

The political agenda behind the racial politics of the New York Times' Nicholas Kristof

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On Sunday, the *New York Times* published an addendum by columnist Nicholas Kristof to his five-part series “When Whites Just Don’t Get It,” which he produced in 2014 as a racial “soul-searching” exercise in the wake of the crackdown on protests over the police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

The column is part of the *Times*’ broader effort to present race as the all-determining factor in American life, completely tearing the question of racial discrimination from the underlying context of growing social inequality and the global capitalist crisis.

Even as thousands of Americans of every race and ethnicity were protesting in Ferguson and cities across the US against the police violence inflicted on the working class on a daily basis, Kristof and the *Times* were engaged in a campaign to frame police killings as a purely racial issue. They ignored the fact that while blacks are disproportionately the victims of police brutality, the vast majority of those murdered by cops are white, and the killer cops are often African-American or Hispanic.

In Sunday’s column, Kristof again casts police killings in purely racial terms, characterizing the phenomenon as “shootings of unarmed blacks.” Similarly, he implies that the lead poisoning of the Flint, Michigan water supply is racially motivated, ignoring the fact that nearly 40 percent of the city’s impoverished population is white.

Kristof writes that he felt compelled to revisit the subject of racism among whites “because public attention to racial disparities seems to be flagging even as the issues are as grave as ever.” Reading this, one can only wonder what world the *Times* columnist is living in.

There has never been a more relentless drive to make

race the all-consuming issue in American political and intellectual life—a campaign that has been led by what passes for the “left wing” of the establishment. This social-political milieu, grouped around the Democratic Party and incorporating pseudo-left organizations obsessed with identity politics, takes its political and ideological lead from the *Times* and its stable of “human rights” frauds such as Kristof.

What is really concerning Kristof is the growing interest in socialism among workers and youth, black as well as white, and the clear signs that basic class issues—not questions of race or gender—are driving the growth of social opposition to the entire political and corporate establishment. This finds an initial expression in the growth of working class militancy and in the broad support for the campaign of the self-described “socialist” Bernie Sanders—something that was utterly unanticipated by the complacent and privileged pundits on the *Times* editorial staff.

A recent poll found that among those aged 18 to 35, 56.5 percent identified themselves as working class while a recent YouGov survey found that Americans under the age of 30 viewed socialism more favorably than capitalism.

Even more worryingly, Sanders is leading Hillary Clinton amongst young voters, including African-Americans. Exit polling done by Edison Research of the primary contests so far has found that Sanders leads Clinton 51 to 48 percent among black voters between the ages of 17 and 29.

Of course it is not Sanders himself who worries Kristof and the *Times*. They are well aware of his role as a lightning rod for social discontent and political instrument for blocking an independent movement of the working class and channeling opposition back behind the Democratic Party.

It is the political radicalization of the working class that is temporarily finding expression in support for Sanders that petrifies Kristof and company. They sense that the entire ideological edifice of racial politics that has been used for decades to conceal the more fundamental class divide in America and suppress the class struggle is breaking down. It is in opposition to this development that he fires off a new round of race-mongering.

While Kristof cites a number of sociological studies which, he claims, prove the “ubiquitous” and “pervasive” nature of racism in America, he never so much as hints that the plight of poor and working class blacks has anything to do with the capitalist system.

Instead, he portrays racial inequality as the outcome of “unconscious bias among whites who believe in equality but act in ways that perpetuate inequality.” All whites, in other words, are infected with racism. Whether they like it or not, they are “(unintentionally) so much a part of the problem.”

He urges his readers to uncover and confront their own unconscious racial biases by taking a free online implicit association test. Kristof promotes this form of pseudo-scientific “soul searching” as the key to overcoming racial prejudice. This entire approach is as reactionary as it is absurd.

Indeed, Kristof endorses right-wing racial stereotypes that place the onus for the social problems caused by poverty and exploitation on the victims themselves. In his column he praises novelist Toni Morrison for her depiction of “a black world pummeled by discrimination but also by violence, drunkenness and broken families.” He hails as “honest” a recent CNN poll showing that 77 percent of black respondents blame “lack of motivation and unwillingness to work hard” for the difficulties faced by African-Americans.

Racism and racial discrimination are a reality that must be fought and overcome. But if workers are to achieve this, they must understand its objective source. For Kristof and the upper-middle class layers he represents, racism is lodged in the psyche of whites, a result of their racial makeup. They propose more affirmative action programs and set asides for privileged layers of middle-class African-Americans and other minorities.

Affirmative action has been the program of the ruling class for the last 40 years, a period that has seen a

dramatic growth of social inequality throughout American society, and particularly within the African-American population. Out of this has emerged a corrupt layer of black politicians, businesspeople, academics, union bureaucrats, media personalities, “civil rights” officials and others who have benefited from defending a system that has deindustrialized and impoverished cities across the country and driven down the conditions of black workers, in particular, to levels worse than those that prevailed in the 1960s.

The socialist movement has always been in the forefront of the struggle against discrimination, but it has always insisted, as was broadly understood in an earlier period, that it is impossible to fight racism apart from a struggle against capitalism itself, the source of social inequality and class exploitation. The answer to racism is the unification of the working class within the US and internationally in the struggle for socialism.



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