

### *Hilary Clinton and Political Demonology*

Everyone has heard of Donald Trump's presidential bid, frankly everyone has heard too much about his campaign. According to his opponents, Donald Trump is a racist anomaly. Hillary Clinton's platform against Trump so far—granted, it is early in Presidential campaign—plays on this political demonology. Upon visiting her website, a pop-up serves as a greeting, reading “We Need to Stop Trump.” Once the pop-up was dismissed, the slogan “Love Trumps Hate” is readily apparent, plastered all over the website. This approach to Donald Trump, writing him off as “a convenient symbol of ‘hatred,’” is a mistake that makes it easy to overlook the systemic issues of which Trump serves as an indicator.<sup>1</sup> Instead of resorting to political demonology, Hilary Clinton needs to confront the deep-set American racism that has allowed Trump to win the Republican Presidential primaries.

Calling Trump hateful and racist is correct—his comments perpetuate hate and intolerance, after all. However, the conversation about Trump's seemingly improbable rise cannot stop there. By simplifying the argument and writing Trump off as a loud racist, it is easy to overlook the underlying reasons for his success. If Trump is defeated by Hillary Clinton in the general election, but the racial tensions he has utilized are left untouched, other politicians will be able to leverage the same fear and white supremacy that Donald Trump has so effectively harnessed. It is clear that Donald Trump must be confronted, but political demonology is not the correct route, because it oversimplifies matters, making it easy to overlook the underlying issues.

A removed but relevant example of the drawbacks of political demonology is the Kony 2012 movement. Teju Cole notes how Kony 2012 promotions used political demonology,

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm X, My Voice Helped Save America

allowing the public to overlook the inconvenient, systemic issues that allow people like Kony to exist. The moment Cole describes seems benign, but carries significance when explored further: “When Jason Russell, narrator of the Kony 2012 video, showed his cheerful blonde toddler a photo of Joseph Kony as the embodiment of evil (a glowering dark man), and of his friend Jacob as the representative of helplessness (a sweet-faced African), I wondered how Russell's little boy would develop a nuanced sense of the lives of others.”<sup>2</sup> Kony 2012 is a famously bad case of political demonology, but moving past the factual fallacies, the Kony 2012 movement helped people overlook the deeper issues in Africa. People end up overlooking issues that the Western world is at least partially responsible for, issues like “militarization of poorer countries, short-sighted agricultural policies, resource extraction, (and) the propping up of corrupt governments.”<sup>3</sup> Africa is wrought with conflict because of these issues, but all that the public saw in Kony 2012 promotions was a “glowering dark man,” *the* evil that needed to be dealt with. If this demonic warlord was dealt with, supporters of the Kony 2012 movement could feel good about themselves and everything would be fine. By simply supporting this cause, people overlooked the fact that Westerners support “brutal policies in the morning, found charities in the afternoon, and receive awards in the evening.”<sup>4</sup> Political demonology allows the public to avoid the inconvenient truth, to avoid the reasons why Kony came to be—reasons that can be found by looking in the mirror.

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<sup>2</sup> Teju Cole, “The White-Savior Industrial Complex,” *The Atlantic*, January 11, 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/>.

<sup>3</sup> Cole, *White-Savior Complex*

<sup>4</sup> Cole, *White-Savior Complex*

While Donald Trump is not Kony and this is not Africa, the concept is the same. What Africa needed “more pressingly than Kony’s indictment” was a “more equitable civil society, more robust democracy, and a fairer system of justice.”<sup>5</sup> Kony and Trump both serve as indicators of a larger systemic issue. What America needs more pressingly than Trump’s indictment is politicians to stop pretending that we are in a post-racial utopia, America needs to face the value gap.

When Barack Obama was sworn in as the President of the United States, there was a temptation to think that America could move past racial issues. After all, there was an African-American in the White House forty-some years after Robert Kennedy was laughed at for predicting that America would have an African-American president in forty years. The post-racial utopia that people hoped for and even celebrated during Obama’s inauguration was just that—a utopia. During Obama’s presidency, America has failed to move past racial issues. In fact, in African American communities things have gotten worse. According the Pew Research Center, in 2011 alone African-American households “lost fifty-three percent of their wealth.” Foreclosures ran rampant in African-American communities and “billions of dollars disappeared from communities already strapped for resources.” Eddie Glaude dubs this travesty the Great Black depression. He uses this depression along with the fact that America locks “up more black people than South Africa did at the height of apartheid” to fundamentally refute the idea of America being post-racial.<sup>6</sup> Obama did not bring in an era in which racism can afford to be marginalized instead of confronted, and police brutality toward African-Americans is a reminder

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<sup>5</sup> Cole, White-Savior Complex

<sup>6</sup> Eddie S Glaude, *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul* (United States: Crown Publishing Group (NY), 2016), 18-23.

of this fact. Trump serves as a reminder of this fact, as well. Trump should not be too quickly dismissed, because people will try to maintain their post-racial fantasies. Donald Trump's candidacy is an opportunity to open a dialogue about America's racial issues and the 'value gap' that lies at the heart of the problem.

Racial issues manifest themselves in many ways, but the underlying rationale behind racism remains constant. This constant justification is what Glaude calls the 'value gap.' Simply put, the value gap is the fact that "white people, particularly those with money, matter more than others. It has been this way since the very day this country was formed."<sup>7</sup> This value gap is an inescapable fact, and it is a mistake to ignore the deep-set racism inherent Trump's rise. Donald Trump plays on the idea that *your* life—and make no mistake, 'your' in this sense is code for 'white' life—is the most important, and should be preserved at any cost. Donald Trump uses the idea that white people matter more than others to justify intolerant policies.

The value gap is "in our national DNA," according to Glaude.<sup>8</sup> From America's inception, leaders have praised the American Idea, the idea that everyone has unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. While the politicians praised the American Idea, white Americans got rich on the backs of African-American slaves. Explicitly and implicitly, this glaring contradiction was justified by the value gap. African-Americans were simply worth less than white Americans—they were worth two-thirds as much, to be precise. If white Americans were worth the same as African-Americans, slavery would have been indefensible. While white Americans pursued life, liberty and happiness, exerting manifest destiny in a mad rush westward,

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<sup>7</sup> Glaude, *Democracy in Black*, 33

<sup>8</sup> Glaude, *Democracy in Black*, 31

the American Idea was once again contradicted. But the value gap reconciled white Americans' actions with the American Idea. Native Americans were savages, and therefore were not as valuable as civilized white Americans. Because of the value gap, Native Americans could be systematically eradicated and forced out of their land. In short, the value gap justified how white Americans formed America. Glaude does not overstate his case when he says that the value gap is in America's "national DNA."

Politicians still try to breath life into the American Idea. "The underlying assumption" in supporting the American Idea is that it "is not inherently bad or in need of revision."<sup>9</sup> Yet, our history clearly shows the flaws and hypocrisy inherent to the American Idea. Politicians have tried to "ignore our history," pretending that "America is an exceptional place, a chosen nation charged to redeem the world."<sup>10</sup> In its current state, America is incapable of being a city on a hill or a redeemer. Whether or not the American Idea is inherently bad, whether or not America *can* "redeem the world," these grand ideologies help to hide the value gap, ensuring the continued erosion of the American Idea. Instead of pretending that America is on track to being a perfect city on a hill, politicians have a moral obligation to confront the value gap. If they do not confront the gap, minorities will continue to suffer outside the spotlight. Currently, "whenever white America has a cold, black America has the flu."<sup>11</sup> The American Idea needs revision, and Trump's bombastic rhetoric offers an opportunity to start revisions.

If Hillary Clinton decides to skirt the underlying racial issues that empowers Donald Trump, she will be the latest in a long line of notable politicians that fail to confront the value

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<sup>9</sup> Glaude, *Democracy in Black*, 153.

<sup>10</sup> Glaude, *Democracy in Black*, 31.

<sup>11</sup> Glaude, *Democracy in Black*, 18.

gap. Even Hillary's husband, Bill Clinton, remarked on the "disturbing tendency to wrongly attribute to entire groups, including the white majority, the objectionable conduct of a few members."<sup>12</sup> It is tempting to embrace this seemingly benign notion at face value. After all, *you* are not racist. But accepting this statement unconditionally is a mistake. Racism does not just linger on the outskirts of society. It is part of our national identity, not something that can be attributed to a few particularly heinous individuals. Racism is an insidious force that runs throughout American history. To use political demonology to condemn racism, attributing systemic racism to the loud racists, does nothing to fix the racial problem. Political demonology will do nothing to revise the American Idea. Instead of confronting the value gap that has perpetuated harsh conditions for minorities, blaming individuals only "reinforces the idea that our race problem rests with bad people, with loud racists among us, but not with all of us."<sup>13</sup> It is uncomfortable and flawed to assume that *every* white American is a racist. However, in order to face and fix the problems that minority communities face, it is necessary to first face the fact that racial issues are bigger than a handful of bad people. It is the idea that will continue to be perpetuated if Hillary Clinton stays the course in the Presidential campaign, demonizing Donald Trump as a symbol of hatred.

If Hillary Clinton confronts Donald Trump as an indicator of deeper racial issues, as an indicator of the value gap, successfully revising the American Idea fundamentally is far from guaranteed. Racial issues could still very easily bubble to the surface, regardless of how much mainstream politicians assault the value gap. In Germany today, this very thing is happening.

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<sup>12</sup> Glaude, *Democracy in Black*, 113

<sup>13</sup> Glaude, *Democracy in Black*, 113

After the evil Nazi regime, German politicians strove to eliminate the value gap and the white supremacy that Third Reich leadership held dear. Despite the best efforts of German politicians over the past seventy years, the far-right Alternative for Germany party has made a spirited comeback on the coattails of the refugee crisis, leveraging Islamophobia and xenophobic nationalism. They use the value gap like Donald Trump does, to make people feel as though “their values, national culture and identity are under threat from rapid demographic change.”<sup>14</sup> In recent regional elections, the Alternative for Germany has emerged as the eminent third party in German politics.<sup>15</sup> With over a million refugees admitted into Germany in 2015 alone, the Alternative for Germany party has been able to play on white Germans’ fears of Islam.<sup>16</sup> Their rhetoric justifies violence toward Syrian refugees, who according to the Alternative for Germany are implicitly less valuable than German citizens. This successful reintroduction of the value gap into mainstream German politics is disheartening, and shows that racial issues will not simply disappear once confronted.

Talking about the value gap in America will not be enough. Glaude hypothesizes that government programs and a linked shift in public opinion will play an important role in fighting the racial issues that threaten to rot the core of the American Idea. Racial habits, Glaude states, “are shaped by the kind of society in which we live, and our government plays a big role in shaping that society.”<sup>17</sup> If politicians like Hillary Clinton continue to ignore the value gap,

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<sup>14</sup> “What Can Europe’s Far Right Tell Us about Trump’s Rise?,” FiveThirtyEight, May 18, 2016, <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/what-can-europes-far-right-tell-us-about-trumps-rise/>.

<sup>15</sup> “Germany’s Far-Right AfD Party Is Scaring Europe, and Rising in the Polls | VICE News,” Vice News, March 11, 2016, <https://news.vice.com/article/germanys-far-right-afd-party-is-scaring-europe-and-rising-in-the-polls>.

<sup>16</sup> “Germany Registers Record 1.1 Million Asylum Seekers in 2015,” Al Jazeera America, January 6, 2016, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2016/1/6/refugees-germany-more-than-1million.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Glaude, *Democracy in Black*, 187.

instead relying on political demonology, pretending that we are in or close to a post-racial America, the racial issues that plague minority groups will not magically dissipate. Instead, Americans can look forward to more demagogues like Donald Trump leveraging notions of white supremacy for their own gains. Americans can look forward to continued hardship in minority communities. Americans can look forward to the continued deprecation of the American Idea.

It is a happy fantasy to think that if politicians like Hillary Clinton confronts the value gap, that things will quickly improve, America would immediately become the city on the hill, the redeeming nation that so many politicians insist it is. Germany's newest strain of racism is disheartening and suggests that these issues might never truly be solved, regardless of politicians' willingness to seek solutions. If Hillary were to confront the issue, her campaign would be at risk. She could very easily alienate moderates in important swing states like Ohio, losing herself the election by publicly confronting the value gap instead of utilizing the soaring rhetoric that resonates with American voters. However, to face the issue instead of resorting to political demonology and pretending that only Donald Trump needs to be condemned—just like people did so eagerly in Kony 2012—will only perpetuate the value gap. The longer it takes to confront the value gap, the more problematic it becomes: more people will believe the narrative of colorblind post-racial utopias, despite the continued suffering in minority communities. The next Great Black Depression could be even worse if people do not believe that racial issues plague this country. While there is no perfect solution to racial issues, confronting the value gap as the reason Donald Trump has been successful is the right thing to do. Politicians, Hillary Clinton



included, should no longer skirt the issue. Instead, they need to face the value gap head on. If they do not, the American Idea, already rotting, will wither altogether.

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