

Fascist violence and the politics of race and racism

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The mass shootings in the United States over the weekend, according to the banner headline in Monday's edition of the *New York Times*, have shaken "a bewildered nation to its core." The massacres in El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio "were enough," the *Times* continued, "to leave the public stunned and shaken."

It is not clear how the editors of the *Times* were able to determine, within hours, the mood of 340 million people. There may be, of course, a certain degree of confusion and bewilderment, as there always is amidst such shocking events. But "bewilderment" is far from being the only, let alone dominant, response. There have been too many mass killings over the last two decades for the citizenry to be merely bewildered. There is a good deal of anger and outrage. People are sick and tired of hearing politicians respond to these eruptions of mass murder with the usual shopworn platitudes. On Sunday night, Ohio's Republican governor, Mike DeWine, was shouted down by participants at a vigil held in Dayton.

In any case, to the extent that there is "bewilderment"—that is, confusion as to the reasons for these murderous outbursts—the *New York Times* and the rest of the establishment media have done everything in their power to disorient and mislead the public.

In place of a serious examination of the social and political environment that has led to the resurgence of fascist violence, the *Times* and most influential sections of the capitalist media assert that the essential cause of the mass killings is to be found in a pervasive and organic racism that is an all but inborn and ineradicable component of "white" identity.

In the headline to its lead editorial on Monday, the *Times* declares, "We Have a White Nationalist Terrorist Problem." The phrase "white nationalist" or "white

nationalism" appears 20 times in an editorial devoted to demands for a "war on terror"-style campaign. However, there is only a passing and incidental reference to fascism and Nazism. A *racialist* appraisal of the source of the violence takes the place of a *political* explanation.

The same issue of the *Times* contains an opinion piece by Melanye Price, author of *The Race Whisperer: Barack Obama and the Political Uses of Race*. Under the headline, "Racism is Everyone's Problem," Price writes that Trump has "chosen to use issues like immigration, crime and the census to foment racial fears among whites." Real remedies to the situation "require a frank discussion with people who perpetrate racism and who benefit from racist policies."

Those who "benefit" from racist policies, according to Price, are what she repeatedly refers to as "white people." She expresses hope that presidential candidates will discuss "how white privilege and racism have shaped this country so profoundly that some whites cannot even see the ways that they are recipients of racist benefits." That is, "white people" are universal beneficiaries of "white privilege" and racism, even if they proclaim their opposition to racism.

Of course, racism exists, as do white supremacists, but the concept of a "white race" or a "white nation" is nonsensical from either a biological or historically informed standpoint. There are no interests that unify all "white people," a category that obscures the immense class divisions that characterize American society.

While fascistic organizations have as yet very limited support, the *racialist* narrative of the *Times* serves to provide them with political legitimacy and present them as genuine representatives of "white people." This is

accompanied by the promotion of the myth of “white privilege,” which is intended to cut across and undermine a sense of class-based solidarity.

This is hardly a new theme for the *Times*, though it has been advanced with increasing ferocity over the past five years. In November 2016, five days before Trump’s election, the *Times*’ Amanda Taub declared that the Trump campaign was the product of a “crisis of white identity” brought on by the fact that “working class whites,” who had previously been “doubly blessed,” were now seeing their privileges revoked.

Hillary Clinton based her 2016 election campaign on reactionary racist identity politics, along with the associated claims of irreconcilable divisions along the lines of gender and sexual orientation. The claims about “rape culture” prevailing among men, of patriarchy, which have developed into the #MeToo campaign, serve a similar function. It is a perspective that is contemptuous of the interests of the working class as a whole.

It was Clinton’s refusal to make any appeal to the interests of the working class during the 2016 elections that paved the way for the election of Trump. The racist politics of the Democrats blew up in their face in 2016, but they are doubling down now.

The political provenance of the language employed by the *Times* is the political right, not the left. As the WSWS noted at the time, the column by Taub “cavalierly and recklessly makes assertions about ‘whiteness’ and ‘white people’s’ beliefs and fears in a manner that bears far greater resemblance to the outpourings of an Alfred Rosenberg, Nazi ideologist, than to any democratic tradition in the US.”

At an earlier stage of American liberalism, Martin Luther King, Jr. expressed widely held views when he noted in 1961 that the idea of “intrinsic differences” between the races “has been contrived by outsiders who seek to impose disunity by dividing brothers because the color of their skin has a different shade.”

Ideas have consequences, and the promotion of the politics of race—from both sides of the political establishment—is metastasizing into overt acts of violence. If the *Times* is right, that the world is divided into separate races with distinct and antagonistic interests, the logical conclusion would be some form of racial separatism, which is precisely what Patrick Crusius, the fascist-minded El Paso shooter,

himself proposes.

The promotion of racial politics is driven by a very conscious political agenda, which has been theoretically prepared over decades. It has its origins in the anti-Marxist and postmodernist thinkers who insisted that class had been replaced by race and gender as the central mechanisms of repression. These reactionary denials of the “ontological primacy of the working class” have not only proven to be politically wrong—class antagonisms are more intense now than ever—they have become central in the functioning of bourgeois politics.

The politics of race is the politics of oligarchy. Neither the racism of Trump nor the identity politics of the *Times* represents the interests of the working class, of any “race.” It is the politics of a ruling class that is, in one form or another, seeking to divide workers against each other. The fight against fascism and racism is the fight to unify all sections of the working class against capitalism. All efforts to deny this basic truth are politically reactionary.



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