

Carelessness

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Teachers sometimes said I hurried through schoolwork and made foolish, easy-to-catch-and-correct errors. Now older by far and wiser, I'm *still* not beyond carelessness.

Too often I've said: "I hate incompetence, especially my own!"

But it's a matter of scale.

The terrible presidents we've had since 2000 share many backward, fundamentalist, opportunist, and nationalist inclinations, and each owes his presidency to *carelessness* on the parts of Bill and Hillary Clinton. Sad but true, because I believe the Clintons otherwise are excellent public servants—not perfect but toward the better end on the bell curve of politicians.

Vice President Al Gore was a shoo-in to succeed President Clinton until the latter's interludes with Monica Lewinsky (a wronged woman if there ever was one) were revealed in January 1998.

Before his White House affair, citizens were generally happy with Clinton, even though the right wing continually tried to bring him down for earlier philandering and his involvement in a commercial real estate failure known as "Whitewater."

Clinton's evasive, untruthful comments about his side romance gave Republicans hope they could force a Democratic president to resign or be removed from office, exacting revenge for Nixon's humiliating 1974 exit.

Ultimately "nearly \$80 million" in taxpayer funds were spent by Republicans in "probes of the Clinton Administration" according to a [cnn.com](#) story published on April Fools' Day.¹ No prosecutable criminal conduct was discovered, but he was impeached by the House of Representatives. Though acquitted in the Senate, the flames of scandal roared until he left office in January 2001.

Gore received the largest share of the 2000 popular vote but lost by five in the Electoral College. Without President Clinton's 24 months of dalliance-fed negative press, it's likely Gore would have won. But the victor was Bush who brought real trouble to the country, from presiding over a slide into the worst recession since the depression to sanctioning torture from the nation's highest office—a low point in our history.

Hillary Clinton was winding down as first lady in the spring of 2000 when she announced she would be a candidate for the New York Senate seat retiring Democratic titan Daniel Patrick Moynihan had held since 1977.

Her original opponent, former mayor of New York Rudy Giuliani, withdrew and his replacement, Long Island congressman Rick Lazio, lost to Clinton by a 12% margin.

She became Senator just as Bush entered the White House. Re-elected in 2006, Senator Clinton competed against Senator Barack Obama for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2008 and lost. Showing no hard feelings, he appointed her secretary of state in 2009.

Obama's election was an enormous change for the better. The economy improved steadily; real estate started selling again; he turned a blind eye to marijuana decriminalization or legalization in Colorado, Oregon, Washington, and other states; institutionalized a major step toward a single-payer health care system with the Affordable Care Act; was a great role model, fit physically and mentally; and headed an administration free of scandal.

Clinton resigned as secretary of state in February, 2013; two years later, during a congressional inquiry into the murderous attack on the American diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya, it was revealed that during her time as secretary, she used a private e-mail server for official communications, some marked "secret" and "top secret." After an FBI investigation, Director James Comey stated Clinton was, "...'extremely careless' in handling her email system but recommended no charges be filed against her" according to a Wikipedia article.²

Despite the controversy, Clinton announced in April 2015 she would run for president in 2016. Bernie Sanders became her Democratic opponent the same month.

She weathered the e-mail disclosure though she was hammered continually for showing poor judgment. Her claim previous secretaries of state had processed e-mail similarly carried little weight with objective supporters—way less with fence-sitters—and why should it? Using others' mistakes to justify your own is no justification. It only made her look worse.

Some say her information technology advisors should have warned her that using a private e-mail server for official correspondence was unwise and, if discovered, certain to generate bad press and maybe more. It's startling no one on her state department staff was forceful in pointing out the risks, primarily to national security but to her reputation, too. Why not? Well, maybe some who reported to her did but were ignored. Or, maybe they kept quiet because they were afraid to upset the woman at the top. Perhaps it was a case of the empress wearing no clothes; fear might have kept them silent.

More carelessness was exposed on July 22, 2016, when WikiLeaks published 19,000 Democratic National Committee e-mails. The hacked messages,

acknowledged as authentic by the DNC, showed a concerted, official effort to denigrate Bernie Sanders and derail his campaign.³

The Washington Post cited an example that is particularly disgusting: "On May 5, DNC officials appeared to conspire to raise Sanders' faith as an issue... 'It might make no difference, but for KY and WVA can we get someone to ask his belief. Does he believe in a God... I think I read he is an atheist.'"⁴ This dirty trick was wrong in many ways and exposed rot at the top of the party.

"Basically, all of these examples [the most damaging emails]," the *Post* article summarizes, "came late in the primary—after Hillary Clinton was clearly headed for victory—but they belie the national party committee's stated neutrality in the race even at that late stage."⁵

The committee apologized untruthfully: "On behalf of everyone at the DNC, we want to offer a deep and sincere apology to Senator Sanders, his supporters, and the entire Democratic Party for the inexcusable remarks made over email. These comments do not reflect the values of the DNC or our steadfast commitment to neutrality during the nominating process..."

However, they *did* reflect the values of the DNC, at that time, and clearly, high-level DNC staffers' "steadfast commitment" was to securing the nomination for the former first lady who undoubtedly was viewed as more likely to beat the Republican candidate. Of course the tune changed when they were caught.

How could this have happened? Clinton—the strongest candidate by far—should have seen it coming and taken steps to prevent it. For example, she could have scheduled a meeting with DNC executive staff, including former Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman-Schultz, and invited the press: "Whatever this committee does," she might have said, "I want it to treat Bernie Sanders' candidacy and mine exactly the same. Exactly the same! I want to win because my ideas are better, my experience superior, and my appeal to voters greater. Don't let favoritism color your interactions with, work for, or official comments about either of us." But she didn't...

When the story broke it made her look terrible even though she might not have had anything to do with the DNC's bias. Ultimately, it further incensed many of Sanders' supporters who saw her, in the sixties sense, as "part of the problem" and decided to vote for another candidate or not vote.

Why didn't she make it clear to the DNC that she only wanted victory if fairly and squarely won? Ego? Win at most costs? Carelessness?

Meanwhile another terrible story was developing involving long-time Clinton aide Huma Abedin and her bewilderingly irresponsible husband Anthony Weiner. In May 2011, when he was a congressman from New York, reporters obtained tweets Weiner had sent to a woman following him on Twitter. The messages featured images of his genitals.

Soon Weiner admitted sending exhibitionistic photographs to other women, political pressure grew quickly, and he resigned from Congress in June 2011. Clinton, who knew all too well the crazy sexual weaknesses of husbands didn't blame Huma and kept her on as a close aide. That's admirable, if foolhardy, loyalty...

Two years later, while embroiled in a campaign to become mayor of New York, Weiner again was caught sending erotic selfies to a woman, this time under the asinine alias Carlos Danger. Certainly this should have been the final straw for Clinton: "Huma, you're wonderful," she might have begun, "but your husband is a scandalous jerk I can no longer be associated with, given my political objectives. Thank you for your excellent service, but I'll need to find a new close aide." (Averdin could have continued working for the Clinton campaign in some capacity.) But she didn't.

About a month after the convention that made Clinton the Democratic presidential candidate, Weiner sexts to another female were revealed. Abedin separated from him at last, but things got much worse. In late September, a story in the UK's *Daily Mail* reported a 15-year-old girl received some of his erotic messages. FBI Director James B. Comey mailed a letter to Congress October 28, 2016 announcing: "In connection with an unrelated case, the FBI has learned of the existence of e-mails that appear to be pertinent to the investigation [of Hillary Clinton's personal e-mail server while she was secretary of state].

The "unrelated case" was the bureau's inquiry into Weiner's inappropriate messages to a juvenile; the same laptop used for that illicit activity the FBI found contained a large number of Clinton's state department e-mails. Comey's letter included the suspense-building: "...the FBI cannot yet assess whether or not this material may be significant, and I cannot predict how long it will take us to complete this additional work..."

It was another cloud in a darkening sky of public opinion caused by Clinton's lackadaisical attitude toward official e-mail. Nine days later a November 6 Comey letter stated: "Based on our review, we have not changed our conclusions that we expressed in July with respect to Secretary Clinton."

But additional concerns, doubts, and flags were raised practically on the eve of the election—two days later, Clinton lost the presidency to Trump. Given Barrack Obama's spectacularly successful presidency, she should have won easily...

Her opponent had deal-killing negatives ranging from referring to women in stupidly vulgar ways to racking up bankruptcies as a silver-spoon tycoon.

Clinton's a brilliant, well-educated, accomplished, dedicated, freedom- and equality-loving woman with excellent ideas and so is her husband. Both served the nation well and fell not due to malfeasance but instead to carelessness. Right-wingers would not have voted for her regardless, but it was the undecideds and angry Bernie supporters who cost her the election.

Bill Clinton's foolish behavior helped elect a man who took christianity seriously but ignored Jesus' pacifist teachings, as nationalist fundamentalists usually do. Though he never left America to engage an enemy himself, Bush directed an invasion of Iraq over what proved to be false claims about despot Saddam Hussein's "weapons of mass destruction." Hundreds of thousands died in the conflict, and it's still not over.

And now, thanks to Hillary's carelessness, we have a president who has no relevant experience for the office other than celebrity. His campaign was built on tavern-talk beliefs about people, commerce, globalism, the environment, science—worst of all, war—and a willingness to cater to christian-myther objectives including banning abortion and same-sex marriage. Trump appears to have no motivation beyond personal aggrandizement.

Some have said Republicans brought the Clintons down through decades of harassment and investigations, that every effort was made to destroy them because they championed progressivism. True. But shouldn't both have been hyper-sensitive to the scrutiny they faced? Shouldn't they have taken all pains to avoid actions that might provide ammunition for attacks involving easy-to-understand weaknesses-transgressions such as sexcapades, cover-ups, and imprudence involving national security?

Fundamentalist nationalists are vicious, as exemplified by the horrendous eight-hour grilling they subjected presidential candidate Clinton to on October 22, 2015 before the House Select Committee on Benghazi. I watched some of the ugly proceedings on C-SPAN, and the obvious aim was breaking her, making her falter or give in to fatigue (or boredom at being asked about the same things over and over), forcing her to weaken and say, "I'm tired, can we start again tomorrow?" After which her remarks would be used in anti-Clinton ads during the 2016 campaign to show she didn't have the stamina to be the nation's leader. What a disgusting waste of federal resources.

Clinton took responsibility, but the Benghazi raid was a complicated action that defies easy explanation and was difficult to predict or defend against. Her organization failed the Americans who were targeted, and it failed her, but many factors were involved. In a *New Yorker* article, Dr. Anne Stevens, sister of Ambassador Chris Stevens, who was murdered during the assault, said: "It is clear, in hindsight, that the facility was not sufficiently protected by the State Department and the Defense Department. But what was the underlying cause? Perhaps if Congress had provided a budget to increase security for all missions around the world, then some of the requests for more security in Libya would have been granted. Certainly the State Department is underbudgeted. I do not blame Hillary Clinton or Leon Panetta." ⁶

Moreover, far worse slaughters occurred during Reagan's presidency when Democrats held the Congressional majority. A second *New Yorker* article contrasts how the suicide bomber attack on barracks in Beirut that killed 241 American troops, mainly Marines, early on October 23, 1983 was handled. "There were more than enough opportunities to lay blame for the horrific losses at high U.S. officials' feet...Instead of playing it for political points, a House committee undertook a serious investigation into what went wrong...Two months later, it issued a report finding 'very serious errors in judgment' by officers on the ground, as well as responsibility up through the military chain of command, and called for better security measures against terrorism in U.S. government installations throughout the world."⁷

Clinton was tough and resilient and didn't show any weakness while being detained into the night by the partisan Benghazi lynch mob; questioning was led by vilely sanctimonious former-federal-prosecutor-now-congressman Trey Gowdy.

Fundamentalist-nationalist-caveat-emptor capitalists—my name for

individuals (often Republican) in America's right wing—detested Bill and Hillary Clinton not for any true criminality or abuse of power but what they stood for: equal opportunities and rights for all, including homosexuals; legal abortion; protection of the environment; single-payer healthcare; diplomacy over war; and other enlightened approaches and policies.

These wonderfully advanced, humanist stands were defeated in the nation's highest election twice...because of carelessness.

And, in my time, I can't think of another administration, even Nixon's or Bush Jr.'s, that has imperiled US democracy more than Trump's.

Endnotes

1. <http://edition.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1999/04/01/counsel.probe.costs/>
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillary_Clinton_email_controversy
3. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/07/24/here-are-the-latest-most-damaging-things-in-the-dncls-leaked-emails/?utm_term=.1788c840bbec
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/chris-stevenss-family-dont-blame-hillary-clinton-for-benghazi>
7. <http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/ronald-reagans-benghazi>

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