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The Clintons, Trump and White Backlash

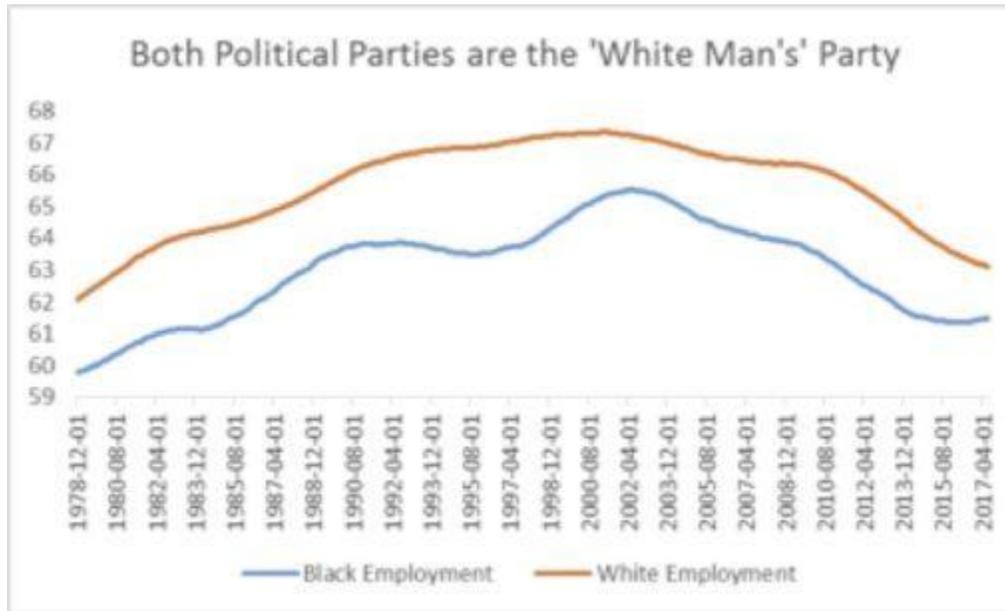
By Rob Urie
August 11, 2017

In the mid-1980s Klan leader, White nationalist and one-term Representative from Louisiana David Duke traded in his KKK garb for a business suit and a corporate haircut in order to merge his version of White nationalism with then resurgent capitalism. Neoliberalism links a malleable conception of freedom as what those with social power want to circular social apologetics. And the capitalist / Thatcherite assertion that the individual is the fundamental social unit revivifies White nationalism by erasing history.

Another way of putting this is that neoliberalism has long been a subtext of White nationalism. If social outcomes reflect individual capabilities, goes the theory, then group social failures result from aggregated individual failures— from some ‘defect’ that characterizes individuals as members of that group. This is the theoretical basis of ‘scientific racism.’ Likewise, Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s ‘culture of illegitimacy’ erased three centuries of race-based social repression to frame the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow as Black moral failures.

The charitable explanation is that this sort of ‘rational’ racism is prescriptive— an effort to right existing circumstances, rather than descriptive as misstatement of actual social history. However, the temporal sleight-of-hand of historical erasure comes straight from capitalist theory. By the early 1990s Bill and Hillary Clinton were using this temporal flattening to conflate the neoliberal

theory that markets create a society where individual capacities and effort are rewarded with their programs that exacerbated existing social divisions through class warfare.



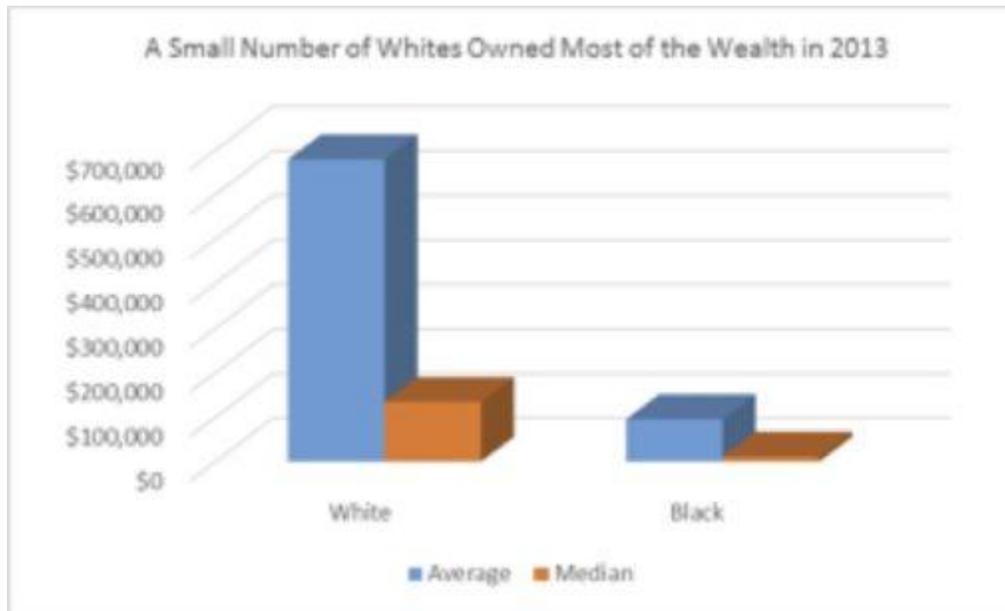
Graph: 'participation rates' are the percentages of given populations that are employed. With the caution that demographic differences explain some of the variability, the persistence of a lower Black Participation rate regardless of which political party is in power demonstrates the emotive (content-free) quality of party differentiation when it comes to race. In other words, the Democrat's 'opportunity society' looks like Reagan's / Trump's 'White backlash' when it comes to institutional outcomes. The greater variability of the Black Participation Rate is cyclical, a sign of the relative vulnerability of Black employment. Source: St. Louis Federal Reserve.

Of current relevance is the effort to explain Donald Trump's election in terms of 'White backlash.' Both the Clintons and Barack Obama made a small number of rich people much richer while making working class and poor people poorer. From starting positions characterized by unresolved institutional racism— race-based social disadvantage, the Democrats' economic policies rewarded and punished people by these starting positions and not by capacities and effort. The Democrats 'meritocracy' is in this way tautological, a low-budget restatement of Voltaire's 'best of all possible worlds.'

For displaced Democrats the theory of White backlash has obvious appeal— barely employed, barely educated hicks get their revenge for eight years of America's first Black president passing virtuous and inclusive policies. Questions like why a number of Americans sufficient to elect Mr. Trump are barely educated and barely employed eight years into a Democrat administration and economic 'recovery' are left for the communists. (The bourgeois and the rich vote— they elected Mr. Trump). And in fact, recent research supports the contention that millions of workers were forced to exit labor 'markets' during Mr. Obama's tenure due to a lack of jobs.

This isn't to dismiss the theory of backlash entirely. Amongst the 16% of the population that voted for Mr. Trump ((eligible voters / population) X 27% eligible who voted Trump), some fair

portion may well be ideologically committed racists. Furthermore, American history is full of political opportunists periodically exacerbating racial tensions to divide working people and the poor and distract attention away from capitalist predations. The problem for Democrats with charging dim jackass Trump with racial opportunism is that the Clintons mastered that game some twenty years ago.



Graph: capital, a remarkably sore subject in economics despite its place at the theoretical core of capitalism, is well described as control over social resources— in particular, productive resources. The neoliberal epoch has placed most wealth, and with it control over social resources, in a small number of overwhelmingly White hands. The difference between average and median wealth is a measure of this concentration. Through deregulation, financialization, globalization and the concentration of corporate power in the executive suites, Bill Clinton helped build this system of wealth concentration. Through bailouts of Wall Street Barack Obama restored it to power. As the graph suggests, ‘opportunity’ is a non sequitur when a few connected White people own all of the resources. Source: Economic Policy Institute.

The oft-uttered contention that the Clintons are mere racial opportunists while Mr. Trump is a real racist ignores that the Clintons pushed some of the most destructively racist legislation in American history. The argument that they (the Clintons) shouldn't be held to account for legislation they supported undermines the base precept of legal liability used to write it. In other words, the Clinton apologia appears to be that they shouldn't be held to account but the several million poor Blacks imprisoned under legislation they supported should have been. And there is no hyperbole in linking the language, structure and intent of the 1994 Crime Bill to Nazi Law through precedents in Jim Crow.

Finally, the ‘backlash’ thesis proceeds from the premise that there was something worthy of backlash against. There was celebration around the globe when Barack Obama was elected in 2008. And Republicans did spend the next eight years proclaiming that his neoliberal (state-capitalist) policies were ‘socialist.’ But the debased state of American political discourse hardly

makes this so. The more descriptively accurate term for a politician who bails out Wall Street, passes a ‘market-based’ health insurance sales scheme, pushes high-capitalist trade agreements and works to cut social spending is ‘Republican.’

None of this is to give dim tool Trump a pass for fanning the flames of hatred and intolerance. It is to argue that the premise of difference, and therefore that there is refuge in the Democrat Party, is based on ignorance, wishful thinking and delusion. As vile as Mr. Trump is, the governing ideology of the national Democrats’ (paging Antonio Gramsci) revivifies White nationalism through reifying starting positions of asymmetrical economic power (graph above). Race and class repression have grown in lockstep with resurgent capitalism supported most effectively by national Democrats.

Ultimately neoliberalism is for those hearty souls who took Margaret Thatcher’s (and Ayn Rand’s) brain-farts seriously. From Hillary Clinton’s speeches to Wall Street, she appears to have confused prescriptive with descriptive in the sense laid out above— she believed the educated fools in \$3,000 suits who had just killed the global economy were capable of running the world because they still had jobs. This is the very same ‘creative class’ that Barack Obama bailed out Wall Street to save. It also fits Donald Trump’s preference for ‘winners’ over people otherwise able to do a job.

The difference between living in a flawed capitalist democracy and a relentlessly oppressive totalitarian shithole depends more the social space that one occupies than pre-modern social apologetics. The tautological conception of merit favored by national Democrats implies that Blacks suffer from institutional racism because of some deficiency inherent to Blackness. The American ruling class favors this tautology because it legitimates the concentration of wealth and power under the illusion of merit. Neoliberalism, the governing ethos of Washington, links three centuries of White nationalism to capitalism through this circular social apologetics.

Last, a new article in The Nation gives substantive backing to the long held contention that the ‘Russian hacking’ story is complete and utter bullshit. As Julian Assange and others contemporaneously argued, DNC emails were gotten through a leak— through an inside job, and not through a hack by malevolent outsiders. A quick bet is that this will ultimately do for national Democrats what the ‘weapons of mass destruction’ fraud did for the Bushies and the New York Times. The larger question is why grift-o-crats use short-con fabrications when they will still be in full view when the con falls apart? To save the suspense, these are enthusiastically not-gifted people. So much for a meritocracy.