

Black Lives Matter blames “white supremacy” for election of Trump

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On November 15, Black Lives Matter Global Network released a statement on the election of Donald Trump that ignores the facts of the vote to present a false interpretation of American society as one dominated by racial hatred.

This racist narrative goes hand in hand with the endorsement by the top leadership of Black Lives Matter of Democrat Hillary Clinton, whose campaign was based on a combination of personal attacks on Trump, anti-Russian propaganda and the promotion of racial and gender politics.

The statement is a semi-coherent collection of bald and unsubstantiated assertions, non-sequiturs and moralistic declarations. Even apart from its politically reactionary content, it has no intellectual substance and offers no perspective for achieving its stated goal, which is to “end all state-sanctioned violence until all Black Lives Matter.”

The statement is perhaps most remarkable for what it lacks. Names that do not appear include Obama, Clinton and Sanders. Also absent are the words “Democratic” and “Republican.” Other words not to be found include “capitalism,” “unemployment,” “inequality,” “poverty,” “working class,” or any reference to the social crisis in America.

Instead, the authors operate with the abstract and ahistorical terms associated with identity politics. Without citing any evidence, the statement asserts that a “white supremacist” was voted into office by an electorate opposed to “dismantling white supremacy.”

The statement begins by arguing that all of American history is to be interpreted from the standpoint of race and racism: “What is true today—and has been true since the seizure of this land—is that when black people and women build power, white people become resentful. Last week, that resentment manifested itself in the election of a white supremacist to the highest office in American government.”

Further on, the authors state, “We must reckon with the anti-blackness of America’s history that led to this political moment... White supremacy fortified the decision to disregard racism and sexism as serious variables in the outcome of this election.”

They continue: “In the months leading up to this election, we have demanded support from white people in dismantling white supremacy... We feel more than disappointed or angry—we feel

betrayed.”

Black Lives Matter feels betrayed by “white people.” But the organization and the social layers for which it speaks, for all their denunciations of Trump, also see in his election a potential opportunity. They are prepared to accommodate themselves to the new regime so long as they get a cut of the spoils from Trump’s austerity policies.

In an interview with the online news site Quartz, published the very day Black Lives Matter issued its statement on Trump’s election, November 15, spokeswoman and co-founder Patrisse Cullors declared, “This is an opportunity to imagine a black future that we’ve never imagined before.”

The article on Quartz continued: “Ahead of Trump’s inaugural ceremony on Jan. 20, [Cullors] says African-Americans need to organize and decide on their requests for the first year... A new presidency brings sweeping changes to the political landscape, and is a chance to reconsider what’s possible.”

“Cullors wants to train 300 black leaders across the country to get on school boards, city councils, neighborhood councils, and ‘every branch of government,’” the article notes.

After claiming “It was white people who got Trump into office,” Cullors makes overtures to the ruling elite, saying, “There’s too much amazing work in the world that needs to be funded. White people with wealth need to be funding it.”

Evidently, the leaders of Black Lives Matter consider the \$100 million awarded to the organization by the Ford Foundation to be a mere down payment from the corporate oligarchy. This is confirmed by the statement’s reiteration in its final paragraph of the organization’s demand for “reparations” for black people, the vast bulk of which would flow to the layers represented by Black Lives Matter.

The claim that American society is based on white supremacy, widely promoted by academics and purveyors of “critical race theory,” is radically at odds with reality. Black Lives Matter and similar organizations, as well as the various pseudo-left organizations that promote them, never provide a serious answer to a simple question: How could a white supremacist society elect an African-American as president—twice?

In fact, the American ruling elite has over a period of decades

increasingly made use of the politics of race, gender and sexual orientation to divert attention from the fundamental class divide in society and the immense growth of economic inequality. It has, by means of programs such as affirmative action, promoted into political office, corporate administration and the media a privileged upper layer within the African-American and Latino populations and among women to defend the profit system and the capitalist state. The Democratic Party has become the political vehicle for this type of politics, even as it has repudiated social reform policies and linked itself more directly to Wall Street and the military/intelligence apparatus.

As a result, economic and social inequality within minority populations and among women has grown at a faster rate than within the population as a whole. It is for the more privileged layers of the African-American population, including current or aspiring academics, better-off professionals and entrepreneurs who are obsessed with advancing their own careers and economic and social status, that Black Lives Matter speaks. Its racialist program is directed toward obtaining a bigger cut for these layers of the income and wealth of the top 10 percent of society.

Trump openly promotes anti-immigrant chauvinism and anti-Muslim racism, and he made covert appeals to anti-black racism as part of his right-wing pseudo-populist campaign. He has ties, through figures such as his chief strategist Steve Bannon, to white supremacist elements. His election poses very real dangers to the working class. But it is false to say he ran as a white supremacist. Had he done so, ala David Duke, he could not have captured the Republican nomination, and in a general election he would have suffered a massive defeat.

The vast majority of workers and low-income people who voted for Trump were not voting for anti-black racism, war or authoritarianism. They voted for Trump to protest a political establishment in both big business parties that has presided over the devastation of jobs and living standards and a colossal growth of economic inequality. A breakdown of the vote shows that there was no “surge” of white working class votes for Trump, but rather a mass abstention in which the collapse in turnout among traditional Democratic voters—including black, Hispanic and young voters—predominated. (See: “Race, class and the election of Trump” and “The myth of the reactionary white working class”).

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Numerous articles have been published in the establishment press documenting the fact that working class counties in key industrial states such as Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania that voted for the African-American Democratic candidate in 2008 and 2012 went for Trump in 2016, moving those states into the Republican column.

On the other hand, turnout and votes for Clinton among minority and young voters in cities such as Detroit, Cleveland and Milwaukee fell sharply from the totals registered for

Obama in 2012.

Exit polls show that racial issues did not even register among the main concerns of voters. Overwhelmingly, the predominant issue was jobs and the economy. Clinton, who ran as the candidate of the status quo and the continuator of Obama’s legacy, was punished by voters who continued to suffer economically and socially during the two terms of the candidate of “hope” and “change.”

Black Lives Matters’ analysis is not only false and politically reactionary, it is intellectually vacuous. It is full of empty abstractions and moralistic phrases. Thus, the statement on Trump declares: “We’ve asked white people to organize their communities, to courageously help their loved ones understand the importance of solidarity and to show up for us, for themselves and democracy.”

It offers on this basis no coherent or viable strategy to oppose racism, the increased repression and police violence that is certain to come with the installation of Trump in the White House, let alone the intensification of austerity and social cuts. The authors write: “But we ask ourselves—how do we reconcile our vision for future generations’ prosperity with the knowledge that more than half of white voting Americans believe a white supremacist can and should decide what’s best for this country?”

By way of a reply, all they can muster is: “We organize... Civic engagement is one way to engage democracy and our lives don’t revolve around election cycles... We continue to operate from a place of love for our people and a deep yearning for real freedom.”

In other words, moral appeals combined with support for the existing economic and political system in general, and the Democratic Party in particular.

Black Lives Matter is incapable of identifying any objective basis for the unification of working people and youth of all races. In fact, it opposes such a struggle, because it defends the capitalist status quo.

Racial politics have been used throughout American history as a weapon by the ruling class to divide and demobilize the working class to prevent a unified struggle to overthrow capitalism. Today, Black Lives Matter plays a significant and reactionary role in this strategy of divide-and-rule.



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