

# Progressive Regression

By [Victor Davis Hanson](#)

July 30th, 2018



Donald Trump has certainly changed the rules of presidential behavior, through his nonstop campaign rallies, tweets, and press conferences. What his critics call lowering the bar of presidential decorum by unfettered and often crude invective, Trump dubs the “new presidential.”

His style has become a sort of “don’t-tread-on-me” combativeness. In truth, Trump at home and abroad is mostly retaliatory. His theory seems to be that no slight should go unanswered. When Trump retorts in kind or trumps the original attack, he believes he adds yet another brick to his wall of deterrence—and exposes the sometimes dormant and disguised irrational hatred of the Left.

But what the Left loses in its slugfests with Trump are some once-supposed cherished leftist principles, justified by the short-term advantage of nullifying the Trump agenda.

Indeed, it is eerie that almost all the canons of progressive orthodoxy no longer apply. And they will no longer be taken seriously after Trump is long gone. Certainly, those lost principles will be impossible to reassert when Democrats return to power and seek sanctuary in the very ideas they have now so utterly trashed.

Liberals, who now warn of Trump's "war on the press" long ago excused Eric Holder's monitoring of the Associated Press reporters and Fox News's James Rosen. And they had no problem with John Brennan lying under oath when he claimed the Obama CIA had not monitored the computers of Senate staffers (he would lie brazenly again under oath about drone collateral damage and his role in seeding the Steele dossier).

Likewise, they snoozed after Director of National Intelligence James Clapper lied to Congress in his denial of government surveillance of U.S. citizens. Both were seen at the time to be useful liars. Their partisanship and exemption from any consequences for past lying under oath led to lucrative cable news gigs—proof, as it were, of their innate Trump hatred. Their legacy is that lying under oath now is not a sin, much less illegal.

### **So Much for Civil Liberties**

When Trump appeared on the national scene, an all-out assault on civil liberties followed, in a manner that is now irrevocable. The Left destroyed for good the idea that progressives are the protectors of constitutional freedoms.

If fear of Trump, some connected with the National Security Council under Obama helped to surveil American citizens, unmasked them, and leaked their names to the press. The press, hand-in-glove, complied in spreading such unsubstantiated dirt.

Former National Security Advisor Susan Rice flat out lied in her denial about her involvement in unmasking. The Obama FBI and Justice Department officials deliberately misled FISA courts, on the premise that spying on American citizens even with flimsy or fabricated evidence was OK—if it at least neutered the Trump candidacy and presidency. Had they just told justices something like, "We present, as justification for these warrants of surveillance, opposition research compiled on candidate Donald Trump, and paid for by Hillary Clinton during the present campaign," they likely would never have been able to spy on American citizens.

No one again will have much confidence either in the FISA courts or any rationale for spying on any American citizen. They will logically assume FISA requests are political efforts to spread dirt on the opposition—in the fashion that we now have no idea, in the era after Lois Lerner, what prompts an IRS letter in our mail. The legacy of the Obama Administration is that if one is not progressive and loud in the public sphere, he may well be monitored, audited, or investigated.

## **Reputations Stained Beyond Repair**

The FBI may not recover its reputation. Certainly, the brand of its Washington office is shredded. Watching new Director Christopher Wray stumble about to reassure us about his reforms inspires about as much credulity as a pre-war French general touting the invincibility provided by the Maginot Line.

The Left more or less has canonized a parade of disreputable FBI officials. Peter Strzok violated almost every canon of professional conduct, in his personal comportment, in his blatant prevarication about his own text messages, and in his dogged pride in his conflicts of interest in using his authority to pursue a political agenda. His superior Andrew McCabe, according to the inspector general, likewise lied on several occasions.

So did former Director James Comey when he denied under oath the prominent role of the Steele dossier in FISA warrant applications. Leaking a classified government memo with the expressed intent of prompting a special counsel investigation is *not* what FBI directors do. Nor do they deliberately set up a president by not informing him that base accusations against him are the result of opposition campaign hit pieces, subsidized in part by the FBI.

FBI directors do not politicize investigations, in the manner Comey warped his conduct toward Hillary Clinton on the rationale she would be elected. Comey alone has pretty much destroyed any idea that in the near future the FBI Washington office can again be trusted to be disinterested.

Add in the conduct of Lisa Page and various other FBI officials—James Baker especially—who have either resigned or been reassigned. FBI apologists on the Left are excusing the very weaponizing behavior that they used to rant about in the days of J. Edgar Hoover—who, we think at least, never sought to alter the outcome of a U.S. election.

The Left is fine with the idea that the FBI, with a wink and nod from the CIA, can insert spies into an ongoing presidential campaign, on the rationale that embarrassing information might be collated, leaked, and thus useful to “insure” that a supposedly dangerous man would not be president. Should a right-wing FBI do the same with a candidate Bernie Sanders, reminding us that Sanders went to Moscow on his honeymoon and therefore was under suspicion, what would the Left say?

Any notions of conflict of interest are gone. The Obama Justice Department, FBI, and CIA destroyed that concept entirely. When Loretta Lynch met Bill Clinton on the tarmac in the course of investigations about his wife's likely illegal behavior or the Justice Department and FBI gave immunity to Clinton's top aides after making false statements, all credibility was shot.

Justice Department official Bruce Ohr communicated with a political campaign's opposition research team that had hired his own wife. The deputy FBI director Andrew McCabe oversaw the Hillary Clinton email investigation shortly after his wife had received hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign donations from Clinton-related political action committees. Rod Rosenstein was knee-deep in the Uranium One investigation, the Clinton email investigation, the FISA warrant applications, and the Trump-collusion mythologies. He should have been recused long ago. If Rosenstein was not recused, there is now no such thing as an idea of recusal at all.

Liberals do not care much whether Bill Clinton received a \$500,000 honorarium in Moscow or that Russian interests gave millions to the Clinton foundation shortly before Hillary Clinton urged the government to approve the sale to them of 20 percent of U.S. uranium.

If there is someday a special counsel appointed to monitor the possible illegality of the Obama FBI, Justice Department, CIA and NSC, and many of its legal team proves to be Trump donors, and a few of them are found out to be veteran counsels for Trump-related defendants, or two members are caught texting their hatred for Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton and bragging how they had schemed to stop such a 16-year envisioned Obama-Clinton continuum, apparently no one is going to complain of any "bias" or conflict of interests.

### **More Norms Annihilated**

Is there still any notion of a confidential lawyer-client special relationship or disdain for stealthily taping private conversations of a client? Apparently not. Former Clintonite Lanny Davis knows the Left saw nothing wrong when the FBI seized legal records from Trump's attorney Michael Cohen or that lawyer Cohen taped the phone calls of his own unknowing client Trump. Instead, the Left's shrug is that if Trump was stupid enough to hire such a creepy rake, then he deserves what he gets—legal precedent and civil liberties be damned.

It used to be a progressive truism that "words matter"—as in the warning not to give voice to violent things because they may happen just because you said them.

Actually, words today no longer matter at all. If they did, Madonna, Johnny Depp, Kathy Griffin, Robert De Niro, or Peter Fonda would all be socially ostracized for their threats of bodily violence to the president of the United States or his family. God forbid that such eliminationism rhetoric will spill over to the next Democratic presidency. But if it should, the Left has now lost all moral authority to condemn it.

By the same token, there is no longer any accepted limitation on presidential hate speech. No one will have a problem with calling any president a Nazi, the new Hitler, an abject traitor, treasonous, or his conduct tantamount to the mass death of Pearl Harbor, 9/11 or the Holocaust. Those who compare Trump to the worst monsters of history regularly appear on cable news and enjoy vast Twitter and social media audiences. I fear theirs will be the new standard: For every Trump Hitler who killed 6 million, we will one day hear of a new anti-Trump Stalin who killed 20 million. All one now needs to say is “President X or President Y is a threat to the United States, and so deserves what he gets.”

### **Security Clearances-as-First Amendment Right**

We have also established a new code of behavior for ex-security and intelligence officers.

From now on, they will really never leave office. Instead, their opposition to the new administration begins the moment they become private citizens—while drawing on and sometimes monetizing their vestigial security clearances to enhance their invective against the sitting president.

Imagine the following: that as soon as Trump leaves office, a paid Fox News contributor Mike Pompeo or Dan Coates begins trashing nightly newly inaugurated President Elizabeth Warren as despicable, treasonous, or the worst something in the history of America—while still privy to some of top-secret communications of her administration. And they will wink and nod at their clearances as proof of their seriousness and of direct conduits to “sources tell me” gossip. To question why they would do so or expect security clearances at all will earn cries from Republicans of “enemies list!”

There is no longer any sense of public and private first families. If Barron Trump can be smeared and ridiculed in print and cartoons, if the president can be accused of incest with his daughter by mainstream reporters, if the first lady can be demonized as everything from an illegal alien to a former call girl, no first family is off limits. The next time a Democratic president takes office, any call for

“restraint” or “have you no decency” to recreate the bubble that once protected the Obama family would be laughed at—and understandably so.

### **Endless Unchecked and Unaccountable Investigations**

Special counsels will have no restraints. They will be sacrosanct Roman tribunes about whom any criticism will be tantamount to unpatriotic behavior. They can ignore their original mandate and wander wherever they wish on the principle that they have found their criminal and need only find the crimes by which to destroy him.

The special counsel will stock his team with partisans who hate the object of his investigation, with law firm cronies who share his views. If he fires one or two of them, he will hide the reasons for their departures and stagger their severance to avoid the appearance that they were connected—in the style of belatedly and separately disclosing the career ends of Lisa Page and Peter Strzok.

From now on, the accusation that a president is a traitor, a colluder, a lackey, a pimp, a whatever of the Russians, or a dupe of the Chinese, or of who knows what else, will be an accepted way to help stall an opposition administration, to smear it as unpatriotic, to use any low means necessary to achieve a supposed high end of destroying it

Just watch soon what the Left has birthed. Thucydides, writing more than 2,400 years ago about the civil strife on the island of Corcyra, observed that “men too often take upon themselves in the prosecution of their revenge to set the example of doing away with those general laws to which all alike can look for salvation in adversity, instead of allowing them to subsist against the day of danger when their aid may be required.” They are not going to like the results when in their “day of danger” they cry foul and no one listens.

*Content created by the Center for American Greatness, Inc. is available without charge to any eligible news publisher that can provide a significant audience. For licensing opportunities for our original content, please contact [licensing@centerforamericangreatness.com](mailto:licensing@centerforamericangreatness.com).*

### **About the Author: [Victor Davis Hanson](#)**

Victor Davis Hanson is an American military historian, columnist, former classics professor, and scholar of ancient warfare. He was a professor of classics at California State University, Fresno, and is currently the Martin and Illie Anderson

Senior Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution. He has been a visiting professor at Hillsdale College since 2004. Hanson was awarded the National Humanities Medal in 2007 by President George W. Bush. Hanson is also a farmer (growing raisin grapes on a family farm in Selma, California) and a critic of social trends related to farming and agrarianism. He is the author most recently of [The Second World Wars – How the First Global Conflict was Fought and Won](#) (Basic Books).