

# Respectability Politics, or You Gotta Be Nice To Monsters

Romeo Kokriatski

31 August 2018

John McCain is dead. And people all over the political spectrum are telling me I should feel bad about this. But do I? (Hint: No.) Everyone from his colleagues in the GOP, to committed ideological opponents in the Democratic Party – hell, even Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the seemingly socialist darling child of the American electoral left – are all crowding around to pay homage to a war criminal. It seems (politics really makes for strange bedfellows) that the only ones interested in dancing on the late Senator’s grave is the far Left, and, of course, Donald “I-owe-most-of-my-fortune-to-the-Russian-mob-and-now-Vladdy-owns-my ass” Drumpf.

But this is all beyond the point. Why would liberals, leftists, and so-called progressives mourn to pay respect to a man that was in all respects their ideological enemy? A man who, it bears repeating, paved the way for Drumpf’s candidacy with his own stumping of a clearly unfit and incompetent buffon for high office – his running mate, Mrs. Sarah Palin. The answer can be found in the curious political habit known as ‘respectability’. It assumes that all positions hold equal moral authority, and even if you disagree with the position, it is rude to disagree with the human holding that belief.

Now that McCain is dead, people seem compelled to write praise-filled obituaries of the ‘I may not agree with what he said, but he had *character*’ type. Here’s the Tweet I referred to earlier, by Ms. Ocasio-Cortez:

*“John McCain’s legacy represents an unparalleled example of human decency and American service. As an intern, I learned a lot about the power of humanity in government through his deep friendship with Sen. Kennedy. He meant so much, to so many. My prayers are with his family.”*

Many of her supporters, myself included, are a bit put out by this tweet. Surely Ms. Ocasio-Cortez knows that tweeting outright support for a man many on the Left condemn would induce a backlash from her base. And yet, she did it anyway. It is possible that she is simply trying to moderate her discourse, after the primary, and that may partially explain the message. Yet, for someone as seemingly honest and forthright as Ms. Ocasio-Cortez, it seems a bit cynical to assume that as the primary cause.

After all, her district (which, coincidentally, contains the neighborhood I grew up in) isn't exactly a bastion of WASP middle America voters who would notice one way or the other. Instead, the answer can be found in the Tweet itself. She was an intern of Ted Kennedy, one of the members of the Kennedy political dynasty (don't ask how this works in a country that is nominally a democracy) and, through that experience, has been infected with the repulsive virus of "respectability."

"Respectability" should be a swear word. Even rolling it around my tongue feels like I'm tonguing raw sewage, or maybe a particularly used condom. It implies a certain standard of behavior. To those who aim to be respectable, the standard is of civility, of fair-mindedness, of calm, reasonable debate and jovial disagreement. To those who don't give a fuck about that bullshit, it stinks of elitist posturing, of valuing messaging over content, and of Puritan control. That's how the scumfucks get away with it, you understand. They decry your tone, your language – not your content.

Not the thing that really matters, but the distraction of respectability and civility and propriety. Because you see, it makes them uncomfortable. They don't like to be reminded that their policies affect real human beings. That would make it nearly impossible for some of them (not all, of course, there are some real fucking sociopaths there) to pass bills that cut welfare spending, or to authorize missile sales to Saudi Arabia.

I've met politicians of all stripes, and can honestly say that many of them are utterly charming, down-to-earth, genuinely nice people who believe that they are serving their country to the best of their ability. Respectability politics tells me that I should treat them with a modicum of decency in return. But my anger, my rage, and my values – tell me I should shit in my hand, and then fling it in their face. I don't give a fuck how that looks – because "the way it looks" has no bearing on the wars they vote for, the money they steal, or the crimes they ignore. Ultimately, a call for respectability is a call to take your beating with a smile, because you are serving the interests of their narrowly-defined democracy.

But isn't decency a good thing? Shouldn't civility be a goal we all strive for, especially for public figures?

No.

Here's the fucking truth – everyone is a fucking asshole, especially those who claim that they just want some "decency." How do I know this? Because the same people who claim "civility" are the people who authorize defense appropriations for arms sales to theocrats, the people whose idea of a "humane homeless policy" is to put spikes on public benches, the people who think fascists can be defeated by hugs. Embracing "respectability" over content, and over values, is promoted primarily by those that have the privilege of ignoring the deleterious effects of said policy. It is, for example, the reason Democrats pay homage to American war criminal Kissinger, and why British war criminal Tony Blair still has admirers in the Labour Party. It says that maintaining decorum is always more important than fighting for your beliefs.

Of course, that isn't the reasoning that the liberal or the classical conservative will feed you. Instead, they'll claim that 'sinking to the level of your opponent makes you just as bad as them'. It is, in effect, one of the primary reasons the establishment Democratic Party is a party of cowards and losers. And what's more – it gives these people the audacity to claim the laughable concept of the "moral high ground!" In fact, the only reason you can claim a moral high ground on the simple act of civility is if you value civility in your moral system. But doing so necessitates

valuing it higher than at least some forms of action – in other words, if you fucking care about how something was said, you must not care about what was said all that much.

After all, you can claim the fucking moral high ground if that norm is violated, regardless of what was actually done! It is a classic bait-and-switch. The liberal claims to care about racism or inequality but then gets defensive the moment you point out that maybe voting for ever-larger war budgets is not the way to resolve those issues. They know that by their professed values, they cannot argue against that. But what they can do is police your tone, is call for you to moderate your language, is state that you are “too emotional” and “politics requires compromise.” Fuck!

Why is respectability so praised? Why is it held as a sacred value of the American political class? One of the reasons Drumpf is so vilified by the mainstream liberal press – as Glenn Greenwald has pointed out, is not his racism or his oligarchic values, shared by many in American politics, but his refusal to even pretend respect to his opponents.

The answer lies in the construction of the American political system itself, and in the American myth. It’s no shock to anyone that the US Government molds itself on the ancient Roman Republic – hell, the Founders made that point pretty explicitly in their writings. And one of the core principles of the Roman Republic, held up as the pinnacle of statesmanship, was stoicism. While Stoicism is a rich and storied philosophical tradition and is far outside the scope of this article, we can draw a few conclusions from the tradition its use in Roman political life. Stoics, for example, valued wisdom, reason, and logic, over the “base human pleasures,” over emotion. It was in fact a point of pride for many Romans (Cato the Elder being a prime example) that Roman stoicism built an empire, while Greek degeneracy (hedonism, or epicureanism), has led to their conquest.

Degeneracy was understood by the Romans to be not child rape, or some kind of sexual mores, but the display of emotion, and worse, the embrace of it. Being angry (unless it was righteous anger, in defense of Rome), was seen as uncouth, plebeian. Showing grief was dishonorable and un-Roman (meaning, in this respect, unmanly.) Joy was completely frowned upon, as it was a childish thing, and interferes in the Serious Business Of Running The State. For the Roman political elite – the literal patrician class – emotional responses were at best untoward, and at worst degenerate. Logic, wisdom, deference to your seniors, reasoned debate – these are the tools of politics, said the Stoics.

The same idea is applied in the modern American value of respectability. Like stoicism, modern respectability presumes a neutral stage on which opinions are debated. Thus, any emotional response to the position is automatically suspect. Surely, if your moral position was better, then you wouldn’t need emotions – pure, faultless, objective logic would be enough. But of course there is a classist element to such a belief – reasoned, logical debate is often only available to those with the education to articulate it. It isn’t surprising that this myth got it start amongst a literal oligarchic aristocracy as the Roman patrician class.

After all, this is a very useful idea for a political elite. It removes the notion that anyone can really be attacked, or criticized – only their ideas can be. Thus, one can proclaim and support the most odious policies, while keeping their dinner party and golf buddy privileges. It allows people who fucking hate each other to work together in, if not an amiable, way, one that results in less homicide. And ultimately, it serves the myth that politics can be resolved through reasoned debate amongst peers. This serves as a self-perpetuating system for aristocrats and the elite. They have the money and the power to gain the education necessary to debate – and the rules (that they fucking made up) say that only emotionless debate is allowed.

Note the similarities here with what is often said of women in politics – too shrill, too emotional, too subjective – and remember that Rome, of course, was a patriarchy. It is no surprise that the Roman patriarchy advocated for ideals that opposed the traits they straw-manned onto women. Men must be less emotional, less affected by silly notions of empathy and compassion, because to admit otherwise would be admit that men need care and compassion just as much, and once you start caring about people...

That emotionless, technocratic bullshit, my friends and comrades, is a dirty, sneering, smug-faced motherfucking lie. Politics is nothing less than war by other means. The veneer of respectability allows the political elite cover to collaborate over policies that screw over the governed, all in the guise of ‘bipartisanship’ or ‘compromise’. Respectability, and its close cousin, propriety, allows for an elite to dismiss the concerns of the proletariat, not over the content of the message (Stop fucking shooting people for no reason and using government funds to prop up fuckwit bankers, for example), but for the language.

As we’ve seen with Ocasio-Cortez, respectability is a concept that even Leftists fall for. A dialogue between an oppressor and oppressed is never, ever, a neutral ground. Any such conversation, conducted within the realm of “respectability,” automatically dismisses the emotional pain carried by the oppressed. But that isn’t how humans work, and the elites know it. Being “proper and respectable” is not a moral stance – it is admonishment, by the elite, that you have deviated from their standards of behavior (which they have full license to ignore when they want to fuck you).

The perfect expression of respectability in modern capitalism is the phrase “It’s not personal, it’s just business.” This gives the assumption that business is somehow impersonal, that it is taken objectively, motivated only by full consideration of the data. That is, in a phrase, utter fucking nonsense, and anyone who says it is trying to fuck you. No decision a human makes is impersonal. There is no such thing as the perfect technocratic solution to a problem – only one that makes sense under some assumptions. Change the assumptions, and you change the solution – and suddenly, these assumptions start to look awfully biased...

Instead, here’s a good rule of thumb: Take it fucking personally. When a Republican cock-mangler goes on Fox to claim that immigrants are raping our women – take it fucking personally. When a Democratic fuckwit goes on MSNBC to claim that the American people don’t want nationalized health care- take it fucking personally. And when these dishonest, disingenuous Azathothian bastards try to slip policy through the door that fucks you, take it fucking personally. Get mad. Stay mad. And fucking act on that anger.

That’s why I fucking curse, and that’s why I refuse to “moderate my language.” I am fucking mad. I am so fucking mad, sad, angry, and enraged at the actions of the elite and the hateful reality they’ve structured; that the only honest way to express my emotions is to wave a giant neon hatecock in the face of these hypocritical lying shitmongers. I don’t care if they hear me – they would never care, even if I was “respectable.” But they can’t fucking ignore me. They can’t fucking look away. They can only shake their head and claim, ever more shrilly as our world spirals deeper into shit, that “You’ll never convince a moderate with that language!” Fuck you. I don’t want to convince moderates. I want to fucking change shit. I want to inspire people, to get them angry. And if that offends you, if my anger, my emotions, my rage at getting fucked over, over and over and over again, bothers you? Take a step back, and think about what you truly value. Is it the messenger? Or the message?

Don't play by the rules of the oppressor, because their rules are specifically designed to silence you, to negate you, to ignore you. Take it personally, and get fucking angry.

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



Romeo Kokriatski  
Respectability Politics, or You Gotta Be Nice To Monsters  
31 August 2018

Retrieved on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2022 from [www.nihilist.li](http://www.nihilist.li)

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**