on solid ground. Essentially all of the progressive social change made in America has been made under liberal presidents. There were no radical presidents. And the progress has been enormous.

We have come from a point where most White men could not vote to where nearly everyone can; from no regulation of capitalism to a huge body of regulations; from no safety net to Social Security, Medicare, food stamps, and much more; from slavery to electing a Black president. These changes would have been literally unthinkable in 1820. They are more than "fundamental;" they are astounding. And it was all done with incremental changes — thousands of them.

During this 200-year period, the revolutionary approach, which dates back just as far, has done nothing remotely similar and has often set us back, sometimes for decades.

For many years, I was a radical, but I've left that religion. What has changed? None of my goals or aspirations for justice, equality, or liberty. The only thing that changed is my understanding of what has worked and what has failed. My aspirations are still far more radical than Bernie's public agenda, but I now see his revolutionary approach as something sure to fail now and in the future.

So keep this in mind. Taking cautious steps along a difficult path does not mean we're about to stop. It means we know what it takes to go the distance. It means that we do want to go

far. And hoping for a utopian revolution does not mean that day will come.

Those who attack fellow Democrats only slow our progress and could make Trump the winner. Joining forces does not require compromising principles, only giving up some fond illusions.

## **Part 1**

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# Elections

## CHAPTER 1

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# Win or Lose?

*If you think things cannot possibly get worse,  
trust me, they can.*

—Michelle Obama,  
2020 Democratic Convention

For five years, it has seemed impossible that he could win, did win, and now might win again. In all that time, why have we not discovered how to beat the least qualified, most dishonest president in our history? And remember, every one of the 16 other Republican candidates agreed with this assessment in 2016. The truth is, we should win easily.

Democrats favor broadly popular issues and are fired up as never before, and the country craves a return to less angry politics. That should do it. So why is this difficult? The problem is that there's a sizable minority shooting at mainstream Democrats. It's an inside job.

Of course, I'm talking about the radical attack on the liberal/moderate center of the Democratic Party. This time, the radicals have awakened to the need to vote for Joe Biden. That's a real help. But even as they say they'll vote for him, many announce that there will be no honeymoon. Sanders threatens that "The day after Biden is elected, we're going to have a serious debate." This is no way to support a candidate, and it's just the tip of the iceberg.

## The Two Sides of Radicalism

Radicalism in the usual sense of that word — the belief that there should be fundamental social change — is a good thing, and would not cause such problems. When we look at poverty, violence, educational inequalities, and climate change in America, almost all of us want fundamental social change. By the standard definition, liberalism is entirely compatible with radicalism and we're almost all radicals.

But another side of radical ideology is not shared by liberals, and it causes all the trouble. This is the radical mind-set. First described in 1919 by Max Weber (see Chapter 18), the father of sociology, it rejects compromise, applies purity tests and holds that revolution is the only path to meaningful social change. I'll call this the dark side of radicalism.

### Problems from the Dark Side

A quarter of those who voted for Sanders in the 2016 primaries did not vote Democratic in November, and half of them voted for Trump. Most radicals are now recognizing that Democratic votes matter. But the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), with over 50,000 dues-paying members, all of whom are Berniecrats, has vowed not to endorse Biden. Similarly, whenever Biden is criticized, a host of radicals pile on. Michael Moore told *Vanity Fair* on May 21 that “Biden does not generate the necessary enthusiasm,” and said he “may not be the nominee.”

Coming from Trump, such criticism would do no harm; we don't believe a word he says. But millions of Democrats take Moore seriously, and other naysaying Berniecrats are also influential.

Radical myths (and there are many) that slander groups of Democrats function as expanded versions of the personal attacks noted above. In Chapters 6 and 7, we will take a close look at the radical's crime bill myth, which has already been



appropriated by Trump to attack Biden as racist even though Biden was siding with a majority of Black leaders including two-thirds of radical Congressional Black Caucus.

A very different problem is radicals taking extreme positions to show they are more righteous than liberals or even other radicals. For example, ending private health insurance in one step, abolishing ICE, and defunding the police are three positions that make headlines throughout the right-wing press. Trump tweets them, and they fire up his base. He and the Russians back Sanders and love Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez — for all the wrong reasons.

These three, radical, dark-side behaviors damage the Democrats and will help Trump win.

1. Personal attacks on Biden
2. Myths that slander Democratic leaders and the party
3. Extreme positions that fire up Trump's base

## Elections

It's hard to know, but my guess is that radical positions are what do us the most damage in elections. This dates back to at least the 1950s when Republicans frequently smeared Democrats as communist sympathizers.

The 2018 midterm elections are a good test of the impact of such positions. During these elections, the liberals, despite pressure from the radicals, rejected the radical positions. Meanwhile, the radicals relied on these positions to implement their plan for an overwhelming Congressional victory. Altogether the blue wave flipped 43 House seats from red to blue.

The three radical PACs made 117 radical endorsements for the House and promised to elect Berniecrats even in deep-red states! So how many districts did they manage to turn from red to blue? Zero. As in none.

The blue wave was almost entirely powered by moderates and the New Dem PAC, which endorsed 33 of the candidates who did flip seats from red to blue.

The last time radicals gained control of the Democratic Party was the late 1960s, and I was cheering them on. LBJ had won a 61% landslide in 1964. After eight years, we took control and ran George McGovern — a wonderful person, by the way — in 1972. He polled 37% and summed that up by saying, “I opened the doors of the Democratic Party, and 20 million people walked out.” This crushed the Democrats and radicalism for decades. Of course, we hadn’t seen any of that coming; we were radicals.

## Do We Need Radical Positions?

Taking positions is easy. Getting things done is hard. This is reflected in history. Consider who made the fundamental progressive changes in the last 160 years: Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, FDR, LBJ, and Obama. All were liberals in the sense that they compromised, never applied purity tests, and did not strive for a revolution. And Sanders’ three favorites — Teddy, FDR, and LBJ — were super-rich and at the pinnacle of their party establishments. Dark-side radicalism, if it were honest, would reject all three of those presidents, even though they now try to claim credit for their fundamental progressive changes.

There is a similar, though nearly unknown, line of notables on the radical side, but none have accomplished anything remotely close to the fundamental progressive changes brought about by the liberal presidents.

Since we don’t need radical positions — like “defund the police” or that looting is a form of reparations — to make fundamental progressive change, we should disown them or, if possible, dispose of them. That would short-circuit the bulk of

the attacks from right-wing media, the Trump War Room, and Trump himself. There is nothing they like more than tying our candidates to radical positions. Consider these examples:

- “Joe Biden and the Radical Left want to Abolish Police, Abolish ICE, ...” —Trump on Twitter
- “Trump wants Americans to believe Biden is a radical leftist.” —CNN
- “Hannity accuses Biden of 'adopting the radical left's war on police' by 'bowing' to Sanders.” —Fox News.
- “We are focused strictly on how she [Kamala Harris] completes the radical leftist takeover of Joe Biden.” —Communications director for the Trump campaign

Eliminating Trump’s favorite style of attack would be a tremendous help with winning this election.

## What Can You Do?

The most important thing is to help get out the vote. I’m not denying that. But how can you make use of what’s in this book? There are two ways.

- Learn about dark-side myths and avoid spreading them.
- Speak up when dark-side ideas are being expressed.

Few of the most activist radicals can be convinced by logic. But ideology spreads mostly through either social pressure or through persuasion by trusted sources such as friends.

Radicals, who argue aggressively and claim more knowledge than they possess, deliberately make it hard for the center to speak up. However, I have observed that people give voice to their views and feelings more often when they feel confident of their facts and their position. It only makes sense. The purpose of this book is to help instill such confidence in the liberal center.

## Winning the 2018 Midterms

*The People's Party [won] the U.S. presidency and a majority of both houses of Congress in 2020.*

—Robert Reich, Op-ed, March 25, 2016

The blue wave flipped 43 House seats from red to blue. The moderate “New Dem Coalition” had endorsed 33 of those candidates and gained 42 members. That coalition showed how we can win and what we must keep doing to win in 2020.

During the first two years of the Trump presidency, Democrats were desperate. They had zero influence in the executive branch, almost none in Congress and were rapidly losing liberal judges. That’s how the 2018 Congressional midterm elections became the most heavily contested since the first-time voters got to elect Senators back in 1914. And even that election didn’t get many more people out to vote than voted in 2018.

There were 82 “battleground” House races (as identified by Ballotpedia) that could flip a seat from red to blue or blue to red, and 73 of these started out Republican, giving the Democrats a lot of room for improvement. The New Democrats took advantage.

## How Did the New Dems Do It?

There are many pieces to this story. For example, women played an outsized role and ended up gaining 21 Democratic seats in the house. But one of the most talked-about battles was the fight over healthcare. That was particularly important to those over 50, who cast more than half the votes in 2018. And like the nation as a whole, that group shifted 6% toward the Democrats between their presidential vote in 2016 and their House vote in 2018.

In the four elections before 2018, less than 10% of the Democrats' political ads mentioned healthcare. But then in 2018, over half of them did. The Republicans, however, had been attacking Obamacare less each year as Obamacare got more popular. Then, in 2018, they abruptly shifted course and stopped attacking Obamacare. Here's the reason.

During the House primaries, radicals hounded Democratic candidates to endorse Medicare-for-all, and a fair number did. However, by the general election, most of them had wisely backed off. Of the 967 ads that Democrats ran in competitive House districts after Labor Day, only two candidates mentioned either Medicare-for-all or single-payer. They both lost in November.

Obamacare had finally become so popular that in 2018 the Democrats went on the attack, defending it against Trump and the Republicans. The Republicans, on the other hand, stopped attacking Obamacare and started attacking Democrats for backing Medicare-for-all. They even made up stories that some Democrats backed it who didn't. But they lost the Obamacare debate. And they lost the House. Thank you, President Obama.

## The Berniecrat Contribution to 2018

Radicals are terribly pessimistic about the present, but as to the future, the sky's the limit. You know their pessimism about the present, but have you noticed their extreme optimism about the future?

Robert Reich, Sanders' most illustrious surrogate, imagined in his March 2016 op-ed that “[m]illions who called themselves conservatives and Tea Partiers joined with millions who called themselves liberals and progressives” to form the People's Party. Yes, he thought the Tea Party would join the progressives!

Next, he imagined they would capture “the U.S. presidency and a majority of both houses of Congress in 2020.” And then I suppose they would all hold hands and sing “Kumbaya,” as was done back in Reich's college days.

Despite missing the mark on the 2019 People's Party, in his new book, *The System* (March 2020), Reich is still optimistic about winning over the Tea Party. Talk about optimistic! And he's still saying, “a new party could unite the disaffected and anti-establishment elements of both major parties and give voice to the 90% of Americans who have been losing ground.” A radical party that can win a 90% victory! You must admit that's as optimistic as you can get.

**A Pack of PACs.** A month after Reich's wildly optimistic 2016 op-ed, 20 volunteers from Sanders' campaign, led by top campaign staffer Zack Exley, formed the “Brand New Congress.” The Huffington Post explained at the time that they were “looking ahead to the 2018 midterm elections to replace Congress all at once” with lawmakers who agreed with Sanders.

As Exley explained, “We want a supermajority in Congress ... and I think we get it by running Dems in blue areas and Republicans in deep-red areas.” You read that right — they in-

tended to run Republicans who would openly commit to Sanders and win House and Senate seats in “deep-red areas.” Has any top lieutenant of a presidential candidate ever been more out of touch with political reality?



*The DNC was their enemy, not the GOP*

Their first step? They would recruit 400 Congressional candidates by July 2017. I don’t think they ever made it to 30.

PAC #2: “Our Revolution.” Just after finally endorsing Hillary Clinton in July 2016, Sanders announced his plan to form his own super PAC, “Our Revolution,” to promote his run for president in 2020. In early August, he began raising money for it, and soon held a launch party. (This was how he was making sure Trump would be defeated in 2016?)

PAC #3: “Justice Democrats.” In January 2017, Exley joined Saikat Chakrabarti, another top staffer from Sanders’ campaign, to form a third pro-Sanders PAC. The Justice Democrats recruited Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and two years later she was in Congress with Chakrabarti as her chief of staff.

Sanders’ three PACs fielded many candidates and eventually, among the three of them, made 117 endorsements. Only 38 of these were for battleground seats. Surprisingly, the three PACs agreed on only two of these candidates. (Radical factionalism is legendary.)

So how many of their endorsed candidates were among the 43 who flipped blue seats to red and gave us back the House? As you know from Chapter 1, the shocking answer is none. So much for taking a supermajority of Congress all at once. Bernie's minions could not take back even a single seat from the Republicans.

The point here is not so much that they showed no ability to beat Republicans in battleground states, which is a pretty daunting task. The point is that the Berniecrats were completely out of touch with the reality of electoral politics — imagining a sweeping victory and then winning nothing.

## The Big Win — Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez “primaried” Joseph Crowley, a 10-term incumbent backed by the very-progressive Working Families Party. She won her primary by 4,018 votes with 7.2% of registered Democrats voting for her while Crowley got only 5.5%.

Her largest margins of support came from neighborhoods in western Queens with lower Latino populations and higher White populations. She did poorly in the Black neighborhoods.

The entire radical “Squad” of four comes from dark-blue districts where Clinton beat Trump by margins of 55% to 71%. (Yes, a 71% margin means 85% for Clinton and 14% for Trump!) They are in no way representative of the Democratic Party, and their inflammatory rhetoric only makes it harder for Democrats to win in the rest of the country.

## Conclusion

Sanders' PACs focused on fighting Democrats, and they lost when they did fight Republicans. Has this changed? On June 7, a Politico post revealed that “progressives have also come up short against many of the *incumbent* House Democrats



they've targeted." So once again they are spending their energy targeting sitting Democrats.

Every non-Berniecrat Democrat is focused on fighting Trump or Republicans, and they're doing a damn good job of it. That's how to win, and it's how to make progressive change. FDR and LBJ didn't need radicals to make change; they just needed broad popular support.

## Chapter 3

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# Why Sanders Lost

*I've got news for the Republican establishment.  
I've got news for the Democratic establishment.  
They can't stop us.*

@BernieSanders  
180,300 Likes. Feb 21, 2020

On February 28, the day before the South Carolina primary, Sanders still believed his own tweet: “I’ve got news for the Democratic establishment. They can’t stop us.” But by midnight of Super Tuesday, four days later, his revolution had vanished into thin air.

Of course, it was not the “establishment” that stopped him, it was the voters — mostly Black voters who have the sophistication that comes from a memory of history. And he would soon learn in Michigan that the White voters he was most counting on were his least reliable supporters.

Going from “they can’t stop us” to dead in the water in just four days shows the kind of self-delusion that we cannot afford to have guiding the party toward November 2020. Because Sanders and a few of his followers are still pushing hard to have a say in reshaping the party’s brand, we had better take a close look at how they lost their way over the last four years.

## #NeverHillary

After the first two Democratic primaries, the world's best meta-pollster, Nate Silver, decided to look ahead. So he asked himself one simple question: What if Sanders did about the same as in 2016 but lost his #NeverHillary voters? The data showed that about 12% of Sanders' primary voters had picked Trump over Clinton, and another 12% voted for Jill Stein, Gary Johnson, or stayed home with no desire to vote for Clinton. All told, that was about a quarter of Sanders' voters. That led Silver to a simple conclusion:

Sanders won 43 percent of the popular vote in Democratic primaries and caucuses in 2016. If about a quarter of that 43 percent were #NeverHillary voters, that means Sanders' real base was more like 33 percent of the overall Democratic electorate.

In other words, he was suggesting that a quarter of Sanders' voters might not have been for Sanders but only against Hillary, and if those left, he would get only a third of the Democratic primary votes.

**So what happened?** The coronavirus shut things down, but we have results from 31 states, and they brought in 25 million votes, nearly as many as in all of the 2016 primaries. Back in 2016, those 31 states leaned just slightly more pro-Sanders than average, so they are a good test case.

In those states, Sanders tallied exactly the 33% Silver predicted. Just as Silver thought, Sanders had lost his #NeverHillary vote and, on balance, gained no new votes.

Taking into account some details (like a few missing states in the 2020 data), Sanders *lost a bit more* than the #NeverHillary vote. But there's a pretty obvious reason why that might have happened.

## Voter Suppression

Unlike primary elections, where you just vote and go, caucuses are a group process with political speeches and sometimes multiple votes. Working people with families often just don't have the time.

So caucuses suppress roughly 90% of the vote, although there's a huge variation. This makes it far easier for small, activist pressure groups to swing the vote totals in their favor. And it was obvious to anyone paying attention that Sanders was being helped by that voter suppression in 2016. Now we have proof.

In the 24 states that *did not* switch from caucuses to primary elections between 2016 and 2020, voter turnout increased 5%. In the eight states that *did* switch from caucuses to primary elections, voter turnout increased 724%.

In the eight states that stopped suppressing the vote, Sanders' percentage of the popular vote dropped from 66% to 36%. His vote was cut almost in half. Caucus-based voter suppression had been very kind to Sanders. That may be why he never mentioned *that* voter suppression problem.

## Michigan Goes for Biden

A “political revolution” has been Sanders' main theme since 2015. The first thing he did after the 2016 Democratic Convention was to found his super PAC, “Our Revolution.” Then he wrote his book, *Our Revolution*. His next book was *Bernie Sanders Guide to Political Revolution*.

What a revolution needs most is popular support — it needs “millions of people” to “stand up.” So Sanders talked constantly about how the system discouraged voting. He saw his role as providing a progressive choice and dramatically increasing voter turnout, particularly among the young and the working class.

The story was that he had done this in Michigan in 2016 when he pulled off a surprise upset victory over Hillary Clinton. And the hope was that he could push beyond his 2016 record in 2020.

Sanders wasn't taking any chances. He was spending more money than any candidate except billionaire Michael Bloomberg. Three weeks before the primary, his campaign was opening five Michigan field offices, in Ann Arbor, Dearborn, Detroit, Flint and Grand Rapids. And it hired ten staff members to supervise volunteers. Biden only had one paid staffer until a week before the primary.

Sanders focused on Michigan from Friday through the Monday before the primary. Biden campaigned there only on Monday. In 2016, Sanders had won 73 of the 83 counties. This time, Biden took all 83 counties.

**What Went Wrong?** Voter turnout in Michigan had increased dramatically, just like Bernie predicted, but not because of him. It was up 32% in just four years — by a total of 377,000 voters. But Sanders himself actually lost 22,000 voters. And he lost on the issues, not just on electability. Exit polls showed that Biden beat Sanders 58 to 37 on healthcare, 51 to 44 on climate change and 63 to 23 on race relations. The new voters had come out to vote for Uncle Joe. If there's a revolution happening, it's Biden's, not Bernie's.

The main thing hurting Sanders was likely losing those #NeverHillary voters. They never had been his supporters. Using a sample of 50,000 voters, Nate Silver found that Sanders' voters who:

- “didn't think whites benefited from their race” or who
- “wanted to repeal the Affordable Care Act”

were much more likely to be #NeverHillary voters. Silver summed it up saying, “#NeverHillary voters were conserva-

tive, not super liberal.” And it turns out that the White working class who Sanders was courting is, on average, pretty conservative.

## The Big Picture

In the 2016 primaries, Sanders scored slightly less than half as well among Democrats as Clinton did (32.9% to 66.2%). But he scored almost twice as well with independents and Republicans (65% to 34%). Sanders thought that the extra 31% of non-Democrats voting for him were converts to socialism — the first wave of his revolution. That’s still not huge because most Democratic voters are Democrats.

However, Nate Silver found that among Bernie’s new non-Democrat, supposed socialists, almost all of them were just #NeverHillary voters. Half of them left to vote for Trump in 2016, and the other half left Bernie to vote for Joe Biden in 2020. So almost all his supposed new converts to socialism turned out not to be Berniecrats at all, let alone socialists. They just voted for him to spite Hillary. Sanders didn’t win new socialists; he won new sexists.

**Double-checking.** Sanders is a real socialist (but like all American socialists since about 1900, a democratic one), so his main target is the working class. Because the Democrats have already won over the Black working class, he concentrated on the generally better-off White working class. So it’s worth checking how he fared in Grant County, Oklahoma, which is 88% White and where 77% lack a college degree. In 2016, Sanders won 57% of the Grant County vote. But when the alternative was Joe Biden instead of Hillary Clinton, that dropped to 16%.

Now Clinton is politically quite close to Biden, so the explanation can’t be politics. It was just sexism. In Oklahoma, that was the core of Sanders’ revolution.

## Out of Touch

As you've guessed, I'm no Berniecrat. So I'll let Sean McElwee, a dedicated Berniecrat, explain this point. He coined the slogan "Abolish ICE." Unlike most Berniecrats, he's a data scientist and checks in frequently with reality.

Just like Nate Silver, he says, "The white working-class voters that Sanders won were mostly anti-Clinton voters." But he also diagnoses why Sanders and the Berniecrats lost touch with reality.

McElwee says Sanders' people thought they could win with 30% of the vote. Believing that, he says, "inspired some very pernicious thinking," along the lines of, "Those people who don't believe what we believe, we can't win them [over], so fuck them." But McElwee concluded, "When we shut ourselves off from conversations about how to persuade voters, we're making it a lot harder for progressives to win." Yes, exactly.

## How to Win

So how to win is obvious. Don't shut yourself off from voters who fail one of your purity tests. That's the tradition of the radical left, and it's one reason they rarely win.

The way the liberals and moderates win is by accepting people as they are (which is not at all the same as accepting their ideas) and working with whomever they can. If you run people for office who can accept and communicate with their constituents, then you can shift opinions, which is what drives progressive change, and you will also win more votes. That's what we must do to win in November.

## Infighting vs. Elections

The radicals are bad at winning elections, but Sanders scored 43% against Hillary Clinton. Aren't those two statements contradictory? On the surface, Yes, but if you take "winning elections" to mean getting elected to public office, then, No, they're not.

Radicals excel at infighting, but not at gaining public office. Mostly they fight among themselves. But sometimes radical groups ask their members to enter other organizations to attempt to take over or to recruit members to their group. Trotskyites, in particular, are known for this strategy, called "entryism," and they have splintered into over forty little organizations in the US. Sanders has been involved with at least three of them — the Young Peoples Socialist League, the Socialist Party of America, and Socialist Workers Party.

Sanders' used entryism when he ran for the Democratic nomination — asked in 2017 on MSNBC if he considered himself a Democrat, he said: "No, I'm an independent." During the primaries, he claimed to be talking only about issues, but constantly implied Clinton was corrupt. When pressed, he could give not one example. He'd been caught infighting. And in 2020, we found that 24% of his vote was not for him but against Clinton.

By running inside the party, he recruited around 50,000 Democrats into DSA, which is refusing to support Joe Biden, but which will be working hard to bump off incumbent Democrats. In 2012, Bernie Sanders got so close to running a primary challenge to President Barack Obama that Senator Harry Reid had to intervene to stop him. More infighting.



Now Sanders' PACs are running even more primary challenges against Democrats. As noted in the introduction, McElwee believes this should be the focus of the radical faction until they take over the party. This will certainly damage the Democrats, and I see no sign that the party could still win elections if the radical takeover were to succeed.

## **Part 2**

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# **Progressives: FDR Liberals**

## Chapter 4

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# The Dark Side of Radicalism

*A radical is a man with both feet firmly planted — in the air. ... A liberal is a man who uses his legs and hands at the behest of his head.*

—President Franklin Roosevelt, 1939

Radicals want fundamental, progressive social change, just as most Democrats do. And some of them work incredibly hard to achieve that. That's the positive side of radicalism.

But they often refuse to compromise even though refusing only stymies progress. And they mistakenly condemn their allies with arbitrary purity tests. Worst of all, they create false and slanderous myths in an attempt to defeat non-radicals working towards the same goals. These three behaviors comprise the dark side of radicalism.

The attacks and blame that come from the dark side are always directed at liberals and the Democratic Party. Over the long run, these do tremendous damage. So we had best take a closer look at where the dark side comes from and what might be done about it.

**Stunning overconfidence.** That's what we witnessed in the last two chapters. What else can you call it — believing that, on your first try, you could flip Congress from red to Berniecrat by running Berniecrat Republicans in deep-red states?!

Two years later, after “winning” two tiny primaries with less than 30% of the vote, Sanders became sure nothing stood between him and the White House. You know what happened next.

Overconfidence followed by failure often leads to blaming others. But the two recent Berniecrat failures did not produce the collection of refusals to compromise, purity tests and slanderous myths that mark the history of radicalism. So let’s look back at that history.

In 1972 we had the McGovern debacle that I’ve mentioned. In the 1960s, the Weather Underground declared war on America (and lost). The Black Panthers promised to protect the Black community but soon degenerated into a drug gang. The Progressive Party of 1948, secretly organized by Communist Party USA radicals, hoped to make peace with Stalin and end segregation. It collected 2.4% of the vote, and its naive candidate, former Vice President Henry Wallace, who had been wildly popular four years earlier, ended up being the most unpopular man in America except for the gangster Lucky Luciano. The list goes on.

Radicalism in America dates back to the American Revolution, and since then, it has had no significant success. This, and the nature of radical ideology, has led to its antagonistic dark side.

## Radical vs. Liberal: Asymmetric Warfare

Before looking into how overconfidence leads to damaging myths, let’s back up and look at the nature of the radical-liberal conflict.

Radicals want fundamental, FDR-style change (Chapter 5) and believe that requires a revolution. Liberals want fundamental FDR-style change and believe that requires continuing incremental change, although occasionally we can manage a

big increment like the 1964 Civil Rights Act. So the two sides differ mainly on strategy. That difference is large, but each side should view the other as mistaken, not evil, because their long-term goals are almost identical.

That's not how it works.

Liberals do view the conflict as a strategic difference, but the radicals do not. They are sure it's *not* about strategy. They see liberals as immoral and hence their enemy. Bernie Sanders constantly implied that Hillary Clinton and everyone working for the Democratic Party are corrupt shills for Wall Street.

- Liberals say radicals are mistaken.
- Radicals say liberals are immoral, corrupt or evil.

Why do radicals make such a mean-spirited mistake, which only holds back the very causes they care most about?

## Dark-Side Thinking

Stunning overconfidence (along with another key bit of radical ideology discussed in Chapter 18) leads to the three damaging mistakes of dark-side radical thinking:

1. Rejecting compromise — to seek a revolution
2. Purity testing — to vilify those who disagree
3. Slandorous myths — to defeat the Democrats

**Radicals reject compromise** for two reasons (1) they think getting the whole pie is the only “righteous” thing to do, and (2) they believe that rejecting half the pie, makes getting the whole pie more likely. Unfortunately, it never seems to work out that way. Most people learn this lesson quickly. Why don't the radicals? In part, the answer is stunning overconfidence. Overconfidence is believing “this time is different” over and over and...

In college, I watched the protest organizers issue “nonnegotiable demands” time after time. And sure enough, I never heard about any negotiations — or accepted demands. I found this naivete stunning, even back then. But if your confidence is not based on reality, if you are hyper-confident, then you believe, *This time we will get the whole pie*. And you see no need to settle for half.

The demands issued by the Seattle CHAZ/CHOP demonstrators were different. No one had the power to grant them. They were just making demands of the universe, so far with no luck.

Radicals are also noted for rejecting incrementalism and they do this for the same reason. Incrementalism is just a series of compromises, which they reject.

**Purity testing** also comes from overconfidence but with a kicker. For example, a radical may be absolutely sure that Medicare-for-all is the best policy. But the kicker is that they think this is so obvious that *everyone can see they are right*.

So if someone disagrees, that person can’t be mistaken — because “everyone knows what’s right.” And if they are not mistaken, there’s only one possibility left — they are evil.

**Slandorous myths** are purity tests applied to misinformation about the past. But two damaging radical myths are not slanderous: the myth of the bully pulpit and the myth of the Overton window. These are simply tall tales that purport to prove that overconfidence is fully justified. However, we will see that the bully pulpit myth led Robert Reich to slander Obama.

Biden will be attacked by radicals using the crime bill myth as part of their war on liberals. And as we will soon see, although widely believed, that is baseless slander. Purity testing will push him toward using radical rhetoric that makes radicals feel warm and fuzzy but loses votes from anti-Trump Republicans and independents.

## Why this Matters

We can do three things to win, (1) increase Democratic turnout, (2) reduce Republican turnout, and (3) shift voters from Trump to Biden. Notice that complaining about Trump and cursing him did not make the list. We've done that, and it doesn't work.

**Post-game videos.** To achieve our three objectives and win, we must focus on what we do wrong, what we do right, and how to improve. That's why this book matters. It focusses on our side – Democrats — because that is what we can change. We can't change Trump. We will take a hard look at key problems on our side that stop us from winning as well as on strategies that work.

To up their game, sports teams rely on post-game videos to do just what we're doing here. They study themselves — not so much the other team. Watching the videotape of our past performances reveals a lot of self-destructive behavior. Stopping that will make winning much easier. We will also see that there's a lot we do right. That needs to be protected.

**Achieving the three objectives.** Get-out-the-vote efforts are most important for objective #1, increased turnout. But suppressing the radical sniping aimed at our candidates and our party will also increase turnout. This is important for young voters and especially for young Black voters.

Republican turnout will be lower (objective #2), and we will win over more Never-Trump voters in the suburbs (#3) if we don't help Trump fire up his base with useless radical rhetoric. Examples of such rhetoric include “socialism,” “abolishing ICE,” “No Borders,” and saying the *Antifa Handbook* should “strike fear in the heart of @realDonaldTrump” (Deputy Chair of the DNC, Keith Ellison) or “Fuck you, Melanie (sic). ...” (see Chapter 12). That's all bad strategy.

**Is there room for improvement?** Disregarding the 12% of Sanders' supporters who voted for Trump in 2016, there were still about three million of his supporters that *did not* vote for Clinton. And many more from the Clinton camp were likely discouraged from voting. This time there will probably be fewer who defect, but it could still be in the low millions.

And, as we saw in the 2018 midterms, shifting marginal Trump voters into the Democratic column also has great potential, particularly in the suburbs. So yes, there is plenty of room for improvement.

**Can we improve?** I think we can. My main reason for optimism is documented in the next chapter. Although Sanders is a socialist, he has kept his truly socialist ideas to himself and has sold his followers on FDR liberalism. FDR would be the patron saint of the Democratic Party if we had one. In fact, I will show that Sanders learned about FDR's Second Bill of Rights, which he adopted as "my vision today," from a bona-fide establishment Democrat.

Because the two sides share the same vision of the future, there is no legitimate reason for them to be so polarized. But there is little hope this book can convince many radicals. They need to hear from their friends that, yes, Democrats still are true FDR liberals, but sometimes reality blocks our path. That happened to FDR himself. He wanted to implement a broad healthcare program in 1935 but didn't even push for it in public until 1944. The opposition was too strong.

For those who are not caught in the delusion of overconfidence, the pages that follow provide the facts and arguments they need to defend the liberal viewpoint that revolutions don't work, but continuous incremental change does. And when the opportunity for a large increment of change comes along, we'll take it.



## Chapter 5

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# Progressives Are FDR Liberals

*In 1944, in his State of the Union speech, President Roosevelt outlined what he called a second Bill of Rights. ... That was Roosevelt's vision 70 years ago. It is my vision today.*

—Bernie Sanders, November 2015

The shocking truth is that most democratic socialists and “progressives” who follow Bernie Sanders are actually good liberals — FDR liberals to be precise. FDR was the godfather of Democratic liberalism. And that’s still the Democrats’ agenda.

This is terrific news for party unity if it can be widely broadcast.

“Many historians argue that Roosevelt was ... the savior of capitalism at a time when socialism could have been an alternative.” Noted socialist Dan La Botz is right about this. FDR saved capitalism and blocked socialism. And most socialists, from the Great Depression on, agree. That’s why I was startled to read that in April 2016 longtime socialist Bernie Sanders visited Roosevelt’s grave, praising FDR as “one of the great, great presidents in the history of our country.”

Sanders didn’t stop there. Four days later, he released a TV/YouTube ad showing him and FDR side by side, telling us that Roosevelt found “a way to break up big banks, create millions of jobs and rebuild America. Some say it can’t be done

again. But another native son of New York is ready: Bernie.” Sanders was obviously selling himself as the next FDR.

Now Sanders calls himself both a socialist and a democratic socialist, and he calls FDR’s policy proposals democratic socialism. But none of that matters for the point I’m making now. My point here is simply to agree with Sanders that he has adopted FDR’s policies as his own and sold these to his followers as his political “vision.” The result is:

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Sanders’ followers now believe wholeheartedly in FDR’s politics, which is neither “progressivism” nor “democratic socialism” but rather, FDR liberalism, aka Democratic liberalism.

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As one more proof of this, consider his famous 2015 Georgetown University speech on democratic socialism. In it, Sanders cited FDR’s 1944 State of the Union address, which he called “one of the most important speeches ever made by a president.” He quoted FDR’s view on economic security and told his audience, “That was Roosevelt’s vision seventy years ago. *It is my vision today* [emphasis added].”

## Was FDR a Socialist or What?

Sanders and his followers have now fully adopted FDR’s political brand. What was it? Before Roosevelt, the term liberalism was used by both Democrats and Republicans to mean something more like “libertarian.” In his “Rugged Individualism” speech of 1928, Herbert Hoover included a short but forceful section advocating liberalism.

Roosevelt knew his New Deal would be attacked as socialistic, so to protect it he called it liberalism — in essence, camouflaging it as part of the conservative tradition. Of course, this upset Hoover and the conservatives, but FDR won that fight, captured the term for the Democrats and redefined it to

mean a philosophy of government responsibility for social welfare.

The result was that liberalism came to mean things like unemployment insurance, universal healthcare, Social Security and the like. At the time, this was a radical concept because it went well beyond progressivism. As Roosevelt explained it,

A radical is a man with both feet firmly planted — in the air. A conservative is a man with two perfectly good legs, who, however, has never learned to walk forward. A liberal is a man who uses his legs and hands at the behest of his head.

FDR liberalism took a decisive step in a new and more humane direction, and we are still on that track. However, it is a path that leaves capitalism in place as the economic engine. It's just a path that humanizes capitalism. FDR considered himself a liberal until his dying day.

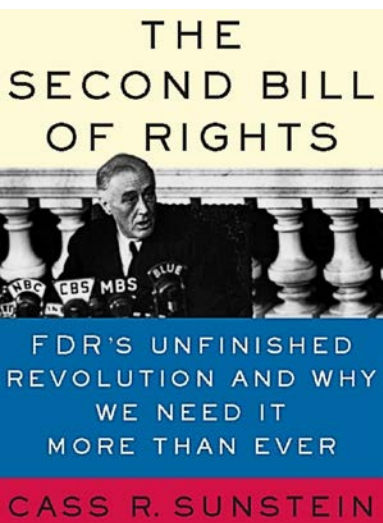
## Why Did Sanders Turn to Liberalism?

When introducing his version of “democratic socialism” (actually, FDR liberalism), Sanders quoted liberally from FDR’s 1944 State of the Union Message to Congress and relied entirely on its “Second Bill of Rights” for his policy proposals. He cited no other document. So how did he come to focus on this ancient speech?

Take a look at the cover of Cass Sunstein’s book (below), published in 2004. Sunstein was Obama’s regulatory “czar.” And he’s all for a “revolution” to finish implementing FDR’s Second Bill of Rights, just like Bernie. Coincidence?

FDR’s Second Bill of Rights drew attention outside the U.S. for a couple of years after he proposed it in 1944. Then it dropped out of sight for the next 60 years until Sunstein wrote his book, which was reviewed in *The New York Times* and The

Washington Post. In 2006, the book was also reviewed by Thom Hartmann, a prominent left-wing talk-radio host who called it “one of the most important books of this decade.” That review contained a prophetic prediction.



“If a Democratic candidate for the presidency in 2008 were to take up Sunstein's modern update of Roosevelt's Second Bill of Rights, he or she would certainly win the election.”

Starting two years before Hartmann's review, and continuing for a decade, Hartmann hosted Sanders for an hour each week on his Friday morning “Brunch with Bernie” national radio show. Hartmann must have told Bernie about the book with the new ideas that he found so exciting. And because Sanders had long been his favorite potential presidential candidate, he would certainly have told Sanders of his prediction and talked that over with him.

Sunstein (via Hartmann) opened Sanders' eyes to the notion that he could win the presidency by jumping on FDR's liberal bandwagon. And if an establishment shill like Sunstein (as Sanders sees him) could call for a revolution right on the cover of his book and still get appointed by Obama, why couldn't Sanders be just as daring?

In 2019, Sanders doubled down on FDR liberalism by not just promoting it but by following Sunstein's recommendation of a modern update of Roosevelt's Bill of Rights. Sanders has now introduced his “21st Century Bill of Rights.” It adds nothing new except the right to a clean environment. (Strangely, it

does not add any civil rights.) But this helps him appear, at least to his followers, to be FDR's true successor.

## Are Democrats FDR Liberals Too?

There's no doubt that Sanders has preached pure FDR liberalism and his followers have bought it, but has the center of the Democratic Party given up on it? Of course, the radicals claim that they have, and this is even one of their central myths.

I think they might not be so sure if they realized that Cass Sunstein, one of Obama's more moderate appointees, had spent most of a decade researching and writing the book that inspired Sanders' political "vision" today. And Sanders did not even start talking about this until six years after Sunstein's book came out. Of course, his "progressives" don't know this because Sanders has never even mentioned that there is such a book. That would be embarrassing.

So there is a strong theoretical interest in FDR liberalism among Democrats, but that's not too surprising because FDR is the number-one Democratic hero, practically a saint. If you don't believe this, you should visit the 7.5-acre FDR Memorial in Washington, D.C., completed in 1995. In my view, it is the most impressive of all the presidential memorials. It was not built by radicals. It's liberals who have kept the FDR flame alive.

But practically speaking, have Democrats kept the faith? Have they continued to press for the rights FDR listed? I can't go into all of them, so to avoid any appearance of cherry-picking, I will pick Sanders' number-one concern, healthcare.

## A Short History of the Fight for Healthcare

The radical myth is that liberals turned conservative after 1972 and since then have made no attempt to pass a decent healthcare plan. As it happens, 1972 was the year the radicals'

candidate, George McGovern, lost in a landslide that he correctly characterized as 20 million Democrats leaving the party. After that loss of political power, Democrats scaled back their ambitions and focused on rebuilding the power the radicals had destroyed.

Whose fault was that? As a radical back then, I raise my hand. Nonetheless, in 1976, the Democratic Party platform took this position:

We need a comprehensive national health insurance system with universal and mandatory coverage. Such a national health insurance system should be financed by a combination of employer-employee shared payroll taxes and general tax revenues.

The Democrats had not forgotten. But Carter did not make a strong effort. That upset Ted Kennedy who had, in the late 1960s, dedicated his political career to securing healthcare for all. So the AFL-CIO and the Democratic Party establishment backed Kennedy in challenging Carter, a sitting president. But Carter, not Kennedy, won the nomination and then lost the election.

**The Clintons came next.** The next opportunity came when Clinton won the presidency in 1992 with only 43% of the popular vote. The first Saturday after his inauguration, he convened a White House healthcare meeting. The effort was led by Hillary and produced a plan for universal healthcare that did not allow insurance companies to discriminate against pre-existing conditions. And the Clintons went after the drug companies:

Exchanging verbal thunderbolts with the companies that make prescription drugs, President Clinton has denounced high prices that force some sick and elderly Americans to skip meals to pay for their medicine.

His proposals for revamping the medical system would fundamentally reshape the playing field for drug companies, pressuring them to hold down prices and in some ways treating them as much like a crucial social service or public utility as private profit-seeking businesses.

—*The New York Times*, Sept. 30, 1993

The corporations retaliated with about \$50 million worth of attack ads. But the failure of the Clintons' effort can be chalked up to their unwillingness to compromise or even accept a gradual phase-in of universal coverage. Basically, the Clintons had failed because they were still too radical. Remember, they had worked hard for McGovern in 1972.

**Obamacare.** The Democrats' next opportunity came with the election of Obama, and he jumped on it immediately. Yes, he offered to work with Republicans. He knew racists, and he wanted to give them no excuses. But that courtesy made no difference to the outcome. In the end, the bill was negotiated solely among Democrats.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid had to give up on the public option because of Senators who felt threatened in their relatively conservative states, but they passed a bill with an \$800 billion-per-year price tag. Nancy Pelosi and a feminist caucus were forced to give in on abortion for similar reasons. Rahm Emanuel forced the compromise that aligned the two bills — no easy task. And then the Democrats lost the special election for Ted Kennedy's Senate seat.

Without its expected 60 votes, the Senate couldn't pass the compromise. Pelosi was forced to start over and get the House to agree to pass the Senate version without any changes. To boost the funding level, she used a tricky "reconciliation" budget bill that only required 50 votes to pass the Senate.

In the end, Reid had no votes to spare in the Senate, and Pelosi had only three spare votes in the House. They squeezed every last drop of progress out of the Congress they had to work with.

At the start of this process, David Axelrod had warned Obama that, given the circumstances, the time might not be right. But Obama thought that if he didn't act then, it might take another decade. "What are we supposed to do," he asked, "put my approval rating on the shelf and admire it for eight years?" So he lost his approval rating, and several Congressional members lost their seats, but they did what was right.

## We Share the Same Goals

To say the Democratic establishment doesn't care about the progressive goal of universal healthcare and that they are a bunch of neoliberal shills for the insurance industry is pure slander.

The truth is that progressives and liberals share the same goals of FDR liberalism. The difference is that liberals are willing to compromise to get the ball rolling. That's the liberal ethic of responsibility discussed in Chapter 18.

The progressives want to stay pure and wait for the revolution. That's why Sanders would not back Clinton's health-care proposal. That comes from the dark side of radicalism. But their positive side, the desire for fundamental social change, is fully aligned with FDR liberalism and the Democratic Party. This is what we must focus on to unify the party, beat Trump and keep winning.



## **Part 3**

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# **Crime Bills and Freedom Riders**

## Chapter 6

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# The Crime Bill Myth vs. Facts

*The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. ...*

*We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin. And then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities.*

—John Ehrlichman, 1994

Nixon's aide on domestic affairs  
(convicted in the Watergate scandal)

Ricky Ray Rector was a brain-damaged killer who barely knew his own identity, let alone the fate that awaited him. At his last meal, he saved his pecan pie to eat the next morning. Just weeks before the critical New Hampshire primary, Bill Clinton proved his toughness on crime by flying back to Arkansas to oversee that execution.

At least that's how Michelle Alexander tells the story to score points against the Democrats in her famous 2010 book, *The New Jim Crow*. That book launched the crime bill myth. She used the story again in February 2016 in a widely distributed article, "Why Hillary Clinton Doesn't Deserve the Black Vote," in an attempt to knock Clinton out of the race. Of

course, the same “logic” applies to Joe Biden 100 times over — he wrote the bill. Hillary had nothing to do with it as she was completely absorbed by her healthcare initiative.

**The darkest of myths.** The Ricky Ray Rector anecdote is one cornerstone of the 1994 crime bill myth, a myth that could not be more vicious or more wrong.

The crime bill was favored by most of the Black community, including most radicals. Biden and Clinton pushed it as far as they could in the direction the Black community wanted, but they were stopped by Republicans, to whom the radicals give a free pass.

The myth claims the opposite, that Biden and Clinton produced “arguably the most immoral ‘anti-crime’ bill in American history.” So wrote Ta-Nehisi Coates in *The Atlantic*. Of course, he meant the “most racist” crime bill in American history. Nothing could be more slanderous.

During the protests over the murder of George Floyd, a Politico post, “How young black voters could break Biden — and why Democrats are worried,” noted that Biden sponsored the 1994 crime bill and reported,

Biden might need to acknowledge his past support for a criminal justice system that’s long discriminated against minorities, said black organizers and Democratic operatives in swing states.

The clear insinuation here is that Biden supported racial discrimination by the criminal justice system, a charge that is utterly false. But because of the power of this myth, adherence to which is enforced by online radicals, if he were to explicitly deny this insinuation he would be attacked as an unrehabilitated racist. Such is the power of mass hysteria.

The only way out of this trap is for liberals, who are not wedded to such dangerous nonsense, to learn a bit of history

and inform their friends. Mass incarceration is a deadly serious problem and blaming the Democrats will not help solve it. Instead it will only help the Republicans who started this tragedy.

**Back to Ricky Ray Rector.** Researching the 1994 crime bill, I'd come across copycat versions of Alexander's damning anecdote a dozen times. I just could not understand why Clinton didn't pardon a man who had no real concept of what he was doing when he committed his crime. It sounded completely heartless (as it was intended to). So I looked up the Ricky Ray Rector story. It only took a minute, and it changed my understanding of the situation forever.

In 1981, Rector and friends drove to a dance hall. When one of them couldn't pay the \$3 cover charge, Rector pulled out a .38-caliber pistol and shot the place up, wounding two and killing another. Three days later, he agreed to surrender, but only to the well-liked Officer Robert Martin, whom he had known since childhood. Rector arrived at his mother's house, greeted Officer Martin, waited until the officer turned his back, and shot him dead. Rector then walked out and shot himself in the head, resulting only in a frontal lobotomy, not in his intended suicide.

Rector himself had chosen death but missed and accidentally condemned himself to a life of terrifying hallucinations.

At that time, almost 80% of the country was in favor of the death penalty for murder. I'd guess that for a double murder that included shooting one of the community's best-liked police officers in the back, the percentage would have been closer to 95%, especially in Arkansas. Had Clinton commuted Rector's sentence, he would have stood no chance of being elected president. Instead, he would have cemented the Democrats' undeserved reputation for favoring criminals over the general public.

Considering that Michelle Alexander is a highly acclaimed legal scholar and that this is one of her prized anecdotes, Rec-tor's back story is a lot to leave out. But as you will see, radical-left myths more often deceive with omissions than with lies.

## ‘The New Jim Crow’

Alexander's book is the bestselling book on the criminal justice system — ever. The claim she makes with her title is that federal crime bills — Republican and Democratic — were all designed with the “well-disguised” intent to function “in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow,” the segregation laws overturned by the civil rights movement.

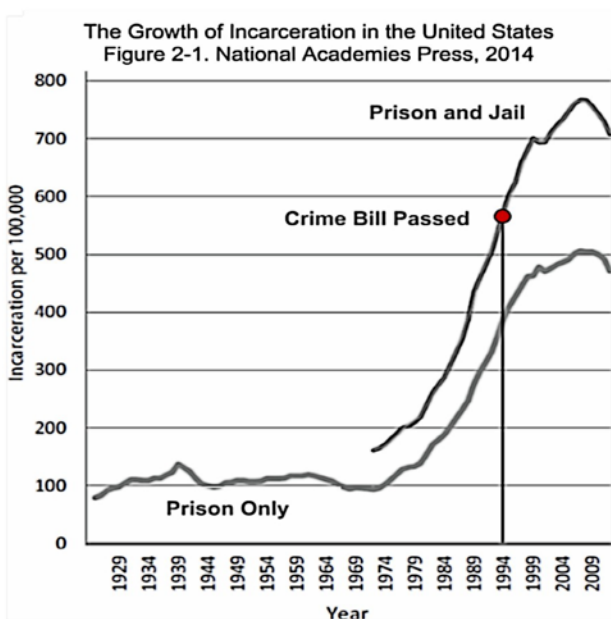
Mass incarceration has nothing to do with segregated lunch counters, schools, buses, or other public places targeted by the Jim Crow laws. So the “striking similarity” to Jim Crow comes down to stopping some Blacks (ex-felons) from voting. Again, she leaves out a few facts. These laws stop a small fraction of the number stopped by Jim Crow. They stop roughly as many Whites as Blacks. And instead of being free to White society, these stopped votes cost about \$100 billion a year — the cost of mass incarceration. No, this is ridiculous. Stopping Black votes is an afterthought, not the purpose of crime bills.

The book's title is a deliberate misrepresentation that has convinced many Democrats that their party has deliberately done something evil.

## Mass Incarceration

Mass incarceration — which has hit the Black community hardest — is dreadfully damaging and needs to be dramatically reduced. But misunderstanding how it came about and what is causing it will not help. A story in the radical-left magazine, *The Nation*, tells us, “Candidate Hillary now declares that ‘the

era of mass incarceration must end,’ without quite saying who inaugurated it.” The article focuses exclusively on the Clintons, so the innuendo is perfectly clear — the Clintons inaugurated the era of mass incarceration. (In a primary debate, Cory Booker called Biden the “architect of mass incarceration.”)



Take a look at the graph above. Mass incarceration started in 1974, twenty years before the Clinton bill supposedly “inaugurated” that era. *The Nation* could not have been more misleading if it had directly lied about that. And the 1994 bill did not cause a spike in incarceration either. Not even Michelle Alexander makes such claims. They are simply distortions made by the radical left as they tell and retell their myth.

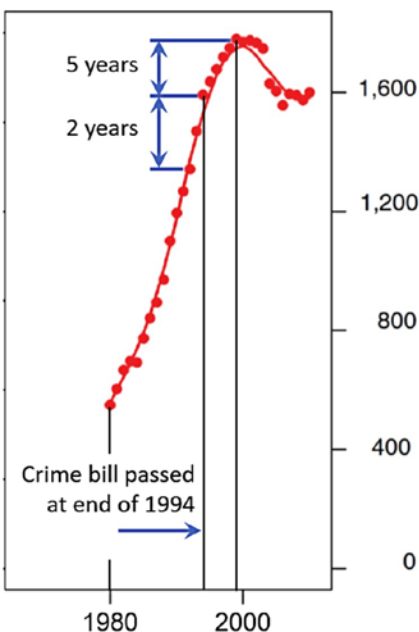
But these deceptions show the real purpose of this myth. The radicals use it to attack the Democratic Party, so they simply leave out the first 20 years and the fact that it was the Nixon administration that consciously started using long drug

sentences to harass and vilify Black radicals and White hippies. Their purpose was, of course, to win racist votes.

## Was the Bill Racist?

The real question is not about grand totals, as shown in the

From Figure 2-1, Chapter 2 of  
 "The Growth of Incarceration in the US,"  
 National Academies Press



**Black Imprisonment Rate per 100,000**

May 24, 2014. nap.edu/18613

graph above; it's about what happened to Blacks. Did the 1994 bill target Black people? This second graph shows the Black imprisonment rate.

The state and federal imprisonment rate for Blacks was increasing most rapidly in the two years *before* the 1994 crime bill. Immediately after the bill was passed, this increase slowed dramatically and, after five years, stopped and turned around.

This graph is taken from a 435-page report of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, published in 2014, the most complete study ever made of *The*

*Growth of Incarceration in the United States.*

There is no indication in the data that the crime bill exacerbated the problem of Black incarceration. Without the bill, the imprisonment rate would have continued to increase. With the bill, the rate slowed immediately and stopped in just five years after accelerating for 20. You could not hope for much more

than that because the programs that the bill set up took time to implement.

What is even more surprising are the changes in the White imprisonment rate. Although that is much lower, it accounts for about the same total number of prisoners because the White population is so much larger. And the increases in the White rate did not slow immediately after the bill's passage. The incarceration rate of Whites continued long after the Black rate had stopped increasing in 1999.

At the end of 2017, The Washington Post published "A mass incarceration mystery," confirming this.

Between 2000 and 2015, the imprisonment rate of black men dropped by more than 24 percent. At the same time, the white male rate increased slightly, the BJS numbers indicate.

Among women, the trend is even more dramatic. From 2000 to 2015, the black female imprisonment rate dropped by nearly 50 percent; during the same period, the white female rate shot upward by 53 percent.

I can find absolutely no data indicating that the overall effect of the 1994 crime bill was racist either intentionally or accidentally. If anything, the data indicate the opposite.

What is certain is that this is a radical-left myth designed to slander high-profile Democrats and the Democratic Party as a whole. It's time that good Democrats stood up and put a stop to this deception. A good time to do this would be before November 3, 2020.



## The Crime Bill Myth vs. Black Opinion

*We do believe and emphatically support the bill's goal to save our communities, and most importantly, our children.*

—40 African-American Religious Leaders

If you hear someone saying that Biden's 1994 crime bill was like Jim Crow laws or was racist, ask them this: Do you think Black people were stupid back in 1994? Of course, they don't think that. But how else can they explain that most Blacks, especially the best-informed, favored a bill that is claimed to be as racist as the Jim Crow laws?

*The Nation*, in an article obviously influenced by Michelle Alexander, tells us, "Representative Ron Dellums, co-founder of the Congressional Black Caucus, voted against it." Like Alexander and the rest of the radical left, *The Nation* just happened to leave out that another 26 members of the Black Caucus, including its chairman, voted for the bill. Only 11 voted against it. This is easy to find out — much easier than the point about Dellums.

Right after saying Dellums voted against the bill, *The Nation* tells us: "So did 34 Senators," as if those Senators had been liberal Democrats who agreed with Dellums. In fact, every one of them was a Republican.

So what was their point? That Ron Dellums must have been right because 34 Republicans agreed with him?! Their only possible point was to deceive their audience into believing their myth and damage the Democratic Party.

So why did the Black Caucus favor the crime bill? The best answer to this question may be a letter sent to the White House by 40 African-American religious leaders from around the country.

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STATEMENT BY  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS

We believe there is no more important responsibility of society than to raise its children to become upstanding adults. ... All of society — including government — must pitch in. That is why we support the President's crime bill. While we do not agree with every provision in the crime bill,

We do believe and emphatically support the bill's goal to save our communities, and most importantly, our children.

We believe and support the \$8 billion in the bill to fund prevention programs such as grants for recreation, employment, and anti-gang and comprehensive programs to steer our young people away from crime.

We believe in drug treatment to help get federal and state inmates out of the cycle of dependency.

We believe in programs to fight violence against women.

We believe in banning assault weapons and preventing these deadly devices from falling into the hands of criminals and drug dealers.

We believe in putting 100,000 well-trained police officers on the streets of our most violence-plagued communities and urban areas.

We believe that 9-year-olds like James Darby of New Orleans, who was killed by a stray bullet only days after writing a plea to President Clinton to stop the violence, must have the opportunity to live and learn and grow in safe, decent communities.

For all these reasons, we support the crime bill and we urge others to join us in this crusade.

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Although this letter was widely reported and is easily available, I have never found it reported by the radical-left myth makers.

Another endorsement that goes unmentioned by the myth makers came near the end of the negotiations over the bill. In July, ten Black mayors wrote to Black Caucus Chairman Kweisi Mfume saying, "We cannot afford to lose the opportunities this bill provides to the people of our cities." The signatories included the mayors of Detroit, Cleveland, Atlanta and Denver.

Shortly before the bill was passed, the homicide victimization rate for Black males 14 and older was more than eight times higher than it was for White males in the same age range. This is why Black communities were so anxious to have more policing. They were not being foolish, and they were not falling for an evil Democratic plot. They were facing a vastly worse crime problem than the White population.

## Republicans Set the Limits

A key fallacy of the crime bill myth is the assumption that the Democrats got exactly what they wanted. It's true that Joe Biden was the author and that he worked on it for years. But no, he did not have a free hand or anything close to that. There were Republicans in Congress, a factor the radical left entirely overlooks.

Passing any high-profile law through the U.S. Congress was almost as contentious in 1994 as it is today. With crime as the nation's #1 concern, there was bound to be a crime bill. It's worth noting that most Republicans did everything they could to block the Democrats' bill. Had they succeeded, there would have been a truly punitive Republican crime bill passed after the Republicans took back both houses of Congress in 1994.

Clinton's strategy for passing the Biden bill was to talk tough on crime and give away what mattered least. That's how he secured the Republican votes he needed to pass a bill that his Black constituents favored. For example, the bill added 60 new death penalty offenses. This sounded tough on crime and made it easier for members of Congress from conservative states and districts to support the bill. Radicals claim this is horrible, but don't mention that there have been only four federal executions since the bill passed and probably none in the new categories. It looked tough, did nothing and helped get the bill passed.

The Democrats had to win over five semi-liberal Republicans. They scraped by with six. It was Republicans, not Joe Biden, who put the limit on how progressive the bill could be.

## So What Caused Mass Incarceration?

The broader myth about mass imprisonment is simply that most of it is caused by drug laws that put people away for years or decades for minor drug offenses. We've all heard about this happening, and once is one time too many. But a few such stories don't tell much about the few million who have landed behind bars. Neither does the Republican quote at the top of the previous chapter. And neither does Michelle Alexander's book.

David Cole, the highly progressive National Legal Director of the American Civil Liberties Union, has reviewed two

books that changed his mind about the causes of mass incarceration. Here is what Cole learned from *Locked In*, by John Pfaff, a professor at Fordham Law School.

[He] makes a powerful case that the war on drugs has had very little effect on incarceration rates overall... In state prisons, which account for a large majority of the nation's inmate population, only 16 percent of prisoners have been convicted of a drug crime. Moreover, the vast majority of those in prison for drug-related offenses ... have also been convicted on more serious charges, including violent crimes. All told, low-level, nonviolent drug offenders ... make up only about 1 percent of all inmates in state prisons.

Pfaff makes the point that the shifting attitudes of District Attorneys regarding plea bargaining and which crimes to charge people with may have been the main cause of mass incarceration.

Cole also reviewed the Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Locking Up Our Own*, by James Forman Jr., a professor at Yale Law School and the son of a prominent civil rights leader. He served as a public defender in Washington, D.C., during the passage of the 1994 crime bill. As Cole explains,

Forman's moving, nuanced, and candid account ... shows that some of the most ardent proponents of tough-on-crime policies in the era that brought us mass incarceration were Black politicians and community leaders who supported these policies, not to subordinate African-Americans, but to protect them from the all-too-real scourges of crime and violence in many inner-city communities.

Here's Forman's first example of this. David Clarke, a White civil rights activist and Washington, D.C. city council

member, tried to decriminalize marijuana in DC. Douglas Moore, a Black civil rights activist associated with Stokely Carmichael's Black United Front, was opposed. So was the city's black clergy as well as John Fauntleroy, one of the city's first black judges. The city council voted it down.

Others who favored tough-on-crime policies at one time or another included Maxine Waters, the NAACP, Jesse Jackson and Charles Rangel, Harlem's congressional representative.



*Joe Biden announcing the signing of the 1994 Crime Bill*

## What Were they Thinking?

Given where we are today, with calls to reimagine policing, it's interesting to take a quick look at what the public was thinking in 1994. A year before the bill passed, 80% of the population believed increasing the number of police would significantly decrease violent crime. And they soon got what they wanted. The most popular provision of the new crime bill was federal funding for 100,000 new police officers.

But the intention of Bill Clinton and his Attorney General Janet Reno was that the new police would be used for "community policing." That idea was highly popular but none too

clear. Simply put it meant “a return to cops on the beat.” Here’s how the Atlantic described it a few months before the bill was passed.

The 100,000 new officers are specifically intended to help revitalize neighborhood life; they're supposed to be trained in community policing, a progressive model of police work embraced, at least rhetorically, by practically everyone. Community policing calls for a partnership of the police and local residents, and expands the focus of the police from arrests to intervention and preventive "problem solving."

The bill also included money for crime-prevention programs, such as prison drug treatment, after-school recreation, job training, domestic violence, and rape prevention education. Clinton wanted more money for these, but these were the programs most vigorously opposed by Republicans who call them “crime pork.”

## Conclusion

Promoted by the radical left, the crime bill myth erases the role of both Blacks and Republicans in influencing the 1994 crime bill. It also erases the very real problem of crime. That leaves White Democrats seeming to have fabricated the problem of Black crime and then passing a crime bill only to appeal to racist voters. And remember, those Democrats include not just Joe Biden and Bill Clinton, but Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, and Bernie Sanders, to name just a few.

It’s hard to imagine a more dishonest stratagem, or one better designed to damage the Democratic Party. Of course, for radicals, the Democratic Party is what stands between them

and the solution to all social problems, right after the revolution. So any tactic can be justified.



## When the Freedom Riders ‘Went High’

*A people without the knowledge of their history,  
origin and culture is like a tree without roots.*

– Marcus Garvey, Jamaican political activist

Once there was a very different way to win progressive victories, so different that few can even imagine it. Fewer still believe it could have had the power it must have had to accomplish what it did. Today it is revered but no longer comprehended.

That knowledge has been stamped out by radicals, who always seek to capitalize on the success of others by disparaging their success and claiming that radicalism could do so much more.

I am, of course, speaking of the civil rights movement. We can’t reproduce it now; times have changed. It took decades to develop the principles of nonviolent direct action. But I think we can at least learn from it that “going high” does not mean what some radicals claim: “putting up with injustice” while being “cheerful throughout” (see Ch. 9). “Going high means taking the harder path. ...standing fierce against hatred while remembering that we are one nation under God,” as Michelle Obama explained in her convention speech. And as the civil rights movement proved, it’s more powerful than going low, if you’re looking for positive social change.



*A few of the Freedom Riders booked in Jackson, Mississippi*

## The First Freedom Riders

John Lewis has been a member of the House of Representatives from Georgia since 1987. But on May 9, 1961, he was on one of the two buses making the first Freedom Ride from Washington, D.C., to Jackson, Mississippi. Al Bigelow, another Freedom Rider, was a 55-year-old White man. He had graduated from Harvard in 1929, studied architecture at MIT and designed buildings for the 1939 World's Fair in New York. In WWII, he served as commander of a submarine chaser and a destroyer escort.

As one of the buses carrying the Freedom Riders crossed into South Carolina, the first deep-South state that they entered, it made a stop in Rock Hill. As Lewis reported in his 1998 memoir, *Walking with the Wind*:

As Al Bigelow and I approached the “WHITE” waiting room in the Rock Hill Greyhound terminal, I noticed a large number of young White guys hanging around the

pinball machines in the lobby. "Other side, Nigger," one said. He pointed to a door with a sign that said "COLORED."

"I have a right to go in there," I said, speaking carefully and clearly, "on the grounds of the Supreme Court decision in the Boynton case."

"Shit on that," one of them said. The next thing I knew, a fist smashed the right side of my head. Then another hit me square in the face. As I fell to the floor, I could feel feet kicking me hard in the sides. I could taste blood in my mouth.

At that point Al Bigelow stepped in, placing his body between mine and these men. It had to look strange to these guys to see a big, strong White man putting himself in the middle of a fistfight like this, not ready to throw a punch, but not frightened either.

They hesitated for an instant. Then they attacked Bigelow, who did not raise a finger. It took several blows to drop him to one knee. At that point, Genevieve Hughes, who had also been on the bus, stepped in the way and was knocked to the floor.

"I figured Southern women should be represented so the South and the nation would realize all Southern people do not think alike."

--Genevieve Hughes



Fifty years later, Elwin Wilson, the man who twice smashed the 21-year-old John Lewis in the face, remembered it like this:

What happened was, after he was beat and bloody and all, the policeman came up and asked him, he said, “Do y’all want to take out warrants?” He said, “No.” He said, “We’re not here to cause trouble.” He said, “We’re here for people to love each other.” ... The thought, it comes in my mind so many times, what he said he wasn’t out to harm nobody.

A little earlier, Wilson had called the local paper in Rock Hill, confessed to the 1961 beating, and said he wanted to apologize. He did apologize to two local civil-rights groups. Lewis read about this and invited Wilson to Washington. Wilson told Lewis that he had tried to block the incident out of his mind for years but just couldn’t. He apologized to Lewis, who commented, “I think it takes a lot of raw courage to be willing to come forward the way he did.”

**Birmingham.** When John Lewis’ bus arrived in Birmingham, Alabama, well-known CBS anchorman Howard K. Smith was on the scene to report on what became known as the Mother’s Day Riot. “The riots have not been spontaneous outbursts of anger,” he reported in one broadcast, “but carefully planned and susceptible to having been easily prevented or stopped had there been a wish to do so.”

White Freedom Riders were singled out by the mob for especially severe beatings. Jim Peck, a longtime White pacifist who was in charge of this first phase of the Freedom Ride, was knocked unconscious and was refused treatment at the all-White hospital but was eventually treated at another. The “rule of barbarism in Alabama,” said Smith of CBS, must bow to the “rule of law and order — and justice — in America.”

**Diane Nash.** The Freedom Riders were making their point effectively, but the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which had organized the Rides, decided they had become too dangerous. Attorney General Bobby Kennedy's man on the scene, John Seigenthaler, arranged a flight for those who wanted to continue to New Orleans, their intended final destination.

Diane Nash wasn't buying it. Nash felt that if violence was allowed to halt the Freedom Rides, the movement would be set back years.

A founding member of CORE, she had orchestrated the 1960 sit-ins that desegregated Nashville's downtown lunch counters. Trained in Gandhi's nonviolent direct action as head of the Fisk University branch of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), she had recruited John Lewis and other Freedom Riders.

Nash convinced CORE of her view that they should continue by bus, and soon Bobby Kennedy got word of this. Here's how Seigenthaler remembers what happened next:

My phone in the hotel room rings and it's the attorney general. "Who the hell is Diane Nash? Call her and let her know what is waiting for the Freedom Riders." So I called her. I said, "I understand that there are more Freedom Riders coming down from Nashville. You must stop them if you can."

Her response was, "They're not gonna turn back. They're on their way to Birmingham and they'll be there shortly." ... I felt my voice go up another decibel and another and soon I was shouting, "Young woman, do you understand what you're doing? Do you understand you're gonna get somebody killed?"

There was a pause, and then she said, "Sir, you should know, we all signed our last wills and testaments

last night before they left. We know someone will be killed. But we cannot let violence overcome nonviolence.”



“

We presented Southern white racists with a new set of options. Kill us or desegregate.

”

- Diane Nash

Leader in fight for desegregation

**Montgomery.** The Freedom Ride continued from Birmingham, protected by the Alabama State Highway Patrol until it reached the city limits of Montgomery. Then all protection vanished. As the Freedom Riders disembarked in Montgomery, all was quiet — until they were ambushed from all sides by a mob led by the Klan.

The mob brutally attacked John Lewis and Bernard Lafayette. William Barbee was beaten unconscious and suffered injuries that would later shorten his life. Two White women were pulled from a cab as they tried to escape and were beaten by the mob.

John Seigenthaler, who was there as an observer, tried at one point to help one of the female Freedom Riders being pursued in the street. He was pulled from his car and beaten with a tire iron. His skull fractured, he was left unconscious in the street.

James Zwerg, a White student from Wisconsin and a friend of John Lewis, was beaten unconscious by the mob. While

unconscious, three men held him up while a woman kicked him in the groin. He spent five days in the hospital, the first two unconscious.

But as Zwerg recalls, "If you want to talk about heroism, consider the Black man who probably saved my life. This man in coveralls, just off work, happened to walk by as my beating was going on and said 'Stop beating that kid. If you want to beat someone, beat me.' And they did. He was still unconscious when I left the hospital. I don't know if he lived or died."

**The outcome.** Thousands joined in the Freedom Rides. More than 300 Freedom Riders spent much of the summer in jail in Jackson, Mississippi. Finally, on Nov. 1, 1961, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued a ruling to enforce the Supreme Court's *Boynton* decision.

But the larger impact was the change in public understanding. The national news had been filled with images, reporting and commentary that exposed the nature of Southern segregation. It suddenly became clear to millions of Americans not only that segregation was part of the South's legal system but how such laws were enforced. Yes, they were enforced by the terrorism of the Klan. But now it was seen that the Klan had the active support of state and local governments.

Perhaps even more shocking to the larger White community was the fact that this terrorism would be, and was, directed at any Whites who openly advocated challenging Jim Crow laws. Even a close friend and assistant to Attorney General Robert Kennedy would be beaten unconscious and left in the street when he dared to help a young woman, a Freedom Rider, who had done nothing illegal or offensive.

## Conclusion

In my view, the civil rights movement was the most advanced political movement this country has seen. It was nothing like the radical movements that followed on its heels and nothing like today's politics. Its most active phase, from Rosa Parks' arrest to the 1964 civil rights bill, took more than eight years. And its strategy and tactics took decades to develop.

But what they accomplished was astonishing. They defeated the system of Jim Crow laws that had been in place for nearly 100 years, had spread to most states to some extent and were enforced by domestic terrorists backed by law enforcement in the South. These laws covered most aspects of public life and even private social and business relationships between Whites and Blacks.

Besides ending Jim Crow, the movement also contributed substantially to the passage of Johnson's War on Poverty programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, the Job Corps, Vista, expanded Social Security benefits and subsidies for low-income schools.

One common misunderstanding of the strategy of nonviolence is that it is simply a moral code. That aspect of it is important. But the nonviolent direct action used in the civil rights movement was a product of Gandhi's struggle to free India as well as the struggle to end Jim Crow. In both cases, the strategy was heavily influenced by the desire to win. And so it was designed to be powerful and effective. Demonstrations were strategically designed and planned.

Much has been forgotten, but a little of the strategy and power of the civil rights movement may now be rediscovered because of the success of the George Floyd protests. The power of this strategy comes from its moral force. I'm convinced that Michelle Obama is channeling the civil rights movement



when she says, "When they go low, we go high." That is not just a moral conviction; she understands its power.

## The Power of the George Floyd Protests

"I can't believe I'm going to say this, but I see hope. I see progress right now, at this moment." Eleven days after a police officer murdered George Floyd, the renowned black author, Ta-Nehisi Coates, known for his radicalism and pessimistic views on race relations, had changed his mind. That he can be so open-minded despite his radicalism gives me hope that other radicals can do the same.

What impressed Coates and his father, who had seen the 1968 riots after Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, was that the demonstrations included so many Whites. The 1968 riots had included none, had destroyed huge amounts of black property, and dozens of Blacks had been killed by the police.

His father compared the change since 1968 with the change between 1900 and MLK's March on Washington in 1963. Both changes were enormous, and both happened incrementally. His father told him that in 1968, four years after passage of the civil rights bill, the present demonstrations would have been unimaginable.

Coates had almost completely missed this enormous positive change in the country. Large changes that happen gradually is exactly what radicalism hides from people. Basically, it claims that nothing happens without a revolution. Coates' radical education is why he called the 1994 crime bill "arguably the most immoral 'anti-crime' bill in American history," missing the fact that it was supported by most Blacks, especially Black leaders.

Only the radicals are systematically unaware of this. Only the radicals are so unaware of the social progress that made it possible to elect a Black president twice.

Floyd's murder triggered a huge reaction unlike any past Black Lives Matter demonstration, or anything seen since the civil rights movement. What made the difference?

There were several factors, but one was by far the most important. By chance, the Floyd incident emulated a civil rights action. Without realizing it, Floyd employed "passive resistance," a technique pioneered by Gandhi and adopted by the civil rights movement. The police response revealed the cold-blooded violent side of policing and it was reported to the nation in irrefutable, graphic detail. That's exactly what happened in the Mother's Day Riot described earlier.

The combination of passive resistance, violent overreaction, and irrefutable proof makes it impossible for people to fall back on their standard rationalizations. This forces them to confront the truth in a highly emotional setting and creates a moral force that changes minds. The clarity of the situation creates mental images that will long be remembered.

Demonstrations are useful for generating publicity, social pressure, and group cohesiveness, but if they degenerate into vandalism or violence they can easily backfire. And the moral force they produce is generally much weaker than that of nonviolent direct action. They should be seen as a complement to, not a substitute for, such action.

The vandalism and violence on the fringes of these demonstrations have empowered Trump and helped him and right-wing provocateurs stir up more violence. If the demonstrations could have been purely nonviolent or

had distanced themselves better from the vandalism and violence, their power would have been greater. Even so, they have been effective, and we are seeing for the first time a national movement to reform policing.

The civil rights movement had far more to overcome (which is not to say that racism is not still our greatest social problem). Southern police departments were uniformly worse and worked with the KKK, and White society in the South was either on the side of the Klan or too afraid of it to say anything. The entire Black population suffered hateful restrictions daily.

To overcome this system, the movement took strategic, well-planned direct actions that they were trained to handle. Even Rosa Parks, who spontaneously refused to give up her seat, thereby sparking the Montgomery bus boycott, had been trained in non-violence. And there had been similar incidents before her refusal that had been rejected because the movement wanted the very best person to play the part. Sad to say, but that is important, if success is your goal. Parks was that person and choosing her paid off.

America has made a huge amount of social progress since then. But political activism has a long way to go to catch up with where the civil rights movement was even in 1955, let alone 1963. Hopefully, George Floyd will turn out to have sparked a return to more powerful non-violent activism.

## **Part 4**

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# **Trump and His Base**

## Chapter 9

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# Don't Be the Enemy He Needs

*Radicals must be resilient and sensitive enough to the process of action and reaction to avoid being trapped by their own tactics.*

—Saul Alinsky, 1971

Pioneer of community organizing

“Be spittingly angry ... angry enough to curse, scream and name-call” rages Jessica Valenti in *The Guardian*. “Spare me the calls for civility,” because expecting me “to speak with civility is absurd.” She is defending Robert De Niro’s “Fuck Trump!” shout-out at the Tony Awards and comedian Samantha Bee’s “feckless cunt” slur against Ivanka Trump.

Valenti is arguing against Frank Bruni. She has found him “yammering” against De Niro and Bee’s vulgarity in his *New York Times* op-ed. There he also points out, “Anger isn’t a strategy. Sometimes it’s a trap.”

I’ll call it the “useful-enemy trap” because populist leaders need enemies. The more outrageous, rude and unreasonable an enemy appears, the more useful they are. Valenti and De Niro are most useful ... to Trump. This trap is particularly dangerous because those caught in it aggressively spread their misconceptions and entrap others. Their “righteousness” makes them effective proselytizers.

Two days after Valenti’s op-ed in *The Guardian* went viral, comedian Kathy Griffin made headlines by tweeting with

sparkling humor, “Fuck you, Melanie (sic). ... you feckless complicit piece of shit.” Surely that had many in Trump’s base quaking in their boots, don’t you think? She thought she was getting even after Trumpsters had harassed her. But not understanding the game, she gave Trump a present.

## Why Enemies Are So Useful

George W. Bush’s approval rating jumped from 51% to 86% in one week after the 9/11 attacks. It was not simply the attacks that did it. His speeches were good and well-received. But it is no coincidence that his most effective speeches occurred in that particular week. The country was unified by the attacks, and he was clearly on our side and intent on defending us.

The idea that an external enemy is helpful to leaders is anything but new. It is so well known that leaders often invent threats when none present themselves. For example, Bush invented the threat of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. So it is hardly surprising that Trump would know that enemies are useful. What’s surprising is that radicals don’t get this.

So Trump plays the left with his outrageous attacks, knowing his base is so aware of the game that they mockingly refer to the radicals’ counterattacks as “Trump derangement syndrome.” And even though they know Trump is deliberately pushing the left’s buttons, the counterattacks still prove to them that the “deranged left” is a real danger. Their view is this: *Just imagine if such angry and easily-manipulated people gained power.* Perhaps they have a point regarding our radical extremists.

## Anger Is Not a Strategy

Frank Bruni’s *New York Times* op-ed — the one attacked by Valenti — begins, “I get that you’re angry. I’m angry, too. But

anger isn't a strategy." Completely missing Bruni's point, Valenti strongly implies that Bruni opposes being angry. She even went so far as to suggest that he calls for "putting up with injustice" while being "cheerful throughout."

Obviously, Bruni expected this counterattack, which is why he began his op-ed with "I'm angry, too." But it's no use because the Valentis of this world can see no difference between being angry and screaming. That, of course, is exactly how very young children think. When angry, all they know how to do is throw a temper tantrum. So for them, anger equals a tantrum. And for Valenti, no tantrum means Bruni must not be angry.

But as adults, we learn to channel our anger in many other ways — even, for example, pretending not to be angry and then proceeding to stab our attacker in the back. Sociopaths like Trump become experts at finding sneaky ways to get even. As Bruni says, "Anger isn't a strategy." But temper tantrums are a strategy and organizing to beat Republican candidates is another strategy. Both can be fueled by anger. The first is a counterproductive strategy; the second, effective.

Valenti makes no logical argument for her temper-tantrum strategy. Instead, she simply lists terribly offensive things Trump has done. Because these are true, she gets credit with her audience for speaking the (completely obvious) truth. Then she jumps to the conclusion that since he's horribly offensive, we should be offensive too. What?! We should follow Trump's lead? Mimic his behavior? Some have even taken to saying, "When he goes low, we go lower."

Going lower is a strategy. Cursing is a strategy. Name-calling is another. But anger is just fuel for the strategy we choose. We should use that fuel wisely and choose a strategy that works.

## Conclusion

Radicals seem to believe that the more obvious their attack, the better. Perhaps this is to score points with fellow radicals. Or perhaps they believe their opponent will be frightened by the noise.

In any case, the more obvious the attack, the more Trump loves it. Representative Ocasio-Cortez is one of his greatest assets. Of course, she doesn't mean to be. Her heart is in the right place.

It's our job first to not fall into this trap ourselves. Second, we must remind our friends.



## Economics vs. the Culture War

*Imagine if Christians took a year off from the culture wars ... No, you can't escape the culture wars, even if you wanted to.*

—Daniel Darling, V.P.  
Southern Baptist Communications

Better wages, more good jobs, less inequality — we all agree that's the ticket. But are those the keys to winning? Sanders says yes. But in Chapter 2 we saw that Sean McElwee, the Berniecrat pollster and the favorite radical intellectual of websites like Vox and Slate, didn't seem to be buying it.

He said that “Sanders ... convinced a lot of progressive leaders that his white working-class voters were supporting a progressive agenda.” That means progressives bought his economic analysis and tried to use it to win in 2018. But that had them “knocking on doors in [for example] rural Wisconsin,” and that hadn't worked. According to McElwee, the radicals failed because they bought the economic diagnosis.

It also didn't seem to work for Sanders in 2020. This might not matter, except that the economic-insecurity explanation of Trump's base seems to have caught on with the entire Democratic Party (although only the radicals adhere to it slavishly). What if that's completely wrong?

I'm certainly not suggesting that good jobs etc. are a bad idea or not important to Trump's base. I'm just asking, what if

Trump's base either dislikes or does not care about radical economic policies, and does care about a completely different set of issues that we're ignoring? If that's why the radicals went nowhere in the 2018 election and 2020 primaries, then perhaps the Democratic Party is missing something big and needs to rethink its 2020 election strategy.

Most political scientists, as well as most of Trump's base, think we're missing the culture war — and they think that's the biggest part of today's politics. So before the Democrats adopt any more radical economic rhetoric, it's worth comparing these two theories. This would not mean giving up our goals and aspirations. It would just mean smarter campaigning.

## Testing Sanders in Denmark

Sanders' radical-left theory claims that our social and political problems are rooted in economic inequality. Solve that problem and you'll win over many working-class Whites and heal our social divisions. Trumpism will be vanquished.

He claims Denmark proves his case. It's his favorite example. As many of us have known for decades, Denmark does a remarkably good job of reducing economic inequality, and it provides about the best safety net anywhere. I went there in 1974 and took their social-services tour because we all knew its reputation. I was enormously impressed. There's no doubt in my mind that the U.S. should, in its own way, follow Denmark's example.

But does that mean such economic policies, if implemented here, would win the culture war and win over the White working class? Does it even do that in Denmark? Sweden is Sanders' second-favorite example. What's happening to their politics?

Pippa Norris, a political scientist at Harvard University who studies international populist movements, points to the

surprisingly Trump-like populist movements in both Sweden and Denmark.

The right-wing Danish People's Party, formed in 1995, sounds a lot like Trump, and it had the second-largest representation in Parliament in 2015. The Party's stated goals are to protect the Monarchy and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark; to enforce a strict rule of law; and to limit immigration to prevent Denmark from becoming a multicultural society. This is almost identical to Trumpism.

Sanders' socialist theory does not work in Denmark. So what's going on? Norris summarizes the effect saying,

A lot of data suggests that countries with more robust welfare states tend to have stronger far-right movements. Providing white voters with higher levels of economic security does not tamp down their anxieties about race and immigration.

She conjectures that when people have economic security, their focus shifts to more polarizing cultural issues.

## Testing Sanders' American Example

Sanders tells us that after 1973, many good manufacturing jobs went away, wage growth slowed dramatically, and income inequality rose. He's right. That's why, according to Sanders, the White working-class left the Democratic Party. Hang on. Where did *that* come from?

The huge wave of the White working class that left the Democratic Party did so *before* 1973. The sour economy after 1973 had nothing to do with it.

Sanders is right that before 1973 the White working class was doing great. There were lots of good manufacturing jobs, rapid wage increases, low economic inequality, and LBJ had dramatically improved the social safety net with Medicare,

Medicaid and food stamps. So what caused Trump's White working-class base to leave the Democrats?

The short answer is the culture war. Not economic insecurity. And that war was started by the radical left. I was part of that, and everybody saw it happening. The counterculture made news for years. White kids started smoking dope and then dropping acid; guys grew their hair long. There was the Summer of Love in San Francisco and then almost half a million hippies flocked to Woodstock.

Political radicalism was even more culturally upsetting to the White working class. Often this is excused by citing the radicalism of the civil rights movement, but this is wrong for two reasons — that movement was not radical in the usual sense, and it did not upset and polarize the country. It was radical in that it advocated a dramatic and fundamental social change — the end of Jim Crow laws. But so did liberals. However, it rejected the dark side of radicalism that separates radicalism from liberalism, and it appealed to traditional American values.

That movement did not significantly polarize the country as is confirmed by the fact that four months after LBJ passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act, he was re-elected in one of the largest landslides in U.S. history.

Then came the true radicalism of the 1960s, beginning with Stokely Carmichael, who attacked Martin Luther King Jr. for being moderate or worse and launched the Black Power movement. The Black Panthers engaged the police in shootouts. After 1968, the antiwar movement went radical and backed the Weathermen (aka the Weather Underground), who declared war on America and launched their bombing campaign.

The White working class also played a role. In the Hard Hat Riot in New York City, about 200 construction workers were mobilized by the New York State AFL-CIO to attack

some 1,000 college and high school students who were protesting the Vietnam War. And there was plenty of racism on display. But remember, this was all part of the culture war.

**At the end of the eight-year period of 1964–1972**, George McGovern, the radicals' candidate, lost in a landslide that was the reverse of LBJ's. And as I've mentioned, about 20 million voters left the party during those eight years. That was the White middle class and working class doing the walking. They amounted to 40% of the Democratic Party — lost due to the culture war.

**Sanders' economic theory** says that between 1964 and 1972, the White working class, which was doing great economically, should have been swinging left, toward McGovern. But 20 million headed the other way.

**Culture-war theory** says that between '64 and '72, the White working class, which was then deeply offended by left radicalism, should have been swinging right, away from McGovern. And it was.

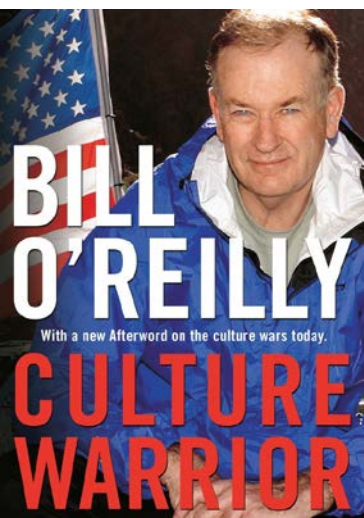
Even though Sanders knows this economic data, he is so blinded by his socialist analysis, which maintains that economics explains all politics, that he can't see the obvious. His theory predicts that restoring good jobs, rising wages and high tax rates on the rich, like we had before 1973 would bring back the white working class. Yet, when we had all that, that was when the largest slice of the working class left the Democratic party. When radicals give you advice about elections, it's quite likely to be backwards. Chapter 18 partly explains why this is.

**Check it with Nixon.** George Wallace and Richard Nixon are the experts on the culture war. They led those 20 million Whites out of the Democratic Party.

Just listen to their slogans. Wallace: “Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever!” Nixon: “Stand Up for America,” “Law and Order.” McGovern was ridiculed as the candidate of “Acid, Amnesty and Abortion.” This was an attack on the hippie counterculture, the draft dodgers in Canada and the women’s movement. Nixon implicitly blamed the largely-Black urban riots on the Black Power movement. None of which has to do with Sanders’ economic arguments. Those are all culture-war issues. Wallace and Nixon knew exactly what they were doing. They knew that culture-war issues were more powerful than a booming, low-inequality economy. Radicals don’t get it.

## That Was Then; Is It Different Now?

By November 2016, the unemployment rate was down to 3% in North Dakota and 2.9% in South Dakota. For decades, neither state has had a shortage of good, hard-hat oil and gas jobs. Yet what happened? Trump won by 36% in North Dakota and by 30% in South Dakota.



This is just what we saw in the late 1960s. Although economic conditions were good for winning back Trump’s base — according to the socialist theory — Trump still won overwhelmingly. Once again, the culture war trumped economics.

Meanwhile, Blacks, with roughly 10% unemployment (compared to the national average of under 5%) voted heavily for Clinton (76%). So exactly where Sanders’ theory would

predict a group should abandon the Democrats, they overwhelmingly voted for them. Culture-war concerns were the reason.

In all these cases, Sanders' theory points to the opposite of what happened. The culture-war view gives the obvious and correct answer.

## A Sociologist Gets to Know Trump's Base

But Trump's base also wants more jobs and better pay. Doesn't that prove there's some truth to the economic theory? Actually, no. The problem is that while they do want good jobs, they don't want to get them through "socialist" policies. To check this out, I turned to a sociologist who got to know Trump's base.

Arlie Hochschild, the author of *Strangers in Their Own Land*, is a sociology professor at U.C. Berkeley and a Bernie Sanders supporter. She spent five years interviewing Tea Party and Trump supporters in Lake Charles, Louisiana, where she concluded that Trump supporters were mainly upset with "people of color, women, immigrants, refugees, public sector workers," and with environmental causes. They viewed all of these as, in effect, "cutting in line" in front of them.

When I asked her at a book talk about how they would feel about taxing the rich to fund a huge infrastructure program to provide jobs, she regretfully answered that they would oppose it. In other words, their primary concerns were all cultural. To the extent that they are concerned about jobs, they blame their problems on discrimination against them by progressive programs, and they don't want the government creating the jobs.

They far prefer Trump's approach to adding more jobs: build a wall and wage trade wars with China and Mexico. To cap it all off, Trump's base sees Democratic regulations and the taxing of business as job killers.

Like it or not, the Democrats, and especially the radical left, need to understand the politics they are dealing with. That doesn't mean changing our goals, but it does mean not being needlessly offensive. And it also means listening to the other side. They may have some legitimate points. For example, as Sanders used to point out, some of them may be losing jobs to immigrants, documented or undocumented.



## What's Infuriating Trump's Base?

*We simply cannot allow people to pour into the United States undetected, undocumented, unchecked, and circumventing the line of people who are waiting patiently, diligently, and lawfully to become immigrants in this country.*

— Senator Barack Obama, 2005

Donald Trump was leading the Republican presidential field in December 2015 when a USA Today poll found that an “overwhelming majority of his supporters” would vote for him if he bolted the GOP and ran as an independent. The next day Jeb Bush said, “I can guarantee you Donald Trump is not going to be the nominee.”

What the other 16 Republican contenders did not understand was that about half of the Republican base hated the Republican establishment. And that explains how Trump won the nomination. But why were they so antagonistic toward their party?

Democrats, and especially the radicals who hate the Democratic establishment, tend to think the reason must be similar to Bernie Sanders hating the Democratic Party. But it's not. These were people who had been good Republicans their whole lives, and they were backing a billionaire. That doesn't sound anything like Sanders.

In fact, the Republican base had one grievance that overshadowed all others at the time Trump decided to run. It's essentially the same number-one grievance they have against the Democrats.

Trump figured all this out very early on, but most Democrats still don't have a clue. So what did Trump figure out? Let's turn back the clock and listen to him as he entered the race.

## Why Republicans Couldn't Beat Trump

"They're bringing drugs; they're bringing crime; they're rapists." With those words, he launched his campaign. His first TV ad said, "He'll stop illegal immigration by building a wall." There's a lot of racism in this, but there's also a lot more to it. Here are the bare bones of that story.

In 1986, the two parties cut a deal. The Democrats gained a path to citizenship for 2.7 million who had immigrated illegally. And the Republicans were guaranteed a secure border. The Democrats got their half of the bargain, and the Republicans got nothing. By 2007, 12 million more immigrants were here illegally.

And to rub salt in the wound, John Judas and Ruy Teixeira, two very smart radicals, wrote the best-seller *The Emerging Democratic Majority* in 2002. A major theme was the view that the growth of minority populations would boost the Democrats into a permanent majority position.

After Romney gained only 30% of the Hispanic vote and lost to Obama in 2012, the GOP establishment decided to take a more favorable view toward immigrants who were here illegally, and the party's base revolted. This became clear when David Brat, a political unknown who was outspent 40 to 1, defeated House Majority Leader Eric Cantor largely by criticizing his position on illegal immigration.

Trump was watching. He read the tea leaves early, trademarked his “Make America Great Again” slogan in November 2012, and tested his attacks on illegal immigration in a 2013 speech to conservatives. Then he went on to defeat the Republican Party.

## Democrats have a similar problem

By 2018, when a Harris Poll commissioned by Harvard asked, “Do you think we should have basically open borders?” 32% of Democrats said yes. Combine that with the fact that Democratic radicals worked for years, along with businessmen like the Koch brothers, *against* keeping our half of the 1986 bargain. Then remember that radical Democrats bragged about how minorities would help us take over the country, and you can see a good part of the reason that Trump’s base hates us, is fired up, and why he is hard to beat.

## So What’s a Reasonable Position for Democrats?

First, we should note that wanting to deport immigrants is not necessarily a racist attitude. In 2016, Gallup found that 21% of Hispanics favored “Deporting all immigrants who are living in the United States illegally back to their home country.” That’s a very harsh policy. The likely reason for this is simply a sense of fair play. Those who waited their turn felt that others should do the same.

**Two basic beliefs:** Polls indicate Americans generally share two basic beliefs. First, immigrants almost all come here for good reasons — mainly to work hard and support their families. Many have broken immigration laws, but their intentions are good. They intend no harm to America or Americans and should be treated with “dignity and respect,” as the Democratic platform states.

As of April, 2019 an ABC News/Washington Post Poll found that 80% of Americans thought that “the situation with illegal immigration across the U.S.-Mexico border is currently a serious problem or crisis. But Gallup tells us that 77% of Americans think *legal* immigration is a good thing.

Second, the laws of the United States should be enforced, which is not to say they should never be changed. But the rule of law is a foundation of democracy. Most Americans favor a secure border and enforcement against employers who break the law. On these points, the Democratic platform waffles or is silent.

**The Democratic platform** says we will “work toward comprehensive immigration reform ... that improves border security.” That’s a terribly weak commitment given the track record at the border. Why not at least state that a secure border is our goal? And why is workplace enforcement not mentioned, when it could be the most effective and humane way of controlling illegal immigration? (And remember, cheating by employers is grossly unfair to law-abiding companies.)

And the first thing the platform says is that “Democrats are fighting for every immigrant who feels threatened by Donald Trump’s election.” Clearly, that includes every immigrant who is not in the country legally or has committed a crime because those will be the ones who feel most threatened.

**Some basic economics.** Paul Krugman, a very liberal, Nobel Prize-winning economist, explained the basics clearly in the *New York Times*, in 2006.

- Immigration since 1980 has raised the total income of native-born Americans by no more than a fraction of 1 percent.

- Many of the worst-off native-born Americans are hurt by immigration.
- U.S. high school dropouts would earn as much as 8 percent more if it weren't for Mexican immigration.
- Low-skill immigrants threaten to unravel [our] safety net.
- We'll need to reduce the inflow of low-skill immigrants.

He also debunks one of the most prevalent myths about immigrants who will work for low wages.

It's intellectually dishonest to say, as President Bush does, that immigrants do "jobs that Americans will not do." The willingness of Americans to do a job depends on how much that job pays -- and the reason some jobs pay too little to attract native-born Americans is competition from poorly paid immigrants.

**Bernie Sanders.** Before you conclude that Krugman turned conservative the day he wrote that op-ed, consider what Bernie Sanders said in July 2015. As he interviews Sanders, Ezra Klein said, "I think if you take global poverty that seriously, it leads you to conclusions ... like sharply raising the level of immigration we permit, even up to a level of open borders." Bernie Sanders responded:

Open borders? No, that's a Koch brothers proposal. [Klein: Really?] Of course. That's a right-wing proposal, which says essentially there is no United States. ... What right-wing people in this country would love is an open-border policy. Bring in all kinds of people, work for \$2 or \$3 an hour, that would be great for them.

## Conclusion

Solving the immigration standoff would be tremendously good for the country, good for most immigrants who are at present not here legally, and good for the Democratic Party. But because the 1986 deal was broken in a completely one-sided way, we must show that this time we are serious about ending illegal immigration.

Since before the Civil War, when newly arriving Irish and German workers were willing to work longer hours for less pay, native-born workers have felt threatened by some immigrant groups. During this election, it could significantly help the Party's credibility with working-class voters if we at least acknowledged that the 1986 immigration bill was not implemented in a fair manner.

## Trump: Charismatic Sociopath

*Revolutions in democracies are generally caused by the intemperance of demagogues.*

—Aristotle, 330 B.C.

“I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn’t lose voters,” bragged Donald Trump. Comedian Jimmy Kimmel had no trouble finding Trump supporters that loyal. And yes, they even said that if he shot someone on Fifth Avenue, they would absolutely still vote for him. And what if he punched the Pope in the face? “I’m a Catholic. Punch away,” said a loyal supporter. That’s the power of Trump’s charisma — a character trait most Democrats can’t even imagine he could possess.

This lack of imagination has cost us. If we can’t understand his charisma, how can we defeat it? According to Andrés Miguel Rondón, a Venezuelan who lived through the rise of Hugo Chávez, the opposition’s misunderstanding of the connection between Chávez and his base was what kept him in power. Trump relies on strongman charisma just as Chávez did. His followers see themselves as unfairly under attack and look up to him as their protector.

Many attacks on Trump simply leave his base ever more convinced of their need for a strongman. That gets them out to vote.

## What's Charisma?



FDR was highly charismatic, as are Barack and Michelle Obama. That raises a fundamental question: How can Michelle and the Donald both be charismatic when they have almost nothing in common? Is the concept meaningless? The answer is simple: They have something huge in common. They both form a tight emotional bond with their supporters. What's charismatic to some is repugnant to others.

The strength of your charisma is measured both by how many people find you appealing and how appealing they think you are. It's not just about the leader's personal magic; the followers' tastes are just as important. Here's a definition that takes that into account:

**A leader is charismatic** if a large number of followers find the leader attractive in a way that creates a strong emotional attachment to the leader.

Charm and warmth come to mind first as characteristics of charisma. But those matter more for celebrities than for politicians. Trump lacks those, but he does appear to have self-confidence, another key to charisma. He puts on quite a show. We could quibble about whether it's real, but all that matters for charisma is his appearance to his followers. To them, he appears both self-confident and competent — after all, he's a billionaire so he must know what he's doing. Those are both key qualities for a charismatic strongman.



But his followers must also identify with him. How can they identify with such an arrogant billionaire? His trick, a standard one, is to reflect their interests and their opinions. He tries things out and watches closely to see what they like. Eventually, he found the lines that drew the biggest applause, such as: “I’ll build a wall, and Mexico will pay for it.” His followers trained him to say whatever they wanted to hear, and he was open to taking any position or attitude they wanted.

He also promises to be their champion — their strongman — and they long for that. His vulgarity helps prove he is one of them, and not part of the establishment, despite his apparent enormous wealth. And besides, he really does despise the establishment, which shuns him for his crudeness.

To sum up, the key to his charisma is playing the role that his base wants him to play — a self-confident, powerful strongman who considers their needs legitimate and wants to defend them. And they don’t just want this; they feel they desperately need it because they’ve been losing the culture war since the late 1960s.

The more we attack Trump and his base, the stronger his charisma becomes. Instead of attacking, whenever it’s a situation that is not too damaging, we should give him enough rope and let him hang himself. And when the situation is dire, we should focus on fixing the situation while making his responsibility clear, not on attacking Trump and his base.

Shouting “Fuck you” from a fancy stage in front of a fancy audience, far from damaging him, is exactly what strengthens him. Trump knows that and constantly suckers us into playing the role he needs us to play — his unhinged enemy.

His base knows this so well that they have a term for our weakness: “Trump derangement syndrome.” Google it if you care to read one of the half-million web pages that mention it.

## Mueller and Maddow

The Russian investigation shows how we lose. Night after night for two years, MSNBC and its commentators presented circumstantial evidence that Trump had secretly colluded with Russia, and they seemed sure that Mueller would prove it. And maybe Trump had colluded. But the MSNBC commentators did not consider how it would strengthen Trump's base if their speculations about Mueller proved wrong.

Mueller's report so unhinged Rachel Maddow when she saw it that she blurted out Trump's main talking point before Trump did: "He [Mueller] decided to take it upon himself to declare definitively, 'Yeah, you know, I looked at all that stuff, and I can tell you there is no crime there, it's fine.'" Mueller said no such thing.

In fact, Mueller had declared, "While this report does not conclude that the President committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him." And just for emphasis, he wrote that into the report three times. But Maddow lost it and channeled Trump rather than Mueller.

MSNBC should have used the opposite strategy. We should look like we are not attacking him and appear to give him the benefit of the doubt. Then — and you can depend on this — it just happens to turn out that he is more duplicitous than we "thought" (or pretended to think).

The impact of Mueller's report on Trump's base would have been the opposite. His conclusions — Trump might have obstructed justice, might have committed a crime, and the Russians helped him — would have brought discouraging realism to his base. The problem is that we say what we want to hear, not what helps us win. That's especially true of radicals.

## A Charismatic Sociopath?

There's been some debate over whether Trump is a narcissist or a sociopath. Well, of course, he's narcissistic. He vastly overrates himself and sees others as unimportant. But he's also a sociopath. What's most commonly misunderstood is his sociopathic behavior. So let's focus on that.

I'd be the first to tell you that a conscience may be the most important human trait. But if all you care about it is "winning" — if you're Donald Trump — you're better off without one. And that's basically the definition of a sociopath.

Understanding sociopaths should be simple, but for us "normies" it's extremely difficult. Their way of thinking just doesn't seem possible. Perhaps the best way is to imagine playing a game — anything from poker to football to Monopoly. Games let us leave our conscience behind. If you're playing poker, lying (bluffing) is not only okay, it's expected. You would be considered a fool if you told the truth — Trump's view precisely. In football, being sneaky is okay. In Monopoly, we attempt to drive our opponents into bankruptcy and couldn't care less.

A sociopath sees life as a game. End of story. Without a conscience, they just play to win, any way they can. And they feel absolutely fine about it — no matter what it takes. It's fine to lie, and it's fine to break the law. Just don't get caught. If you can get away with it, you're stupid not to.

Roughly speaking, about 1%, or three million Americans, really do think like this most of the time. I've seen three instances of this up close. Two of these people had good careers and led useful, even helpful, lives while causing a lot of unnecessary hurt. The third chose an extremely different strategy and ended up with a 15-year-minimum prison sentence, although he had appeared normal enough to a friend of mine that she rented her basement apartment to him.

That demonstrates a key point. Just like normies (us), sociopaths choose many different careers, from caregivers to criminals to political leaders, so they can be very hard to spot. But one of the easiest clues to spot is this: Do they lie and not seem to care at all when they get caught as long as they suffer no consequences? Trump passes that test every day.

I don't know what Trump understands and what he doesn't. But the only thing he cares about — and he has said this himself — is winning. So the only argument that he'll pay attention to is one that concerns his popularity. Arguing that saving Obamacare would save a million lives will cut no ice with him. Arguing that ending Obamacare would be unpopular with his base just might work.

It's surprising how many people don't understand this. European trade ministers brought binders of data to the G7 trade negotiations to convince Trump not to start a trade war.

What were they thinking?!

### Update: Quote from John Bolton

CNN, June 21, Zakaria — John Bolton, in his new book, *The Room Where It Happened*, has come to the same conclusion after personally observing dozens of Trump's policy decisions. His conclusion matches the sociopath diagnosis.

I am hard-pressed to identify any significant Trump decision during my White House tenure that wasn't driven by re-election calculations.

## Trump: A Fake Jacksonian Populist

*Fear not, the people may be deluded for a moment but cannot be corrupted.*

—Andrew Jackson

Trump is not a Jacksonian populist. He just plays one on TV — and in the White House. Many of those who hate Trump now trash Jackson, thinking that will discredit Trump. It does not. It simply reinforces the view of Trump's base that Trump is another Jackson, who they honor as a courageous war hero and an authentic (albeit right-wing) populist.



*Frame taken the instant Trump became President.  
WhiteHouse.gov*

Despite superficially similar personal characteristics, the differences between their psychologies are enormous. A sociopathic president only champions his country to further his own interests while an ultra-patriot like Jackson would give his life for his country.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not ignoring Jackson's fiery temper or excusing his misdeeds. But Jackson joined the American Revolution when he was 13 while "cadet bone spurs" relied on fake medical reports arranged by his father to gain five draft deferments. In the Battle of New Orleans, 30 years after he fought in the revolution, Jackson defeated the British forces who attacked him with twice as many well-trained troops. The British suffered more than 20 times the number of casualties as the Americans. Trump is no Jackson.

## Trump Is a Leader of Jacksonians

Those in Trump's base are largely part of an ancient Jacksonian folk culture that has been a powerful force in American politics from the beginning and shows no signs of disappearing. And most Democrats have no clue it even exists. This is why the Sanders PACs — Brand New Congress, Justice Democrats and Our Revolution — made fools of themselves in 2018. So let me introduce you to the Jacksonians.

Jackson himself, and the Jacksonian folk culture at the heart of Trump's base, are descendants of the Scots-Irish who left the lowlands of Scotland for Northern Ireland in about 1600. Life was as rough in Ireland as it had been in Scotland, so in the 1700s, before the American Revolution, about a quarter-million Scots-Irish headed to Pennsylvania and then down the backbone of the Appalachians.

They were Scottish Presbyterians — not the Irish Catholics who arrived much later. Neither were they related to the Deep South's slave society. At a crucial juncture, they allied with the

Yankees to tip the balance toward democracy as our nation was forming. They were fighters. As George Washington was camped out for that terrible winter at Valley Forge, half his men were Yankees and the other half were Scots-Irish. So you can thank the hillbillies, rednecks or White trash, as some now disdainfully call them, for your country.

Historian Walter Russell Mead claims that “Jacksonian culture, values and self-identification have spread beyond their original ethnic limits” and that “Northern immigrants gradually assimilated the values of Jacksonian individualism. Each generation of new Americans was less ‘social’ and more individualistic than the preceding one.”

Although the Scots-Irish are the source of Jacksonian folk ideology, it now has a life of its own, to put it mildly. And although Trump is not a Jacksonian himself, he can still be an effective Jacksonian leader by faking it. The Jacksonian folk culture is what makes Trump's leadership a powerful force in national politics.

## Trump Follows His Jacksonian Base

Andrew Jackson was running for President as a populist, and the Whigs (who later morphed into Republicans) found this so hilarious that they called him Jackass Jackson. So Jackson put a donkey on his campaign poster to remind the millions of White men without property (who had just been given the right to vote) what the Whigs thought of them. He won in a minor landslide, and the donkey became the symbol of Jackson's new Democratic Party.

The Democratic Party remained dominant in the South and the Appalachia of the Scots-Irish through the 1960s. But much of the Jacksonian element turned Republican under Nixon. With Trump's election, they now form his base.

But does Trump reflect Jacksonian folk ideology, or does his base reflect Trumps political views? To find out, let's look at his talking points.

1. Build a wall to keep out Mexicans, and ban Muslim immigrants.
2. Support the Second Amendment and gun rights.
3. Attack the liberal elites, party establishments and Wall Street.
4. Attack trade deals that help foreigners.
5. Attack "politically correct" rhetoric in favor of offensive discourse.

But did these come from Trump or from the Jacksonians? To find out, we need a description of the Jacksonians from before Trump ran for office to see if that's what the Jacksonians already thought. Mead provided such a description back in 1999, so let's look at what he said then:

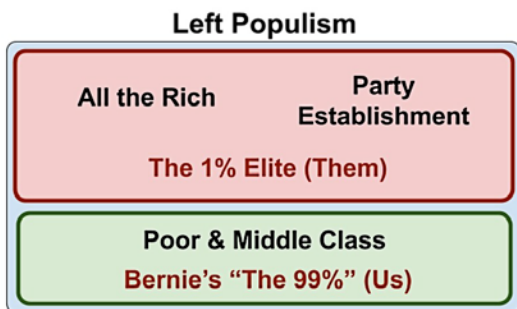
1. [The] Jacksonian community ... automatically and absolutely excluded: Indians, Mexicans, Asians, African Americans, obvious sexual deviants, and recent immigrants of non-Protestant heritage.
2. Jacksonians see the Second Amendment, the right to bear arms, as the citadel of liberty.
3. Jacksonians are profoundly suspicious of elites.
4. [Jacksonians worry that the government is] giving all our industrial markets to the Japanese?
5. The Jacksonian hero dares to say what the people feel and defies the entrenched elites.

That list, describing Jacksonian views in 1999, predicts Trump's talking points almost perfectly. So the Jacksonians (with help from Steve Bannon) taught him their views, and those became his talking points. Trump is just *following* the Jacksonian folk culture.



## Left Populism vs. Jacksonian Populism

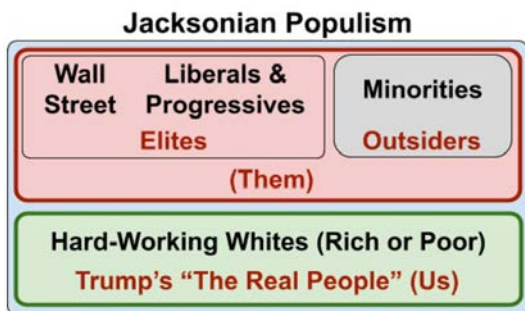
To see why the radical PACs imagined they could unite progressive Democrats with Trump's base, it helps to diagram these two very different populisms — left populism and Jacksonian populism. Left populism presents a simple populist dichotomy. The elite consists of the richest 1% and their political enablers, and the rest are “the people.”



According to the left-populist view, pretty much everyone is part of Us, so Trump's base is also part of Us. This makes the views of the Berniecrat PACs, Robert Reich and Bernie Sanders seem entirely logical. That's because the Berniecrats assume the Jacksonian populists see populism the same way Sanders sees it. Big mistake.

**Jacksonian populism** is a right-wing form of populism that includes an out-group. Notice there are still two main groups — Them and Us — just like there are with left-populism.

But Jacksonians, like most right-wing populists, split Them into the Elite and the Outsiders — Blacks, immigrants and sexual-preference minorities. The outsiders are excluded from “the real people.” In this way, Jacksonians exclude about half of the Democratic Party from “the real people.” But that's not all that's different.



A second surprise is the most shocking. Jacksonians see White liberals and progressives as part of the elite! That excludes the rest of the Democratic Party. In right-wing populism, the elite are usually seen as being in cahoots with the excluded group. Democrats are obviously champions of the poor and minorities. So that makes them *part of the elite* because White liberals and progressives are in cahoots with the Outsiders. This fits the Jacksonian populist view perfectly.

The third surprise is the Jacksonian sympathy for the “hard-working” rich. Jacksonians will tell you “they worked hard for their money.” Sometimes they sort of have a point. Consider Steve Jobs and LeBron James. The result is that Trump’s base classifies many billionaires as part of “the real people.” Even Trump, a presumed multibillionaire born with a silver spoon in his mouth, who brags about taking advantage of tax loopholes, gets a pass. Again, this makes a progressive alliance with the Tea Party hard to imagine.

Jacksonian Trumpsters see it working like this: Democrats arrange help for minorities from the federal government, and in return, these “outsiders” vote for the Democrats. Of course, they are right about this. The problem is that they exclude, as outsiders, the groups that Democrats most care about. Socialism tries to overcome this divide between progressives and

Trump's base by focusing on economic disadvantage. But that's not what the Jacksonians focus on.

The Jacksonians look down on Sanders' economic focus as crass, and instead focus on the culture war issues listed above — immigrants, guns, snobbish elites (including progressives), foreigners and PC language. If you mistake that for progressive populism, you're in deep trouble.

And that's exactly the trouble Robert Reich, Bernie Sanders, and his three Berniecrat PACs all got into when they tried to foment a revolution based on the idea that populism is always progressive populism. That mistake confirmed their mistaken Marxist analysis that the working class has class solidarity. They had no theory or understanding of right-wing populism and the culture war, so they assumed the progressives and the Tea Partiers were brothers in populism.

That's why Robert Reich could imagine that "Tea Partiers joined with millions who called themselves liberals and progressives," as we saw in Chapter 2. That's why Sanders' top campaign staffer Zack Exley could imagine running Berniecrat "Republicans in deep-red areas" to win us a "Brand New Congress" in 2018.

Letting people with such a confused political analysis help set Biden's campaign agenda is about as smart as asking help from Trump counselor Kellyanne Conway.

## **Part 5**

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# **More Radical Myths**

## The Myth of the Bully Pulpit

*I have always been fond of the West African proverb, "Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far."*

—Teddy Roosevelt

“To convince the American people,” said Sanders, imagining his first 100 days as president, “I suspect we’re going to use Air Force One quite a bit.” That’s exactly the sort of thing Robert Reich, Sanders’ most renowned surrogate, had in mind when he explained, in a 2016 op-ed, why Sanders, and not Clinton, would make the best president.

This is Robert Reich’s #1 reason for supporting Sanders.

This is the myth of the bully pulpit — the idea that presidents can use the status of their office to shift national opinion by “preaching.” Preaching?

When William McKinley was assassinated just six months into his second term, Teddy Roosevelt unexpectedly found himself president. Delighted with his new powers, he told a preacher friend, “Critics will call this preaching. But I have got such a bully pulpit.” Back then, “bully” meant “first-rate.”

The radical version of this myth holds that presidents can shift public opinion more than a little. It claims that the bully pulpit gives them the power to get all their good laws passed

by “mobilizing the public to demand” them. That’s what Sanders planned to do with Air Force One.

It’s not terribly surprising that this myth is wrong. But it is shocking that Reich, at top-level academic and advisor to four presidents, gives four historical reasons for believing it, and every one of them is simply fake history — pure mythology.

And if that weren’t enough, as will see shortly, he then uses his bully pulpit myth to slander President Obama. Reich claims he used \$16 billion a year of public money to bribe the drug companies to contribute to his 2012 presidential campaign — something he has no evidence for other than his own magical thinking.

The bully-pulpit myth will mainly harm Biden after he’s elected, but it hurts him in two ways right now. First, it is constantly used to blame Obama for all the things he couldn’t do. Calling Obama “such a disappointment,” taints how young voters view Biden. Second, because radicals believe in this magic, they are pressuring Biden to make radical promises. Many of these will not help him win the election; otherwise, he would have already made them.

## Reich’s Accusation

In the 2016 op-ed just mentioned, Reich claims that Obama gave away \$16 billion a year to the drug companies, essentially as a bribe for future campaign contributions. Really?

**The accusation.** At first, Reich says, “Obama got the Affordable Care Act this way.” So you might think that’s *why* Obama gave away the \$16 billion a year. But then Reich tells us that Obama made the deal “because he thought he needed big money for his 2012 campaign.”

Those are not contradictory claims. Here’s Reich’s thinking

1. Obama approved a drug-company deal to get Obamacare passed. (True.)

2. Why didn't he use his magic bully pulpit instead and save the public \$16 billion a year? He knew he could. (Nuts.)
3. Since he didn't, he must have needed the deal to shake down the drug companies for a campaign contribution. (Logical if #2 were true.)

**Radical “logic.”** Step #1 is easily checked and true. Step #2 is the problem step, but let's just assume it's true too. You'll see why in a second.

If Reich is right about #2, then Obama would have had no excuse — no reason to give away the \$16 billion a year — because he could just have given a few speeches from his magic bully pulpit and saved us that money.

So if step #2 is right, then Obama is guilty as charged. He must have made a deal for some corrupt reason, probably for campaign contributions.

But what if there's no such thing as a magic bully pulpit or Obama didn't know his was magic? Then he's innocent. The reason he made a deal was because he saw no other way to have a good shot at passing Obama care.

So that's the answer. Reich can only convict if (1) Obama's bully pulpit was magic, *and* (2) Obama knew it was magic.

**The key radical fallacy.** As I'll soon show, the bully pulpit is not magic and usually doesn't work at all. But the above “logic” demonstrates the radical thought process that causes radicals to think others are evil. Here it is in capsule form.

- I know what's right; it's obvious.
- It's so obvious everyone must know it.
- So, anyone who doesn't do what I know is right, must know they're doing wrong. So they're corrupt or evil.

This “logic” leaves out two possibilities. The person who's using this “logic” could be wrong. The accused person might be mistaken — they might not have “seen the light.” That's

what religious fanatics miss when they accuse heretics. The fanatic “knows” what’s right because God told them. And then they told everybody, so all heretics must know they are doing wrong.

Radical purity tests work the same way, but with God replaced by some radical ideology. And remember, even when the ideology is right, the other person could be mistaken rather than evil. Why can’t radicals see this? I really don’t know.

**So what really happened?** Obama was staking his legacy on this bill. Yet Reich claims he gave away \$16 billion per year for some one-year contribution of perhaps \$4 million — about 1% of his campaign budget. For that, he screwed the public and risked getting caught. That makes absolutely no sense.

And what happened? Big Pharma shifted from being even-handed in 2008 to favoring Romney in 2012. Big bucks to fund his campaign? Quite the opposite. And Obama did get hammered by the left radicals for cutting a deal. Moreover, there is not a shred of evidence for Reich’s sinister accusation.

**Obama’s motivation is obvious.** Universal healthcare had been blocked by lobbyists for 75 years starting with FDR, then Truman, then LBJ, then the Clintons. Obama knew that if he failed, it might take another 20 years, but if he succeeded even halfway, that would open the door for each Congress to improve the bill — just as happened with Social Security and most entitlement programs. He was not going to risk fighting on all corporate fronts at once as Hillary Clinton had.

This is the deal he won. The drug industry would chip in \$80 billion to help fund the law’s insurance expansion, and they would support Obamacare with generous advertising. In return, the new law would leave their prices alone (Reich’s \$16 billion). Given how close this bill came to failing, even with Big Pharma on board, that was one hell of a smart deal. And no, Obama got nothing out of it, except the satisfaction of



taking the biggest step toward FDR's goals that had been achieved in half a century.

**Reich is smart**, dedicated and well-intentioned. But the radical bully-pulpit myth has sucked him in and caused him to do something shameful.

Without believing the bully-pulpit myth, he would realize that Obama had no choice but to make a deal or take an irresponsible risk. So what convinced Reich to believe in this myth?

### The Four Bully-Pulpit 'Miracles'

Roosevelt's excitement 118 years ago makes a flimsy foundation for a theory of fundamental political change. Realizing this, Reich backs up his claim about the power of the bully pulpit with four examples of Teddy Roosevelt doing astounding things, supposedly by using his bully pulpit. Reich claims that by using his bully pulpit "Teddy Roosevelt got:

1. A progressive income tax,
2. Limits on corporate campaign contributions,
3. Regulation of foods and drugs, and
4. The dissolution of giant trusts."

Before we check these, I should mention that Reich served under Presidents Ford, Carter and Clinton. He is the Chancellor's Professor at U.C. Berkeley's School of Public Policy and has taught at Harvard's School of Government.

**1. The income tax.** The Democrats passed the first federal income tax in 1894, and it was progressive. But the next year it was declared unconstitutional, and it remained so until the 16th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified in 1913. Teddy Roosevelt was president from 1901 to 1909. So he had nothing

to do with getting a progressive income tax. He didn't even push for it.

To top it off, the real story shows the exact opposite of Reich's theory — we got the income tax through ... you guessed it: political dealmaking! President William Howard Taft championed the 16th Amendment and secured its ratification. According to Doris Kearns Goodwin, author of *The Bully Pulpit*:

As he [Taft] pursued his tax agenda with [Senator] Aldrich, Taft engaged in “some pretty shrewd politics.” He met individually with members of the Finance Committee and “committed them separately” to [backing the 16th Amendment].

That's not using a bully pulpit. That's backroom dealmaking, and that's how we got a progressive income tax.

**2. Campaign contributions.** In his first run for president, in 1904, Teddy Roosevelt and the Republicans were caught taking enormous corporate campaign contributions. The most radical of the era's famous progressive journalists argued privately with Roosevelt that he should give them back. Roosevelt refused and argued that it was “entirely legitimate to accept contributions, no matter how large,” provided they were freely given. Finally, under mounting political pressure, he signed a bill, written by his archenemy, “Pitchfork Ben,” limiting contributions — but lacking an enforcement mechanism.

I was prepared for Reich to overplay the bully-pulpit myth, but I was totally unprepared to discover that Reich had misled me about which side of an issue Roosevelt was on.

**3. Regulation of food and drugs.** Upton Sinclair's blockbuster novel, *The Jungle*, was released January 25, 1906, and has never gone out of print. The book's hero worked in a meat-

packing plant and became a socialist. To set the scene, the book described the unhealthy conditions in slaughterhouses.

According to a popular political commentator of the time, Roosevelt was “reading it at breakfast when he suddenly cried, ‘I’m poisoned,’ started throwing his sausages out the window and became a vegetarian.” In reality, Roosevelt was slow to catch on. After reading the book, he wrote to Frank Doubleday, the publisher, and berated him for publishing “such an obnoxious book.” A strange way to lead the progressive movement from your bully pulpit.

Doubleday, and eventually TR’s own inspectors, confirmed the book did in fact accurately portray the meat-packing industry. The public outcry caused by Sinclair’s book was so great that in 1906, Congress passed both a new Meat Inspection Act and the long-dormant Pure Food and Drug Act. Sinclair Lewis mobilized the public, and Roosevelt dragged his feet.

**4. The dissolution of giant trusts.** TR did have his justice department file 44 lawsuits based on the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890. But I’m sorry to say that does not count as mobilizing the public. So where did the public pressure for such actions come from? The short answer is Ida Tarbell — not Teddy Roosevelt.

In a series of 19 lengthy articles published in *McClure’s Magazine* beginning in November 1902, Tarbell exposed the Standard Oil Trust. It was her focus on John D. Rockefeller that won her a huge national audience. *The Outlook*, a publication aligned with TR, proclaimed Tarbell to be “a Joan of Arc among moderns,” crusading “against trusts and monopolies.” The Washington Times said she had “proven herself to be one of the most commanding figures in American letters.” She used McClure’s Magazine as her bully pulpit, and she galvanized public opinion.

Ultimately, Roosevelt sued Standard Oil, but not until 1906. He was not leading the way from his bully pulpit; he was following.

## Roosevelt's Role in Progressive Change

Roosevelt played an important role in the progressive movement, but usually he followed it and gave the movement his blessing or made deals to implement what the progressive movement wanted. But as with the civil rights movement and LBJ, the movement needed to be led by outsiders.

The one fundamental change that Teddy Roosevelt deserves full credit for — a change that has stood the test of time better than anything else he did — was to lay the administrative foundations for corporate regulation. And to accomplish that, he used his first-rate dealmaking skills of which he was justly proud.

**What about his bully pulpit?** Despite its title, Doris Kearns Goodwin's book, *The Bully Pulpit*, only mentions Roosevelt using it once: "He created the Palisades Park and used his bully pulpit to promote it."

In fact, her book shows that Roosevelt was mostly following the progressive movement at a safe distance and using his dealmaking skills to implement some of their desired changes. This shouldn't be surprising. Lyndon Johnson is most famous for his unparalleled dealmaking skills. Franklin Roosevelt is noted for his fireside chats. But these did not average even three per year, and he used this bully pulpit mainly to reassure a worried public who already wanted more change than he could deliver.

Reich picked Teddy Roosevelt because he's the only one who supposedly got fundamental change by using his bully pulpit. But it turns out that that's just a myth based on his famous quote and his love for "preaching" during campaigns.

That was not done to lead a radical movement; It was done to win election. He was always very even handed between the capitalists and the workers.

## The Political Science of the Bully Pulpit

The mild version of the bully-pulpit myth, which says that presidents can have some influence on public opinion, has long been widely believed. However, *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit*, a book by political scientist George Edwards, shows that presidents nearly always fail in their attempts to persuade the public. And not infrequently, speaking from their “bully pulpit” has had the reverse effect to what they intended.

For example, Edwards found that during Ronald Reagan’s presidency, support for regulatory programs and spending on healthcare, welfare, urban problems, education, environmental protection and aid to minorities all increased rather than decreased — the opposite of what he intended. And remember, Reagan is known as the “great communicator.”

Edwards spent 10 years researching this topic. And the bottom-line conclusion from his research, and the research of others as well, is that presidents can sway members of their own party a bit. But the other party sees what they’re up to and heads in the opposite direction. Even the mild version is just a myth.

## Defend Joe Biden

Sanders' plan to lead his political revolution as president by flying around the country in Air Force One was always just a radical pipe dream. But what really matters is this: When you hear radical Democrats criticizing people like President Obama and Vice President Joe Biden for not doing things the critics believe they obviously could have done, don't listen to them.

Being president is enormously difficult and there are dozens, if not hundreds, of difficult people trying to get in the way. None of us on the outside can see even a fraction of these factors. So anyone who thinks they know what the president could have done, without causing some problem we've never thought of, is dreaming. Or more likely they have bought the radical bully pulpit myth that presidents can fly around in Air Force One and get anything they want.

So as Joe Biden runs for president, and after he's elected, give him a break and defend him against his arm-chair-quarterback critics.

## Socialism, Liberalism and All That

*I am against private socialism of concentrated private power as thoroughly as I am against governmental socialism. The one is equally as dangerous as the other.*

—Franklin Delano Roosevelt, March 12, 1935

Only one presidential candidate that I know of has ever adopted his own political label and given a speech defining it. That label, of course, is “democratic socialist,” an old label but one which Bernie Sanders gave his own personal meaning to in 2015 and again in 2019.

You might think he was trying to clarify “democratic socialism” for his followers. Quite the contrary. The definition he gave left many (and in my experience, most) of his followers unable to answer the two most obvious questions about *real* democratic socialism:

- Is it a kind of socialism? (Yes)
- Is it a kind of capitalism? (No)

Confusingly the answers are just the reverse, if we are talking about Sander’s new sanitized “democratic socialism” — what he tells his followers, not what he believes himself. And his followers are just as confused about Sander’s definition as they are about the real definition.

I tried asking some among his army of texters whether Sanders was a “democratic socialist” or a “socialist” and found that Sanders’ campaign had supplied them with a pre-approved message that dodged the question, and none would answer in their own words. When I pushed two of them, one guessed Sanders was a capitalist and the other guessed, not a capitalist. Neither had heard what Sanders thought about this.

Why would Sanders make such a big deal out of this label and not clear up such obvious questions? Clearly, he has a hidden agenda. But what is it?

**Sanders’ hidden agenda.** In this chapter and the next, I’ll argue that Sanders has spent his political life in the socialist lane, which has no track record of success. For credibility, he needs to move out of it but cannot abandon his lifelong “socialist” label. So he tweaked his label to a less familiar one, “democratic socialist,” and redefined this to be the same as FDR liberalism. So now he pretends that FDR was a socialist and that he, Sanders, is the new FDR.

This is a deplorable misrepresentation of both FDR and Sanders himself, but the damage to the party comes from the deceptions he has perpetrated on his followers. The result is that Berniecrats now believe liberals reject FDR’s political agenda.

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Berniecrats believe: Today’s liberals reject FDR’s political agenda because FDR was a democratic socialist.

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And so they see liberals as either conservative (neoliberals) or corrupt. Their reasoning is this: *Liberals reject democratic socialism, and FDR was a democratic socialist, so liberals reject FDR.*

This is nonsense. FDR hated socialism, which already meant democratic socialism back then. Modern liberals are FDR liberals, and they agree with FDR about rejecting social-



ism, and they support his political agenda. So they agree with Sanders supporters, who as we saw in Chapter 5, are FDR liberals but don't know it.

This deception continues to do a huge amount of damage to the Democratic Party.

- It causes Berniecrats to hate the half of the party that opposes (real) democratic socialism (e.g. Venezuela).
- It makes it vastly easier for Trump to call the party a bunch of socialists and make it stick.

To discuss all this, we need to untangle Sanders' definitions of socialism and democratic socialism.

## First, What Is Capitalism?

Under capitalism, companies are privately owned, and the owners get the profits. I'll bet you knew that already. This is why the President of Denmark told Sanders that Denmark was not socialist when Sanders said it was. The Danish economy is driven by companies owned by capitalists, so Denmark has a capitalist economy.

In the early days of capitalism, in the U.S. and elsewhere, some business owners got exceedingly rich while the workers who made all the products worked 60 or even 80 hours a week and received starvation wages. (That still happens to some undocumented immigrants.) In America, most workers are now vastly better off than that, but the inequality remains, and many are still paid unconscionably low wages, give the wealth of this country.

But capitalism does not have to be like that. Capitalism just means businesses are privately owned, the owners decide what to sell and then set prices to make a profit. There is still plenty of room for government regulation and taxes that dramatically reduce inequality and treat workers fairly.

## What's Socialism?

The core idea of socialism is that companies should be socially owned and that no capitalists should be involved and making profits. So the one sure thing about socialism is that it's not capitalism.

That is why you will never hear Bernie Sanders say he is a capitalist or that he believes we should have some type of capitalist economy.

That is also why Elizabeth Warren has said she is "a capitalist to my bones" and will never say she is a socialist. The whole point of socialism has always been to replace capitalism. There are two kinds of socialism:

1. Government-ownership socialism
2. Worker-ownership socialism

Bernie Sanders believed in the first kind, government ownership, until he was about 40. In the 1970s, he liked to talk about how utilities and energy companies should be owned by the government, not capitalists. Then he went silent until his 2015 democratic socialism speech when he said, "I don't believe government should own the means of production." That's Marxist jargon for rejecting government-ownership socialism.

Sanders has now switched to worker-ownership socialism. Companies would not be owned by capitalists but, instead, by their workers. The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) are also fond of this kind of socialism, although they have mixed views.

## What's Real Democratic Socialism?

Both kinds of socialism (governmental and worker ownership) are simply economic systems that can operate under a democracy or a dictatorship. So there is no mystery to democratic socialism. It's just socialism under a democratic government.

This idea dates back to at least 1900. About the only American socialists who were not democratic socialists (worker-dictatorship socialists), called themselves communists. For the last 120 years, “socialist” has just been a short-version of “democratic socialist.” There is no difference

Some democratic socialists, like Michael Harrington, the founder of DSA, favor government-ownership socialism, while others favor worker-ownership socialism. Sanders started as the first type but seems to have flipped flopped to the second.

## What’s Sanders’ “Democratic Socialism”?

Because Sanders wouldn’t make the biggest flip-flop ever, he is still a real democratic socialist, in other words a real socialist who wants socialism under a democracy. But for his followers, he has misdefined democratic socialism to be FDR’s liberalism — a kind of capitalism, not a kind of socialism.

## What is FDR Liberalism?

When FDR first ran for president in 1932, he ran on a balanced-budget, small-government platform much like President Hoover’s. But, as explained in Chapter 5, Roosevelt shifted a bit to the left and then captured the “liberal” label from the Hoover conservatives. He also labeled them “conservatives.” Hoover, who had been a leading progressive, was not happy, but his side lost, and the “liberal” and “conservative” labels stuck.

Although “liberal” had, roughly speaking, meant libertarian, Roosevelt redefined it to mean a philosophy of government responsibility for social welfare — the opposite of libertarian.

**It’s to the right of socialism.** The socialists saw Roosevelt’s liberalism as applying Band-Aids to capitalism to save it from

a political revolution leading to socialism. Whenever Norman Thomas, the six-time Socialist presidential candidate, was asked if FDR was carrying out his socialist program, he would answer with one of his famous quips such as, “Yes, he is carrying it out in a coffin.”

And as noted in Chapter 5 and on the DSA website, many historians agree that Roosevelt saved capitalism from socialism at a time when socialism could have been a serious threat. So Roosevelt was far to the right of socialism.

**It’s to the right of Huey Long’s populism.** We can be even more precise. Huey Long, the famous populist U.S. Senator from Louisiana, was a staunch anti-socialist and openly sought to preserve capitalism. He was clearly to the right of the socialists, yet FDR still considered him dangerous and so far left that he would adopt few of his proposals. So Huey Long was to the right of the socialists, and FDR was to the right of Huey Long.

**FDR liberalism** is FDR’s New Deal plus his Second Bill of (economic) Rights, plus all kinds of civil rights and environmental protections.

Roosevelt’s liberalism was a new, middle path, one step to the left of Hoover’s conservative, small-government philosophy and two steps to the right of socialism. It included his New Deal policies and his Second Bill of (economic) Rights. But when modern Democrats speak of liberalism, they mean all that plus something else just as important — all kinds of civil rights. And that’s what I mean when I refer to “liberalism.” But just as a reminder, I will often call this combination FDR liberalism.

## The Myth of ‘Democratic Socialism’

*Don’t tell me words don’t matter.*

—President Barack Obama, 2008

“Would you kindly clarify your statements that Bernie Sanders self-identifies as a socialist? He says ‘democratic socialist.’ There is a whopping difference.” That note, and a few like it, prompted PolitiFact to explain to the befuddled Berniecrat that his claim made no more sense than saying, *This is a Honeycrisp apple, not an apple; there is a whopping difference.*

I was not surprised. Sanders’ famous democratic socialism speech from late 2015 was a masterpiece of misdirection. He says what democratic socialism means to him nine times but never mentions plain “socialism,” his traditional label, and never mentions what every other socialist means by democratic socialism. He talks about Democrats he admires but never mentions a socialist, not even Eugene V. Debs, whose portrait hung in his Senate office for years. And Sanders’ campaign ignored multiple requests from PolitiFact for a comment on the difference.

Sanders is clearly trying to mislead his followers. And he is succeeding. What is he up to? And what are the consequences for the Democrats?

What I will show is that he has deliberately misinformed his followers about democratic socialism by pretending it’s just FDR liberalism — the New Deal and FDR’s Second Bill

of Rights. And he has done this with the hope that his followers can later be converted to real socialism. So far, he has induced 50,000 of them to join a Marxist, socialist organization. And you can see from the following tweet that at least 1,500 of them, and likely many more, now think that even “communism is good.”



## Is Sanders a Socialist?

It might seem obvious that Sanders is a socialist. He has a life-long socialist track record and, as the wildly popular podcaster Joe Rogan tweeted, “He’s been insanely consistent his entire life.” In spite of this, many recent op-eds, such as Paul Krugman’s “Bernie Sanders Isn’t a Socialist: But he plays one on TV,” have claimed he’s not.

Krugman’s point is that Sanders is not running on socialist policies. He’s right about that. As Chapter 5 shows, he’s running on FDR liberalism. Even Joseph Schwartz, Vice-Chair of the Democratic Socialists of America, agrees. Schwartz did some searching and the most recent socialist quote from Sanders that he could find was the one about how people should not have to “work as semi-slaves” for capitalists. That’s from clear

back in 1985. Schwartz couldn't find him saying anything socialist since then.

This had me puzzled for years. Sanders doesn't mind misleading people, but he does not like to tell lies, and he's an expert in socialism. In 2009, he posted on his Senate website that he doubted that "there are any other socialists in all of the Congress." In November 2016 he labeled himself a straight-up socialist four times in his book, *Our Revolution*. How could he not be a real socialist? But if he was one, how could he go for 35 years without saying anything clearly socialist?

Sanders has been running for office as a socialist for fifty years, and one thing he learned long ago is that talking about what socialism really means doesn't help you win. And talking about genuine socialist policies also doesn't help. So his strategy has become one of making people angry at the elite and talking about non-socialist reform policies that might improve capitalism.

You don't have to take my word for the fact that real socialists often advance their agenda by pushing non-socialist reforms in ways that heightens class conflict. Meagan Day, a leading voice at Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), tells us:

"Here's the truth: In the long run, **democratic socialists want to end capitalism**. And we want to do that **by pursuing a reform agenda today** in an effort to revive a politics focused on class hierarchy and inequality in the United States [emphases added]."

When she says "reform agenda," she means the kind of non-socialist policies Sanders is advocating. Almost as if in answer to Krugman's argument, she writes in the DSA's *Socialist Forum* that "revolutionary socialists have historically been very focused on the proper integration of **reform campaigns** into revolutionary strategy." And in case you're un-

clear on the point of a democratic-socialist revolution, she explains,

Social democratic reforms like Medicare-for-all are, in the eyes of DSA, part of the long, uneven process of building that support, and eventually **overthrowing capitalism**.

So Sanders hasn't flip-flopped; he still is a socialist. And he wants to convert others to real, capitalism-free, Marxist socialism. But he does that indirectly, without advocating actual socialist policies, which he knows would put people off. Instead, he advocates a "reform agenda," just as Meagan Day suggests.

This misleading indirect approach is an old one on the left. The Communist Party USA used it very effectively in the 1930s. But when people eventually found out what communism was, they realized they'd been duped, and they left the party in droves.

## What's the DSA?

The DSA is the Marxist training camp for real socialism, and Sanders is their recruiting officer. He is not a member, but his views and aspirations align far more closely with the DSA's than with the Democrats. They backed Sanders' first run for the Senate in 2006, and he gave the keynote address at their 2007 national convention. He sought and gained their blessing before he ran for president in 2015.

The DSA's Honorary Chairman, Cornell West, is one of Sanders' closest advisors, and Sanders appointed him to the Democratic Platform Committee in 2016. West then defected to socialist Jill Stein to help her attack Clinton. So when asked on MSNBC, Sanders refused to tell his supporters to vote for Clinton, not Stein. As a result Stein got a million more votes in



2016 than in 2012. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has joined the DSA along with fellow "Squad" member Rashida Tlaib.

Sanders' successes in the 2016 primaries pushed the DSA's membership from about 6,200 to about 56,000 in early 2020. These are now dues-paying members of a political organization that "will not be endorsing Biden" but will be criticizing him.

**Is the DSA a Marxist socialist organization?** The DSA launched a new quarterly publication, *Socialist Forum*, in the fall of 2018 with ten articles by influential members.

They discussed the "overthrow of capitalism," how "Marxist theory is indispensable," how Bernie was fomenting "class struggle on a massive scale," how "The Russian Revolution" is a guide to "organizing for the revolution in the U.S.," what Marx had to say about "subverting the [U.S.] economic base" and how "Marx and Engels" gave us the "framework for understanding capitalist economics." Another of the authors has written a "Marxist analysis" of the Nicaraguan revolution.

All ten papers are written from a Marxist perspective and make it clear that the DSA is a Marxist organization trying to end capitalism. The DSA knows Bernie's program is not socialist, but they appreciate how "Bernie Sanders has led the charge on Medicare for All and has done a remarkably effective job in linking the demand to the need for class struggle on a massive scale."

DSA also sees calling his reform policies "democratic socialism" as a great way to recruit new DSA members. They are busy converting them to real socialism without them knowing where they're headed. Sanders is fully aware of this and is complicit in it.

## How Does This Help Trump?

Thanks to Sanders, we now have almost half of the Democratic Party believing that some kind of socialist revolution is a good idea, with no clear idea what that means. In particular, they don't know that real socialists, like Sanders and the DSA leadership, intend to "overthrow capitalism."

The right-wing press loves reporting such things. And with all the hype about the Democrats moving left, it's hard to escape the charge that they really are headed toward the overthrow of capitalism.

Another danger is that Biden will be harmed by the new Democratic brand — half liberal capitalism, half radical socialism. Biden is already under attack for being a socialist as we knew he would be. But being pushed to align with the same policies that proved unpopular in the 2020 primaries and the 2018 House races would amplify the negative impact of the new Democratic flirtation with "socialism."

The impact will be to discourage the type of suburban swing voters who helped us win in 2018 and to act as a red flag for Trump's base. And in this era of negative partisanship, that's the sort of thing that really fires them up.

Similarly, Scott Jennings, an adviser to Mitch McConnell, thought Trump's line on "Biden being a tool of the radical left" was his most effective message at his June Oklahoma Rally "because it will resonate with wobbly suburbanites."

Furthermore, many of the new "democratic socialists" will see Biden as not a democratic socialist and hence think he's opposed to FDR liberalism. So they will condemn him even though Biden is a good FDR liberal, just as they are.

## The Myth of the Overton Window

*You win policy debates by crafting arguments for extreme positions — and then shifting the entire window of debate.*

—DailyKos.com, 2006

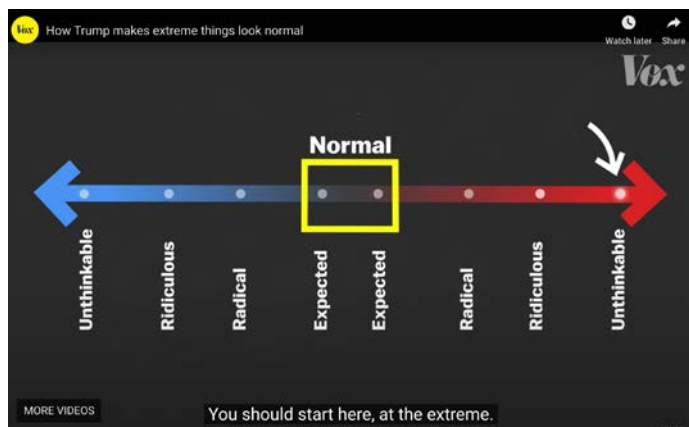
The Myth of the Overton Window is a bit like the Myth of the Bully Pulpit, but you don't need to be president and you don't need to be thoughtful. Anyone can make the country more progressive just by saying extreme things on social media.

This myth is where “Abolish ICE” came from and you can be pretty sure “Defund the Police” did too. And about all it's good for is firing up Trump's base and getting them out to vote.

Perhaps you think I'm exaggerating. Let's check the Overton-window video posted on Vox.com, the successor to The Washington Post's WonkBlog. “If you want to change what people think of as acceptable [inside the Overton window], you shouldn't start here” explains the narrator, pointing to “Radical” representing an idea located just outside the window. Then skipping over “Ridiculous,” which is well beyond “Radical,” he says, “You should start here” as he points to “Unthinkable.”

This may sound a little silly (because it is), but this video got 1.5 million views, and I couldn't find a critical single critical comment. The concept has been popular with the radical

left for more than a decade and has become a mainstay of radicalism.



There are two problems with this myth. It doesn't work as advertised, and it helps Trump. In fact, as I write this, I worry that the newest example of an Overton-window slogan — Defund the Police — could save Trump from his self-damaging response to the George Floyd protests.

## The Overton 'Theory'

As the narrator explains, "Forcing people to consider the Unthinkable idea will make your Radical idea seem more acceptable." At least that's the myth. This way there's no need to come up with a reason for your Radical idea. Just say something unthinkable. That's brilliant!

Who Was Overton Anyway? When Joseph Overton died in 2004, he was in the process of trying to explain, in a fundraising brochure for his think tank, how to move the policy window in the libertarian direction. Naturally, he thought his think tank could do that best. That was his pitch for funding.

His "window" idea is simplistic but reasonable: "At any given time, in a given public-policy area, only a relatively nar-

row range of potential policies will be considered politically acceptable.” That range is the Overton window. He was arguing that think tanks were best equipped to shift this “Overton window” and that they should do this by making cogent arguments for ideas that were a bit outside the window in the direction they wanted it to move.

Thoughtful, cogent arguments, ideas that are just a little outside the window — none of that sounds like the Vox video. So how did such ordinary ideas, which started in a conservative think tank, end up as flamboyant nonsense on a progressive blog?

## A Leap to the Left, then to the Right

Less than three years after Overton’s death, his ideas somehow took a quantum leap over to the left-wing DailyKos website and mutated into “You win policy debates by crafting arguments for extreme positions — and then shifting the entire window of debate.”

As they explained it, “The GOP takes impossibly radical positions and makes them worthy of consideration just by talking about them,” so the Democrats should do that too.

The Overton-window noise on the left soon drew the attention of right-wing radio talk show host Glenn Beck, the scourge of progressives (or “Crime Inc.,” as he calls them). What a great scare concept — the left uses the Overton window to take over the whole country. Beck wrote a thriller called, of course, *The Overton Window*, and it made it to #1 on *The New York Times*’ hardcover fiction list on July 4, 2010.

## The Myth and Reality

The myth is that taking extreme-left positions moves everyone left and extreme-right positions move us all to the right. Does that make sense to you? When Trump takes an extreme right-

wing position, do you move right? No one on the radical left ever seems to ask that question.

Every four years, Gallup asks: “If your party nominated a generally well-qualified person for president who happened to be \_\_\_\_\_, would you vote for that person?” Between 2015 and 2019, Trump took extreme anti-Muslim positions. The result? Muslims became less acceptable to Republicans but more acceptable to Democrats.

Meanwhile, Bernie Sanders took positions that were extremely pro-socialist. Socialists became more acceptable to Democrats and less acceptable to Republicans. And for the country, there was no net change. In fact socialists were the only group that did not become more acceptable nationally.

So the myth is just wrong. But taking extreme positions does have an effect — it polarizes the country. In fact, the extreme positions of both the left and the right are the primary force behind polarization. Trump is the right-wing source of polarization and left-radicals using the Overton-window myth are the main left-wing source.

## A Tragic Example

Ida Tarbell, an investigative journalist, wrote a very non-extreme and incredibly well-researched article, “The History of the Standard Oil Company,” that appeared in the November 1902 issue of *McClure’s*. With it, Tarbell shifted the Overton window of acceptable views regarding trusts, the giant monopolies owned by the robber barons. This helped clear the way for Teddy Roosevelt to begin suing them under the Sherman Antitrust Act and breaking them up — part of his famed trust-busting.

This part of the story fits with Overton’s view (not the myth) that careful arguments can shift public opinion.

But other progressive journalists thought that if her non-extreme ideas were this powerful, more-extreme ideas would be even more powerful. Soon all kinds of magazines and newspapers were publishing “investigative” articles, which became ever more extreme and sensational.

William Randolph Hearst, who was then on the left wing of the progressive movement, published a series of articles called “The Treason of the Senate,” which Teddy Roosevelt considered unthinkable. Lincoln Steffens, a socialist journalist who was close to Roosevelt, claimed that Senator Aldrich was “the boss of the United States.” Roosevelt was deeply offended.

According to the Overton Myth, such claims, which Roosevelt considered “absurd,” should have shifted Roosevelt strongly towards Steffens’ socialist views simply because the claims were extreme and on the socialist side. Instead, it caused Roosevelt to vehemently reject Steffens’ views. So Roosevelt gave his famous “Man with the Muck Rake” speech, which caused Steffens to conclude that Roosevelt had “put an end to all these journalistic investigations that have made you.”

This was only three-and-a-half years after Tarbell’s first Standard Oil article appeared. We now call Ida Tarbell and her fellow journalists “muckrakers” and think of that as a badge of honor. When Roosevelt gave his speech, he meant it as a harsh criticism of the extremists, but it was used against all investigative journalists.

Life magazine immediately published a devastating satire of “McSure’s Magazine,” ridiculing “Ida Tarbarrel” and all the best “muckrakers.”

In the final analysis, the death of powerful and effective investigative journalism, which was the beating heart of the Progressive Era, can be laid at the feet of unthinking left extremists. They had bought into the myth of the Overton window a hundred years before anyone had heard of it.



*Ida Tarbell in her Library*

## Conclusion

There is no theory or evidence behind the Overton window myth. It's just what radicals like to do — grab attention with extreme statements and cause polarization, which they hope will lead discord, the first step toward a revolution.

Extreme-left statements fire up the right just as extreme-right statements fire up the left. Think about that. It means that right-wing extremists actually help us win elections, and the radical left helps Trump.

Of course, this does benefit the radicals. As the Democrats move left, more join the radical fringe. But according to Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt in their 2018 book, *How Democracies Die*:

If one thing is clear from studying breakdowns throughout history, it's that extreme polarization can kill democracies.



And yes, the radicals are putting this theory into practice. Sean McElwee, the most prominent Berniecrat pollster, who we met in Chapter 3, calls himself an “Overton Window Mover.” And he is best known for inventing and promoting the slogan, “Abolish ICE,” which was taken up by Ocasio-Cortez to the delight of Trump, the Republicans and the far-right media.

## **Part 6**

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# **How Social Change Happens**

## The Paradox of Radicalism

*The bombing ushered in a period of intense political repression that "created an atmosphere of fear and hatred that prevailed for decades," set back the country's strongest trade-union movement and permanently crippled anarchist politics.*

Chicago Tribune, 2006 Review of  
*Death in the Haymarket* by James Green

A bomb, thrown by an anarchist into a phalanx of police near Chicago's Haymarket Square, killed one and started a deadly riot. The oppressive, conservative reaction doomed the Knights of Labor, the largest labor organization the country had seen, with 700,000 members in 1886, the year of the Haymarket riot. And as the radical historian Michael Kazin explains, "[A] reputation for revolutionary terrorism sentenced the anarchist movement to an early death."

The anarchists, by striving for maximum progress, defeated themselves. That is the "*paradox of radicalism*." It has been with us at least since the Middle Ages when prophets led rebellions against the elite establishment and promised to deliver peace and prosperity "for generations to come" just as promised by the Green New Deal (p. 6, of the proposed law). These rebellions mostly ended in horrific massacres.



*Antifa radicals in Oregon, busy helping Trump*

Often when the paradoxical result occurs, it damages the broader left. This happened to some extent in 2016 and may well have even elected Trump. In 2018, the damage was mainly wasted effort. In 2020, as the radicals “help out” by criticizing Biden and pushing him toward more-righteous, less-popular policies, we are again in danger from the paradox of radicalism. Even their slogan “Defund the Police,” if it becomes too closely associated with Democrats, could throw the election to Trump and reenact the paradox.

The paradox also caused great damage in 2000 when radicals tipped the balance to elect George W. Bush. As mentioned earlier, the paradox decimated the party and the radical movement in 1972 when McGovern lost in a landslide. Communist infiltration of the government helped empower right-wing Republicans in the early 1950’s and their witch-hunt ruined the lives of thousands of innocent leftists. And the paradox destroyed Henry Wallace in 1948 (Ch. 4), turned the Republican Party from progressive to conservative in 1912, and wiped out Teddy Roosevelt’s muckrakers in 1905. It’s time to understand the mind-set that’s behind the dark side of radicalism.

## Visible Attributes of the Dark Side

In Chapter 4 we saw how over-optimism helped produce the three attributes of the dark side:

1. Rejecting compromise — to seek a revolution
2. Purity testing — to vilify those who disagree
3. Slandorous myths — to defeat the Democrats

And in Chapter 16, we saw the role played by over-confidence that the radical view is obviously right so they will win. But there's more to it than over-confidence and over-optimism. So to understand the dark-side attributes and the paradox of radicalism, we need to dig a little deeper into the radical mind-set.

## Radical and Liberal Mind-Sets

The radical mind-set was identified by Max Weber, a father of sociology, and explained in his classic 1919 essay, "Politics as a Vocation." I learned of this explanation from Michael Kazin's book, *American Dreamer*. Kazin is the best historian of American radicalism who is also a radical. He adopts Weber's definition of the radical mind-set, so this idea has top-drawer academic and radical credentials.

Weber defines two mind-sets, one that Kazin identifies as radical and another that he identifies as liberal. Weber calls the radical one the ethic of conviction and the other the ethic of responsibility.

**The radical ethic of conviction:** Make your moral judgments without considering that there are bad actors who may cause your action to result in an unwanted outcome.

An example of this would be a radical who voted for Ralph Nader because he believed Nader was better than Gore; and voting one's conscience is best; end of thinking. You can already see that Weber was onto something enduring. As he

notes, the radical ethic, “contrasts abysmally” with the liberal ethic, which says to take responsibility for the consequences of your actions.

**This vote-your-conscience rule** is precisely what Weber was talking about. It is a “moral” rule that says, “vote as you would if there were no bad actors in the real world.”

In Florida in 2000, about 97,421 people did just that and voted for Ralph Nader. Al Gore needed only 538 votes to win (despite the bad vote count). So if Nader had not taken 97,421 votes, mostly from Gore, Gore would have won easily. We would not have had the Iraq War. Thousands would not have died.

To this day, if you read a radical analysis of the Nader voters, they will say, to quote a self-described “Berniecrat” from April 2020, “It’s not Ralph Nader’s fault ... Gore ran a lack-luster campaign.” This is exactly the type of excuse that Weber predicts would be used by those following the radical ethic:

If an action of good intent leads to bad results, then, in the actor's eyes, not he but the world, or **the stupidity of other men** [emphasis added] is responsible for the evil.

Just as Weber predicted, the radical blames Gore’s loss on his stupidity, not on the those who knew the danger of wasting their vote and chose to ignore it.

Gore was surely doing the absolute best that he could. But the radical excuses all those who could have changed the outcome simply by checking a different box. They chose to vote for Nader because they wanted to do the “righteous” thing without having to think about the consequences.

Weber’s liberal ethic of responsibility says people are responsible for taking account of real-world consequences, as best they can, including the likely actions of bad actors.

**Liberal ethic of responsibility:** People should strive for good outcomes given reality, bad actors and all.

If the radical Nader voters had followed the liberal ethic, there would have been no Iraq War. That cannot be disputed. That's why the liberal ethic is more progressive than the radical ethic, and it's why radical righteousness so easily leads to evil outcomes.

## Explaining the Paradox of Radicalism

When you think about it, Weber's insight is a bit of a shock. It says quite plainly that in some crucial ways, radicals are not trying to win. They are trying to “do the right thing” regardless of consequences.

Given a choice, radicals would rather be “right” than obtain what they agree is the best possible outcome. They seem to think “possible” is a dirty word. So it's no surprise that they often defeat themselves.

Weber illustrated this with an example: “You may demonstrate to a convinced anarchist, believing in an [radical] ethic of conviction, that his action will result in increasing the ... oppression of his class — and you will not make the slightest impression upon him.”

He was saying that even if you explain the consequences, a radical will choose doing what's “right” rather than getting the best outcome. Of course, that was what happened with the Haymarket bombing. Any fool could have guessed that throwing a bomb into a phalanx of police would bring on more oppression. But this was overpowered by the view that bombing the evil police was good. End of thinking.

Interestingly, the 1886 anarchist bombing in Haymarket Square was so in tune with radical thinking that radicals continue to celebrate it to this day. The first of the 25 bombings conducted by the Weather Underground blew up the Hay-

market Police Monument in 1969. It was rebuilt, and exactly a year later they blew it up again. The “Socialism 2019” conference was organized by the Democratic Socialists of America, *Jacobin* magazine, and yes, Haymarket Books.

## Purity Testing Medicare-for-All

Let’s test Weber’s analysis against the radical-liberal dispute over Medicare-for-all. Liberals argue that, at this time, it would be extremely hard to pass because half the country likes their private insurance and fears new taxes. Moreover, there will be big corporate money in the fight. That’s a strategic argument about real-world consequences.

Sanders response would be exactly what Weber predicted after adjustment for the present situation. Here’s a quote from Weber interpreted for the current debate. “If an action of good intent [Medicare-for-all] leads to bad results [a failure to pass any new health insurance], then, in the actor’s [Sanders’] eyes, not he but the world, or the stupidity of other men [Democrats and Republicans], is responsible for the evil [no new health insurance].”

So Weber’s analysis still fits perfectly 100 years later. In Sanders’ eyes, if his proposal fails, it’s not his fault but the fault of Democrats and Republicans. Even though he can see that his righteous proposal would almost certainly fail, he feels no responsibility for its failure and no responsibility to propose something with a better chance.

He never even acknowledges the possibility that his approach could fail due to public sentiment and corporate opposition even though he knows that it could. To him, it doesn’t matter. He is doing the “right” thing, so what happens is not his fault.

In my experience, such thinking is usually accompanied by an excuse when it is challenged in private, such as: *My pro-*



*posals will raise expectations, and its failure will cause disappointment and anger, which will bring us closer to the revolution.* That excuse is partly spelled out by the DSA and partly just hinted at. But the excuse does not seem to be the real explanation.

In many circumstances, radicals truly feel that they should “do the right thing,” because it is right regardless of consequences. Then, when pressed, they rationalize their irresponsible behavior with some story about how the forces of history will prove them right in the end. But really, they do what they do because their religion tells them what’s “right,” saving them the trouble of taking responsibility for their actions.

## We Should Be Proud of the Liberal Record

The difference between liberals and radicals, as we have seen, is not in wanting fundamental change for the better. The difference is that liberals think strategically about the real world when trying to change it for the better. And that’s why they have had success.

But it’s tough to get radicals to think that way. So let’s look at how change has happened. That might prove more convincing to them.

The biggest progressive changes have happened under Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, FDR, LBJ and Obama. All were liberals. Of course, Robert Reich tried to claim Teddy was a radical, but every one of his stories was fabricated. And Sanders tries to claim FDR was a socialist even though FDR hated socialism and even populism.

Actually, FDR was ultra-elite and at the top of the Democratic establishment. Moreover, he came to power on a balanced-budget, small-government platform and dramatically cut the federal budget in the middle of the Depression, throwing four million out of work.

Sanders also claims LBJ as a near-socialist, forgetting that he was hounded out of office by radicals who tarred him as liberal. As the radical Michael Kazin says, "the war in Vietnam became a liberal one—led by liberals [e.g. LBJ]."

So why should we be so proud of this liberal record?

Because of what those presidents accomplished. They were liberals so they could compromise, make deals and accept incremental changes that only got the ball rolling. Lincoln ended slavery — a big step, but only a start on an very-long road. Teddy Roosevelt ended unregulated capitalism — he busted up some monopolies but more importantly, he set up the machinery to regulate business, something we now depend on in a thousand ways.

FDR started building the federal safety net, a process that continues to thrive. LBJ ended Jim Crow laws and passed Medicare, Medicaid, the food stamp program and much more. Obama took the biggest step towards completing FDR's agenda in 45 years and opened the door to today's discussion of universal healthcare.

Social movements have been important in this process and remain necessary. But liberal politics has been necessary every step of the way.

Sanders has now taught his followers that FDR's liberal agenda is the goal we should be reaching for. That opens the door for us to reach out to radicals and explain that our goals are the same, but FDR's liberalism was not just a list of policies. It was a tolerant, experimental, incremental approach to achieving lasting change. That's always what has worked when we have succeeded.

## What You Can Do

*Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing.*

—John Stuart Mill, 1867

The most important thing to do, if you can, is to help get out the vote. Vote Forward and Swing Left are working together on a retro letter-writing campaigns that have been proven to work better than more impersonal approaches. Indivisible and Daily Kos have similar programs. And there are several other ways to plug into these and similar organizations.

But as you work with these organizations and as you talk politics with your friends, remember to apply some of the principles suggested by this book.

- **Don't spread damaging stories** you may hear about our Democratic leaders. They are almost all slanderous.
- **Do think practically.** Idealism is fine, but if it makes things worse, that's not true idealism.
- **Do speak up** when you hear liberal Democrats being slandered or hear baseless claims that radicals can accomplish what no one else has been able to.

Myths, prejudices and attitudes are all spread as much from person to person as they are through mass media. So what we

say to our friends matters. Unfortunately, extremists and radicals, who are always completely sure they are right, assert their views more often and more forcefully than those with more nuanced views. Your help is needed to shift political discussions back towards reality.

It's not necessary to argue. Expressing doubt or disbelief is enough to apply some gentle social pressure. Every nudge in the right direction is a help.

Also, remember that this is the age of negative partisanship. Expressing hate for Trump's base, even when not in their presence, fosters a climate on the left that seeps out, fires them up, and galvanizes them. Besides, it contradicts our philosophy of opposing hatred of others.

Here are two warnings for the next few months and one for November 3:

- Don't believe any new information about candidates that comes out in the last three weeks before the election. The biggest lies are held till the end.
- Remember that Joe Biden is not now and has never been a racist. His positions have come from and been shared with the Black community.
- Don't let friends not vote for Biden just because they live in a deep-blue or deep-red state. That still helps Trump and what he stands for. The popular vote has a huge effect on the popular view of the outcome. A landslide confers a mandate, while a close popular vote could energize Trump's base.

Finally, if you have found this book useful, I would ask that you put in a good word for it with others who might agree and at [HowDemocratsWin.org](https://HowDemocratsWin.org).

# Epilogue

Anyone who feels remotely confident that Joe Biden will be elected on November 3 hasn't been paying attention. Consider the predictions of our best polling analyst, Nate Silver, and the best political prediction market. They tell us his chances are about two in three and they don't show any upward trend. We're playing Russian roulette with a three-shooter. One chance in three, we're dead.

As expected, the main Republican attack follows a pattern dating back to the 1950's — the Republicans, reported USA Today, "sought to paint Democrats as socialists who would take away America's greatness, destroy the suburbs and cause chaos and lawlessness." That would follow defunding the police, abolishing ICE, and opening the border.

*New York Magazine* had a great comeback which the Republicans never anticipated, "The GOP Thinks Marxists Are Taking Over. If Only That Were True." So wrote Sarah "I'm a socialist" Jones. Thank you very much.

Of course, it's hard to prove Biden's a socialist because he's not and would never claim to be. So instead, Trump claims (in TV commercials as well as at their convention) that Biden is a Trojan horse sneaking our self-proclaimed socialists, Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez and Tlaib, into the Capitol.

And our ever-helpful socialists defend us against that charge by proclaiming that Biden's a pushover, that he's already caved-in to a lot of their demands, and that they're going to pressure him into the rest. Sanders emphasizes that this will start the day after Biden's elected. They're more focused on the day after than on getting him elected.

Immediately after Rep. Ocasio-Cortez won her primary, Sanders was asked about our loss of the presidency in 2016. "In many ways, we won." That was how he saw November

2016; it helped elect Ocasio-Cortez. That feeling still holds. If Biden loses, they will be screaming from the rooftops that this proves Democrats aren't electable, and we need radical socialists.

They won't mention who sabotaged the party by spending five years tarring us as socialists, mostly without knowing what that means. And then they capped it off with a last-minute push to create a police-free zone in Seattle, 80-days of anti-police demonstrations in Portland, and looting in Chicago that was justified by a few BLM supporters as reparations for slavery.

So if you hear any crowing about left radicalism, tamp it down. And when we lose, remember who was helping Trump.

Chapter notes can be found at: [HowDemocratsWin.org](http://HowDemocratsWin.org)

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