

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

by ROB URIE
29.06.2020

Racism and the Neoliberal Consensus



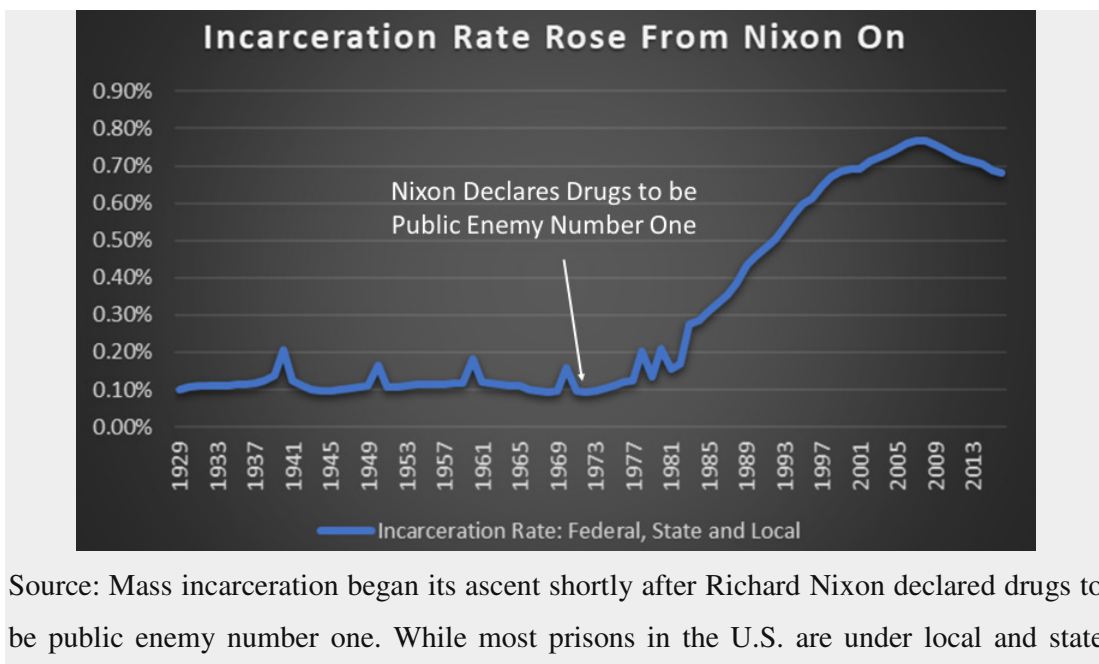
Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

A political line was drawn in 2016 when Hillary Clinton asked: 'if we broke up the big banks tomorrow, would that end racism?' With history erased, the question is a non sequitur. When it is considered, Wall Street was financier to the slave trade and money launderer for it. Leading up to the crisis of 2008, Wall Street securitized predatory loans made at high interest rates to blacks because of their historic exclusion from access to

credit. When the housing bubble turned to bust, Wall Street disappeared a generation or more of black wealth through foreclosures organized by America's first black President, Barack Obama.

In the midst of protests and the reinvigorated Black Lives Matter movement, race is once again being put forward as the social axis most in need of rectification. From the perspective of 'racial capital,' the ills of capitalism can't be meaningfully addressed until white supremacy has been defeated. From a left perspective grounded in Marx and history, race is a product of capitalism, not its cause. The economic relationships of indentured servitude and slavery both preceded the concept of race. And the iterative view begins with economic relationships to claim that at some point race became a causal factor in itself.

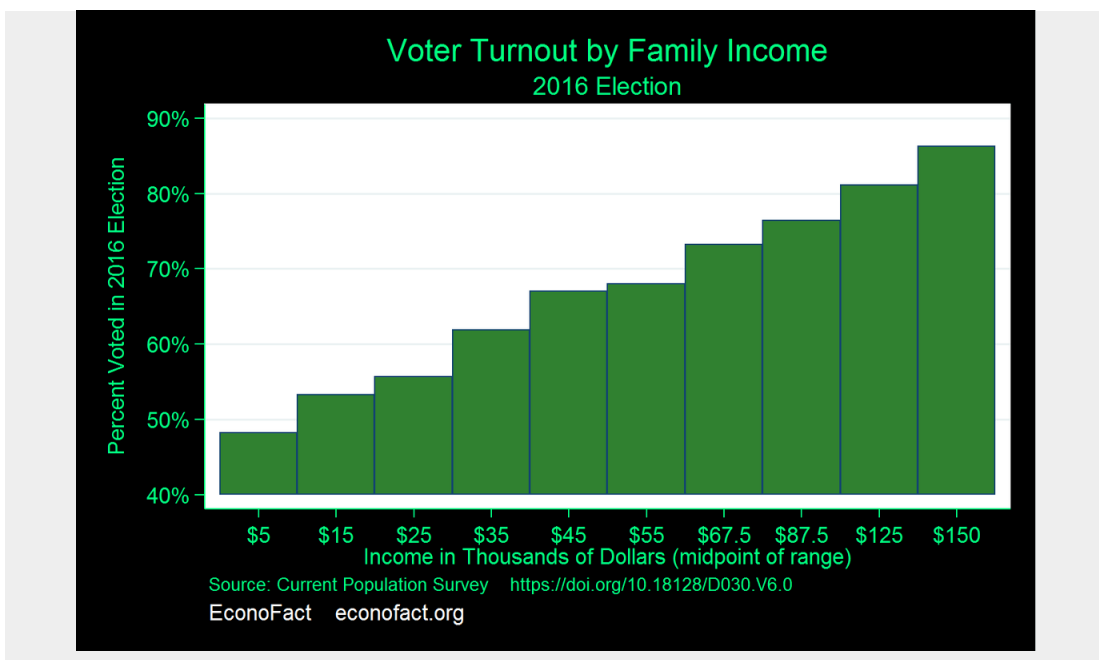
With this laid out, the establishment political parties exist to subsume and subvert social movements that threaten the rule of capital. Considered this way, Ms. Clinton's effort to separate Wall Street from the Democrat's emotive theory of racism serves a political purpose. Her reference to it is as a moral failure, not the toxic social residual of policies she supported. Assertions that the parties are themselves, or represent, social movements are belied by declining party membership, an absence of actionable political programs, and serial disdain by voters for their designated candidates. Their actual constituency is wealthy campaign contributors whose interests correlate with legislation that is proposed and passed.



control, the Federal government sets broad policy through Federal initiatives like the militarization of the police and the war on drugs. Nixon imagined mass incarceration as political re-education camps for his political enemies. Bill Clinton and Joe Biden organized most of the modern infrastructure of mass incarceration. prisonpolicy.org.

To the extent that a political movement grows out of current protests, protesters are unlikely to get a sympathetic hearing from either Donald Trump or Joe Biden. While Mr. Trump is a known quantity, Democrats assume that they know Mr. Biden through his party affiliation and as Barack Obama's Vice-President. While rank-and-file Democrats supported his 'law and order' programs in the past, times have changed, and protesters are unlikely to want a repeat of this history. Given its current trajectory, the economic backdrop in 2021 will more likely than not be one of ongoing decline. This adds to the likelihood of a Weimar moment whether or not Joe Biden prevails in 2020.

Following Mr. Biden's anointment, the Democrat's offer to the political left— with which some protesters share ideological predilections, was to help craft their 2020 Presidential Platform. For background, here is their [2008 Platform](#) drafted to support Barack Obama's candidacy. The Platform itself is a marketing device intended to incorporate the ideas of the losing primary candidates to entice their supporters to vote for the Democratic nominee. The 2008 Platform recalled the legacy of FDR, while Barack [Obama cited Ronald Reagan](#) as his ideological predecessor. The 2008 Platform bore no determinable relation to Mr. Obama's political program.



Graph: The propensity to vote rises with family income. This has to be considered against the fact that there are far more poor people than there are rich. But fewer poor people vote, and they do so less often, than the rich. When tied to the role of campaign contributions made by the rich, American elections are by and for the rich. Four years of assertions that ‘deplorables’ elected Donald Trump redefine the term to mean the suburban Republicans that Democrats have spent three decades coveting. They elected Donald Trump. Source: econofact.org.

This point is made because there has been no left candidate in the general election for President in living memory. Protesters imagining that Democrats will be swayed by their numbers and political passion misunderstand their role. By placing themselves as the gatekeepers of legitimate politics, the establishment parties define its contours and work to de-legitimize political programs that emerge from outside of it. When confronted by economic crises in recent history, this has led to political incapacitation where the legitimate needs of the polity go unmet in favor of restoration of leading capitalist institutions. This is followed by reforms that are either toothless or are premised in more capitalism.

The near-heroic cynicism of the Democrat’s elevation of Joe Biden following four plus years of selling themselves as the antidote to racialized nationalism demonstrates first and foremost that their use of race is as a political lever, not a moral or political position. If militarization of the police and mass incarceration have a racial component, how does this leave their proponents like Biden in a position to posture as anti-racists? The lesson for protesters is that the Democratic half of the reactionary core of capitalism finds rhetorical anti-racism to be the more useful device for furthering the interests of capital than other social wedges.

Were it not for the merging of the anti-racist left with the FBI, CIA, NSA and neoliberal Democrats to place Donald Trump on one side of the racist divide and these other entities— most with substantial, inglorious histories supporting racial repression, wars for economic resources, right-wing death squads and economic warfare against defenseless peoples, then political positions could be treated more discretely. The point, of course, isn’t to elevate Donald Trump, but rather to suggest that the clear contrast put forward to distinguish these parties isn’t all that clear.

Protesters may want to take this idea of a reactionary core to heart regarding black support for Joe Biden. The truism that working and middle class blacks supported the

1994 Crime Bill, and the hard right-turn of the Democrats more generally, begs the question: why wouldn't they? Only white liberals would imagine distinct political realms for working and middle class blacks and whites. If policies around 'crime' can be de-racialized in rhetoric, why can't they in fact? In other words, why was there substance to Bill Clinton's mea culpa regarding his Crime Bill?

The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution reads:

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

In the pseudo-scientific frame of criminology, 'crime' has no racial connotation. It is through the use of incarceration for purposes of economic exploitation that race was tied to it. The rationale wasn't punishment for breaking the law, but to exploit and maintain a super-exploitable class of workers. Richard Nixon used drug laws to disrupt and detain his political enemies. Today a reasonable argument could be made that mass incarceration is warehousing a reserve army of the unemployed, although labor outsourcing has served this purpose quite effectively.

What Bill Clinton, and even more forcefully Joe Biden, said in 1994 was that they didn't care about this history. Their de-historized view of crime and punishment fit the ever-present now of capitalist theory and criminology. Four hundred years of American history may have landed blacks where they were in 1994, but that was irrelevant through the lens of crime and punishment. Clinton and Biden didn't target blacks because they were black, but because they had political motives for criminalizing the political economy they existed within.

This criminalization of poverty ties to neo-colonial strategies like hut taxes that were used to force peasants to seek employment in the cash economy, meaning working for capitalists for whatever wages they can get. What evidence is there for this claim? The Reaganite frame Clinton worked within had 'contributing to society' through capitalist employment as the motive for cutting social expenditures. When the informal economy is criminalized, those working in it either find 'legitimate' employment or they are sent to prison. Their entry drives down wages for existing workers. Policing and incarceration served enforcement roles for capital when they weren't being used for direct economic exploitation.

As those who have experienced it know, violence is abhorrent. Had Messrs. Clinton and Biden criminalized violence, they would have been subject to arrest themselves for the almost daily bombing of Iraq that led up to George W. Bush's wargasm in 2003. As advocates and facilitators of police violence against Americans, nationality held no sway over who they thought should be subjected to it. At the time, fresh evidence had it that the CIA was a major operator in the narcotics trade. In this context, the line between legitimate and illegitimate violence devolves to brute force. Rampant murders in the drug trade at the time mirrored the political ethos from above.

George Floyd was one of about 1,100 people killed by the police in the last twelve months. There is no way to know how the brutality of his murder compares to the others. More of those murdered were white than weren't. Ending police violence and mass incarceration are worthy goals. But they (police violence and mass incarceration) fit into the wider social logic of capitalism. It isn't incidental that the most capitalist nation in the world is also the most militaristic. If you know how to end racial animus, please, do so. I don't. But I do have a few ideas for rethinking capitalism.

CounterPunch 26.06.2020