

Democrats promote “white privilege” fiction to block united working class response to fascist coup plot

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Within hours of the storming of the US Capitol by fascistic supporters of President Donald Trump on January 6, the Democratic Party and allied corporate media began pumping out statements framing the attempted coup entirely in racial terms.

Spearheaded by President-elect Joe Biden and other Democratic politicians, and amplified by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, major television networks and nominally “left” online publications aligned with the Democrats, the flood of racialist commentary has continued unabated.

On January 11, Hillary Clinton published one of the most reactionary examples of this genre on the website of the *Washington Post*. Squarely placing the blame for the fascist coup attempt on “white people,” she wrote that the storming of the Capitol was “the tragically predictable result of white-supremacist grievances fueled by President Trump.”

Clinton went on to demand the removal of “white supremacy” and “extremism” from America, making an implicit amalgam between the fascistic right and left-wing opponents of capitalism. She called for increased internet censorship and new state and federal criminal laws to track “the activities of extremists.”

In an op-ed piece published January 13, headlined “White Riot,” *New York Times* columnist Thomas B. Edsall made more explicit the central theme of such racialist propaganda: it is white workers who are the main bulwark of racism.

Using a standard journalistic euphemism for white workers—“non-college white Americans”—Edsall wrote:

There is evidence that many non-college white Americans who have been undergoing what psychiatrists call “involuntary subordination” or “involuntary defeat” both resent and mourn their loss of centrality and what they perceive as their growing invisibility.

The racialist interpretation of the coup attempt is part of a broader effort to conceal its connection to the herd immunity policies of the ruling class. Both big business parties and the corporate media are silent on the fact that the fascistic rallies last spring and summer at state capitols across the country were organized around the demand to lift all restrictions on businesses that had been imposed to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

Blaming the January 6 coup attempt on “white privilege” obscures the fact that the far-right movement that culminated in the attempt to kidnap and kill lawmakers in order to block the inauguration of Biden originated in a movement of enraged small businessmen and backward workers whose demands coincided with the policy of the corporate-financial

oligarchy to let the pandemic rip.

Not only Trump, but also the Republican National Committee and prominent national and state Republican officials supported the anti-lockdown events, which included armed fascists carrying Nazi insignia and Confederate flags. The rallies were linked to organizations funded by far-right billionaires such as the Koch brothers, the Coors family and Betsy DeVos, until last week Trump’s education secretary. The armed fascist occupation of the Michigan Capitol on April 30 led to the plot to kidnap and assassinate the Michigan governor that was exposed in October.

In promoting this racialist libel against the working class, its proponents seize on the contrast between the generally supportive treatment of the pro-Trump insurrectionists by the police and the brutal repression meted out to anti-police violence protesters last spring and summer. This is to be explained, they claim, not by the far-right politics of the pro-Trump mob, widely supported by the police, but by the rioters’ skin color—overwhelmingly white.

MSNBC commentator Joy Reid declared on the day of the assault on the Capitol: “White Americans aren’t afraid of the cops. White Americans are never afraid of the cops, even when they’re committing an insurrection.”

Ibram X. Kendi, the best-selling author of the racialist tract *How to Be an Antiracist*, tweeted: “White privilege is on display like never before in the US Capitol.”

One function of this racialist narrative is to divert attention from the conspiracy within the highest levels of the capitalist state that led to the events of January 6—and the ongoing preparations for further efforts to overthrow the Constitution and establish dictatorial rule.

“There is nothing new here,” these proponents of racial politics are suggesting, just more of the same old racism. One of the most filthy commentaries along these lines is the article “Whiteness is at the core of the insurrection,” written by Fabiola Cineas and posted January 8 by *Vox*.

Cineas wrote: “There are many details that remain unclear about botched protocol on Wednesday—why the National Guard wasn’t activated sooner, why police reportedly had no intelligence on what the extremists had planned. But the fact that people are searching for answers as to why white people attempted to claim what they believed they own proves that white supremacy is functioning as it always has: unfiltered and out in the open.”

In other words, the stand-down by the D.C. Capitol Police and the Pentagon’s hours-long delay in dispatching National Guard troops against the rioters were simply a matter of “botched protocol.” Any call for a serious, full and public investigation of the coup and the forces that organized and facilitated it, moreover, should be seen as evidence of “white privilege,” if not outright racism.

All those who promote the racialist narrative ignore certain obvious facts that contradict it. First, the majority of those who participated in the nationwide and international demonstrations last spring and summer in response to the police murder of George Floyd were white. The protests were multiracial and multiethnic, and gave expression to the deep-seated democratic sentiment and hostility to racism that predominate in the working class and among the youth.

The majority of those who were beaten, maced, arrested and even “disappeared” by police, National Guard troops and federal paramilitaries were white. Among those killed in the course of the protests was Michael Reinoehl, the victim of a state assassination ordered by Trump and celebrated by both him and his attorney general, William Barr. Reinoehl was white. The two Kenosha, Wisconsin, anti-police violence demonstrators who were shot dead by the fascist vigilante Kyle Rittenhouse (working in collaboration with the police)—Joseph Rosenbaum and Anthony Huber—were also white.

The fiction of “white privilege”

More fundamentally, the central premise of the racialist narrative—the existence and all-pervasive role of “white privilege”—is contradicted by the realities of American society. Over the past four decades, the broad mass of white workers in the United States have suffered a disastrous decline in their living standards, along with their fellow African American and Latino workers.

The American ruling class has responded to economic globalization and the decline in the world position of US capitalism with a ruthless and unremitting class war offensive against the entire working class. Deindustrialization has devastated former industrial centers such as Detroit, Chicago, Youngstown and hundreds of other cities and towns.

Mass unemployment, wage-cutting, speedup, the rise of the “gig” economy—carried out with the full support of the pro-corporate trade unions—have destroyed economic security, slashed real wages and gutted health benefits and pensions for all sections of the working class. These attacks have been implemented under both Republican and Democratic administrations, including the Obama administration, and enforced by black governors and mayors no less brutally than their white counterparts.

This social counterrevolution was intensified during and after the Great Recession of 2008–2009, and is being escalated once again under the cover of the pandemic. The impact has been particularly devastating on white workers. In recent years, drug addition, suicides and mortality rates have risen more sharply, and life expectancy has fallen more rapidly, among middle-aged whites than among blacks. This is largely due to a drastic increase in so-called “deaths of despair,” i.e., those caused by suicide, drug overdose or alcohol.

In 2016, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that a decline in US life expectancy in 2014 was largely the result of increased death rates for white men and women from their mid-20s to their mid-50s, the prime years of adulthood, when death rates are typically low. “The increase in death in this segment of the population was great enough to affect life expectancy at birth for the whole group,” a researcher told the *New York Times*. “That is very unusual.”

In 2017, Princeton University economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton, who have researched rising mortality rates in the US, reported that midlife mortality for middle-aged, working-class, white Americans surpassed midlife mortality for all African Americans for the first time in 2008, and by 2015 mortality for working class whites was 30 percent higher than for blacks.

The CDC found that white Americans and Native Americans had the

highest suicide rates between 2000 and 2015, and that the drug overdose rate for whites had more than tripled since 1999 and was more than double the rate for blacks and Hispanics combined.

No state has been more tragically impacted than West Virginia, where the number of working coal miners has been reduced from 100,000 to just 20,000 today. West Virginia is 94 percent white.

It has the sixth highest official poverty rate in the country, at 16 percent, including a child poverty rate of 25 percent. The state government estimates extreme poverty at 11 percent and food insecurity at 14.8 percent.

In 2019, the state’s median household income was an estimated \$48,850 in 2019, \$16,862 below the national average. This was the second lowest median household income among the 50 states.

No state has been harder hit by the opioid crisis than West Virginia, with 58.7 deaths per 100,000 residents—two-and-a-half times the national average. Opioid-related deaths in West Virginia increased *fivefold* in 12 years—rising from 10.5 deaths per 100,000 in 2005 to 57.8 in 2017. In that year, West Virginia had the highest rate of deaths of despair among the 50 states, at 81 deaths per 100,000.

More current data from this summer shows a further sharp rise in hardship across the state:

- 11.8 percent of adults reported that their household sometimes or often didn’t have enough to eat in the last seven days.

- 17.0 percent of adults with children reported that their kids sometimes or often didn’t eat enough in the last seven days because they couldn’t afford to provide adequate food.

- 29.0 percent of all children in West Virginia live in a family that is either not getting enough to eat or is behind on housing payments.

Once a bastion of the United Mine Workers of America and the Democratic Party, decades of betrayals by the pro-corporate UMWA and policies of austerity and war by the Democrats as well as the Republicans, particularly under Obama, produced a mood of anger, frustration and desperation that led to lopsided majorities for Trump in 2016 and 2020. At the same time, rank-and-file West Virginia teachers struck across the state in February 2018, in defiance of the teachers’ unions. The West Virginia strike sparked a wave of wildcat strikes by educators across the US.

It is this colossal social polarization—based on class, not race—that drives the ruling elite in the US and around the world to abandon what remains of democratic institutions and turn toward dictatorship, war and fascism. A society in which the richest three billionaires have more wealth than the bottom half of the population is a society that is not compatible with democratic forms of rule.

These socioeconomic and class divisions have grown within minority populations, including the African American population, even more starkly than within US society as a whole. The US Federal Reserve published a report in September 2017 showing that social inequality in the US had grown to record levels over the previous decade. The data also showed that the growth of social inequality was most acute within racial minorities. Over the course of the previous 10 years, affluent African Americans had seen their wealth soar at the expense of the working class of all races.

In an analysis of the data, the *World Socialist Web Site* noted that during the Obama years, wealth for the top one percent of African Americans and Latinos soared, while declining for the bottom 99 percent within those groups. The WSWS wrote:

Among both African-American and Latino populations, roughly

65 percent own zero percent of the total wealth owned by their respective racial groups. The richest 10 percent of African-Americans own 75.3 percent of all wealth owned by African-Americans; the richest 10 percent of Latinos own 77.9 percent of all Latino wealth; and 74.6 percent of the wealth owned by whites is owned by the top 10 percent of whites.

The level of inequality within racial groups has skyrocketed since the coming to power of Barack Obama. Over the course of his presidency, from 2007 to 2016, the top 1 percent of African-Americans increased its share from 19.4 percent to 40.5 percent. Among Latinos, the top 1 percent increased its share from 30.7 to 44.7. The figure also increased among whites, but less dramatically, from 31.9 to 36.5.

The enrichment of black business people, politicians, academics, union bureaucrats and other upper-middle class and bourgeois layers is the economic basis for their promotion of race as the dominant social category rather than class. It is the ideological and political reflection of their own class interests, rooted in the defense of capitalism and opposition to socialist revolution.

The global crisis of capitalism and the international class struggle

But there is another and opposite side of this process—the growth of the class struggle and anti-capitalist sentiment in the working class. The most dominant and revolutionary feature of the revival of the class struggle is its international character, rooted in the global character of modern-day capitalism. Both social polarization and the commonality of conditions facing the international working class have been intensified and laid bare as never before by the coronavirus pandemic.

Workers of all races, nationalities and ethnicities are being sacrificed to the “herd immunity” policy of the capitalist class, anchored in the economic interests of the financial oligarchies. This homicidal policy is creating the conditions for an international eruption of revolutionary working class struggles without historical precedent.

Marxism is a science. It bases its analysis of social and political developments and its program for the working class on a historically informed, materialist understanding of the actual structure, contradictions and dynamic of economic life. Capitalism is based on the extraction of surplus value by the owners of the means of production from the exploitation of the labor of the working class—the class of people who are compelled to sell their ability to work, their labor power, to their capitalist exploiters, in return for a wage. It is, as Marx explained, a system of wage slavery.

But the contradictions inherent in this system make inevitable a revolutionary confrontation between the two main classes, the capitalists and the workers, who, in objective terms, stand opposed to one another in irreconcilable conflict. Today, more than ever, the correctness of Marxism and its conception of class struggle and the role of the working class as the leading revolutionary force in society are being borne out. And more than ever, the international character of the class struggle is being demonstrated.

The Democratic Party has long spearheaded the effort of the American ruling class to combat socialism and class consciousness in the working class by making racial and identity politics the cornerstone of its program. This has coincided with the Democrats’ abandonment of any program of social reform and adoption of the right-wing policies of social counterrevolution inaugurated by Reagan.

Those who advocate the racialist narrative, despite their insistence that there is no social issue more urgent than the eradication of “white privilege,” have no viable perspective to fight racism or, for that matter, any other attack on democratic rights. If their claim that fascism reflects the social interests of white people is true, then there is no reason to believe it can be defeated. After all, blacks comprise only 13.4 percent of the US population.

In the end, they are reduced to making a moral appeal to white people, whom they define as inherently racist, to stop being racist.

There is a real and powerful basis for defeating racism, fascism and all forms of political reaction and defending democratic rights. It is the development of the class struggle as a unified and international revolutionary movement against capitalism and for socialism.

Historically, conceptions of society and politics that sought to make race or nationality the driving force of history, rather than class, have been associated with the politics of the far-right, including fascism. The fact that such conceptions are central to the politics of what passes for liberalism and the “left” today only demonstrates how right-wing these tendencies actually are.

The racialist narrative has three interrelated purposes: (1) to divert attention from the fundamental class contradictions, expressed in unprecedented levels of social inequality, underlying the collapse of American democracy and the promotion of fascistic forces, (2) to channel mass opposition among workers and young people behind the Democratic Party, and (3) to divide the working class—the target of the police state buildup and the social force capable of defeating it through mass revolutionary action directed against the capitalist system.

This right-wing political falsification objectively aids not the defenders of democratic rights, but the promoters of fascism, such as Trump, who are hell bent on destroying them.



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