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Donald Trump – An Absurd Person?

[November 12, 2016](#) [Toby Miller](#) [0 Comments](#)

BY TOBY MILLER

Of all the absurd people who have been nominated by the two main US political parties as presidential candidates since the Second World War (George W Bush, Ronald Reagan, John Kerry, George McGovern, Barry Goldwater, and Gerald Ford), the [Bobbsey Twins](#) Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump took the cake.

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Clinton is dull, reactionary, and so laden with (unproven) allegations of corruption as to render her ability to govern highly questionable. Even her (very corporate) feminism did not speak to [many, many female voters](#)—principally white folks without college degrees.

Trump is prejudiced, angry, asinine, and so laden with (unproven) allegations of corruption and assault as to render *his* ability to govern [highly questionable](#). His brutish behavior energized [the white male working class](#) with promises of economic deliverance that he cannot keep.

If Clinton had won and the Republicans triumphed in the other Houses, impeachment and perhaps conviction may have followed over her actions as Secretary of State and her family's fundraising practices.

Given Trump has won, there may be a major swing against his Party in the 2018 mid-term elections, as his mad notion of cutting taxes for the wealthy and upping Pentagon welfare begins to hit. The Democrats could take over both Houses, then impeach and convict him over his taxes and assaults.

The 2016 General Election is no triumph for the right; nor would a Clinton victory have been a triumph for progressives. It was a tightly-fought contest between two incompetents, one of whom successfully rode the wave of white proletarian rejection of neoliberal financial globalization.

[This ribald, self-mocking, culture-industry invocation to vote](#) shows that even TV and music stars' support for Clinton was a matter of favoring the lesser of two absurdities—but one who opposed racism, misogyny, and homophobia, and made history as a woman candidate.

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Pablo Iglesias, the radical Spanish political scientist turned politician, sees Trump as a fascist populist, perverting his own privileged, ruling-class background and oleaginous property dealings into a bizarre status as a supposed outsider, marginalized and silenced.

Clinton was a dreadful candidate, lacking the flair, spontaneity, and freshness of Obama or Bill Clinton. She was reminiscent of Kerry in her blandness and lack of verve. [And the Democrats failed abysmally to get the vote out.](#) [NDTV reported](#) "Trump Towers over Hillary Clinton."

Trump spoke out against neoliberal financial globalization, something that has been bipartisan policy among Republicans and Democrats since Jimmy Carter's Presidency. He touched those who were promised great things by open markets, but whose jobs disappeared and incomes fell; those once represented by the Democratic Party, but whose sense of white supremacy has been fatally compromised by the demographic changes across much of the nation and the anti-racism that has become the new grassroots for that party.

Trump represents a longstanding tendency in US politics. Fifty years ago, the lapsed leftist Richard Hofstadter published an epochal essay in *Harper's Magazine*: "[The Paranoid Style in American Politics.](#)" Hofstadter used the word 'paranoid' to capture the 'heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy' that characterized US ideological struggles. He was not suggesting politicians were clinically ill, but that they had the propensity to state unfounded and brutal ideas then seek to put them into practice.

Hofstadter identified a tendency in the debating content and tactic of US speechmaking that sought to expose internal and external conspiracies against the "real"

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America. The enemy might be Catholic, black, Jewish, secular, Russian, Marxist, or Masonic, and it might be poised to strike in the 18th, 19th, or 20th centuries. Its identity mutated—but the threat was always there, lurking, poised to destabilize republican virtues.

The persistence of ethnic and religious transformations in the population, and fear of cosmopolitanism, has fueled these fantasies across the ages, as more and more people appear on the horizon who look, sound, or genuflect differently. The paranoid politician is afflicted with a terror of the past, present, and future, derived from such encounters with change and newness and the interplay of a death dance, with reality and fantasy intertwined.

Today's Republican base [lags behind demographic trends](#) in terms of age, ethnicity, language, religion, and education—but it remains sizeable and dependably enraged, as per this paranoid style. It was ripe for exploitation by Trump.

Of course, these regrettable tendencies are not limited to the US. [The far right across Europe is celebrating](#). It is said that the [Kremlin was working with Trump's campaign](#) and may have [compromising evidence](#) about his behavior and business dealings, while Russia's [massive Alfa Bank](#) appears to have a private internet line to the tycoon.

NATO officials and advocates are concerned, given the rumors. Unsurprisingly, Trump is running an isolationist but pro-Russia campaign in terms of foreign policy, which [suggests Syria will continue to be an object of devastation](#) at the hands of Putin and his puppet Assad.

And India? Trump made a campaign video that troped Narendra Modi's slogan: '[ab ki baar, Trump Sarkar.](#)' The video is now very hard to find, but in it he refers to India

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and the US fighting together against ‘radical Islam’ and says, in best RSS fashion, ‘We love the Hindus, we love India.’

The *Times of India* has positively salivated over his victory, predicting Trump will undermine Pakistan’s alleged project– ‘destabilising all of South Asia ... using terror as a foreign policy tool’—and work towards greater closeness between Washington, Delhi, and Moscow. At the same time, its neoliberal beliefs force the paper to say that ‘India must come up with a “Trump plan” to cope’ with the prospect of protectionist economic barriers diminishing trade relations.

The *Economic Times* is less welcoming. It acknowledges the role that globalization and the mobilization of a reserve army of labor have played in resentment among the white US working class, a pool of nationalist anger that Trump tapped into. The outcome is inevitably heightened bigotry, distrust, and disharmony.

India must now deal with the uncertainty of a blustering, non-technocratic narcissist whose ascent to power may have implications for politics across the region if, unlike Obama, he favors Beijing over Delhi, undermines foreign direct investment, adopts anti-Islamic policies, limits the use of Indian call centers, and diminishes the H-1B visas allocated to software engineers and others entering the US.

Whatever transpires in the years to come, the paranoid style is in the house. And so is that absurd hairdo ...



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Toby Miller is a British-Australian-US interdisciplinary social scientist. He is the author and editor of over 30 books, has published essays in more than 100 journals and edited collections, and is a frequent guest commentator on television and radio programs. Toby Miller was Distinguished Professor of Media & Cultural Studies at the University of California, Riverside, USA. He is presently 20% of a professor at Cardiff University/Prifysgol Caerdydd. He can be reached at www.tobymiller.com

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