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## What is the United States of America?



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Brett Kavanaugh was confirmed to a lifetime appointment on the Supreme Court despite being creditably accused of [multiple sexual assaults](#) and appearing to commit [perjury](#). He will almost definitely make [a number of decisions](#) that serve to erode the [accountability](#) of big business in general and our Molester-In-Chief in particular.

All of this is deeply troubling and it's been reassuring to see the level of outrage across the country. But there's a deeper conflict going on here, one over a simple question: What is the United States of America?

Is the USA the home of the free? A settler colonial state? A country of equality? Or a place where [Latina women earn only 54% of what white men do](#), where the state [smiles on police killings of black people](#), and where a [handful of billionaires control the majority of resources](#) and poor people [scrounge to survive](#)?

Socialist organizers like myself have a set of answers to these questions. The USA is a patriarchal, colonial, oligarchic state built on dispossession of native peoples, on slavery, continuing exclusion of people of color, and on undervaluing, objectifying and profiting from women's bodies. Gender privilege, race privilege and class privilege are the remnants of systems that were designed to enrich the very few. In meaningful ways, those systems have not ended.

Up until now, those answers were in opposition to the answers of the people in charge. Those people (almost all of them rich white men of both major political parties) looked at the same set of data and came to different conclusions.

“Colonialism committed many crimes, but that’s all in the past,” they might say. “And besides, Native people and the descendants of slaves have access to modern comforts now, that they wouldn’t have had otherwise. Capitalist economics may not be great, but it’s doing much better than the Soviet Union did. Yes there are problems, but things are in general trending up. We have equality of opportunity if not outcome. Yes there are centuries of discrimination to overcome but we’re moving towards a more just and multicultural future. Maybe not as fast as you socialists would like.” (At this point in the discussion I’d usually feel a little condescending pat on the head.) “Women are already in the boardroom and other places of power. Free trade and globalization will make these divisions meaningless in the long run.”

My debates with neoliberal elites are not about values. We all agree (or pretend to agree) that liberty, equality and justice are worthy ideals. We also agree on the data – they are intent on spinning the facts, not denying them. But where I see a need for radical social transformation, they at most see a need for minor adjustments to a status quo that works pretty well. (For them at least.)

The Trump era – and this Kavanaugh moment – is in some ways similar. We don’t disagree on the facts. No one who saw Kavanaugh’s performance on October 4 should doubt that this person is capable of belligerence and using violence to get what he wants. In addition to the allegations of sexual assault, his own [friends](#) and [colleagues](#) say that this guy should not be anywhere near the Supreme Court. And Trump himself has [bragged](#)

[about sexual assault](#). [Lindsey Graham](#), [Susan Collins](#) and others are simply lying when they say that there's no credible evidence against Kavanaugh. And they know it.

And therein lies the difference between Trumpist leaders and those of an earlier era. We don't disagree on the facts and we don't even disagree on the spin. Kavanaugh got away with it; they believe he has the right to. As does Trump. The USA means rich white men in charge – they should be; it's their birthright. History has winners and losers. They are the winners. Trump [avoided or evaded](#) taxes? Of course he did, taxes are for chumps. What are you gonna do about it?

The arrogance and bravado is the same whether they are talking about sexual assault, tax avoidance or global warming.

When faced with this attitude, it is tempting to join the chorus from the centre decrying the evil men who don't even aspire to democracy and equality. But did we really have more democracy and equality when those in the political center paid lip service to it?

Instead of joining the mainstream, the socialist left should be following grassroots movements who have long been calling for transformational change. That means challenging the system where it matters – minimum wages, maximum wages, worker-owned businesses, universal good quality free healthcare and education, cracking down on the tax avoiders who should be paying for these policies, and ending mass incarceration, the military-industrial complex, and corporate welfare. There's no shortage of transformative policy proposals; there is a shortage of political will on all sides to take these projects forward.

Politics in the age of Trump means supporting movements that are building a new set of institutions within which transparency, accountability, democracy and justice are more important than the "rights" of the few to rule over the many. Those institutions need to be asshole-proof. Over-privileged men should not be able to co-opt and control those new institutions. Those working within and outside of the left of the Democratic party – like the [Democratic Socialists of America](#) – have their work cut out for them. Transformation needs to go mainstream and fast. As does accountability for the rich and powerful.

If other Democrats – those who occupy the current mainstream and see themselves as guardians of the status quo – are willing to be allies in that process they are more than welcome to pick up a picket sign, send emails to their lists and make phone calls like the rest of us.