

Adapting to middle-class racial politics

Cornel West selects Black Lives Matter promoter Melina Abdullah as running mate

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12 April 2024

In an appearance on the Wednesday morning edition of *The Tavis Smiley Show*, independent presidential candidate Cornel West revealed that his running mate will be Melina Abdullah, a tenured professor at California State University, Los Angeles, co-founder of the Los Angeles chapter of Black Lives Matter (BLM), and founder of Black Lives Matter Grassroots (BLMGR).

West and Abdullah have placed their racial identity and religion front and center. In a campaign statement announcing his selection, West cited Abdullah's "unique Black analysis," which he claimed "helps us confront our crumbling era of empire, white supremacy, and patriarchy."

In his interview with Smiley, West declared, "I'm running for Jesus, she's running for Allah!" Abdullah said in the same interview that after West invited her to be his running mate, it "felt as if God was speaking to me."

Unlike the two official ruling class parties, West, like all third-party candidates, is obligated to name a running mate before he can begin petitioning for signatures to be on the ballot in November in many states. In one of the many anti-democratic obstacles placed in front of third parties by the Democrats and Republicans, over half of US states (26), and the District of Columbia, require third-party candidates to name a running mate before petitioning for ballot access.

In choosing Abdullah, (née Reimann), West is deliberately amplifying the politics of racial division, practiced and propagated by the upper-middle class and the Democratic Party.

While presenting herself almost exclusively as a "Black woman," Abdullah is the daughter of John Reimann, a non-practicing Jewish person born in New York in 1946.

Abdullah's paternal grandfather, and John's father, was Günter Reimann (born Hans Steinicke), a German-Jewish Marxist economist who fled Germany during the rise of Adolf Hitler. As a teenager, Günter wrote for Rosa Luxemburg and

Karl Liebknecht's *Die Rote Fahne* (*The Red Banner*), the press organ of the Spartacus League in Germany. Following the January 1919 assassinations of Liebknecht and Luxemburg, the paper continued to be published by the Communist Party of Germany until Hitler came to power in 1933.

Günter died in 2005. John is still a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, with which Abdullah also has close relations. On his personal blog, Reimann advocates US funding for the US/NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

Unlike her grandfather, Abdullah rejects a class-based analysis. Prior to founding BLM-Los Angeles, Abdullah chaired the Pan-African Studies Department at California State University. In her 2003 dissertation, titled, "Greater than the sum of her parts: A multi-axis analysis of Black women and political representation," Abdullah advanced the "intersectional" and post-modernist framework that has served as the bedrock of Democratic Party ideology for decades.

Arguing for politics based on racialism and mysticism, Abdullah claimed:

Black women stand at the intersection of race and gender, their identity cannot be wholly defined simply by the sum total of race disadvantage and gender disadvantage; a third position of disadvantage is birthed at the intersection which cannot be divided out and attributed to either the race axis or the gender axis alone.

"Thus," Abdullah postulated, "Black women are in the unique position of being full members of their gender group, their racial group and the group of Black women." Ergo:

Black women representatives are uniquely qualified to

serve as authentic representatives for Blacks (regardless of gender), women (regardless of race), and Black women.

Ten years after writing her dissertation, Abdullah would go on to become a leading member and organizer of the Black Lives Matter organization. From the 2012 killing of Trayvon Martin to today, BLM leaders, including Abdullah, have repeatedly intervened in protests against police violence to sow illusions in reforming the police by “defunding” them and appealing to Democratic Party politicians. At the same time, BLM falsely presents police violence, which affects workers and poor people of all ethnicities, in purely racial terms.

By deliberately covering up the class role of police in capitalist society, Abdullah and BLM seek to block the development of a class-based movement against police violence, which is an international phenomenon.

Abdullah and the reactionary and self-centered politics that dominate BLM found expression in the scandal that engulfed the leadership of the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation (BLMGNF) following the resignation of co-founder Patrisse Cullors in 2021.

In 2022, Abdullah sued BLMGNF, claiming the organization pilfered money and misused donations. This included the purchase of a \$6 million mansion in Los Angeles, which served as the setting for an infamous video featuring Abdullah and fellow BLM leaders Alicia Garza and Cullors. In the video, Cullors, Garza and Abdullah dine on hors d’oeuvres and sip champagne while complaining about the hardships they endured collecting some \$90 million in donations between 2020 and 2021.

In 2023, a Los Angeles judge dismissed Abdullah’s lawsuit against BLMGNF and ordered her to pay Shalomyah Bowers, an executive of the organization, over \$100,000 in legal fees.

Abdullah is almost a caricature of identity politics. If one didn’t know any better, one would think her entire public persona was performance art. For years on her Twitter/X account, Abdullah, posting under the handle @DocMellyMel, has advanced reactionary Black nationalist, pro-capitalist and, frankly, racist conceptions.

Abdullah has repeatedly tweeted in favor of “Black liberation” via the boycotting of “white corporations.” Last November, she tweeted the hashtag, “Build Black, Buy Black, Bank Black.”

Abdullah makes a practice of tweeting in favor of racial separatism despite the fact much of her family is white. In a

July 6, 2019 tweet, Abdullah complained that she was “compelled to step off the sidewalk three times during my 30-minute walk so that White folks and their dogs could pass.” She continued: “Got me feeling like #gentrification is #JimCrow revisited.”

In a June 18, 2021 tweet, Abdullah wrote that “White folks don’t get to come to the #Juneteenth barbecue,” which she clarified in a later tweet was a “CELEBRATION DAY for Black people” and “PAY REPARATIONS DAY for white folks...”

During the 2020 Democratic presidential debates, Abdullah declared, “Nobody White should ever refer to the nation of Niger. Periodt. (sic)”

Just over two months ago, on February 11, Abdullah tweeted, “Why do I feel like it’s slightly racist to be a Taylor Swift fan?” When a user responded that “everything and everyone is racist,” Abdullah responded, “Nope. Only white people can be racist.”

Predictably, Abdullah is a fan of the *New York Times*’ “1619 Project,” a racist falsification of American history. The project postulated, among many falsehoods, that “Black people alone” fought back against racism and slavery. In January 2023, Abdullah favorably tweeted quotes from the main author of the “1619 Project,” Nikole Hannah-Jones, when Jones was promoting the Hulu television adaptation of the project in Los Angeles.

Like West, Abdullah has abandoned any fight against the ongoing spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, and has even expressed anti-vaccine sentiments. In September 2020, she tweeted, “Who’s gonna be first in line to get the rushed, untested COVID-19 vaccine? #NotIt #PresidentialDebate2020.”

There is nothing remotely progressive, let alone left-wing, in the black nationalist and anti-Marxist campaign of West and Abdullah. Workers and youth interested in ending police violence and the genocide in Gaza must be armed with a political perspective that is aimed not at racial division, but at uniting the international working class in a mass movement against the source of police violence, war, inequality, racism and fascism—the capitalist system.



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