

What Was Applied

November 4, 2026

Shellac seems to have entered English from India in the 1600s. The noun was derived from "shell" + "lac" — a resin secreted by the lac insect of South Asia, scraped from trees, refined into flakes and dissolved in alcohol to make varnish.

It was ubiquitous in the 19th and early 20th centuries for furniture finishing, phonograph records, and sealing things.

In American slang, "shellac" came to refer to cheap alcohol and the adjective "shellacked" to being drunk. Shellac joined other slang terms for hooch like "varnish."

From this latter meaning, "shellacked" morphed into "beaten up" or "trounced" — someone staggering after a fight looked much like someone staggering out of a saloon. By the 1930s, sportswriters were using "shellacking" freely to describe lopsided defeats. You'll find it ubiquitous in boxing and baseball coverage of that era; political writers followed suit, saying a defeated candidate had "taken a shellacking."

Yesterday, Donald Trump and the Republicans took the proverbial shellacking.

We've seen this sort of thing before. It's not unheard of. Americans repudiate failed programs, and Trump, who promised to keep the American people out of war did the precise opposite of what got him elected in the first place. Only by grace extended from the American people could the application of the varnish be withheld.

Boy, that grace was so *not* extended! Overwhelmingly electing members of a party that includes actual "seize the means of production" communists was . . . graceless?

A kind of justice, maybe.

This could be a warning to all: the awfulness of your opponents will not stay the hand of shellac . . . er, citizen correction.

This is Common Sense. I'm Paul Jacob.