

In wake of Trump victory: Michael Eric Dyson denounces the “white working class”

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Michael Eric Dyson’s latest column, on the front page of the Sunday, December 18 editorial section of the *New York Times*, extends the venomous attacks of the practitioners of identity politics on those who dare to question the view that race is the fundamental dividing line in American society.

Dyson, a Georgetown University professor, author and regular contributor to the *Times*, headlines his article, “Donald Trump’s Racial Ignorance.” Within a few paragraphs, however, it becomes clear that his real target is not Donald Trump at all, but rather the working class.

Pundits and Democratic politicians alike have struggled to come up with explanations for the evaporation of the Clinton electoral victory they had so confidently predicted. The dominant line, championed by the *Times* and also by both Bill and Hillary Clinton in recent weeks, is that “Russian hacking” and the last-minute intervention of FBI Director James Comey on the issue of Clinton’s emails combined to deliver key battleground states to the Republican nominee.

Many millions of people are not buying this unlikely explanation, however. In the weeks since the election, it has become increasingly clear that Trump’s success was due largely to his ability to pose as the “anti-establishment candidate,” a pose made possible only by both the reactionary record of the Obama administration and the right-wing campaign of Hillary Clinton.

Major sections of the corporate media and the ruling elite, committed to the identity politics strategy that was, along with war-mongering against Russia, the sum total of Clinton’s campaign, have mounted a defense of their racist and gender-based appeals, even as they continue their hysteria on Russian hacking and its supposedly enormous impact.

Dyson is part of the identity politics counterattack. There is only one subject he wishes to discuss, and that is race. He accuses Trump of “not knowing” black people, but then he continues, “Mr. Trump is not alone in this deliberate ignorance, as postelection calls on the left to forget about identity politics have shown. ... The road ahead is not easy, primarily because Mr. Trump’s ignorance about race, his critical lack of nuance and learning about it, exists among liberals and the white left, too.”

Dyson zeroes in on 2016 presidential aspirant Bernie Sanders, who won more than 13 million votes in the primaries, only slightly fewer than Clinton, by declaring himself a “democratic socialist” and calling for a “political revolution” against the billionaires.

“From the start of his 2016 presidential campaign,” Dyson writes, “Bernie Sanders was prickly about race, uncomfortable with an outspoken, demanding blackness, resistant to letting go of his preference for discussing class over race. ... Mr. Sanders seemed to remain at heart a man of the people, especially if those people were the white working class.”

One should note the sarcasm with which Dyson drops the phrase “man of the people.” He portrays himself as a representative of “black America,” but Dyson is, in fact, a political representative of only one thin section of the African-American population, the upper-middle class. The *Times* columnist owes his allegiance to the ruling elite and has nothing but contempt for the working class of all races and ethnicities.

Dyson is outraged at Sanders’s timid recent suggestion that it may be necessary to “go beyond identity politics.” He quotes Sanders as saying that it is “very easy for many Americans to say, I hate racism, I hate homophobia, I hate sexism,” but “a little bit harder for people in the middle or upper-middle class to say,

maybe we do have to deal with the greed of Wall Street.”

This, according to Dyson, is “a nifty bit of historical revisionism,” since, he claims, “for the longest time there was little consideration of diversity...among liberal elites.”

It is Dyson who is guilty of revisionism, if not worse. For more than 40 years, the US ruling class has embraced the mantra of diversity and programs such as affirmative action. Far from liberal elites avoiding this approach, it has been a key element of the social counterrevolution over the past four decades: attacking the jobs and living standards of the working class while elevating a privileged layer of blacks, Latinos, women and gays into the ranks of corporate management, political office, academia, the labor bureaucracy and the media.

The ruling class and both capitalist parties, beginning with Nixon’s “black capitalism” almost five decades ago, have fomented divisions on the basis of race. Nixon combined his cynical use of “affirmative action” with the notorious “Southern strategy,” aimed at shifting the remnants of the Jim Crow establishment to the Republican Party. This was followed by various other techniques, including the law-and-order campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s.

Meanwhile, the Democrats, reflecting the impossibility of any program of even modest social reform under decaying American capitalism, abandoned even the hint of an appeal to workers based on the defense and extension of the social programs of the 1930s and 1960s. The two parties worked out an unspoken and filthy division of labor, in which the Democrats were allowed to posture as defenders of the black, Hispanic and immigrant population, while white workers were increasingly labeled as “privileged” and ceded to the Republicans.

Bernie Sanders is, of course, no representative of the working class. His differences with both Clinton and Dyson are only tactical. Sanders meekly accepted the nomination of Clinton and obediently lined up in support of her campaign. And he is continuing his efforts, after the election fiasco for the Democrats, to channel mass opposition to Trump and Wall Street back into this party of big business and war.

It is not primarily Sanders that worries Dyson. He cannot forget the millions who voted for Sanders

precisely because of the fact that, in Dyson’s words, he was guilty of “discussing class over race.” All these voters—masses of workers and young people—not to mention the even greater number who didn’t vote because they were thoroughly disgusted with both big-business parties, were not “turned off” by the talk of “class.” Dyson’s attack on Sanders for daring to speak of “the greed of Wall Street” makes very clear his own alignment—with Wall Street.

Dyson closes with an attack on “working class solidarity,” which he calls “a cover...to combat racial, sexual and gender progress.” Here he makes explicit his hostility to the working class and his use of racial politics to attack and divide the working class on behalf of the ruling elite.

Dyson and the whole layer for which he speaks fear that the decades in which identity politics has been largely unchallenged except by the Marxist movement are coming to an end. The identity politics industry that has provided so many perks and privileges in academia and elsewhere will find itself under siege from the left, from a genuine movement of the working class and the resurgence of the class struggle.

Those disgusted by the identity politics campaign of Hillary Clinton were by no means confined to white workers, some of whom voted for Trump in protest or disgust. Millions of black, Hispanic and immigrant workers stayed home (and some even voted for Trump), because they were also disgusted with eight years of growing inequality and continuous war under Obama, and Clinton’s promise to continue his policies.

It is the stirrings in the working class that have Dyson and the editors and publishers of the *Times*, along with the rest of the media, increasingly worried. They are working overtime to change the subject from class to race, from the collapse of the vote for the Wall Street Democrats to the supposed “whitelash” that elected Trump.



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