

“Hacks: The Inside Story of the Break-ins and Breakdowns That Put Donald Trump in the White House”: Donna Brazile, the Dismal Dollar Democrat

Book Review

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*You can't tell a book by its advance press. Take **Donna Brazile's** new 2016 campaign memoir [Hacks: The Inside Story of the Break-ins and Breakdowns That Put Donald Trump in the White House](#) (released three weeks ago).*

To say that Brazile brings an insiders' view to the 2016 election is an understatement. She was named interim Democratic National Committee (DNC) Chair to replace the noxious Clintonite hack **Debbie Wasserman-Schultz** as the Democratic Party held its national convention two summers ago. Brazile stayed in that position through the Electoral College triumph of Boss Tweet, which left her “depressed” but determined to “heal [the nation's] partisan divide” and “fight for my country.”

Reading the pre-release coverage of *Hacks*, one might think the book was a great vindication of Bernie Sanders' progressive-liberal challenge to the corporate Democrat Hillary Clinton. Press reports oohed and aahed at Brazile's “revelation” – in a chapter bearing the evocative title “Bernie, I Found the Cancer” – that the DNC was under the explicit financial and programmatic control of the Clinton campaign *well prior to Hillary's securing of the Democratic Party's presidential nomination*. The August 2015 “Joint Fundraising Agreement” (JFA) that Brazile unearthed weeks after becoming DNC chair specified that, in her words, “Hillary would control the party's finances, strategy, and all the money raised.” This gave the Clinton team “control of the party long before she became its nominee.”

“I had been wondering,” Brazile writes, “why I couldn't write a press release without passing it by [the Clinton campaign's headquarters in] Brooklyn. Well, here was the answer.”

“The funding arrangement,” Brazile reflects, “was not illegal, but it sure looked unethical. If the fight had been fair, one campaign would not have control of the party before the voters had decided which one they wanted to lead.”

“I thought the party I had given so much of my life to was better than this,” Brazile writes – a statement that is either [very naïve](#) or very cynical.

Brazile claims that discovering this deal was part of a pledge she made to the Senator from Vermont.

“I had promised Bernie when I took the position of the interim of the DNC,” Brazile writes, “that I would get to the bottom of whether or not Hillary’s team had rigged the party process in her favor so that only she could win the nomination.”

She writes of the pain she felt as she got ready to tell Sanders about the JFA:

“Before I called Bernie I lit a candle in my living room and put on some gospel music. I wanted to center myself for what I knew would be an emotional phone call.”

Big deal. My guess is that Sanders already knew very well that the DNC had been under the Clinton machine’s thumb since before the opening Iowa Caucus.

The JFA story aside, much of *Hacks* betrays Brazile’s continuing attachment to the neoliberal nothingness of the dismal, dollar-drenched Democratic Party. Clinging to an absurd image of the “lying neoliberal warmonger” (Adolph Reed Jr’s all-too [accurate description](#)) Hillary Clinton as some kind of noble and progressive champion of social justice, children, and human rights, Brazile demonstrates no sense of Mrs. Clinton’s deeply conservative, corporatist (see [this study](#)), militarist, and imperial (see [this volume](#)) record and world view – or of how that record and world view contributed to Hillary’s (hopefully) final humiliation. Brazile also shows no understanding of how her hero Barack Obama’s [neoliberal, imperial, wealth- and power-serving presidency](#) helped fuel Trump’s ascendancy.

For some time now, the United States’ two dominant political organizations have functioned less as real political parties than as corporate fundraising platforms and vehicles for the promotion of big money candidates. Brazile gives no reasonable sense of grasping that her memoir describes symptoms of that problem. *Hacks* says nothing about the big corporate and Wall Street dollars behind the Clinton campaign and the Democratic Party.

Brazile reveals little understanding of the ideological division between progressive Bernie Sanders Democrats and the reigning Clinton-Obama-Wall Street Democrats. She would have readers absurdly believe that this intra-party conflict stems essentially from WikiLeaks and Russian cyber-hacking.

Brazile is unconvincing in her claim not to recall having used her role as a CNN commentator to send the Clinton campaign [advance looks](#) at debate questions during the primaries.

It is hard to take seriously Brazile’s claim to have had the power to “replace [Hillary] as the [Democratic] party’s candidate for president” in September of last year. And it is fascinating that the candidate she briefly dreamed of replacing Hillary with was **Joe Biden**, who didn’t run for president, *not Sanders, who busted his ass across the nation and who would have prevailed* had the Democratic primaries not been rigged against him by the Clinton machine and the Wasserman-Schultz DNC.

The main culprit in *Hacks* is, who else?...Russia. Following in the dangerous, neo-McCarthyite New Cold War grooves of the dismal Democratic Party, Brazile is obsessed with the childish yet ubiquitous notion that big bad Vladimir Putin gave the election to Trump by hacking the DNC and handing its internal emails (many revealing a mean-spirited bias against Sanders) to WikiLeaks.

Brazile clearly sees Trump's election largely as an assault on U.S. "democracy" by Moscow.

"When I got back [just days before the election] to the DNC, I went to the officer and opened my blinds...[and said] Hey, Vladimir! You-hoo! You want a piece of me? Take your best shot. I'm done. Do svidaniya, motherfucker."

Reflecting on the night of the election, Brazile writes that she "accepted that Donald Trump would be our next president. Not only that, the Russians had won."

"The Russian hacking of 2016," Brazile concludes, "showed us that our electoral process...is deeply vulnerable to tampering. That should terrify every American."

Unfortunately, Dasvidaniya Donna offers no substantive evidence for her Russophobic paranoia. She simply relies on what she was told by an unnamed and mysterious "Spook" (her term), the claims of the U.S. "intelligence community," and the DNC's hired cybersecurity experts.

Brazile complains about "Russian interference" in U.S. elections without acknowledging that Washington regularly interference in other nation's political processes.

Surely Donna must know (privately) that Moscow's influence on U.S. elections is a tiny drop in the bucket compared to the controlling power regularly exercised on [U.S. "democracy"](#) by top U.S. corporations and financial institutions. Should Americans perhaps be terrified by the longstanding radical disconnect between the progressive, social-democratic, and left-leaning [profile of majority public opinion](#) and oligarchic and corporate-plutocratic direction of policy in the U.S.? As the distinguished liberal political scientists Benjamin Page (Northwestern) and Marin Gilens (Princeton) show in their important new volume [Democracy in America?](#):

"the best evidence indicates that the wishes of ordinary Americans actually have... little or no impact on the making of federal government policy. Wealthy individuals and organized interest groups - especially business corporations - have...much more political clout. When they are taken into account, it becomes apparent that the general public has been virtually powerless...The will of majorities is often thwarted by the affluent and the well-organized, who block popular policy proposals and enact special favors for themselves..." (emphasis added)

This is equally true regardless of which of the two dominant political organizations hold nominal hold nominal power in the executive and/or legislative branches, as Page and Gilens show. It's been going on for decades and it has conditioned millions of Americans to give up on politics altogether.

"Voters feel, rightly," **Theo Anderson** wrote, "that their voices don't count. They become more cynical and disengage..."

Someone tell dismal Donna that "The Russians, the Russians, the Russians" (that is the

actual title of *Hacks*' third chapter) didn't do that: the U.S.-American ruling class and its authoritarian, oxymoronic "capitalist democracy" did.

The problem of plutocracy, which lay at the heart of the Sanders campaign, is a complete non-issue in *Hacks*.

Anyone who thinks Brazile has become some kind of left-leaning progressive Democrat just because she told Bernie about the JFA and writes about it with disfavor in her new book should read the following silly and imperialist passage in *Hacks*:

"None of what WikiLeaks did was clandestine; it was right out in the open. The impact of its actions was to split the Democratic Party into warring factions that sought to discredit each other...The fact that we had pulled off a harmonious convention defeated [the Russians'] active measures that time, but it was clear the Russians were not done yet...The only thing I could hope for and pray for was that Hillary would get elected. Even if I disagreed with what her campaign had done to secure control of the party, I knew when she was in power she would stand up to the Russians. She was strong and knew the international political landscape. Putin despised her, and I bet this was one of the reasons he was working so hard to make sure she did not sit herself in the White House. She was our best hope, and I wanted more than I ever had for her to win, even if in my heart I had my doubts that she could" (emphasis added).

Here Brazile takes it as self-evidently true that WikiLeaks got the DNC emails from "Russia," that Washington needs to "stand up to the Russians," and that factionalism inside the Democratic Party was a result of Moscow's interference. Never mind the absence of substantive proof on Russia as WikiLeaks' source. Never mind that the U.S. is the main antagonist by far in the New Cold War, aggressively interposing itself in the deadly and militarized geo-politics of distant Eurasia, right on Russia's border. And never mind the deeply rooted, thoroughly homegrown moral, ideological, and related generational division between the corporate-neoliberal (Clinton-Obama) and the progressive social-democratish (Sanders-Conyers) wings inside the Democratic Party.

People who want to fantasize that Brazile has gone soft for Bernie and the Sandernistas might also want to read *Hacks*' account of the 2016 Democratic National Convention. She tells how she "went directly to see Donnie J. Fowler, one of my 'kids' and the person in charge of running the whip operation ...to tamp down signs of acrimony on the convention floor." Brazile is proud of how this "whip operation" created a false public image of harmony at the spectacle:

"They had cameras on the crowd scanning for trouble. Wherever Bernie supporters would hold up signs attacking Hillary, [Donnie would] send people to stand in front of them with bigger signs to block those people out. If someone from the Bernie faction left his seat, Donnie would send a Hillary personal as a replacement to dilute the negative energy. He used a number of tactics to calm the crowd, and he was mostly successful. To seasoned convention watchers, what we saw on the floor was atrocious, but most of the folks at home saw a flawless convention, where one strong speech built on the next, and a triumphant nominee".

Gee, great, Donna! Note how Brazile identifies membership in the Sanders camp as

“negative energy” and describes heartfelt criticism of the right-wing Democrat Hillary Clinton as “atrocious.” And note the pride – or at least lack of shame – she feels in having helped foster the illusion of a rancor-free convention.

Brazile denies that the corporate Democratic Party rigged the primary campaign against the progressive Democrat Bernie Sanders – a charge for which there is [abundant evidence](#).

“He had legitimate reasons to complain about the actions of a handful of people at the DNC,” Brazile writes, “But overall the game was not rigged against him” (p.159, emphasis added).

That judgement is less than surprising, of course, since Donna helped fix the primary game for Hillary at CNN.

At one point, Brazile defends Hillary against Trump’s claim that Mrs. Clinton helped write tax laws that favored the rich by saying that “Hillary has not served in Congress, the branch of government that writes the tax laws.” I had to read that sentence three times to believe it. Does Donna Brazile not know that Hillary Clinton was a U.S. Senator from New York from 2001 to 2009?

The most valuable parts of *Hacks* are Brazile’s first-person descriptions of how the Obama and Clinton Democrats handed the election to Trump by “drain[ing] the party of its vitality and its cash.” Brazile writes with humor and irony about her failed efforts to get the Clinton campaign to engage and energize the Democratic Party’s fading progressive base. She tellingly portrays a Clinton team that was too arrogant, too confident, too coldly attached to “data,” and too devoid of an inspiring “human touch” to turn out the voters it needed to prevail. She gives an evocative and instructive reflection on her first trip to the Clinton campaign’s headquarters:

My taxi pulled up in front of the towering brick office building at One Pierrepont Plaza ...Security was tight. I had to be escorted up from the lobby to the offices on the tenth floor, where I felt some of [the loud and boisterous] campaign energy I craved. By contrast, on the executive floor, where Hillary’s top staff worked, it was calm and antiseptic, like a hospital. It had that techno-hush, as if someone had died. I felt like I should whisper. Everybody’s fingers were on their keyboards, and no one was looking at anyone else.

“In campaigns, it’s not just about electing a candidate. It’s about getting citizens more engaged in their democracy and giving them a voice. The campaign succeeds when it makes supporters feel that they hold in their own hands the power to change the country. When you have that feeling, you usually aren’t too quiet about it...”

“Look, I really respected a lot of people in that building...But I could see that it was run only by analytics and data, which is only part of what you need to win an election. [Clinton campaign chief] Robby Book believed he understood the country by the clusters of information about voters he had gathered...The attitude in Brooklyn was Hillary was such a superior candidate that she had already locked up the race. Clinton’s campaign needed people to call and remind them: *Hillary needs you today to go out and talk about her plan[s] to create jobs....to protect children and child health*. I did not see that. I heard them saying that they only needed to register five new Hillary voters in this neighborhood, and seven

over here...I did not leave Brooklyn feeling enthusiastic.”

Brazile repeatedly notes Mrs. Clinton’s failure to elicit popular excitement on the campaign trail. In early September of 2016, Brazile recalls, Sanders asked her what she thought of Hillary’s chances in the upcoming November election: “I had to be frank with him. I did not trust the polls, I said. I told him I had visited states around the country and I found a lack of enthusiasm for her everywhere.” (Speaking to an acquaintance of mine in Iowa City, Iowa, on the last Friday before the election, Sanders confidentially said the same thing about the difficulty he was experiencing trying to rally support for Hillary Clinton at rallies in the upper Midwest).

Brazile significantly includes Black and other minority voters among those who were less than excited about Hillary. That is an important observation in light of the exaggerated emphasis many commentators have given to the Democrats’ failure to turn out and win “white working-class” voters last year. As [Ta-Nehesi Coates was right to remind folks](#) earlier this year, Hillary failed perhaps just as significantly with the Black and Latino lower and working classes, who “Brooklyn” took for granted in light of Trump’s racism and nativism.

But Brazile fails to mention that the small-donor-based Sanders team ran precisely the kind of campaign she identifies as the kind that succeeds: one that advances by “getting citizens more engaged in their democracy and giving them a voice...mak[ing] supporters feel that they hold in their own hands the power to change the country.” Did she really not know about the giant crowds that turned out for Sanders in no small part because he campaigned in exactly the way Brazile says she “craves”?

What Sanders certainly (if all too politely) understood and Brazile still does not was that the “lack of enthusiasm” for Hillary was rooted in Mrs. Clinton’s longstanding and ongoing ideological and financial attachment to the nation’s wealth and power elite.

Here, though, are some final words of wise retrospection from Brazile – words that Sanders and his backers might well appreciate in a “told you so” **[1]** kind of way. Speaking to her Georgetown University Women’s Studies class in the aftermath of Trump’s chilling victory, Brazile found, she writes, that her students now “disliked identity politics. They thought that Hillary spent too much time trying to appeal to people based on their race, or their gender, or their sexual orientation, and not enough time appealing to people based on what really worried them – issues like income inequality and climate change.”

You don’t say.

Help Paul Street keep writing [here](#).

Paul Street’s latest book is [They Rule: The 1% v. Democracy](#) (Paradigm, 2014)

Note

[1] Not that Sanders is all that great a progressive champion himself. He isn’t. I have written extensively about and against Sanders’ morally and programmatically self-negating silence on – and his embrace of – the Pentagon System and the U.S. Empire. It is *disgraceful* for him to repeatedly cite Scandinavian social democracy as his social policy role model without acknowledging that Scandinavian nations spend comparatively tiny portions of their national budgets on the military, which eats up more than half U.S. federal discretionary spending. Then there is the dire ethical failure inherent in combining opposition to inequality and poverty inside the U.S. with silence on numerous U.S. crimes abroad. Trite

as it may sound to say yet again, the Senator from Vermont needs to sit down and read through the speech that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave on April 4, 1967, exactly one year before his assassination – the one where King said that America will “never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as [U.S. militarism] continue[s] to draw men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube” and where King had the basic moral courage to properly identify the U.S. government as “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today.”

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