

## The Vengeance Election

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“The fastest-selling item in the online campaign shop of Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) is a mug emblazoned, “billionaire tears.”

“Savor a warm, slightly salty beverage of your choice in this union-made mug as you contemplate all the good a wealth tax could do,” the product description suggests, listing off “universal childcare, student debt cancellation, universal free college, and more” as the benefits of Warren’s plan to raise taxes on the uber-rich.

But c’mon, a pure-hearted devotion to doing good isn’t why this mug is selling so well. It’s selling because of the other half of the description, which recounts the time billionaire Leon Cooperman “was brought to tears on live television while discussing the prospect that a President Elizabeth Warren might require him to pay his fair share in taxes.” It’s selling because in this political moment, as Cato Institute scholar Walter Olson remarked, “the way to rally a mass following is to promise to hurt and humiliate the people they hate.” Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the voter, and the ballot box will be the instrument of my wrath.

Warren is capitalizing on her voters’ political sadism, but she did not create their appetite, nor is she the only candidate whose supporters are thus moved by antipathy and hungry for vengeance. The specific political moment Olson identified is the “Age of Trump,” but it’s bigger than President Trump, too. Fully four in 10 members of both major parties said in study results from earlier this year that members of the other party are “downright evil;” nearly one in five think they “lack the traits to be considered fully human;” and about the same proportion will say we’d “be better off as a country if large numbers of the opposing party in the public today just died.””