



Written by [John F. McManus](#) on August 31, 2016

Do Words Have Consequences?

In the closing days of the 2008 race for the Democratic Party nomination, then-Senator Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) refused to concede when the primary season had already shown she had lost the race to Barack Obama. Undaunted by the will of the voters, she hung on — at least for a while. Asked on May 23, 2008, why she wouldn't concede her loss to the upstart young senator from Illinois, she told an interviewer: "My husband did not wrap up the nomination in 1992 until he won the California primary somewhere in the middle of June, right? We all remember [Bobby Kennedy was assassinated](#) in June in California."



That she would use the word "assassinated" in the context in which she delivered it remains an amazing bit of political history. We bring it up because it has largely been deposited in a memory hole. In 2008, was she suggesting that someone might (or should?) attack candidate Obama? Was she hoping that her use of that word might stimulate some crazy to duplicate what had happened to Senator Kennedy sixteen years earlier? Mere mentioning the possibility of an assassination during a political campaign constitutes a dramatic departure from legitimate political discourse. And the reporters who heard her comment, or heard about it later, should have emblazoned it on the minds of all. But most didn't.

Hoping that no one remembers her 2008 use of such an inflammatory word, Mrs. Clinton has chosen to imply that Donald Trump's recent comment about her selection of possible candidates for the Supreme Court invited violence, the very tactic she had employed in 2008.

What did Trump say that Clinton seized upon? He stated during a rally: "If she gets to pick her judges, nothing you can do, folks. Although the Second Amendment people, maybe there is. I don't know." Asked later what he meant, [Trump explained](#), "The media is desperate to distract [voters] from Clinton's Second Amendment stance. I said that pro-Second Amendment citizens must organize and get out the vote to save our Constitution."

But Mrs. Clinton speedily accused Trump of what she should have been accused of in 2008. She pontificated, "Words matter, my friends. And if you are running to be president, or you are president of the United States, words can have tremendous consequences." Correct! Which is precisely why the media should have excoriated her in 2008, and why her recent attack on Trump for something that had no mention of the kind of possibly deadly suggestion contained in the word "assassinated" is mountainous hypocrisy. In 2008, she not only wasn't held accountable for possibly inciting a monstrous crime, she repeated her remarks a few weeks later.

Only days after her first use of the word "assassinated," Richard Stengel, the managing editor of *TIME*, interviewed Hillary. Having had no repercussions from her first use of the explosive word, she repeated it: "I think people have short memories. Primary contests used to last a lot longer. We all remember the great tragedy of Bobby Kennedy being assassinated in June in Los Angeles." Was that another attempt



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to plant the idea of assassination in the minds of some potential killer? It certainly seems so. Did the [mainstream media](#) hold her accountable? With rare exceptions, its supposedly hard-nosed reporters and commentators ignored her second outrageous use of the term.

All during their rise to prominence, the two Clintons have benefited from a standard that few have ever enjoyed. Others have to submit to strict rules and temperate conduct while Hillary and Bill are given a pass. Hillary obviously knows that explosive words can lead to explosive actions, which is why she attacked Trump's statement. If she were held to the standard she has set for Donald Trump, she would long ago have become a political has-been.

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