

# America's latest "Scarlet Letter" moment

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In the two months since the *New York Times* first reported allegations of sexual assault by film producer Harvey Weinstein, the American political, entertainment and media establishments have become embroiled in claims of rampant sexual impurity and abuse.

America is passing through yet another "Scarlet Letter" moment, with the letter "A" (for adulteress) being replaced by the letter "P" (for predator). Nothing that is happening today would have surprised Nathaniel Hawthorne, who warned in another novel (*The House of the Seven Gables*) that "the influential classes, and those who take upon themselves to be leaders of the people, are fully liable to all the passionate error that has ever characterized the maddest mob."

Each day, the "Me Too" movement, described by its cheerleaders as a "national reckoning" or "national conversation," takes a new victim. Transgressions that may have occurred as far back as a half-century ago are being recalled and deemed worthy of brutal punishment. Shameful rituals of allegations and pathetic apologies are being enacted. Long careers are ruined in a matter of minutes. The accused in many cases are men in their mid to late seventies, some of whom have records of decades of distinguished contributions to the arts. They are not even informed of allegations against them until after their dismissal. Asking to substantiate the veracity of an accuser's claims is proof of "rape apology" or outright guilt.

Senator Al Franken announced his resignation Thursday after coming under immense pressure from the Democratic Party. Even Senator Joseph McCarthy was not forced out of the Senate, although his anti-communist witch-hunt violated the Constitution and claimed hundreds of victims. The Senate took the exceptional decision to censure McCarthy for his crimes, but left the Wisconsin Republican at his seat until his death in 1957.

Franken's resignation has prompted a series of self-congratulatory comments that display a striking absence of democratic consciousness.

The *Washington Post's* Ana Marie Cox wrote an article December 7 titled "Al Franken isn't being denied due process. None of these famous men are."

"Let's not dither about the dangers of proclaiming guilt or innocence," she writes, arguing that only the guilty, the complicit, or the political right-wing hide behind claims of due process violations.

*New York Times* editorial board celebrated Franken's resignation Thursday afternoon, writing: "We are in the middle of a stunning and welcome cultural shift... We are witnessing a long-overdue moral reckoning that—dare we hope?—could drive real change."

The *Times* praises women for "identifying themselves and their harassers and providing proof." The fact is that many accusers neither identify themselves nor provide any proof beyond their own testimony of events often years or decades in the past. No matter, the *Times* urges Congress to "Learn from Al Franken" and calls for more resignations to break "the mechanisms and mind-set that keeps predators in power."

The "Me Too" campaign is reactionary to the core. It has no progressive content. There are many forms of sexual harassment, which extend from the annoying to the legally actionable to the outright criminal. But a vast range of activities, including many that reflect the ambiguities and complexities of human interactions, is being described as malevolent and even criminal.

The all-inclusive and reckless use of the term "sexual harassment" has the effect of obscuring the chasm between the amorphous catch-all called the "unwanted advance" (request for a date, complimenting another person for his or her looks, and, heaven forbid, indicating sexual interest) and a physically violent assault. In reporting the resignation of the long-time editor of the *Paris Review*, the *New York Times* informs its readers that Lorin Stein was rumored to be "a serial dater," and that "whispers about Mr. Stein's relationships with women circulated for years." Other depraved acts by Stein reported by the *Times* include the fact that he "often complimented young women on their appearance" and held "raucous parties."

Progressive social movements have certain essential characteristics, of which the most significant is their broadly egalitarian and democratic content. In the modern world, they are invariably and inseparably connected with the struggle of the working class against capitalist exploitation. Progressive movements strive to elevate, rather than debase, popular consciousness. When fighting injustice, they direct attention toward the underlying social causes of that which is being fought.

The "Me Too" movement exhibits none of these characteristics. Its social base is not the working class, but the more affluent sections of the middle class. As the *World*

*Socialist Web Site* has often explained, there is dissatisfaction within these layers with the distribution of wealth at the top. They want access to privileges and wealth, and are prepared to use any means to obtain it. This accounts for the contempt for elemental democratic rights and sheer vindictiveness that finds expression in the statements of the *Post*, the *Times* and other leaders of this campaign.

The “Me Too” movement is pitched to the lowest level of social awareness, even on the question upon which it is most focused: sex. Throughout the 20th century, there was a persistent effort to demystify sex, to remove the tyrannical weight of religious prejudice in the evaluation of sexual behavior. Even aberrant and violent sexual behavior came to be viewed as a social and psychological phenomenon that required scientific study and medical treatment. Remorseless and inhumane punishment serves no end other than the bitter desire for revenge.

The “Me Too” movement has not brought to the discussion of sex an iota of intelligent discourse. Determined to introduce as much distrust and fear as possible into human relationships, it offers only stupid and malicious denunciations of “men in general”—“predators”—and their supposedly raging and uncontrollable beast-like passions. The writings of frothing rightwing feminist columnists combine America’s age-old Puritanism with the staples of Victorian wisdom, passed down for generations from bourgeois mothers to daughters, about “what men always want.”

The “Me Too” movement, like its no less reactionary predecessor, the “Black Lives Matter” hoax, is most notable for its disinterest, even contempt, for the real social concerns and anxieties of the broad mass of working men and women, within the United States and internationally. It has nothing to say about imperialist wars, the suppression of democratic rights and poverty. Aside from the occasional and palpably insincere invocation of working women, the “Me Too” movement is concerned not with what is happening on the factory floor, but, rather, with the power politics of the executive suite. As the *Guardian*’s Hadley Freeman recently declared: “Or, hey, here’s another idea! How about if only women get the big top jobs for the next, let’s say, 1,000 days?”

What about the concerns of working women? Access to health care and abortion, childcare facilities, decent schools, affordable housing, safe neighborhoods, freedom from deportation? These issues are ignored because they cut across the pro-capitalist agenda of the “Me Too” scam.

Underlying the right-wing bourgeois feminist movement is the fraudulent claim that men, and especially “white” men, are privileged.

The “Me Too” movement seems not to have noticed the fact that roughly 40,000 men died from opioid overdoses in 2016—roughly two-thirds the total killed. Nearly two million men are in prison, where countless inmates are subjected to rape and other forms of abuse. Men made up roughly 90

percent of all immigrants interned in immigration jails, according to ICE statistics from 2009. Some 553,000 people are homeless on any given night in the US, a large majority of whom are men. In Libya, in the aftermath of the Obama administration’s bombing campaign—initiated by Hillary Clinton, the icon of right-wing bourgeois feminism—thousands of immigrant men are being forced into slavery for a few hundred dollars per person.

Of course, there are many well-meaning people who are sincere in their loathing of sexual abuse and believe that the “Me Too” movement is a worthy cause. Some, who should know better, are even buying into the claim that this campaign is part of a “revolution.”

Genuine revolutions are not launched by the *New York Times*, backed by the Democratic Party, and honored by *Time* magazine. Nor do they legitimize the suppression of core democratic rights.

Decades of identity politics have disoriented and corrupted social thought. The displacement of the scientific evaluation of society on the basis of class with the flimflam of gender and race has lowered social consciousness. Especially among the “educated” upper-middle class there is an inability—even an unwillingness—to place events in an historically-informed political context. What is all but obvious—that the “Me Too” campaign is embedded in the identity politics strategy of the Democratic Party—is somehow not noticed. The connection with the “fake news” campaign, the anti-Russia hysteria and the calls for Internet censorship is missed. The fate of Julian Assange—the victim of a set-up using fraudulent allegations of rape—has been all but forgotten. Despite the many examples of false accusations of rape, the absurd claim that the woman accuser must always be believed is accepted.

Above all, confusion abounds when the entire campaign is seen outside the broader context of a quarter-century of war, the expanding assault on democratic rights and staggering levels of social inequality.

Opposition to real instances of sexual abuse and all forms of anti-human cruelty and exploitation is a class issue, requiring the mobilization of the working class against capitalism. The motto that animates the struggle for human progress is not “Me Too” but “Workers of the World Unite.”



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