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OPINION

Calling Working People of All Colors

Our mutual economic interests

BY EBONY
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A little over 80 years ago, NAACP founder W.E.B. Du Bois wrote “Black Reconstruction in America,” a groundbreaking essay that looked at the racial politics of the post-Civil War years.

The major failure of those years, Du Bois insisted, was that poor whites and poor blacks failed to form an alliance around their mutual economic interests and challenges. Instead, white elites doubled down on their efforts to divide poor people of different races.

“So long as the Southern white laborers could be induced to prefer poverty to equality with the Negro,” Dubois lamented, “a labor movement in the South [was]

impossible.” Though similarly exploited by white elites, economically disenfranchised whites and blacks “never came to see their common interest.”

More than eight decades later, we’re still waiting.

In the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election, the resounding explanation for Hillary Clinton’s loss to Donald Trump has been that Democrats failed to respond to the economic needs of the white working class. As a result, this story goes, the white working class turned towards Donald Trump and contributed significantly to his victory.

For some, then, the diagnosis for the party’s malaise is simple: Bring the white working class back into the fold.

“If you are going to mention groups in America, you had better mention all of them. If you don’t, those left out will notice and feel excluded,” Columbia University professor Mark Lilla wrote. He sharply criticized Hillary Clinton for “calling out explicitly to” blacks and Latinos while suppos-

edly neglecting the white working class.

Bringing those white voters into the fold would make the Democratic Party a formidable force, but not if it means marginalizing the concerns of people of color. That would be an unmitigated disaster.

The best way for progressives to realign themselves with the white working class isn’t to reverse this progress. It’s to argue forcefully that the economic concerns of the white working class and people of color are more alike than different.

For instance, working white people understandably complain of lower wages and lost jobs. Yet these economic challenges are part and parcel to those confronting communities of color.

The unemployment rate for black Americans is twice that for the white community across education levels. Similarly, the income gap between black and white households grew to \$25,000 as of 2014, a statistic due in no small part to the same wage stagnation, deindustri-

alization, and de-unionization plaguing many Rust Belt whites.

Trends in wealth have mirrored those in income. Where the Great Recession led to a 16 percent loss in wealth for the average white family, it led to a 53 percent loss for the average black family. As of 2014, around a quarter of black and Latino Americans lived in poverty, compared to 10 percent of whites.

The racism that’s worsened conditions for many Americans of color needs to be addressed head-on. But many of the same populist economic policies that would lift them up would also help struggling whites.

Instead of erasing race from the equation, working people and their progressive advocates should take their cues from Du Bois and get to work building what he called a unified “proletariat” of all colors.

At this rate, we don’t have another 80 years.

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The Greater Truth of One Planet, One Humanity

Bending the Arc towards justice

BY ROBERT C. KOEHLER

Maybe this much is true. Donald Trump, pseudo-president-elect, loser of the real election, charismatic stump-speech populist whose actual ability to govern may well be non-existent, has inflicted significant damage on America’s political infrastructure.

This is scary, of course, but not necessarily a bad thing. I say this even, or especially, if he manages to assemble a far right, white-nationalist-friendly cabinet and inner circle and starts attempting to implement some of the promises he made on the campaign trail. If the Trump pseudo-presidency is “normalized” and we-the-people and the media shrug our shoulders at the rebuilding of Jim Crow Nation — the Wall, the Muslim registry and God knows what happens next — then yes, this is a disaster and moving to Canada is a viable option. But if Trump, instead, is the reincarnation of Bull Connor, someone who makes a dark, hidden ugliness suddenly clear to the public at large, then his rise

to power may be the harbinger of profound, positive change.

“I do not pretend to understand the moral universe,” abolitionist Theodore Parker wrote more than 150 years ago, prefiguring the words of Martin Luther King. “The arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what

that Trump himself expects. Perhaps he’s just the trigger.

Consider, for instance, the idea of creating a Muslim registry, notoriously defended by former Trump-backing super PAC spokesman Carl Higbie, who told Megyn Kelly of Fox News, “We did it during World War II with the Japanese.” He proceeded to cite the internment camps, quasi-prisons in which as many as 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry were forced to live between 1942

Thus: “We need to stand in solidarity with Muslim people who are being targeted by Donald Trump,” “Daily Show” host Trevor Noah said to a cheering studio audience. “If they start registering Muslims in America, we all register as Muslims.”

And slowly the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice.

“Noah said that if all citizens stood with immigrants and said, ‘I am a Muslim,’ it ‘would take away any power the registry might

“We pledge to stand together with Muslims across the country, and around the world. Because when we stand as one, no American can be singled out by their race, religion, income, gender identity or sexual orientation.”

I see I am sure it bends towards justice.”

But the arc doesn’t bend by itself.

The Trump era may be defined less by the damage he inflicts than by the outrage he incurs: the outrage of a public that loves this country but also manages to love the whole planet and revere the principles of compassion and connection. This may, indeed, be an era of change, but not the change

and 1946, as a “precedent.”

“Look,” he said, “the president needs to protect America first.”

What does it mean to “protect America”? This is now a concept that is up for grabs, thanks to the non-election of Donald Trump. As his baldly racist plan to pretend to protect America gains publicity, determination to oppose it also grows, and, in that opposition, bring deeper values into play in our national politics.

have,” according to Huffington Post reporter David Moyo.

And several websites have sprung up creating this opportunity, including a site called Register US:

“Donald Trump has said he would ‘absolutely’ require all Muslims to register in a database. This is just one of Trump’s racist and Islamophobic proposals that

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