



THE STORY BEHIND THE BOOK

THE MENDACITY OF HOPE

Barack Obama and the Betrayal of American Liberalism

by Roger D. Hodge

A bold manifesto that exposes President Obama's failure to enact progressive reform at home and abroad, by the former editor of *Harper's Magazine*.

The Mendacity of Hope argues that the sins and omissions of the Obama Administration represent not only the failures of a single man or his cabal of close advisors, but more significantly the legacy of the Democratic Party's long history of civic corruption.

American democracy is best understood as the rule of the politician, not the rule of the people. The role of the people, in our system, is to accept the leadership of the most successful politicians—a status that is determined, in large part, by the contest for political investors.

Understanding that the myth of the sovereign voter is a hollow sham is the foundation for any realistic assessment of our predicament. After a brief consideration of a handful of particularly revealing episodes in American political history (the political economy of the United States Constitution, Andrew Jackson's war on the Second

Bank of the United States, the political crisis of the 1890s, the New Deal) I will analyze the current failings of the Democratic party in terms of its competition for corporate patrons.

The liberal intelligentsia's stubborn refusal to publicly attack a president whose every action as president has evinced a repudiation of their hopes and dreams is itself a betrayal of liberalism.

Although Barack Obama's failings can be analyzed as largely a symptom of the rotten system in which he finds himself, cultivating political agency on the part of the electorate requires the working assumption that our leaders are political agents as well. Thus the liberal intelligentsia's stubborn refusal to publicly attack a president whose every action as president has evinced a repudiation of their hopes and dreams is itself a betrayal of American liberalism. There is no evidence that Obama, despite the ardent wishes of his supporters, is playing a "long game" that will end in liberal triumph. Indeed, Obama's actions as president reveal nothing less than a mercenary ambition to roll back the already embattled achievements of the New Deal and the Great Society. I develop an argument that the recovery of political agency in the United States can be best achieved by drawing on the neglected traditions of classical republicanism that were the inspiration of the American revolution and conceptual core of the Jeffersonian persuasion.

Philosophically and rhetorically, the republican principles of personal autonomy, independence, and civic virtue are the foundation of the broad stream of American liberalism. This tradition forms the lingua franca of American politics, and it is only in these terms that the predations of oligarchy and monopoly capitalism can be successfully combated.

HOW DID THE IDEA FOR THE BOOK ORIGINATE?

The book grew out of my long preoccupation with the pathologies of American governance. More specifically, it was inspired first by the constitutional crises brought on by the Bush Administration and, more immediately, by Barack Obama's embrace of Bush's extra-constitutional policies and executive usurpations.

WHO IS THE AUDIENCE FOR YOUR BOOK?

Anyone who is interested in politics and civil affairs. It will give readers a toolkit for political argument, a vocabulary and a historical context for discussing our current political predicament: the train wreck that is the Obama Administration.

HOW CAN THE CHANGE YOU ARGUE BE REALIZED—AND WHAT CAN READERS DO?

The power of money in politics is our most pressing challenge. Reforming the system of legalized bribery that drives our government is absolutely essential, and only a mass movement of citizens demanding such reform can possibly bring it about. Hope is not enough. Nor is political hero worship. Americans have to stop waiting for a political savior to come along and fix the system for them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Roger D. Hodge was the editor-in-chief of *Harper's Magazine* from 2006 to 2010. Hodge began his journalism career as a freelance writer in 1989 and joined the staff of *Harper's* in 1996. He was a National Magazine Award finalist in Reviews and Criticism in 2006, and has worked as a ranch hand, an insurance adjuster, and for several years taught philosophy at Eugene Lang College. Hodge was born in 1967 and raised in Del Rio, Texas. He lives in Brooklyn, New York, with his wife and their two sons.