

ZEITGEIST

Triumph of the Mediocre

by Theodore Dalrymple 

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photo credit: Shutterstock

Hillary Clinton

Hillary Clinton, so we are told, kept a spreadsheet devoted to her enemies, whom she rated on a scale of her own devising. I can't say this surprised me: Mrs. Clinton doesn't have a forgiving face. She is more Lady Macbeth than Cordelia (she would be wonderfully cast as the

former), and while it is unwise to always judge a person by his or her face, it is even more foolish never to do so. A person's appearance is at least as trustworthy a guide to his character as his words, especially when his stock in trade is words.

I suppose that keeping your hatreds warm, never forgetting them, and fanning their embers when they threaten to go cold is one way to succeed in life—perhaps *the* way if you are an ambitious person of no particular talents or gifts for anything but intrigue and bureaucratic infighting. This is not to say that talented persons never bear grudges or never hate, but their ascent is not attributable solely or even in part to acting upon their grievances or resentments, and they would have succeeded in life even if they had been more sweetly disposed to their fellow beings. Nor do I mean, of course, that untalented people are intrinsically prone to hatred: That, too, would be a logical mistake.

No, the deadly combination is lack of talent *and* ambition, especially when allied to average intelligence and above. Just as talent has little connection to character, it also has little connection to intelligence, beyond the basic cognitive abilities necessary for the talent to flourish.

The ability, willingness, and desire to hate are keys to success for untalented persons because they lend to their conduct a ruthlessness that it might otherwise lack. Moreover, it serves as a moral justification for that ruthlessness.

“The mediocre triumph because, having little or nothing else to

Everyone thinks that he is a good person, give or take an occasional fall from grace. It follows, therefore, that those whom he hates must be bad persons, as must be those who are or whom he imagines to be his enemies. (Such a person hates his enemies, but not *only* his enemies.) It also follows that ruthlessness becomes a moral duty, for otherwise the bad would triumph over the good. Did not Burke say that all that was necessary for evil to triumph was for good men to do nothing? Actually, it is **not certain** that he said it, but a moral aphorism's truth does not depend upon its provenance.

do, they can devote themselves to intrigue, backstabbing, and jockeying for power.”

So in the minds of the untalented ambitious, their own ruthlessness becomes not a rather unpleasant human trait, occasionally but by no means often justified by the moral purpose that it serves, but rather a sign of their own purpose's laudable seriousness. Only the ambition of others is bad, but that is because they are enemies or bad people. Hence, no quarter is due to them, and scruple becomes faintheartedness or cowardice.

It might be my age, the age at which one is biologically programmed to believe that the world is going to what Mr. Mantalini called **the demnition bow-wows**, but it is my distinct impression that the world, or at least the Western world, is filling up with the untalented ambitious.

The mediocre triumph because, having little or nothing else to do, they can devote themselves to intrigue, backstabbing, and jockeying for power. In my own little career, I have often seen the genuinely gifted and morally upright pushed aside or thwarted by schemers and apparatchiks who viewed their betters with a mixture of fear and hatred. An apparatchik may be defined as a person who doesn't mind how long a meeting goes on unless he has another meeting to attend. He is interested in power for its own sake, divorced from purpose though he claims to want it for the good of humanity, but has very sensitive antennae for the power of others. When that power is strong, he retreats; when it shows a weakness, he pounces. Apparatchiks, like the Clintons, never forget; their minds are like filing cabinets.

There are Mrs. Clintons now in all organizations, each according to his or her level. Some dictate the fate of nations and others decide on the most trivial of local matters, but their manner of proceeding is identical. Why, almost everywhere you look, should such mediocrity triumph?

Of course, if mediocrity has not triumphed throughout the Western world, there is nothing to explain. There is, after all, no need to search for the origins of the nonexistent. But let us suppose that

there is such a trend to mediocrity, a manifestation of which is bureaucratization: What can explain it? (Here I should mention that we should not get too exercised about definitional matters: Words should be used as precisely as possible, but not *more* precisely than possible. We know what a cloud is without being able to define its limits.)

l'Opinion

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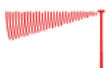
The explanation lies in the expansion of tertiary education. Earlier in my life I used to think that this was unequivocally a good thing: The more educated a population, the better. But length of education, or attendance at supposedly educational establishments,

is not the same thing as education itself. But in the modern world, where governments have to demonstrate tangible progress to their electorates, length of education and education are confounded.

Guerrilla movements in the last half-century or so in Latin American countries, seeking to establish totalitarian utopias, were caused by the expansion of tertiary education, not by peasant discontent. The graduates of that education—many of them, at any rate—found after obtaining their diplomas that the only work available to them, if any at all, was beneath their new status as educated person, a status that formerly would have entitled them to both respect and an important position in society. If they found work, it was work that they could have done without having gone to university. Bitter disappointment and resentment was the natural consequence.

We in the developed Western world do not have guerrilla movements, at any rate to a significant extent. Our equivalent is the bureaucracy that administers increasingly politically correct regulations. In this way people who have gone to the considerable trouble of obtaining a tertiary education that is of value to them neither vocationally nor intellectually may avenge themselves upon an unjust world, though their anger can't be assuaged, being the only thing that gives meaning to their lives.

Thus, the mother of mediocrity is the university.



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**CelestiaQuesta** • 15 days ago

Hillary is one pissed off woman. You hear her anger when summoned about Benghazi, "does it really matter". It was below her to be questioned or held accountable, as her cronies blamed the Mohammad B-movie as a distraction.

If she becomes prez, you're going to see a lot more anger. Her years are numbered and time is of the essence.

This pantsuit bi@&h is in PMS 24/7, 365.

95 ^ ▾ • Reply • Share ›

**Antiphon411** → CelestiaQuesta • 15 days ago

"If she becomes prez..."

Oh, I do hope so!

4 ^ ▾ | 16 ▾ • Reply • Share ›

**Mary** → Antiphon411 • 14 days ago

For entertainment's sake?

22 ^ ▾ • Reply • Share ›

**Antiphon411** → Mary • 14 days ago

No, because her election might finally (finally) begin to wake up white men in America. We'll have had a half-black president, a woman president...perhaps your average white man

will become aware of how debased USA has gotten.

62 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



AnthonyMa → Antiphon411 • 14 days ago

Nope. The average white man in the US has become a sniveling coward afraid to say anything that might offend anyone. The younger generation of whites worship negro entertainers and try to act like them. There's a small core left, but it's fading fast.

72 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



smoothieX12. → AnthonyMa • 14 days ago

The younger generation of whites worship negro entertainers and try to act like them.

Not all. I wouldn't be making this sweeping generalization.

18 ^ | 3 v • Reply • Share ›



Katherine McChesney → smoothieX12. • 14 days ago

Sure seems that way to me. Using gang signs, listening to hip-hop and rap music...I see a lot of Wiggers in my neighborhood. Furthermore, they believe that black behavior is the fault of Whites. They make excuses for them. The younger generation will sell us down the river for thug blacks and will suffer for it in the long run.

30 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›



smoothieX12. → Katherine McChesney • 14 days ago

Key word--"seems". I see the types you are talking about too and it is disturbing but they are just the part of the equation. How large this part is--I don't know, but I do also observe a lot of average American kids who are different.

9 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›



bobruark → Katherine McChesney • 13 days ago

Oh but think of the fun the black thugs will have with those nice white girls ... and white boys...they just love to use them as ****toys then throw them in the garbage....all you crackers, welcome to the world you worked so hard to make....IDIOTS!

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Antiphon411 → AnthonyMa • 14 days ago

I suspect you're right, but perhaps the remnant can be jolted? I know: Pollyanna.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



bobruark → AnthonyMa • 13 days ago






exactly correct ... and the universities are full of those 'ball-less' wonders...i know I have lived amongst all those eunuchs or ...


5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›














will → AnthonyMa • 13 days ago


I've given up on the US. The South is my

- ...to get on top of the boat and swim to my country.
6 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **Marcus McSpartacus** → Antiphon411 • 14 days ago
If one black guy and a woman in over 2 centuries is too much for you, what a bunch of wimps
3 ^ [v] • 9 [v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **Brian** → Marcus McSpartacus • 13 days ago
Most of us didn't experience the administration of Zachary Taylor.
4 ^ [v] • 1 [v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **offinya** → Marcus McSpartacus • 13 days ago
It has nothing to do with black, but someone being elected to POTUS for no other reason than that. Don't get me started on the Hildebeast
18 ^ [v] • [v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **anonymous** → Marcus McSpartacus • 11 days ago
We would have welcomed a president Colin Powell or Condoleeza Rice. We would not have welcomed a president Teddy Kennedy. It's policy, and personal merit or lack thereof, not color or sex, that's the snag here.
9 ^ [v] • 1 [v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **waterman3** → Marcus McSpartacus • 7 days ago
That's the problem- you see it as "black guy," like you earned some cheesey merit badge and you're now ready to move on to the next, "a woman."


You think in stereotypes. You ignore the particulars of "that" black man, or "that" woman, because all that matters is "your" merit badge. That's more important to you than what those in-div-iduals will do to your friends and neighbors in their blind uncompromising seizure of power to mess with everone.
3 ^ [v] • [v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **anonymous** → Antiphon411 • 11 days ago
Never hope for disaster. Never wish the general public ill. The wish is father of the deed. You will find yourself doing things to make matters worse, because vindication is sweet and you've predicted the worst.

In particular, do not hope for Hillary to become president. It won't be pretty.
6 ^ [v] • [v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **Tom caulfield** → Mary • 14 days ago
No, it's so a Bull Dyke gets a crack, so to speak, to run er further ruin, America.
13 ^ [v] • [v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **Robert Dnago** → Antiphon411 • 14 days ago
o 208 well applied!


- 2 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **Texas Chris** → Robert Dnago • 12 days ago
It is amazing the change than can be effected with a few shards of lead, well placed.
- A lesson the self styled rulers of the US would do well to learn.
- 2 ^ [1 v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **acronymous** → Texas Chris • 11 days ago
It's amazing how much chaos a few shards of lead, heedlessly and cruelly placed, can let loose. Remember Sarajevo?
- 1 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **smoothieX12 .** → Antiphon411 • 14 days ago
This is Mao's dictum: "the worse it is--the better it is" (c). While I get where are you coming from, I cannot call this a desirable outcome by any stretch. The problem--the other side doesn't have anyone (yeah, Rand Paul fanboys will get furious) who even remotely is qualified to run the country.
- 7 ^ [4 v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **LPB** → smoothieX12 . • 14 days ago
Sure they do. The problem is getting one of them elected.
- 12 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **Roger U** → smoothieX12 . • 14 days ago
I don't think anybody is truly qualified to run this country. No one person, or even a group like congress, can actually represent such a diverse population.
- 14 ^ [1 v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **smoothieX12 .** → Roger U • 14 days ago
I politely disagree. There are people out there who DO have vision and who DO understand the challenges this country is facing and who DO have experience and leadership qualities, in simple words, who are qualified. It is just that system is designed such way that for those people to make it is very difficult, next to impossible.
- 13 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **Roger U** → smoothieX12 . • 14 days ago
I would love to know who.
- 3 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **smoothieX12 .** → Roger U • 14 days ago
I cannot name particular names, but, I would say, among current political "elite" and after what I heard (I yet to buy it) about Bob Gates' memoir, why not him? But that is just my desperate attempt to come up immediately with the name. I think, however, that some military-intelligence circles do have a very worthy people.
- ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›
-  **WCH4** → smoothieX12 . • 14 days ago

 **smoothieX12** • 11 days ago
If anyone from our side wins, the left will subito become as sad and angry as we ourselves are, now. There needs to be partition, or secession.


6 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›

 **anonymous** → HFH1 • 11 days ago
No there doesn't. The left will bitch and moan, as it did when Reagan was president, but their personal lives were carried up by the general prosperity of the day. They can get over their disappointment at temporarily having to be prosperous but diminished in power.


1 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›

 **bobruark** → smoothieX12 • 13 days ago
gimme a break .. Bill Gates is not as smart as you think. He got where he is through privilege and market protection (MS-DOS was for IBM it was not in the open market place and neither is WINDOWS really)...he is as LEFT and RUTHLESS as any...so shows how little you know ... did you vote for Obama after he claimed not to have heard the hatefilled speeches of his pastor for the past 20yrs? then I have some beach front property in New Mexico to sell you


4 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›

 **freedom74** → bobruark • 12 days ago
Bob Gates, not Bill Gates. You are jumping around a little.


4 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›

 **fluffybiskuts** → smoothieX12 • 9 days ago
Former General Patreaus ? Wisconsin Gov Scott Walker who gave Wisconsin a billion dollar surplus and fought off the union hordes. Ohio Govenor John Kasich is superb.


1 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›

 **Antiphon411** → smoothieX12 • 14 days ago
There is no one. Whomsoever the Republicans run will be bad, but just not bad enough to wake people up. Michael Jackson was right: Bad = good.

1 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›

 **smoothieX12** → Antiphon411 • 13 days ago
GOP is a torn party which hit ideological dead-end and is in turmoil. It discredited itself thoroughly by inability to govern on the national level. This is not to say that Dems are any better, in fact--they are revolting, but, at least for now, they are not running around starting wars.

2 ^ | 3 v • Reply • Share ›

 **aintnodarnfool** → smoothieX12 • 13 days ago
All of these people are revolving door whores, bill gates included (sorry). hills will start her war as soon as she gets in. her husband, afterall. was the wall street candidate. none of

this crop is clean.

5 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›



anonymous → aintnodarnfool • 11 days ago

Not Gates. Gates came back through that door unwillingly. He was happy where he was, and unhappy wearing the lead robes of power. He did it only because he figured duty called.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



freedom74 → smoothieX12 . • 12 days ago

You haven't been watching the news for the last six years have you? Still in Afghanistan, got involved in Libya, talking about fighting in Iraq, Iran and Syria now.

You need to be a little more informed.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



gizmo118 → smoothieX12 . • 12 days ago

GOP Rinos are their own worst enemy.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



brior → smoothieX12 . • 13 days ago

And Obummer is remotely qualified over Rand Paul (not a fan by the way)? How about a US college educated illegal immigrant I hear there is a way around the legalities. Kinda fits since we are half way to becoming Mexico.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



gizmo118 → smoothieX12 . • 12 days ago

Ted Cruz

4 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›



Censor Maximus → CelestiaQuesta • 14 days ago

Shillary is one very busy servant. She is presently preparing for a presidential bid by appointing her bosses: Robert Kagan, Daniel Benjamin, Jeffrey Feltman, Wendy Sherman, Victoria Nuland will be her foreign policy "advisors". Like Obama, Hillary selects from lists that are handed to her. Look out Syria and Iran--your bosses are coming and get ready to herd your children into indoctrination centers where they will learn all about the benefits of 'tolerance' and 'diversity'.

When your bosses arrive, don't resent them; that would demonstrate your mediocrity. Get on your knees like the Clintons and worship them as masters.

Remember the Soviet adage: 'Only someone mentally ill would oppose socialism.' You don't want to be sent to a mental asylum do you? And don't try to become a psychiatrist. That profession is reserved for the children of your new bosses.

46 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›



John O'Neill → Censor Maximus • 14 days ago

According to the American ministry of propaganda otherwise known as the main stream media Hilary is the most intelligent woman in the university; she is also the most morally upright person in the American State. Millions of college educated Americans believe that she and her cohorts have all the knowledge that will ever be needed to usher in the age of utopia and universal happiness. She is the face of the neo

American, vicious, voracious, dim witted, arrogant and holier than thou all in one. O tempora O mores.

44 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



bobruark → John O'Neill • 13 days ago

Yea there is a reason she was fired when on the watergate 'team'

1 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



Bill_der_Berg → Censor Maximus • 13 days ago

The US has taken a keen interest in Iran since the end of the second world war. That was because of the Cold War. The US was very anxious to keep Iran and its oil out of Soviet hands. It had nothing to with Israel.

In 1953 the US and UK colluded in overthrowing the Mossadeq government and replacing it with their own puppet Shah. That explains much of the Iranian hostility to the US and its allies.

The Cold War is over but western interest in the country continues. No surprises there, the US has been dependent on cheap imported oil since 1945 or so. Saudi Arabia is the most important supplier and Iran is its rival and a potential threat.

Of course the defence of Israel is another factor but it is far from being the only one that matters.

6 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



anonymous → Censor Maximus • 11 days ago

The US writ doesn't run in Syria or Iran. They don't have to worry about heavy-handed US government. Their problem is their own far worse heavy handed government.

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



speakhip → CelestiaQuesta • 14 days ago

The mediocre can rule, because they are exempt from any form of accountability. (Think Benghazi).

Had the good ol' days of the guillotine (the promise of a public beheading of the responsible) come back - the mediocre would march right out of Washington. Overcome by the fear of being held accountable for their actions and decisions.

The captain of a ship is the last to leave. If he cannot leave he will – stoically – go down with the sinking ship.

In politics – again, think Benghazi – the “captain” (we all know who) did not gracefully accept responsibility and accountability and “go down” stoically. Instead, the “captain” is being groomed for a promotion – that of President.

26 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



Fred Garvin → speakhip • 14 days ago

Unless the Captain is Italian and the ship's the "Concordia", natch.

1 ^ [1 v] • Reply • Share ›



anonymous → speakhip • 11 days ago

The guillotine was right handy for the vengeful hacks who rose to power during the French revolution. Scheming bastards took over from too-trusting dreamers, and the tumbrils were busy getting rid of

anybody that anybody ever had any kind of grudge against.

^ [v] • Reply • Share ›



conbabe → CelestiaQuesta • 14 days ago

The best defense is an offense. My husband calls it BDAPMS before, during, and after. (In my case he was only joking!)

2 ^ [v] • Reply • Share ›

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