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5-3-2018

May 3, 2018: “They Were Never Going to Let Me Be President”

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Repository Citation

Ledewitz, B. (2018). May 3, 2018: “They Were Never Going to Let Me Be President”. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/1157>

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Title: "They Were Never Going to Let Me Be President"

Date: 2018-05-03T06:06:00.002-04:00

5/3/2018—This quote was the headline of last Sunday's New York Times essay by Amy Chozick that was a teaser for her new book, *Chasing Hillary*.

Aside from the self-congratulatory and perhaps false claim that Chozick had an early feeling Hillary would lose, and the false equivalency argument that it was unethical for the press to cover Clinton's hacked emails, the essay perfectly illustrates the real reason Clinton lost—there was never a reason to vote for her other than she was going to be the first female President and Trump was a menace. Even Clinton did not know why she was running—Chozick writes, "If I had to identify a single unifying force behind Hillary Clinton's candidacy, it was her obvious desire to get the whole thing over with." Chozick also called the campaign a "mechanical slog."

The tragedy of Clinton is that we know in retrospect that she had a task that she simply refused to accept—to defend American values. Not just the values associated with Trump's personal flaws—misogynist, foul-mouthed, immature, unprepared—but the rest of our values: free trade, multi-nationalism, immigration, democracy, the environment. Maybe she would have lost by an even bigger margin, but her campaign would have been honorable. Trump was a menace, but Clinton always figured it was giving in to him to run against what was really wrong with him. To admit that Trump would repeal Obamacare would have meant defending it. To admit that Trump would end the recovery would have admitted that the recovery had been weak under Obama. Etc. It was never a real campaign for her.

I don't blame her for this mistake. If Trump himself wasn't the best argument against voting for him, nothing else was likely to win.

But it was still a mistake. Voting for Clinton was in effect voting for the post-war system. She never said so because although she believed that, she did not want the burden of defending the post-war system. The mood was against that system. In retrospect, that mood was why she lost. She never confronted it.

Clinton's weird belief that racism and misogyny were the only reasons she lost—that was the "they"—meant that she bore no responsibility for convincing anyone of anything. It allowed her the indulgence of labeling Trump supporters—the deplorables—and of not reaching out to religious voters to defend religious exemptions or coal miners to propose carbon capture.

Look, Clinton won the national vote convincingly and narrowly lost the States that gave Trump the Presidency. So, her strategy was a mistake but not crazy. The real problem was that even if she had won, it had all remained personal. Because of the kind of campaign she ran, she could never have reached out to the Republicans—maybe a majority—who did not just disapprove of Trump, but actually believed in the post-war world.

There never was any "they" opposing Clinton. All of Trump's votes were his practically no matter who the Democrats nominated. A lot of Americans wanted to express their opposition to the post-war world. That includes some racism and misogyny because tolerance of other people is part of the values of that world. There is no indication that even today Clinton realizes the deepest mistake of her campaign—failing to defend the world America largely built, now being undone. It was a better world than the one we are heading into now.