

Kavanaugh's nomination, Cosby's sentencing: News media pornography and the enraged middle class

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Following the press and television news in the US on Wednesday might lead one to believe that a kind of madness has seized hold of the American media, along with sections of the affluent petty-bourgeoisie.

The media generated new geysers of filth in regard to the controversy surrounding the nomination of Judge Brett Kavanaugh, Donald Trump's candidate for the US Supreme Court. On the same day, the degrading impact of its #MeToo campaign could be seen in the hysterical, semi-fascistic tone of the response to the sentencing of comedian Bill Cosby.

The Senate Judiciary Committee is scheduled to hear Thursday from Christine Blasey Ford, who says Kavanaugh sexually assaulted her when both were high school students. But newer allegations against Kavanaugh bumped up against one another on Wednesday. Before the population had time to digest the claim by Deborah Ramirez (reported by the *New Yorker* magazine September 23) that Kavanaugh had exposed himself to her at a Yale University party 35 years ago, a third woman came forward with even more sensational charges.

Michael Avenatti, best known as the attorney for porn star Stormy Daniels in her legal case against Trump, tweeted a sworn statement by Julie Swetnick, 55, claiming that Kavanaugh and others, while in high school, spiked the drinks of girls at house parties so that they might more easily "gang-rape" them.

Swetnick went on to allege that she herself became the victim of one of these "gang rapes... where [Kavanaugh's friend] Mark Judge and Brett Kavanaugh were present."

Avenatti's tweet became the occasion, in the bland phrase of the *New York Times*, for "immediate, blanket coverage across social media and cable news." The cable news channels did indeed bombard their viewers non-stop with the story—if they weren't reporting on Cosby's being sent to jail.

MSNBC correspondent Kate Snow, for instance, read the most graphic portions of Swetnick's statement. The other

cable channels followed suit, along with the *Times*, the *Washington Post* and the rest. CNN anchor John King asked correspondent Sara Sidner to "walk us through" the allegations, which she obliged by providing every salacious detail. Afterward, King expressed appreciation for the "live reporting" on "a very sensitive and dramatic issue."

The *Times* set the stage for the day's torrent of media smut in its morning edition, which plastered across its front page two lead articles on the Kavanaugh sexual assault allegations and a third on the Cosby sentencing. The report on Trump's fascistic and war-mongering rant at the United Nations was relegated to a subordinate spot. The opinion pages featured a lengthy editorial ("Questions Mr. Kavanaugh Needs to Answer") listing detailed questions for senators to ask about his sexual activities.

The American media lowers and demeans itself further with every new scandal.

It is impossible for us to determine the truth of the claims against Kavanaugh. It is *certain*, however, that the Democratic Party campaign against Trump's nominee is a reactionary diversion and an effort to bury the most pressing issues. Kavanaugh is a zealous right-winger and enemy of democratic rights. But no Democrat on the Judiciary Committee will ask him, "What was your role in the attempted coup d'état, known as the Starr investigation, against Bill Clinton?" or "Why did you support torture and illegal detention as part of the Bush administration?"

None of the Democrats, the supposed defenders of women, will even forthrightly denounce him for his attacks on abortion rights. They've all but dropped the issue.

Speaking on CNN, the *Times*' Michael Shear inadvertently alluded to the anti-democratic character of the campaign against Kavanaugh: "One of the dynamics that we've seen throughout this entire #MeToo movement is that accusations that start out as a single, a solitary accusation against... a man in power, often don't pick up the kind of steam that ultimately forces action until there's a second allegation,

and a third allegation, and beyond. And that's what creates often the kind of pressure—overwhelming pressure that forces some action.”

Five, ten or twenty accusations do not amount to proof. Kavanaugh may have been guilty of sexual misconduct, but Shear and the rest apparently need to be reminded that every witch-hunt in history has also operated on the principle of “numbers.”

The repressive, right-wing character of the middle-class outrage over sexual misconduct, whipped up by the #MeToo campaign, is on view in the frothing reaction to Cosby's sentencing. The comedian was convicted of sexually assaulting a Temple University employee at his home in 2004 while she was under the influence of a sedative.

The comments on the outcome of the Cosby case in the *Times* from readers of its article “Bill Cosby, Once a Model of Fatherhood, Is Sentenced to Prison,” are overwhelmingly vengeful and vindictive:

“I'd rather my taxes don't go toward paying for his 3-10 year confinement. Just put him in with the general population and don't have the guards intervene to protect him. He would be dead within minutes, but at least his last moments on earth would be filled with terror.”

“He is a beast no matter his physical condition.”

“We can only hope he dies in jail. Such a shame. Good riddance.”

“I really don't care that he is old and has lost his sight. He should have been in prison decades ago. Let him serve his time in the dark in a cold cell.”

“Only 10 years? He deserved 100!”

Neither the *Times* nor the majority of its middle-class readership has ever expressed this degree of outrage about the past quarter-century of bloody, neo-colonial wars and occupations pursued by American imperialism, which has led to more than one million deaths and the displacement of tens of millions more. The destruction of societies in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen and beyond does not keep this social element awake at night. Drone strikes, “kill lists,” NSA spying, the persecution of Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange—none of this merits more than hand-wringing or the occasional tsk-tsk, if not outright assent.

Of no concern either is the industrial slaughterhouse in America: the 5,190 workers (90 percent of them male) who died on the job in 2016, and the 3.7 million workers across all industries who had work-related injuries and illnesses.

The hysteria over the Cosby case and the Kavanaugh nomination has a logic, despite its unhinged character.

On the part of the Democratic Party and the *Times*, the incitement of a frenzy over sexual abuse is a conscious political operation.

For the American ruling elite, it is a pressing matter to “change the subject” from economic inequality; to weaken, dissipate and divide popular anger toward the wealthy and capitalist rule by pointing to other guilty parties—men or white people. The aim is to reduce and blunt *class* hatred and feeling, divide along gender lines, prevent as far as possible and for as long as possible independent political and social action by the working class, slow down and ideologically cripple such a movement, and build up a reactionary constituency within the upper-middle class.

This was the response of the Clinton campaign in 2016 to the mass support for Bernie Sanders: the manipulation of the case of Stanford student Brock Turner and the focus on Trump's alleged sexual carryings-on.

The current furor is a repetition along even more reactionary lines. It is a reaction to the growth of popular hostility to Trump and anti-capitalist sentiment generally, to the movement of masses of the population to the left and to the increase in strike activity. The sex hysteria is meant to poison the atmosphere, pollute political consciousness, stop people in their tracks, numb and confuse them. It has the effect of completely discrediting the entire political system.

The *Times* and the Democrats are appealing to a well-to-do social layer that has already moved far to the right. These elements oppose Trump on a right-wing, anti-democratic basis, including the #MeToo sexual witch hunt's explicit renunciation of due process and the presumption of innocence. All of this is entirely compatible with war, dictatorship and savage attacks on the mass of working people.



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