

Europe, USA...: Nationalism, Patriotism, Hate Crimes

Sunday 13 January 2019, by [MIAH Malik](#) (Date first published: 1 January 2019).

French President Emmanuel Macron's November 11, 2018 speech, during the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I, called rising nationalism across Europe a "betrayal of patriotism" and warned against "old demons coming back to wreak chaos and death."

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In rejecting claims that "nationalism" of states can be positive, Macron completely ignored the crucial distinction between the nationalism of oppressors and the oppressed.

"The lessons of World War I were not the same everywhere," argues Walter Russell Mead in The Wall Street Journal (Nov. 12, 2018) in response to Macron. "In Eastern and Central Europe, the war demonstrated the value, not the dangers, of nationalism. It broke the transnational bureaucratic empires that denied Poles, Lithuanians, Czechs and many others their freedom."

Nationalism, he continued, later helped countries break out of the Soviet bloc and thus "confirmed their belief that the cause of nationalism was the cause of freedom" from that "multiethnic, bureaucratic imperial system." (Mead is Professor of Foreign Affairs and the Humanities at Bard College.)

The debate about nationalism, thus, is not so black and white. But it is extremely important. Nationalism has been used by oppressors to cause divisions and scapegoat peoples who are not like the majority. The nationalism of oppressed peoples on the other hand, such as the Palestinians living under the state of Israel, is justified and can be a progressive force.

Trump's Nationalism

Donald Trump is a master at using reactionary nationalism to advance his political and economic interests. He declared himself a proud "Nationalist" two years after his election, because it whips up his supporters and aligns himself with white supremacists.

He claims he is an American "patriot" who has "Made America Great Again" — because he is president. He grades his presidency with an A+. Such false stories have a cynical purpose that he effectively used in his real estate career — misdirection and big lies as he carried out his agenda of self-promotion and enrichment (which he even boasted about in The Art of the Deal).

Trump seeks to re-define patriotism as identical to his “nationalism.” Unless you accept his definition, he says, you are not a true patriot. Worse, you are an enemy of the state. Hitler or Mussolini could not have said it better.

Trump also understands the uses of the U.S. electoral system, which is institutionally rigged — just as the Founders intended. They feared how uneducated and propertyless people used the vote. The Constitution, at the time, made sure that the slave-owning states got “credit” for owning slaves and established the Electoral College to prevent direct popular vote of the president.

Today it’s a system that allows voter suppression and gerrymandering to benefit the rich and white majority. In Republican controlled states, the targets are Blacks and other ethnic minorities. When the Democrats controlled all three branches of government, they refused to change the voting system — such as mandating weekend voting or making election day a national holiday as occurs in most other countries.

White nationalism erupted after Barack Obama, the first African-American president, was elected in 2008. The Republican establishment and far right then strengthened their alliance to suppress the votes of Blacks and other minorities.

The same tactic was applied in the late 1800s to end the promise that former slaves and their descendants would become full citizens. Jim Crow-type segregation became the effective law of the land, and not just in the former Confederacy.

With the Civil Rights revolution, southern states had been restricted in their voter suppression efforts under the 1965 Voting Rights Act. When Chief Justice John Roberts wrote the 2013 narrow majority decision to gut that law, Southern states and Republican-controlled legislatures immediately imposed strict voter ID and other laws to suppress the Black vote.

White Nationalism in Practice

The largest segment of the population to be arrested, convicted and imprisoned are African Americans. The private prison industrial complex now depends on this for its massive profits.

Blacks are disproportionately arrested and criminalized, assaulted and shot by cops for no reason except the color of their skin.

The one group to whom the Second Amendment does not apply is African Americans. If Black men and women walk around with legal guns, as whites do, the assumption is never that they are expressing their Second Amendment rights.

This November a Midlothian, Illinois white cop murdered a Black security guard in the neighboring Chicago suburb of Robbins. Jemel Roberson was using his gun to protect patrons from an active shooter in a bar. The cop only saw a Black man with a gun even though patrons told him the guard was a hero.

On Thanksgiving night, Emantic Fitzgerald Bradford Jr., an army veteran running into a Birmingham, Alabama mall to help people fleeing a shootout, was gunned down by a police officer who just saw a Black man with a (legal) gun.

That’s what white nationalism looks like in practice.

A 2017 FBI report on hate crimes shows a rise in right wing extremism and bigoted violence.

According to the annual report, there has been a 17% increase since 2016.

Of the more than 7100 hate crimes reported, nearly three out of five were motivated by race and ethnicity. Religion and sexual orientation were the other two primary motivators.

Reporting hate crimes to the FBI is voluntary. The data show that victims often do not trust that reporting will help them.

When a Black female reporter challenged Trump's support for white nationalism, he said the question itself was "racist." African-American civil rights leaders and activists see his blatant appeal to white nationalism as a return to the ideology of Jim Crow and a green light for bigots to go after Black people. It happened before, it can occur again.

[1]

Important Debate on Nationalism

A serious debate about nationalism is about peoples, racism and oppression — and the rise of neofascism.

White nationalism is reactionary by its nature as it promotes continued domination by whites. In Europe it has similar features but emphasizes the pureness of "bloodlines and culture."

Black Nationalism in the United States historically has been in response to slavery, racism and the white backlash against Black progress. Because the U.S. nation-state can't be based on ethnic "bloodlines," skin color is the root of racial tensions.

The 2018 elections saw blatant voter suppression and racism (the "public hanging" comment by the Mississippi Republican Senate candidate, and the newly elected Florida Governor referring to his Black opponent in a derogatory "don't monkey this up" comment).

Neither white nationalism nor Black nationalism are the same as patriotism — identification with a nation state, a country. Patriotism, of course, can be used as a reactionary tool in war as it's promoted by the rulers of the United States in its wars in the Mideast and Asia. On the other hand, patriotism is used by former colonial countries to unite their peoples against imperialist powers.

Marxists make a crucial distinction between nationalism of oppressed people and those of the oppressor. The Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky applied that understanding to the United States and the African-American population (See "Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism & Self Determination," Pathfinder Press.) Trotsky convinced his American supporters in the 1930s to see African Americans as an oppressed nation who will play a vanguard role in the working class and the struggle for socialism.

Fighting White Nationalism

Trump and white nationalists are confident that they can win by exercising control of government. The powerful executive branch, however, did not start with Trump. He simply has used it to go beyond what others have done before him.

With Trump's attacks on the courts and other institutions, comparisons to Adolph Hitler after he

legally took over Germany's government are not entirely far-fetched. "Pure blood" Germans went along with Hitler's "make German great again" and his vicious anti-Semitism.

Trump sees keeping political power by being more aggressive and limiting the rights of the poor and oppressed — and by speaking lies to whites who see themselves as victims of changing demographics. Poor whites especially see Black people and immigrants as a threat.

The midterm elections saw many progressive Democrats get elected to Congress. The hope for a fightback against the far right and white nationalism, however, will not be realized by elections or in Congress.

Many liberal pundits are concerned about the progressives being "too left wing." They are urging long-serving Black Congressional Democrats to push the Party back to the center.

But the way to win working class and impoverished white people to the banner of progress and against neofascism is by a far-left agenda that is fought for openly. There is no middle road or center in this fight.

Slavery was not defeated by elections. Women did not win suffrage by waiting for "good elected men" to support their right to vote. They pushed all of society through street actions to change the dynamic of policies.

Ending the Vietnam War likewise took mass street protest. This includes when the Democratic Party ran the government.

Both then and now, defending democracy and the oppressed also requires exposing the government's lies and protecting the freedom of an independent press. Those on the left who refuse to defend Wikileaks and Julian Assange because of the release of information about Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party are playing into the far right's dirty hands.

African Americans, especially mobilized and enlightened Black women, remain a threat to the ruling class. Black people's unique position in the U.S. capitalist economy is why they have played a vanguard role in resistance to racism and oppression, and built alliances with progressive-minded whites and others.

White nationalism promotes (consciously or implicitly) white supremacy. Black nationalism as expressed today as "Black Lives Matter" demands full equality and full citizenship protections. The former leads to a dictatorship, the latter to a vibrant democratic state.

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P.S.

• Against the Current n° 198? January-February 2019:
<https://solidarity-us.org/atc/198/nationalism/>

Footnotes

[1] For more information of the racist violence against Blacks, follow these sites and groups: theroot.com, colorforchange.com. The NAACP annual reports and the Southern Poverty Law Center provide details on hate groups and their activities.