

The Real Story Isn't Donald Trump
It's The Populous Nature of His Message

By: Lacino Hamilton

After the 2008 and 2012 Obama presidential victories, the claim that the United States was now a "post-racial" society enjoyed popular dissemination and acceptance from both the right and left. That a black man could be elected to the highest post in the land was cited as a stunning testament to how far the nation had come since slavery, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights era; and interpreted as resounding proof that the nation had moved beyond race. Then there was the presidential candidacy of Donald Trump to offer a bit of perspective.

Donald Trump's nonstop, unapologetic, racist, anti-immigrant, sexist, right-wing rhetoric has propelled him to front-runner for the nomination to represent the Republican party in the 2016 race for the White House. Still, Trump's rhetoric is not the real story. He is just a prop, a symbol, the proverbial canary in the mine. The most visible and vocal spokesperson for the millions of primary and caucus goers whom his message of exclusion and marginalization resonates with.

The real story, is Trump's bid for the White House is being used to draw attention away from elites and the disproportionate distribution of wealth and power in this country, by provoking anger and resentment among white workers, to the supposed threats of immigrants and people of color. By targeting affirmative action programs, as well as the influx of immigrant workers from Mexico, and the "outsourcing" of jobs to other countries, Trump reflects a populous belief that the greatest challenge facing "America," is unfair competition from people of color both here and abroad. Dynamics of class privilege fueling white racism.

Most people that support Trump's bid for president will be quick to express they are not racist, and many sincerely so. No one likes to think of themselves as intolerant or openly hostile to others based on race. So the

response has been to find a way to justify what sure appears to be racism. Perhaps the easiest way is to simply deny it. "Racism used to be a problem, but not anymore." Closely related to denial is minimization by acknowledging that racially structured disadvantages exist, then claim they do not amount to much. "If others found a way out, they can also." Then there are those that simply blame the victim. "If 'they' were smarter or worked harder those things wouldn't be happening." This lack of reflexivity is not surprising since dominant groups tend to remain oblivious precisely because they interpret social relations as normal, and therefore, nonracial.

But really, should it have actually taken Donald Trump's presidential bid to uncover what we should have known from a myriad of other sources, not the least of them our experiences? That is, racism is a blanket covering the United States. Racism doesn't come and go, it merely becomes more or less evident as its "spectacular episodes" are spaced closer or farther apart.

We may think this isn't so, because many of us do not notice the difficulty we have trying to breathe. This is because we have become accustomed to the reality and the weight of the blanket. Long gaps between spectacular episodes have given many of us the impression that racism has been "pulled back" or "lifted." But it's been here all the time--before Trayvon Martin, before Michael Brown, before Freddie Grey--we have simply learned to move under its weight, and now consider all but the "spectacular episodes" of racism to be normal.

That is why it took for Ferguson to explode, Baltimore to erupt, and the Flint, Michigan water crises to be declared a national disaster before official investigations and reports revealed that residents in those majority black U.S. cities experience pervasive patterns of exploitation, deprivation, poverty, mistreatment, and isolation that denies access to employment, housing, transportation, information, basic services needed to fully participate in society, and do not enjoy the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards as that provided to other communities. Unfortunately, many other communities of color experience the same, but

absent a "spectacular episode," may never be acknowledged.

Only when someone is caught on video hurling racial slurs, or when someone famous is rudely awoken to the reality that they're not famous enough to shield themselves from the subtle discriminatory attitudes and prejudices of those with influence and power, or a whistle blower breaks ranks, do we begin to talk about a "new" wave of racism, as if the "old" racism has somehow passed on, spent itself, or was crushed by the U.S. Congress after passing the 1965 Civil Rights bill.

Critical race theories represent ways of thinking about and assessing social systems and groups that incorporate recognition of the following principles: [a] race is a central component of social organization and systems; [b] racism is institutionalized--it is an ingrained feature of racialized social systems; [c] everyone within racialized social systems may contribute to the reproduction of these systems through social practices; and [d] racial and ethnic identities, in addition to the rules, practices, and assignments of prestige and power associated with them, are not fixed entities, rather they are socially constructed phenomena that are continually being revised on the basis of white's self-interests.

According to critical race theories, fully understanding the influences of race in a changing demographic and political climate requires a greater appreciation for the underlying processes and mechanisms that drive racial stratification systems. Which can prove extremely difficult because racism often happens in ways noticed only by those experiencing it, and it can happen without anyone intending harm. I mean, all Trump supporters want is "to make America great again," right?

Given the importance of economics in social life, which is, after all, how people organize themselves to provide what they need for their material existence--food, clothes, shelter, health care, and the like--increased economic uncertainty influences increased anxiety and desperation. America's economic system does produce an overall abundance of goods and services, but

distributes them so unequally that it also produces conditions of scarcity for tens of millions of people, of all races. This makes life for a large percentage of the population an ongoing competition for a finite amount of resources and services. And in an era of continuing corporate downsizing, the flight of well-paying industrial jobs overseas, and stagnate wages, this inevitably creates a situation where those fighting for finite resources and services will see one another as competitors and threats to each others livelihood.

Given the historical legacy that encourages whites to feel a sense of superiority and entitlement in relation to people of color, such competition is bound to provoke anger and resentment, which is then directed at people of color rather than at those whose wealth and power lie at the heart of what is essentially an economic problem centering on the distribution of wealth. This makes it possible for "competitors" to reconcile treachery and even dehumanizing actions toward "the other" in pursuit of what's commonly referred to as the American Dream.

None of this is to suggest that racism doesn't happen openly or on purpose. Only that swastikas and racial epithets don't have to be scrawled on campaign signs for Trump supporters to be racist.

The chances of this brief essay settling racism in the U.S. once and for all is unlikely. The major point to be taken away is we can go on and on about Trump being a racist and miss the fact that millions of people have flocked to hear the disparaging and divisive things he has had to say. Focusing exclusively on Trump, means patterns of history continue into the present and show every sign of going into the future unless people do something to change them. And the only way to do that is to change the structures of power and inequality that shape almost every aspect of life in this society, from economics to politics to religion to school and the family.

The idea that we are going to solve America's socio-economic problems by somehow kicking out all immigrants, stopping all Muslims from entering the

country, and ending programs that assist the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in this country ignores most of what we have to overcome. It sets us up to march into voting booth and right pass solutions--we will not get rid of racism without getting rid of classism, because the system that produces the one also produces the other and connects them.

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According to Llacino Hamilton, his writings are a summation of his personal and life long experiences and observations as a prisoner within the ghettos of Detroit long before he actually became a prisoner of the Michigan Department of Corrections. For more information about Llacino, he can be reached at: Llacino Hamilton 247310, Thumb Correctional Facility, 3225 John Conley Dr., Lapeer, MI 48446