

The Myth of American Democracy, the 2016 Election and the Critical Role of Politically Independent Organizing and Movements

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This paper is an analysis of the role of “American democracy” for the past 400 years; the 1960, 1964, 1968 and 1972 presidential campaigns; the roles of the Clinton, Sanders and Trump campaigns; and the relationship of the 2016 election to grassroots political organizing and movement building.

The American Colonies and the Counter-Revolution of 1776

The first two centuries of colonial plunder and exploitation in North America were based on a system of Trans-Atlantic chattel slavery of tens of millions of Africans and the displacement and genocide of millions of Native Americans. This history has been explored and popularized by Professors Gerald Horne, William Loren Katz and the late Howard Zinn.

Beginning in the 1600s, America was a colonial, white, male settler-planter-capitalist state. Africans were slaves for life, and “all persons except Negroes” were banned from carrying arms in 1650 in Virginia. On the other hand, the colonial rulers set up a system of indentured bondage for lower-class Europeans. These indentured servants were offered emancipation from debt on the one hand, and brutal suppression on the other hand when they made common cause with the large and growing numbers of Africans that worked on their plantations. Anti-British, anti-colonial, “democratic” conspiracies were limited to white male slaveowners, merchants and property owners.

In *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America* (2014) Professor Gerald Horne describes how the revolt against British rule in North America was driven by the fear of the colonial leaders, most of whom were slaveowners like Washington and Jefferson, that the example of slave rebellions in Jamaica, Antigua and other British colonies were spreading to the 13 colonies on the American mainland. From 1776 to 1783, substantial numbers of African slaves in the American colonies rose up against their slavemasters. They took advantage of the outbreak of a war that pitted the British occupation forces against the powerful American slaveocracy.¹

A secondary force in the “American Revolution” was the Northern merchants who raised the cry of “No Taxation without Representation” in order to break free from Britain and build their own capitalist empire based on the American mainland. The “Revolutionary War,” Horne writes, was a counter-revolution that the Founding Fathers—an alliance of slaveowners from Virginia and North Carolina and free traders

¹ www.nytimes.com/2016/07/04/opinion/did-a-fear-of-slave-revolts-drive-american-independence.html_r=0

from New York and Boston-- fought in order to “preserve their liberty in order to enslave others.”

The Expansion and Consolidation of the Slave System after 1783

As a result of defeating the British crown forces in 1783 with the help of the French empire (whose military was fighting with the British for control of Europe), the American economic and political system became more consolidated and oppressive. Millions of Africans, men, women and children, were chained to plantations throughout the South, where they worked under the eagle eyes of white overseers armed with whips, guns and dogs trained to hunt down runaway slaves. The agreement to fully develop slave-catching state militias (which became the Second Amendment) secured Virginia’s ratification of the new union.

The combination of the invention of the cotton gin at century’s end, coupled with the successful slave revolt in Haiti in 1803, followed by the French yielding the Louisiana Purchase to the U.S. the same year, doubled the territory of the new state. These developments led to sharp contention over whether slave-plantation owners or Wall Street-merchants would control these new territories. This also led to a subsidiary struggle between federalism and states’ rights.

In 1808, the African slave trade to the U.S. was legislated out of existence. However, it created a domestic slave breeding industry, especially based in Virginia and North Carolina. This broke up hundreds of thousands of African families, and led to monstrous forced marches to the Deep South and an expansion of the slave population by more than eight times over the following 50 years. These oppressive conditions produced a wave of slave revolts, including the most massive rebellion on plantations north of New Orleans in 1811.

The rapid expansion of American slavery was funded directly and indirectly by Northern and British capitalists, whose most rapidly developing industry, textiles, grew in lock-step with U.S. slave plantation production. In return for their investments, the capitalists demanded financial and political control of the production of “King Cotton.” By 1840, cotton produced by slave labor constituted 59 percent of the country’s exports, North and South alike.

In the North, a rising and eventually dominant class of capitalists imported millions of poor Europeans, who were largely white but were not given white American privilege. They were exploited in miserable factory working conditions and forced to live in urban tenements. The Irish, Southern and Eastern Europeans were only conditionally white in relation to Northern European white, male propertied owners, tradesmen and merchants.

Democratic president Andrew Jackson, one of the biggest slaveowners in Tennessee, launched wars in the South from 1812 until the late 1830s to accomplish several pressing tasks: To suppress growing communities of escaped slaves (maroons); to maintain social difference between African slaves and Native Americans; and to drive Native Americans

off their ancestral lands, onto Trails of Tears that were trails of death, and into jail-like reservations in the Midwest. In Florida, the U.S. army met fierce resistance from a military alliance of Seminole tribes and nearby settlements of runaway slaves. The Seminoles were forcibly “removed” by the army to Oklahoma between 1838 and 1843.

Between 1836 and 1849, the U.S. ruling class annexed Texas as a slave state, and seized the northern half of Mexico, including California. During this war, the San Patricio Battalion, made up mainly of Irish and German immigrants, deserted and fought on the Mexican side. Today millions of Mexicans and Chicanos (Mexican-Americans) say that “we didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us.”

From the American Revolution until the Civil War, American “democratic” claims were built upon the denial of the franchise to African slaves and freedmen, to recently conquered Mexicans, to the majority of conditional white males, to all women and to the nations of Native Americans. In order to forge a new social construct of “white people,” composed of privileged settlers and conditionally white poor and working class European immigrants, the alliance of Northern capitalists and Southern slaveowners made some concessions to non-slaveowning yeoman farmers in the South and to immigrant industrial workers in the North. For these white people, the ruling class served up a heavy and unending stream of racist and xenophobic cultural attacks to turn them into gatekeepers for the control of limited economic and political resources.

The Civil War, Abraham Lincoln and a Slave Rebellion of Millions

The Republican Party, led by Abraham Lincoln before and during the Civil War, spoke for the Northern capitalist “federalists.” From 1861 to 1863, their objective was to only end the secession of the Confederate states, not to end slavery. A key re-alignment of political, economic and military forces was necessary to defeat the Confederacy, including the enrollment of the abolitionists into the Union. The militant abolitionist John Brown went from being portrayed in both the North and South as a “madman” and a “religious fanatic” to the martyred hero celebrated in Union military marches.

Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 was carefully crafted for political purposes. It did not apply to the slaveowners in the “border states” of Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia, who Lincoln wanted to keep from joining the Confederacy. A succession of defeats by Confederate armies forced Lincoln and his generals to agree to the enlistment of hundreds of thousands of Northern freedmen and escaped male Africans from the Southern plantations into the Union armies. They were much more motivated than the white conscripts from the North.

Abraham Lincoln is a central mythical figure for American democracy. When he was developing plans for a limited inclusion of the Black masses into the post-Civil War system, Lincoln was assassinated in 1865 for letting his intentions out of the bag. “This country was formed for the white, not for the Black man,” John Wilkes Booth wrote before killing Lincoln.

The “Great Emancipator” is featured in history books used in U.S. public schools, alongside one of the biggest slaveowners in Virginia, George Washington. It is impossible to avoid using these \$1 and \$5 bills, as well as Jackson’s \$20 bills. Plans to replace Andrew Jackson with Harriet Tubman have run into white resistance in Congress and among Southern “patriots,” who have now settled upon a \$20 bill with Tubman on one side and Jackson on the other.

After 1863, the Civil War became a war to end the system of chattel slavery in the South. Its revolutionary thrust came from 4 million slaves and ex-slaves who deserted their plantations, sabotaged production behind Confederate lines, demanded arms when they reached Union lines, and forged new forms of Black political, economic and military power, beginning in the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia in 1861. This set the self-emancipated Black working class in the South on a collision course with the Southern slaveowners.²

In the decades preceding and during the Civil War, white people of all classes were offered a choice between two ruling class parties: The openly racist Democratic party spoke for the slaveowners, who demanded the power to expand the plantation slave system into the Southwest, and into Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Panama.

The less exposed Republican party spoke for the Northern capitalist federalists who understood that chattel slavery in the South was a roadblock to the consolidation and expansion of capitalist rule in the Western territories. Slavery had to be removed, by force if necessary. When Union generals Ulysses Grant and William Sherman forced the Confederacy to sue for peace in 1865, the Northern capitalists could then expand their operations into the Southern states and contested territories of the West (formerly Mexico) without opposition.

The Beginning of the Wars of Extermination of Native Americans in the West during the Civil War

As a number of progressive historians have demonstrated, the U.S. government’s “war of extermination” of the Native American nations in the Trans-Mississippi West began during the Civil War under President Lincoln.³ Lincoln sent the same generals who commanded Union forces in the Civil War to suppress an uprising by the Dakota Sioux in 1862-1863 and to end resistance by the Cheyenne and Arapaho in southeastern Colorado in 1864. These and other Native American peoples fought to stop aggressive land grabs by white settlers and refused to continue to sign “peace treaties” which had been repeatedly ignored and broken by the federal government.

² See *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom* (2009) by Steven Hahn, which contains a chapter titled “Did We Miss the Greatest Slave Rebellion in History?”

³ See “Slave Emancipation, Indian Peoples and the Projects of a New American Nation-State” by Steven Hahn in the fall 2013 issue of *The Journal of the Civil War Era*.

For the Sioux, the Cheyenne and other Native American peoples, the Civil War against slavery in the South didn't require them to end their struggles for their long-suppressed rights. This brought them into conflict with President Lincoln and the Republican-led Union armies. This was a continuation of hundreds of years of Native resistance since the first colonial settlements, and they became a major barrier to the westward expansion of U.S. power in the middle of the 1800s.

The Rise and Defeat of Reconstruction, the Violent Overthrow of Black Political Power in the South, and the Rise of Jim Crow throughout the U.S.A.

In 1864, Union general William Sherman first promised Southern freedmen “Forty Acres and a Mule” after his armies drove away thousands of plantation owners in Georgia and South Carolina. However, Black ownership of land in the South was short-lived. After 1865, Union officers and leaders of the Freedmen’s Bureau from the North—who were setting up schools for illiterate slave families—forced the ex-slaves to give up their land and sign annual “labor contracts” for work on the plantations. They were now controlled or outright owned by ex-slavemasters or by Northern finance and merchant capitalists, who had replaced the slaveowners as the dominant class in the South.

Under Democratic President Andrew Johnson in the late 1860s and Republican General-President Ulysses Grant in the 1870s, the promises of Reconstruction to 4 million ex-slaves in the South were violently suppressed and sold out. A new system of semi-slavery in the South was based on sharecropping and debt for Black farmers on former plantations and slave-like primitive conditions for Black workers in mines and factories in the South.

These new forms of exploitation and oppression were enforced by white police forces composed of heavily armed ex-Confederate soldiers and by semi-official white supremacist groups. Many of the night-riders of the KKK, the White Brotherhood and the White League in Louisiana were ex-Confederate soldiers. They had a special role to play in violently suppressing any efforts of Black sharecroppers and workers to organize politically. Public lynchings were staged by mobs of white racists in order to intimidate and terrorize African-American organizers and communities.

In response to these terrorist campaigns, tens of thousands of Black men formed chapters of the Union League and other armed self-defense groups, especially in remote plantation areas. During the second half of 1865, arms and training were provided by Black Union soldiers until General Grant re-deployed them to major Southern cities, and then pulled them out of the South altogether. The Union Leagues throughout the South were overwhelmed when the Northern army was rapidly demobilized after the Confederate surrender. The number of Union troops in the South fell from 1 million on May 1, 1865 to 38,000 in the fall of 1866.⁴ Many of the Black troops who remained in the Union

⁴ See *After Appomattox: Military Occupation and the Ends of War* by Gregory Downs (2015).

forces were reassigned as “Buffalo soldiers” to suppress and remove Native American peoples in the West.

During Reconstruction, the first Black members of Congress from Louisiana and the Black-majority states of Mississippi and South Carolina were forced out by ex-slaveowners, white supremacist groups and by all-white electorates. Local Black politicians and sheriffs were stripped of power and disarmed. This counter-revolution nullified the 13th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution, which declared an end to chattel slavery and promised Black men the right to vote. In the South, African-Americans could not vote or participate in the political process for the next one hundred years. The 14th Amendment, which extended the “equal protection of the laws” to African-Americans, also only existed on paper for 100 years in the Jim Crow South.

Most African-Americans in the North and South supported the Republican party after 1863, and there were white abolitionist “radical Republicans” in Congress during the 1860s. However, African-Americans were sidelined and eventually betrayed by the dominant capitalist forces in the Republican party in the late 1860s and the 1870s.

After the Civil War, the system of monopoly capitalism-imperialism consolidated its power throughout the mainland and beyond. The wide recruitment of European workers to bolster the size and force of white power and privilege, the end of Native American resistance, the enactment of Chinese exclusion laws, the displacement and expulsion of Mexicans from vast parts of the Southwest, and the confinement of Black people to the most menial work without legal rights, education or resources, marked the close of the 19th century.

In the 1890s, the U.S. military suppressed wars of independence in the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Hawaii and Guam. Republican and Democratic presidents alike made more ambitious plans to expand the reach of the U.S. global empire in preparation for the outbreak of World War I in Europe in 1914.

The Great Migration, the Pogrom in East St. Louis in 1917—and its Reverberation in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014

After 1900, a Great Migration of African-American sharecroppers and workers fled Klan terror in search of work in the expanding industrial centers of the North, the Midwest and California. On their arrival, millions of refugees from the South ran into a Northern version of Jim Crow. Black migrants were forced into segregated urban ghettos where they were overcrowded, overcharged and undereducated. When African-American men and women could find work, it was as super-exploited laborers. These conditions for the Black working class did not undergo significant changes until the mid-1960s and the 1970s.

When Democratic President Woodrow Wilson committed an American Expeditionary Force in 1917 on the side of the British and French imperialists as well as pre-

revolutionary Czarist Russia in World War I, he claimed that it was “a war to make the world safe for democracy.”

Closer to home, in the summer of 1917, the Black community in East St. Louis--across the Mississippi from the city of St. Louis-- came under attack by politicians of both parties and the white press. All-white union leaders opposed the entry of Black workers into the wartime factories around St. Louis.

In the course of a “race riot”--which Marcus Garvey and the NAACP called a massacre--racist mobs killed 39 African-American men, women and children in the streets of East St. Louis. These mobs were encouraged by an intentionally absent white police force. In a sign that the Black community fought back, nine white men were killed on the streets of East St. Louis.⁵ The objective of this assault, and similar “race riots” in Chicago in 1919 and Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921, was to force African-American workers to accept their position as a super-exploited, segregated workforce, and to force their families into oppressive urban ghettos.

The 1917 pogrom in East St. Louis prefigured the creation of working class and poor Black inner-city and suburban areas in and around St. Louis over the past 100 years. Both Democratic and Republican mayors have presided over this process. This has included the formation of militarized white-led police departments in order to contain and suppress the growth of political consciousness and combativeness in the African-American communities of St. Louis, and in its segregated and poor northern suburbs.

In Black suburbs such as Ferguson, located 10 miles north of St. Louis proper, white-led police departments has employed racially discriminatory methods of enforcement, with guns-at-the-ready for traffic stops of Black men. The murder of 18 year-old Michael Brown by Ferguson police officers in 2014 became a flashpoint for resistance of African-American communities around the U.S. to an epidemic of police murders of unarmed Black men.

During the first half of the 20th century, Democratic and Republican presidents and their parties had virtually identical positions on the defense of Jim Crow in the South and a modified form in the North; the need to maintain a segregated and super-exploited Black working class throughout the country; and an aggressive posture of defending and expanding U.S. imperialist investments and political interests worldwide.

Roosevelt’s New Deal in the 1930s rested on a foundation of Jim Crow. Sharecropping in the South was official policy. When Roosevelt signed Social Security into law in 1935, 65 percent of African-Americans nationally and between 70 and 80 percent in the South were ineligible. The previous year, Congress established the Federal Housing Administration, which insured only private mortgages in neighborhoods which received favorable ratings. Black families received “D” ratings and their neighborhoods were colored in red. This established the system of “red-lining,” which made it nearly

⁵ See *The Making of St. Louis* by Tony Sewell (1990).

impossible for Black families to receive mortgages in white neighborhoods and to make improvements in their homes. Red-lining by the FHA and private real estate firms maintained poor all-Black neighborhoods in urban concentrations all around the country. After World War II, Black veterans were denied access to low-interest home loans by the Veterans Administration.

Fissures in the System of White Supremacy

Important fissures in the system of white supremacy took place during the early 1930s. Black, immigrant and white members of the Communist Party USA fought for the right of Black workers to join unions in auto, steel and other industries; the CP-led Unemployed Councils in Northern ghettos recruited African-American families; CP members organized Black and white sharecroppers and poor farmers in the South; and the CP led a nationwide fight to free eight Black teenagers, the Scottsboro Boys, who had been framed for the rape of two young white women in Alabama in 1932. However, the leadership of the CP betrayed these gains for the multinational working class when they mobilized the party to vote for Democratic President Roosevelt in the 1936 election.

During World War 2, after white workers rioted and refused to work alongside African-Americans in wartime plants, Roosevelt was forced to integrate some of these plants in order to deflect Nazi and Japanese charges of racism in the U.S. While FDR ordered the U.S. army to form some segregated military units of Black, Japanese and Puerto Rican soldiers to fight in Europe, he also issued the infamous Executive Order 9066, which forced 120,000 Japanese-Americans and Japanese nationals into prison-like “internment” camps from 1942 to 1945.

A more substantial break in the system of white supremacy took place during the Republican Eisenhower administration in the 1950s. These were the years that a civil rights movement in the South took shape, with Martin Luther King, Jr. and the NAACP emerging as leading forces in a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955. This movement interfered with the ruling class’ projection of the U.S. as a non-racist country, especially in colonial Africa, where the U.S. hoped to set up neo-colonial states to replace hated British, French and Portuguese colonial regimes.

The civil rights movement in the 1950s was a destabilizing and threatening event for the U.S. ruling class. Both parties, with the exception of die-hard, segregationist Dixiecrats, agreed on the need to make limited concessions to Black people.

In 1954, the Supreme Court handed down *Brown v. Board of Education* by a 9-0 vote. This decision was a symbolic political act. Segregated school systems came under attack only as the civil rights movement moved in the direction of Black liberation. This movement wrung some concessions in employment, public accommodations and education, and dismantled Jim Crow restrictions on the right to vote after the rebellions in Harlem and Watts in 1964 and 1965. These concessions were obtained from two Democratic presidents (Kennedy and Johnson) and two Republican presidents (Eisenhower and Nixon).

Thus “American democracy” in the 21st century has consisted of a choice between two parties that have enforced the interlocking systems of white supremacy, capitalist-imperialist exploitation, and the projection of U.S imperialist power around the world.

The Presidential Elections from 1960 to 1972

In the 1960, 1964, 1968 and 1972 elections, the ruling class (those who hold the actual reins of political, economic and military power in the U.S.) employed *dual tactics*, with somewhat different toolboxes, in order to confine people into acceptable, non-threatening electoral arenas, and to suppress those who refuse to go along with the hegemonic program on which the ruling class as a whole is united.

The period from 1960 to 1972 was a time of powerful, mass upheavals against the oppression of Black people, against the war in Vietnam and U.S. imperialism world-wide, and against many forms of the oppression of women. In the years that followed, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people (LGBTQ) targeted the oppressive male-dominated system of patriarchy.

During these years the Republican party ran white supremacist, law-and-order and pro-war candidates. The Democrats ran “liberals” who supported U.S. imperialism in Southeast Asia. At the same time that Democratic office-holders and leaders professed support for civil rights in order co-opt mainstream civil rights groups, they supported the Nixon administration’s use of COINTELPRO (the FBI’s Counter-Intelligence Program) to suppress radical and revolutionary forces in the Black liberation struggle by infiltration and assassination.

The 1960 Election and the Kennedy Administration

In the face of the growing civil rights struggle in the South and an emerging Black liberation movement in the North, both “liberal” Senator John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon, Eisenhower’s Vice-President, deployed the FBI to undermine and attack these struggles. JFK and Nixon identified the socialist People’s Republic of China and the imperialist Soviet Union as opponents of the U.S. government on a global scale.

Between 1961 and 1963, President Kennedy sent 26,000 Special Forces “advisers” to prop up a corrupt dictatorship in South Vietnam. In the months before he was assassinated in October 1963, JFK was preparing to introduce U.S. combat ground forces into South Vietnam in order to avert defeat at the hands of the communist-led National Liberation Front. It is a stubborn and politically useful myth that Kennedy was preparing to pull U.S. military forces out of South Vietnam in 1963.

During these same years, Kennedy sent thousands of U.S. Army Green Berets and CIA agents to dozens of countries in Latin America in order to counter the anti-U.S. Cuban Revolution of 1959, and the rise of anti-imperialist national liberation movements there.

The 1964 Election and the Democratic Convention

In 1964, faced with the prospect of a Goldwater presidency, the slogan of the still reformist SDS was “Part of the Way with LBJ.” Soon afterwards, Johnson escalated the war in Indochina for five years, which eventually left three million dead in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos and millions poisoned by the “defoliant” Agent Orange.

Under intense pressure from the civil rights struggle in the South, and an embarrassing image problems in Africa and elsewhere in the world, Johnson and a bi-partisan Congress passed two civil rights acts banning Jim Crow restrictions on voting rights and racial discrimination in employment and public accommodations in 1964 and 1965. However, the first prosecution under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was that of H. Rap Brown, a leader of the Student Non-Violent Committee (SNCC). He was charged with crossing state lines into Maryland to “incite a riot.” The Justice Department’s twisted theory was that a speech by Brown “violated civil rights.”

In the early 1960s, the African-American Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) emerged to educate and mobilize African-American sharecroppers and workers in the heart of the Black Belt. Led by Fannie Lou Hamer, the MFDP challenged Jim Crow laws and white supremacy, and engaged in voter registration campaigns. At the 1964 Democratic convention, held in Philadelphia, the MFDP demanded that Mississippi’s white segregationist delegates be expelled, and that the MFDP be seated in their place.

LBJ dispatched his “liberal” Vice-President, Hubert Humphrey to force the MFDP to stand down in order to maintain the “unity” of the Southern segregationist delegates at the convention. According to SNCC Field Secretary Robert Moses, Humphrey, Bayard Rustin and Walter Reuther, the “liberal” chieftain of the United Autoworkers, threatened to cut off financial support for Rev. King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference in order to use King to “persuade” the MFDP to accept Humphrey’s plan to defend the places of the segregationist delegation.

After the MFDP held a sit-in in the seats of the segregationist delegation, the FBI removed these chairs from the convention floor in order to prevent the national media from giving publicity to the anti-racist stand of the MFDP. The MFDP delegation responded with a public walk-out from the Democratic convention, and returned to Mississippi to continue their organizing.⁶

In November 1964, Malcolm X, the foremost Black nationalist leader in the U.S., explained that “If Johnson had been running all by himself, he would not have been acceptable to anyone. The only thing that made him acceptable to the world was that the

⁶ See ““We the People’ Confronts Democratic Party Leadership in ’64,” on the Real News Network, June 29, 2014. Also *The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC* by Cleveland Sellers, 1973.

shrewd capitalists, the shrewd imperialists, knew that the only way people would run toward the fox would be if you showed them a wolf. So they created a ghastly alternative. And it had the whole world—including people who call themselves Marxists—hoping that Johnson would beat Goldwater.” On February 21, 1965 Malcolm was assassinated in New York City after he had taken increasingly revolutionary and internationalist positions on domestic and foreign issues.

The Rise of Black Power and a Revolutionary Struggle for Black Liberation

After the 1964 Democratic convention, the struggle for civil rights increasingly gave way to demands for politically autonomous Black Power and revolutionary change. Leading roles were played by SNCC’s Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown, and by the Deacons for Defense and Justice in Lowndes County, Louisiana, which was formed in 1965.

In 1966, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was formed in Oakland, California and soon had chapters in dozens of cities and a weekly readership of 100,000 of *The Black Panther* newspaper. After a powerful rebellion in the summer of Detroit in 1967 was put down by the 82nd Airborne Division, the League of Black Revolutionary Workers began organizing and leading wildcat strikes in Detroit’s auto factories that segregated and super-exploited Black workers.

After holding the world heavyweight championship for two years, Muhammed Ali refused induction into the Army. At a press conference, Ali rhymed: “Keep asking me, no matter how long, On the war in Viet Nam, I ain’t got no quarrel with the Viet Cong.” At this time, SNCC distributed a large poster picture of Uncle Sam, with the slogan “Uncle Sam Wants You, Nigger.” Both SNCC and the Panthers underlined the fact that the U.S. government was recruiting Black men to fight in Vietnam—and die in disproportionate numbers there—when they were not free in the U.S.A.

As the reformist civil rights movement turned into an independent, radical and revolutionary movement for Black liberation, the U.S. ruling class believed that politically independent forces among African-Americans, other oppressed nationalities and radical whites were out of the question and moved to block and suppress them.

At the height of this repressive campaign in 1968-1970, the FBI’s COINTELPRO (Counter-Intelligence Program) killed 29 members of the Black Panther Party, including the execution of the 21 year-old BPP leader Fred Hampton by the Chicago Police Department. The military assault on the headquarters of the BPP in Los Angeles was Conducted by the first SWAT team in the U.S.

In 1968, all of the Black liberation organizations, as well as radical Chicano, Puerto Rican, Native American and Asian-American groups, stayed clear of the Democratic Party. So did many recently radicalized whites, led by SDS, which had a membership of approximately 100,000 in 1968. These political forces refused to vote for Vice-President Humphrey and his pro-war politics, while he claimed to be a “liberal” on civil rights.

In 1968, millions of people, with the Black liberation movement leading the way, asserted their political independence and refused to be drawn into the two-party electoral arena. This mass-based critical orientation was largely successful in resisting the efforts of two U.S. senators—“Clean Gene” Eugene McCarthy (similar in many ways to Sanders) and the recent convert to Vietnam war-critic Robert Kennedy—to take millions of people off the streets and into the Democratic primary campaign.

Nixon and McGovern in the 1972 Election

In 1972, Nixon was a reactionary law-and-order candidate who said he had a "secret plan" to end the war. This was a plan to limit U.S. casualties, to “Vietnamize” the ground war and escalate the bombing of North and South Vietnam, with the goal of demobilizing the anti-war movement. Liberal Democrat George McGovern also ran on a platform of withdrawing U.S. ground troops from Vietnam.

These positions taken by Nixon and McGovern were a reflection of the fact that 500,000 American soldiers and marines had already been defeated on the battlefield by the Vietnamese liberation forces. The morale and discipline of the U.S. military had collapsed, and Nixon began to phase out these conscripts with a “volunteer” army.

Like Nixon, McGovern wanted to continue the air war from the Gulf of Tonkin and Thailand, so that the anti-war movement could declare a “victory” and go back to work and college. Some cast “protest” votes for the independent candidacy of Shirley Chisholm, the first African-American woman to run for president, which did nothing to challenge the ruling class and their two hegemonic parties.

Lessons from Presidential Elections

These lessons from the 1960, 1964, 1968 and 1972 presidential elections, and looking back at the first “democratic” presidential election in 1791, can be applied to how the 2016 election is shaping up.

It is worth noting that the Democratic party decided on Philadelphia, the “cradle of democracy,” to stage its convention in 2016. Philadelphia was the site where the Liberty Bell rang after a Constitution was ratified in 1787. This was the result of an infamous “compromise” between Southern slaveowners and Northern capitalists that counted African slaves as 3/5 of a white man, in order to increase the political power of the slaveocrats led by George Washington. Along with millions of Africans, the Liberty Bell did not ring for Native Americans, for women and even for many European immigrants.

While much of the American ruling class has thrown their support behind Clinton, Trump is playing an essential role for them in activating reactionary, nativist and disaffected whites who believe that they are losing their privileges to Black people, immigrants and women. As an open white supremacist and law-and-order candidate, Trump is positioned

to carry on the reactionary politics of Republican presidents and presidential candidates from 1960 to 1972, as well as George Wallace's rear-guard segregationist third party run in 1968. Trump's candidacy will be discussed on page 24 below.

Clinton's Record on the Global U.S. Military

What is Clinton's record? On foreign policy, she is an imperialist hawk. She voted for the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, embracing the lies of U.S. intelligence agencies about a continuing Iraqi program to develop weapons of mass destruction that her Republican predecessor, Secretary of State Colin Powell, presented to the United Nations. Clinton has supported the long imperialist war in Afghanistan, stretching from Bush's "war on terror" to the Obama administration's support for Hamid Karzai and other warlords in Kabul.

As Obama's Secretary of State beginning in 2008, Clinton has supported U.S. bombing attacks and drone strikes, directed by U.S. Special Forces on the ground, in seven countries: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen in the Middle East; Libya and Somalia in North Africa; and Pakistan in South Asia.

While the Obama administration claims that it is intervening in Syria only to defeat ISIS, the U.S. and Russian imperialists have been engaging in a shadowy proxy war there. On one side, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Qatar are arming "rebel" Sunni groups, many of whom are tied to Al-Qaeda.

On the other side, the Russian military has set up air force bases inside Syria in order to launch bombing raids of civilian areas controlled by pro-U.S. forces in order to support the Shiite-Alawite government of Bashir al-Assad in Damascus. The Shiite theocracy in Iran is arming Hezbollah forces based in Lebanon in order to support Assad's dictatorship, which has little popular support.

This war is reactionary on all sides. Millions of Syrian civilians have been killed in this U.S.-Russian proxy war. 2.9 million Syrians have been forced into refugee camps in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, and 6.5 million Syrians have been displaced within their own country. The doors to the European Union have been slammed shut after more than one million refugees were admitted in 2015, while less than 10,000 Syrian refugees have been admitted into the U.S. by the Obama administration.

The "Gold Star" Debate over the War in Afghanistan

Trump's attacks on Muslim-American "Gold Star" parents, and a remark that he doesn't support American soldiers who have "allow themselves to be captured," set off a political firestorm. Taking advantage of Trump's self-inflicted wounds, both parties are trying to build support for the war in Afghanistan, which has continued for more years (2001-2016) than the U.S. war in Vietnam (1961-1975).

Leaders of the Democratic and Republican parties are manipulating public sympathy for Khizr and Ghazala Khan, whose son died in combat in Afghanistan, in order to build support for a war that has led to the deaths of millions of Afghan people. According to leading Democrats and Republicans, only Gold Star parents are permitted to speak about the war in Afghanistan.

Veterans and active-duty soldiers have spoken out publicly against the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and how they have been used as cannon fodder against the peoples of these countries. They have been ignored and marginalized by the U.S. government. Some have been given or threatened with long prison sentences, like the courageous whistleblower Sgt. Chelsea Manning, and the exiled former analyst for the National Security Agency, Edward Snowden.

The activists of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Against the War have followed in the tradition of Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). In the late 1960s and the early 1970s thousands of VVAW members used their right-to-speak about the unjust nature of the war in Vietnam. They provided critical leadership to the anti-war movement and were able to silence reactionary pro-war groups who had experienced the war only on TV.

The McCain-Trump Wrestling Match over the Vietnam War

Enter a Republican mud-wrestling contest between Trump and McCain over the Vietnam War. In one corner is a Republican businessman who received a get-out-of-the-draft card by means of a short-lived medical condition. In the other corner is Senator John McCain, who was shot down and imprisoned for bombing civilian targets in North Vietnam, which were considered war crimes under UN principles.

McCain has made a career out of his “heroic” POW years in order to reverse the verdict on the imperialist nature of the U.S. war in Vietnam, which led to the deaths of three million people in Indochina and 58,000 Black, Latino and white working class soldiers and marines. The U.S. military invasion of South Vietnam and aerial bombardment of North Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos was one of the greatest war crimes of the 20th century. This imperialist war of the U.S. was defeated by the Vietnamese liberation forces, which received support from the People’s Republic of China and from anti-war forces in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world.

Both Clinton and Trump have given unqualified support to the Israeli settler state, including its occupation of the West Bank and its repeated assaults on the Palestinian people in Gaza with F-15 fighter-bombers, Apache helicopters and other advanced U.S. weaponry. Under both Democratic and Republican administrations, the U.S. government has given more than \$4 billion annually in military and economic aid to Israel. No debate on this issue will take place during the 2016 or any other presidential campaign.

Clinton has recently stated that Henry Kissinger will be a major foreign policy adviser in her administration. As Nixon’s National Security Adviser, Kissinger developed American political and military policies in Indochina from 1968 to 1975. In 1971 Kissinger

secretly provided military support to the pro-American Pakistani military junta, which killed hundreds of thousands of civilians in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Kissinger also was the architect of the CIA-backed military coup in Chile on September 11, 1973. Kissinger was rightly condemned as a war criminal in the 1970s. What kind of “advice” will he provide to a President Hillary Clinton?

Like every other President in the 20th and 21st centuries, Clinton and Trump believe that the U.S. government has a “duty” to create and rapidly expand a global police force. Today the U.S. military has bases or troops in over 200 countries—from the Middle East and Europe to Africa and East Asia. Putting Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump in the White House will lead to the aggressive prosecution of the bi-partisan “war on terror” that Bush II carried out for eight years, and which has continued for the past seven years under the Obama administration.

U.S. Preparations for Inter-Imperialist War with the Chinese and Russian Imperialists

While Hillary Clinton was Secretary of State, she enthusiastically supported the Obama administration’s plan to “pivot” more than half of its naval forces and air power to military bases in East Asia by 2020 in order to confront China, a rising imperialist rival. China will soon be the world’s largest economy; China’s military base-building in the

South China Sea and its rapid development of a world-class navy will be able to project Chinese imperial power worldwide.⁷

In Syria, the Ukraine and elsewhere in Europe, the U.S. and its imperialist allies in NATO are facing a growing military challenge from Putin’s Russia, which has modernized most of its Cold War nuclear arsenal, and has begun to build a military alliance with China.

In order to prepare for war with the imperialists’ Chinese and Russian rivals, the U.S. military budget has climbed to \$682 billion under the Obama administration. As Secretary of State, Clinton supported the Obama administration’s plan to spend \$1 trillion on “modernizing” the U.S. nuclear arsenal over the next decade.

Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump will be confronted with other significant challenges from their imperialist allies: Decades of economic stagnation in Japan; the recent referendum in Britain (Brexit) to leave the European Union; and other centrifugal forces at work in the European Union in which German-imposed austerity in Greece may spread to other countries carrying unsustainable debt.

⁷ See *Is China an Imperialist Country-Considerations and Evidence* by N.B. Turner et.al., 2014, www.red-path.net.

Revolutionary Movements Challenge U.S. Imperialism, Other Imperialist Powers and Reactionary Regimes

In the Kurdish areas of eastern Turkey, and among poor peasants, indigenous peoples and peoples of African descent in Brasil and other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, revolutionary people's struggles are on the rise.

In India, the U.S. and Israeli militaries are providing weapons and military advice for the government to defeat the growing Maoist insurgency in the indigenous (adivasi) areas of eastern India. This is the most powerful and politically advanced revolutionary movement in the world today. The Indian ruling class has also stationed 700,000 troops to suppress a decades-long struggle for azadi (independence) in Kashmir, on the eastern border of Pakistan.⁸

The U.S. is no longer the only global imperialist superpower. It needs to create a bi-partisan consensus in the Democratic and Republican parties, and among their different social bases, to provide political and military support for the American ruling class in its potentially unpopular efforts to mobilize against a Chinese-Russian military alliance, and against the growing number of revolutionary challenges to its global empire.

Generals, Spies and Billionaires for Hillary

While the leaders of both parties support these unprecedentedly high military expenditures during "peace time," many of the U.S. military and intelligence agencies have weighed in to support Hillary Clinton. At the Democratic convention, John Allen, the former commander of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan, stated that Clinton "knows how to use all instruments of American power, not just the military, to keep us all safe and free." In a recent op-ed in the New York Times, Michael Morell, the Acting Director of the Central Intelligence Agency when Clinton was Secretary of State, stated that she is "highly qualified to be the next president."

To their credit, many of the Sanders delegates at the Democratic convention booed Leon Panetta, a former defense secretary and CIA director in the Obama administration, when he praised Clinton's foreign policy credentials. After the heckling of Panetta and shouts of "No More War!" persisted, Clinton's supporters tried to drown out the anti-war chants with counter-chants of "U.S.A! U.S.A!"

Clinton's Dual Tactics: Attacks on African-American Communities and Attempts to Take Resistance Off the Streets

Clinton has a long history of opposition to the needs of working class and poor African-American men and women. In the 1990s she supported President Bill Clinton's elimination of welfare, arguing that it was destroying the "work ethic" of poor Black mothers. In 1994 the first lady supported the President Clinton's criminal "justice" law,

⁸ See www.bannedthought.net on India and Kashmir.

which provided billions of dollars to expand the country's police forces; accelerated prison building; and instituted sentencing guidelines that disproportionately gave Black and Latino men decades-long sentences.

These Democratic policies created a system of mass incarceration—a New Jim Crow. From 1990 to 2014, the number of incarcerated men and women, more than half of whom are Black, has doubled to 2.2 million. Hillary Clinton has issued some weak and superficial criticisms of these policies in order to establish some credibility with African-American communities in the 2016 election.

As her presidential campaign got underway, Hillary Clinton started to hold public meetings with some Black mothers whose children had been killed by the police. She then added meetings with widows of Dallas and Baton Rouge police officers. Clinton's core message, in line with President Obama, is that "trust" must be restored between the police forces and African-American communities. Clinton hopes to take activists in Black Lives Matter (now known as the Movement for Black Lives) off the streets and into "dialogue" with the same police departments which are gunning down unarmed Black men at an unprecedented rate.

Clinton is taking a softer approach than President Obama, who recently told Black Lives Matter activists to "stop yelling" and start working with politicians to create "solutions." Obama has lectured African-American activists to take "personal and cultural responsibility" for the oppressive conditions in their communities. At the Democratic convention, Obama promised with great pride that Hillary Clinton would take over his political legacy for the next four years.

In pursuing this strategy, Clinton and the national leadership of the Democratic party have formed an alliance with members of the Black economic and political elite who have taken advantage of the victories of the civil rights movement to feather their nests and offer themselves as the "natural leaders" of efforts to reform police departments, especially in Black-majority cities.

Clinton and her advisers have adopted a "Southern strategy" based on the choice of Senator Tim Paine as her running mate. As Mayor of Richmond, Virginia, Paine positioned himself as a "bridge builder" between Richmond's majority Black community, and its ruling class and white-led police department. In the 1990s, as Mayor of Richmond, Paine championed "Program Exile," Virginia's version of President Clinton's mass incarceration program. This program produced the country's most extensive and punitive program for Black prisoners, with the exception of California, which has a much larger prison population.

The attempts of Clinton and leading Democrats to build "mutual understanding" and "trust" between police departments and their victims cannot hide the fact that no changes in the militarization of police departments in African-American urban concentrations and suburbs are on the Democratic agenda in the 2016 election. As a result of this *system*, which has intensified during the past seven years of the Obama administration, a Black

man or woman is murdered by heavily armed police officers or extra-judicial agents every 28 minutes.⁹

Both the Democrats and Republicans support militarized police departments, and are rapidly building up the U.S. military as a global police force. Following the playbook of the Democratic party since the 1960s, Hillary Clinton has included disempowering and co-opting “carrots” along with militarized “sticks” to be wielded in the U.S. and around the world. Because of these dual tactics, Clinton is particularly dangerous to African-American and other oppressed communities. As a Black poet in NYC recently commented, if progressive people hold their noses and vote for Clinton, they will cut off the supply of oxygen to their brains.

Clinton and the Democratic Party Support Weaponized Neo-Liberal Economics and the Suppression of Black Labor

Senator Sanders has recently claimed that his candidacy moved the Democratic platform to the “left,” hailing the new platform as “the most progressive in the party’s history.” The Democratic platform now includes a \$15 minimum wage, weak-kneed regulations of Wall Street, a rejection of some provisions of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a commitment to a superficial version of “climate change” and a plank on gun control.

One point that is not found in the Democratic platform, for obvious reasons, is that Clinton and the Democratic party as a whole is deeply embedded in Wall Street and monopoly capitalist America. This is not just a question of how Clinton has raised most of her campaign funds, but a pattern of big capitalist-friendly actions and policies throughout her political life.

The Democratic and Republican parties have unbroken histories of supporting neo-liberal and militarized policies that allow U.S. corporations and financial institutions to make and defend investments around the world where the highest profits can be obtained. Both parties have supported multilateral trade deals, including the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

All of these trade deals serve the interests of U.S. multi-national corporations and their close capitalist cousins in Latin America and East Asia. Facing attacks by both Sanders and Trump, Clinton has announced that she will oppose TPP “as currently written.” With a straight face, Clinton told Democratic labor leaders that she will make the “top 1 per cent pay their fair share,” and that as president her version of the TPP would “raise wages in the U.S.”

Since the 1970s, U.S. multinational corporations have exported millions of industrial jobs, backed by an annual \$682 billion war budget, to set up mega-factories of super-exploited workers in China, Mexico and other countries. The increasingly automated

⁹ See the 2012 report, *Operation Ghetto Storm*, on the website of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement.

phase of capitalist production has accelerated. In many American centers of industrial production, including the North/Midwest rust belt, wages for the employed have been undercut, private sector unions are nearly extinct, and the ranks of the semi-employed and unemployed have grown rapidly.

The de-industrialization of America and the assault on the working and living conditions of tens of millions of working people is not a result of “misguided” economic policies of the Democratic or the Republican parties. It is built into the global operations and profit-seeking of the U.S. capitalist-imperialist economy. *It is systemic.*

By far the highest rates of unemployment today are found in African-American communities. From 1960 to 2014, unemployment among Black people increased from 19% to 35%, including prisoners. Much more than in the past, the U.S. ruling class considers Black workers to be “disposable.” The “American Nightmare” project explores the connections between the militarization of U.S. police forces, a 400-year history of white supremacy and structural racism, and the necessity of the American ruling class to “control and contain 45 million African-Americans who have a diminishing economic role, but who have a long history of resistance.”¹⁰

In 2014, the average wealth of African-American families was \$11, 000, compared to \$142, 000 for white families. An important factor in this differential is the continuation of red-lining in the practice of sub-prime home loans to Black families. These predatory loans cause more home foreclosures. Wells Fargo loan officers called these sub-prime products “ghetto loans.”

Colonial Austerity in Puerto Rico

Though the American ruling class does not like to discuss its colony in the Caribbean, decades of corporate and financial disinvestment in Puerto Rico have created an economic crisis that cannot be ignored in Washington D.C. The \$73 billion debt carried by the Puerto Rican-colonial government is several times bigger than Detroit’s bankrupt government during the 2008 economic crisis. The U.S. Congress is preparing a bail-out that will come with draconian austerity measures. Essential government services will be cut in Puerto Rico, and the living conditions of millions of people on the island will be driven down further.

Many Puerto Ricans are moving to Florida or New York, while others are getting organized to defend their living standards and working conditions. Many political activists have identified the history of U.S. colonial control of Puerto Rico under both Democratic and Republican administrations as the central problem facing the Puerto Rican people. A new generation of political activists is raising the demand for independence and national liberation for Puerto Rico.

¹⁰ See “An American Nightmare: Black Labor and Liberation,” a project of Deep Dish TV and Cooperation Jackson’s Nubia Lumumba Arts and Culture Cooperative. www.deepdishTV.com.

Selective Gun Control

As an alleged sign of fresh thinking, Clinton and the Democratic platform are talking about “gun control.” This consists of a call for stricter licensing for the purchase of assault rifles, mainly keeping them out of the hands of people on government terrorist lists.

These limited restrictions will not keep AR-15s and AK-47s with 30 bullet magazines out of the hands of white supremacists and vigilantes like George Zimmerman in Florida who have been using “stand your ground” and “public carry” laws to intimidate communities of color. In addition, military-grade automatic weapons will remain in the hands of police departments all over the U.S.

The U.S. Government’s Central Role in Accelerating Global Warming

Thousands of environmental and other groups in the U.S. are taking the threat of global warming seriously and are advocating aggressive actions that reach well beyond—and in many cases directly challenge—the platform and promises of the Democratic party.

Some facts: Global warming is not a threat for the future. Since the late 19th century, the Earth as a whole has warmed 1.5 degrees F. on average. Most of this warming has taken place since 1960. The Earth reached its highest temperature on record in 2016.

The temperatures in some parts of the Arctic have increased by 20-30 degrees F. As a result, much of the Arctic ice cap has melted, and the world’s largest island glaciers in Greenland are melting. Sea levels around the world are rising, swallowing up several Pacific islands. While Miami can afford Dutch-like infrastructure measures to cope with rising sea levels, many of the 90 million people living in Bangladesh, one of the world’s most densely populated and poorest countries, are facing flooding.

Increasingly severe hurricanes, such as Katrina on the Gulf Coast in 2005, and Typhoon Haiyun in the central Philippines in 2013--the most powerful storm to make landfall in recorded history--have received little or no protection from the U.S. government and by its former colony in the Philippines.

Global warming is also taking place in the oceans. The Great Barrier Reef of Australia is the world’s largest coral reef system and consists of 2,900 individual reefs and 880 islands. In recent years, hotter water has caused bleaching, leading to the death of 35% of the coral in the northern and central parts of the Great Reef. Catastrophic climatic events such as this underline the fact that a healthy Earth depends on healthy oceans.

The major drivers of global warming are industrial enterprises, power plants and transportation systems that burn “dirty” coal, oil and other fossil fuels, sending vast amount of hot CO₂ into the earth’s atmosphere. What the Democratic party and the capitalist media will not tell you is *why* the United States of America, which has 5% of the world’s population, is responsible for 25% of the world’s CO₂ production.

While Obama’s Environmental Protection Agency has shut down some of the oldest coal-fired power plants, it has allowed the energy industry to rapidly expand the production of natural gas from underground shale rock. Scientists and anti-fracking activists have demonstrated that the natural gas that escapes from shale deposits, and from transportation to natural gas users, produce *more* CO2 and more toxic methane than coal or oil-fired power plants. The various arms of the monopolistic energy producers, and the government agencies that “regulate” them, are the same people under Democratic and Republican administrations.

The system of American monopoly capitalism, which is regulated by the demand for the production of maximum profits, drives the process of global warming. This takes place both within the U.S. itself and within U.S. neo-colonies such as India, Brazil and Indonesia. India is the second biggest polluter in the world, after monopoly capitalist-imperialist China, where three-quarters of its electricity comes from coal. Also driven by the compulsion to produce for profit, the capitalist regimes in Brazil and Indonesia have cut down tens of millions of hectares of jungle and forest that convert CO2 into life-sustaining oxygen. They are the “lungs of the world.”

Winning the Right to Vote in the 1960s, and Rejecting the Electoral Path Today

The “American people” that both parties incessantly talk about does not include over 12 million non-citizen immigrants from Mexico, Central America and other countries, four million state and federal prisoners, those with felony convictions, and poor people whose IDs are rejected at the polls. In addition, less than 50% of eligible voters do not vote, most out of beliefs that elections don’t change their lives for the better.

A study, published in the New York Times in July 2016, concluded that only 9 per cent of over-18 adults in the U.S. will vote in November. The Clinton and Trump campaigns are aware of this study. They will be mounting a barrage of TV infomercials and attack ads in order to bring out millions of people who are likely to sit out the election. A 9% turnout will call into question whether the Republican or Democratic party have received a “popular mandate” to govern for the next four years.

How different is the state of American democracy in 2016 from the first presidential elections, when only white men with slaves or other forms of property could vote? Or from the elections between the 1870s and the 1960s, when Black men and women were denied the vote and were forced out of political life by both parties and by the KKK and other terrorist groups?

Growing numbers of people have developed the understanding that pursuing real paths towards political, social and economic liberation requires rejection of presidential elections and the suffocating “support” of the Democratic party.

“That’s How Democracy Works”

In the Democratic primary, Senator Sanders called for a “political revolution.” When asked to be more specific, Sanders explained that this “revolution” was taking place inside the Democratic party. Sanders has now declared a victory in his revolution by re-shaping the platform, and has endorsed Clinton. He now states: “That’s how democracy works.”

Sanders was referring of the two-party system dominated by the American ruling class. Its objective is to draw people into casting votes for one of two ruling class parties that will claim that the “American people” have voted for their own oppression and exploitation.

On July 14, an important on-line discussion took place on the subject of “The Myth of American Democracy: The Reality of Symbolic but Hollow Empowerment” between Kali Akuno, Rosa Clemente and Jared Bell, and produced by Deep Dish TV. The moderator, a member of Cooperation Jackson and an organizer in Jackson, Mississippi. **[The Myth of American Democracy, Part 1.](#)**

The Sanders and Stein-Green Campaigns

In the primary contests, Senator Sanders raised a number of issues, including Medicare for All and free public university and college tuition. He brought some disaffected voters, many in their 20s and 30s, back into the Democratic party.

In a July 28 article titled “Divisions Linger at Convention,” the New York Times trotted out its usual “expert” on the 1960s, Todd Gitlin. Gitlin is a former SDS leader who has made a lucrative career out of attacking the political advances made by the anti-war and Black liberation movements of that era. Drawing a comparison with the anti-war protesters who refused to support Humphrey in 1968 and the youthful Sanders supporters who are not falling in behind Clinton, Gitlin pontificated: “There will continue to be a hard left, some of whom are naïve. They are young. This is their first crusade. They feel betrayed.” Gitlin’s conclusion is that Sanders supporters must grow up and become realistic by supporting Clinton.

It is encouraging that many of Sanders’ supporters are not following him into the Clinton camp. Many will sit out the presidential election and return to political organizing at the local level. Others will support Dr. Jill Stein and the Green Party, much of whose platform is similar to that of Sanders. Stein’s running mate is Ajamu Baraka, the liberal mayor of Newark, and she has attracted support from some well-known progressives such as liberation theologian Cornell West.

However, even as the Stein-Green campaign attempts to carve out a progressive space in the 2016 campaign, it will perpetuate the illusion that fundamental change can take place by operating within the long-established electoral system dominated by two ruling class parties.

“Outside-Inside” Political Strategies and “Progressive” Big City Mayors

Others who are participating in local Democratic politics are hoping to use this arena to meet people’s needs. This inevitably takes place within the confines of the national Democratic party, and this strategy will suck many local activists into trying to reform a ruling class party.

At the most consciously reformist end of the local organizing spectrum, political activism and local Democratic politics exist only to gain concessions from the national Democratic party and get a “place at the table” at ruling class dinner parties. Van Jones (an African-American environmental activist and former Obama adviser) and Rep. Keith Ellison (the only Muslim-American member of Congress) are prominent advocates of this “outside-inside” strategy.

Arguments about the importance of local Democratic politics also appear in the promotion of “progressive” mayors of New York City, Baltimore and other cities with majority or large Black populations.

In New York City, Bill De Blasio has run on a platform of stopping the “stop-and-frisk” tactics pioneered by the NYPD. With De Blasio occupying City Hall, the NYPD is making greater efforts to hide its racial profiling and lethal “use-of-force” tactics. According to the New York Civil Liberties Union, in the NYPD “There is no systematic reporting about force, and reporting and details about individual incidents are often withheld or distorted.”

The NYPD’s latest “reform” is equipping its officers with Tasers that deliver shocks of 50,000 volts for five seconds at a time. While more than 3 five-second cycles sharply increases the risk of death through cardiac arrest and other means, there is no limit on how many times the NYPD may Tase someone. The NYPD has claimed that several recent instances of Taser-related deaths were “accidents.”

According to Amnesty International, between 2001 and 2012, 540 people in the U.S. died after being Tased by police officers. What is the difference between the choke-hold that the NYPD used to suffocate Eric Garner in 2014, and the use of Tasers to electrocute unarmed Black and Latino men and women?

Behind Di Blasio’s “progressive” image, the African-American communities of New York City have found a law-and-order Democrat whose reforms of the NYPD provide it with new ways to kill with impunity. N.W.A.’s words from 25 years ago in “*Fuck Da Police*”—“They have the authority, to kill a minority”—ring true today.

In Baltimore, a majority African-American city which has a Black mayor, a Black prosecutor and a Black judge who tried the Freddie Gray case, all charges have been dropped against six officers who murdered 25 year-old Freddie Gray for “lack of evidence.” These cops, three white and three Black, ganged up on Gray, leaving him with his legs limp (this was videotaped). Then they threw Gray into a police van without a seat

belt for a “rough ride” that severed his spinal cord, and killed him. After dropping all of the cases, Prosecutor Carol Mosby claimed that as a result of these “prosecutions,” Baltimore is “one step closer to equality.”

Many have rejected this strategy of relying on “progressive” politicians, Black or white, to seek justice for the murders of unarmed Black men and women, and who promise to “reform” their cities’ militarized police forces.

The White Supremacist, Nativist and Populist Threads in the Trump Campaign

Donald Trump is running on parallel and reinforcing slogans of a nativist Make America Great Again and a law-and-order Make America Safe Again. His unstated platform is Make America White Again. There are clear parallels to the Nixon campaigns in 1968 and 1972, especially his demand for law-and-order and activating a “silent (white) majority” to “take back our country.” Trump has given a voice to, and has brought into political life, millions of white supremacists, nativists and populists.

Trump’s core supporters are nothing new. We saw them in racist mobs in the Jim Crow South in the 1960s; pro-Vietnam war, “anti-hippie” white construction workers; working class white parents in Boston who attacked Black children being bused out of segregated neighborhood schools; and in Nixon’s (and Wallace’s) shrill attacks on the radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

With Trump’s encouragement, police unions in Somerville, Massachusetts and other cities have attacked the Black Lives Matter movement with calls to make “White Lives Matter” and “Cops’ Lives Matter.” At one of the primary debates, a 78 year-old white man from Wyoming attacked a Black demonstrator in front of TV cameras. Trump threw red meat to his supporters when he told them that he will pay for their legal expenses if they attack “these bad guys.”

At the Republican convention, former NYC mayor Rudolph Giuliani charged that Black Lives Matter is “inherently racist.” He was followed by a buffoonish Black police chief who claimed that “Blue Lives Matter,” receiving enthusiastic applause from the almost all-white delegates.

Trump’s plans to build a “higher wall” along the Mexican border, deport millions of undocumented workers and their citizen children, and bar Syrian and other Muslim refugees from entry to the U.S. play to ignorant nativist impulses that are not far beneath the surface in the U.S.A.

Trump is also tapping into populist impulses, especially among working class and middle class whites who have suffered from monopoly capitalist neo-liberal economics. Trump has been able to convince many of them that Obama, Clinton and the Democratic party alone are responsible for their economic distress. Employing racially coded language,

Trump and his surrogates are hoping to turn the anger of white workers against Black working class communities and against immigrant Latino workers.

Why is Donald Trump the Republican Candidate for President in 2016?

Why did this demagogic white supremacist, nativist and populist come out on top of the Republican version of “Survivor” this spring?

The ruling class has a 400-year long history of placing openly white supremacist candidates within the bounds of acceptable political discourse. The populist demagoguery of Andrew Jackson and Andrew Johnson in the 19th century—and that of Nixon, Wallace and now Trump—signal reactionary and white supremacist forces that they can act as auxiliary shock troops for the militarized police departments that have been created, and are being employed, by both the Democratic and Republican parties to contain and suppress African-American communities.

It has been argued that with a Trump election, “fascism could get a foot in the door in the U.S.” While the issue of fascism is important to consider for the period ahead, raising this fear now is an argument to support Clinton. Long before Trump entered the race for president, groups and movements under the banners of white supremacy and protecting white privilege have been on the rise, particularly in the South. In a number of states, “white nationalists” fly Confederate flags and support the lost “Confederacy’s fight for independence.” Some of these groups are overtly or covertly fascist.

However, the Trump campaign is not a fascist movement, but a new and dangerous round of white supremacy and state repression that has characterized the U.S. since the 1600s. Today’s white supremacist groups are closely connected to the militarization of police departments across the country. In the Jim Crow South, the night-riders of the KKK were cops in their day jobs; today’s heavily armed white racists wear blue 24 hours a day.

Rejecting the Disempowering Electoral Path of Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party

The aggressive assertion of white supremacy, the attacks on Black, Latino and indigenous communities, and support for the U.S. imperialists’ global empire by both Clinton and Trump require strong opposition and grassroots organizing by millions of people.

Growing numbers of people are involved in grassroots organizing and movement-building all over the U.S. This includes more than 40 chapters of Movement for Black Lives (M4BL); defending the rights of over 11 million undocumented workers and their children; tearing down the one-way wall on the Mexican border, welcoming Syrian and other refugees from the Middle East and Africa; shutting down solitary confinement units in state and federal prisons; and joining Native American activists at the Standing Rock reservation in South Dakota to oppose a massive crude oil pipeline stretching thousands of miles to states in the South and Midwest.

These movements also include opposition to the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East, and the BDS campaign (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) against apartheid in Israel and in support of the Palestinian people. Many of the political activists who are working on these issues are taking a strong stand in opposition to both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump during the 2016 election and beyond.

For those who believe that fundamental changes in American society must be made and that the role of the U.S. government in the world must be challenged, several questions are posed:

- Do elections, particularly at the national and state levels, empower oppressed communities, or do they diffuse and disorient their political energies, and confuse and obscure their real interests?
- Do electoral campaigns, with their siren-calls to support Democratic candidates and campaigns, enable opposition forces to consolidate and focus their political work, or do they set up road blocks to this political work?
- How can the oppressed and powerless empower themselves by strengthening politically independent organizing and movement-building?

These questions are on the table for political activists for discussion—and for taking action—this fall and beyond.