

Hillary Clinton's Extreme End Game: Tags Trump Supporters as "Delinquents" and "Hate Groups"

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The loathsome two are moving into full view, mustering weapons and taking aim at each other in a US election campaign that continues to be filled with colourful missives. But the one to lose most is Hillary Clinton, whose nasty appropriation of the high ground of propriety seems more contemptible by the day.

On Thursday, Clinton pushed further into the field of righteous indignation, traducing extremists all over as the bane of politics. Trotting out of her stable of suggestions was the testy problem of race, that permanent malady of US political and cultural history.

Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump, she claimed, had direct links to the "alt-right" movement, a closet of white nationalists accused of anti-Semitic leanings mixed with a heady dose of misogyny.

"From the start, Donald Trump has built his campaign on prejudice and paranoia," she told those at Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno, Nevada. "He is taking hate groups mainstream and helping a radical fringe take over the Republican Party. His disregard for the values that make our country great is profoundly dangerous."

Not wanting to stop there, the Democratic nominee insisted that Trump had been keeping bad company. White supremacists had been courted; legal actions against Trump had been mounted "for housing discrimination against communities of colour."

The picture of Trump as serial internet trawler, seeking its "dark reaches" for "dark conspiracy theories" while embracing "a long history of racial discrimination" could only be attributed to a form of attack that often stumbles on the turn: outing your opposite number as a dedicated nutter. "This is not a normal choice between a Republican and a Democrat."

These tactics may well have made more sense from a position of strength, but the Clinton machine has faced a hailstorm of anti-establishment resentment it has been unable to stymie. The strategists in the Democratic Party seem to have come to the conclusion that explaining such resentment, while developing coherent policy to counter it, is tantamount to debating flat earth theorists.

Even more outstandingly odd, and risky, is the approach of attacking Trump supporters as delinquents. In the business of electoral politics, notably the sort that at least aspires to notional democracy, mocking millions is high inadvisable. Denigrating the leader as chief nutter is mild stupidity relative to the blanket dismissal of such a vast electoral bloc.

This is exactly what Clinton sought to do in Reno, trundling out headlines from the Breitbart website, now deemed chief altar of Trump supporters after its former chairman was

engaged as Trump's campaign chief executive. Choice bits included "Birth Control Makes Women Unattractive and Crazy" and "Hoist it High And Proud: The Confederate Flag Proclaims A Glorious Heritage." Read Breitbart sites and be damned.

This pulpit of condescension has also been replicated in responding to such symbols of resentment as that British poster boy of anti-European Union persuasion, Nigel Farage. Rather than understand Farage's presence at a Trump rally as the logical consequence of a malaise, an institutional rot, she has preferred to see his success as part of a "rising tide of hardline, right-wing nationalism".^[1]

Not to be outdone, Trump chose to mention Clinton's dirtied paws from previous policy blunders. Central to such blunders was the issue of race. Her own failed 2008 presidential campaign was characterised by "racist undertones", while her past, tarred by the policy of husband Bill, was marked by tough crime measures in 1994 to combat the rise of what she termed "super predators" lacking "conscience" and "empathy".

Such fear found totemic form in the 1994 crime bill, which came with its racial spin off. That stood to reason: those particular predators tended to be of the darker assortment. As Clinton explained in the campaign year of 1996, gangs were no longer "gangs of kids" but "often the kind of kids that are called 'super predators'... We can talk about why they ended up that way, but first we have to bring them to heel."

Such brutal heeling measures have come back in stormy fashion to haunt Clinton's current campaign. Black Live Matters protesters have not avoided their chance to remind the Clintons of that odious legacy, referencing the bill which became the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. Its cruel harvest for the prison system was vast, seeing an explosion in incarceration rates among the black community.

While both Clintons have expressed regret for the consequences of the law, Bill's fuse on the issue has been a short one. "You are defending," reproached Bill Clinton of Black Lives Matters protesters, "the people who killed the lives you say matter. Tell the truth!"^[2]

Hillary Clinton's taking of such ground was always going to be creaky. Corrupt and worn, this week proved a bad one for her and the Clinton Foundation, whose donors she regularly met while Secretary of State.^[3] But when cornered, strike out with at least some measure of plausibility. For the former First Lady, entrusted with the task of rolling back the populist tide, this is proving difficult to do.

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Notes

[1] <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/hillary-clinton-nigel-farage-attack--brexit-us-election-donald-trump-2016-democrats-a7210741.html>

[2] <http://observer.com/2016/04/bill-clintons-racist-defense-of-the-super-predator-myth/>

[3] <https://theintercept.com/2016/08/26/clinton-foundation-spin/>

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