

# The Washington Times

## The high cost of slander

Richard W. Rahn

April 4, 2016

Endless cruelties have been and continue to be committed on the basis of group slander. The communists and socialists imprisoned and slaughtered many of their merchant and property-owning citizens on the basis of a gross slander, not to mention what the Nazis did to the Jews. In America, blacks, gays, many ethnic groups and women were first stereotyped, then slandered, and then discriminated against. But the fashion of which groups of individuals can be slandered has changed to such people as Wall Street bankers; pharmaceutical, coal and oil company executives; conservative scholars; those who question the global warming establishment; and white males, among others.

The general rule that one is innocent until proven guilty goes back at least to ancient Roman law: *Ei incumbit probatio qui dicit, non qui negat* — “Burden of proof lies on him who asserts, not on him who denies.” Over the centuries, not only individuals, but whole classes of people, have been denied this basic human right. The oppressors normally begin by slandering a group, and then use the slander to discriminate and ultimately persecute — and, unfortunately, this persists even in America.

If one listens to Bernie Sanders’ rants, somehow all of those who work on Wall Street are far greedier than most other Americans. It is also obvious that he has no idea of what the functions of financial markets are, nor the disaster that would occur without them. Yes, there are plenty of unethical and incompetent people on Wall Street, as there are in Washington and in most other places in America. That does not justify indicting all who work in a particular industry and a particular place. The ignorant attacks on the financial industry have resulted in increasingly costly and destructive regulation, which increases the risk in the financial system rather than diminishing it.

Pharmaceutical companies and their executives are portrayed by many in the media and politicians as embodiments of evil because of high drug prices, rather than saviors of millions of lives, which they are. Harvard Medical School professor Thomas Stossel notes: “Nearly 90 percent of drugs arise solely from industry, not government funded research. To pilot just one drug through the Food and Drug Administration’s labyrinthine approval process costs on average over \$2.5 billion. Less than 12 percent of drugs entering trials achieve regulatory approval, and the few successes must compensate for the failures.” Both Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders

have advocated putting price controls on drug prices. The result would be fewer new drugs being developed and millions of more deaths from cancer, heart disease and other ailments. In their rush to slander the drug companies, Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Sanders seem not to have noticed that virtually no new innovations have come from the socialist countries that they so admire.

Oil and coal companies and their executives are portrayed as evil monsters who wish to punish mankind through global warming. In fact, these companies have been the leaders in both producing more, cleaner and less-expensive energy, which benefits the poor most of all. Those who work in those companies should be praised, not damned. The fracking revolution developed by private companies has caused carbon-dioxide emissions to drop in the United States. Europe's great experiment with "green" energy has been an economic, social and environmental disaster, which is why many European countries, such as Germany and the United Kingdom, have reversed course and now are building new coal plants and importing natural gas.

Those who have the temerity to question the science and the predictions of the almost entirely government-funded global warming establishment are now not only being slandered but threatened with prosecution under the RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) Act and others. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, Rhode Island Democrat, has been in the lead to prosecute those who disagree with his slanders of those who are doubtful about the immediate danger of global warming. The result of this intimidation and slander has been money wasted on nonviable solar and wind projects, and higher electrical prices with no benefit to public health.

The dubious concept of "white male privilege" is now used as a justification to deprive white males of the basic protections afforded to all others, most notably the right to be perceived as innocent until proven guilty. Women and other non-white males have learned that they can make charges against a white male for a variety of alleged offenses and the white male will automatically be considered guilty. Frequently, due process is ignored, whereby the white male is not given the presumption of innocence and allowed to defend himself. As a result, police forces and other institutions have at times lost some of their most productive and experienced personnel.

As America corrects the slander and discrimination that too many blacks and other minorities have suffered, and in some places still do suffer, the tragedy is that slander and discrimination are still considered acceptable as long as the targets are changed to the "new despised." Donald Trump calling many Mexicans rapists, Bernie Sanders dissing bankers as a class, colleges denying equal opportunity to conservative scholars, institutional administrators denying due process and the presumption of innocence to anyone, including both black and white males, are practices to be condemned.

*Richard W. Rahn is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and chairman of the Institute for Global Economic Growth.*