

Can the Young Left be Taught Old Tricks?

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On the curious collaboration between the cultural left and the economic right, and how to overcome it.

For all the hideous acts of Trump's administration over the past six weeks there's something of a silver lining to our current political moment: we're now witnessing the emergence of what may well prove to be the most energetic and popular protest movement since the 1960s. And yet it's worth wondering what, broadly speaking, this dissent will stand for apart from spirited opposition to Trump and his administration.

As the most universally reviled person ever to occupy the Oval Office, he may not last the next four, let alone eight, years as president. But it's only too clear that the radical right—represented not just by Trump but also by the Tea Party and, to an even greater extent, the alt-right—has graduated from being a formidable force in American political life to a mainstream one. Surely, driving it back to the margins will require more than loud denunciations and protests, indispensable though these activities may be. It will also depend upon fostering broad consensuses around persuasive alternatives to the galvanizing politics the radical right represents. After all, there is, quite literally, no other way to mobilize the voting masses needed to win elections.

In this light, it's interesting to see the number of articles that have, over the past few months, revisited Richard Rorty's 1997 collection of essays *Achieving our Country*. Most of this attention has taken the form of a belated congratulation to Rorty for his prescience in predicting the rise of a Trump-like strongman. Of course, sharp insights into the conditions that led to this disaster also harbor important lessons. They may help to underscore what the Left, such as it is, has been doing wrong to build those vital consensuses on which electoral victories and effective political movements depend. And in this regard Rorty's analysis seems particularly instructive. For this reason, it's worth dwelling and elaborating on.

Rorty traces the decline, beginning in the 1960s, of what he called the "reformist left"—a left concerned most energetically with union activism, legal reform, and establishing a welfare state—in favour of a cooler, theoretically-savvy left more interested in cultural politics, especially concerning the identity and treatment of minorities, women, and gay people.[1] With origins in the writings of European postmodernism, this new style of politics pollinates in literary departments, and its bloom casts a shadow over large territories of higher educational curriculum. Rorty, a self-identified postmodernist, doesn't conceal his admiration for the achievements of this "cultural left", writing that the "adoption of attitudes which the Right sneers at as "politically correct" has made America a far more civilized society than it was thirty years ago." [2] But, in a passage that went quasi-viral in the weeks after Trump's election, Rorty predicts a dramatic turn to this story:

“During the same period in which socially accepted sadism has steadily diminished, economic inequality and economic insecurity have steadily increased... At some point, something will crack. The nonsuburban electorate will decide that the system has failed and start looking around for a strongman to vote for... One thing that is very likely to happen is that the gains made in the past forty years by black and brown Americans, and by homosexuals will be wiped out... But such a renewal of sadism will not alter the effects of selfishness. For after my imagined strongman takes charge, he will quickly make peace with the international super-rich... To get the country to deal with the consequences [of globalization], the present cultural left would have to transform itself by opening up relations with the residue of the old reformist Left...”[3]

It won't be necessary to spell out the parallels between this vision and the political crisis we find ourselves in today. Rorty joins a number of other authors who have probed the confluence between the cultural left and the political right. Although unlike Jurgen Habermas, David Harvey, and others, he treats this relationship as more or less accidental—a matter of symbiosis between unrelated creatures rather than collaboration between ones sharing the same makeup or ancestry. Those who insist on this shared DNA have a number of arguments at their disposal. They can highlight the similarities between economic marginalism and postmodern perspectivism, the alt-right's embrace of postmodernist tendencies (intertextuality, celebrations of “post-truth” discourse, identity politics), Foucault's fascination with neoliberalism, and postmodernism's origins with far-right thinkers like Heidegger and Nietzsche. But today Rorty's critique seems more to the point. His main concern was that by largely abandoning class politics, the cultural left was gradually alienating itself from America's working-class, making them more vulnerable to the call of regressive, race-baiting voices on the Right.

In a similar vein, I'd contend that there's something about the argumentative style that postmodernism has helped to inspire among broad sections of the Left that surely does little to endear otherwise open-minded Americans to progressive causes. We're often told that postmodernism is no longer a particularly dynamic movement. This seems true, but it's partially because its leading authors, mostly deceased by now, have ascended into the very canon they so dazzlingly deconstruct. While once considered irreverent, they have been institutionalized and continue to enjoy a prominent place in the curriculum of perhaps most liberal arts programs. An impressionable student of such postmodernist classics as *Discipline and Punish*, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and *Writing and Difference*, might be forgiven for forming the impression that progressive political engagement is mostly a matter of unshackling the grip of problematic tropes, discourses, and signifiers on our thinking and practices.

It's not necessarily that postmodernists discourage the mainstays of traditional activism—union struggles, economic and legal reform, anti-war demonstrations. Rather, it's that these activities don't really figure into the sort of political dissidence that their most influential writings appear to prescribe. These works, instead, turn us on to all the oppressive discourses that orient society, and they enable the initiated to identify and critique such discourses using new, rarefied techniques and approaches—*genealogy*, *deconstruction*, *kulturkritik*—further honed by their academic followers. Iris Murdoch memorably suggests that the worldview that underpins deconstruction might be called “linguistic idealism” or “linguistic determinism”, because it sets the individual up as a prop of discourse, rather than as an autonomous user of it.[4] Many critics would argue that this worldview typifies postmodernism generally, tracing it back to the linguistic turn in Heidegger's thought, Barthes' pronouncement of the “death of the author”, and so on. Professors will go blue in the face defending deconstruction and postmodernism against the charge of determinism. But there's little denying that postmodernists, like Marxists, tend to single out structural forces as the prime mover of our values and ideologies. And insofar as they do, their focus might be said to involve

a shift from the means of production to the means of representation, from the base to the superstructure.

Writing in the 2000s, David Foster Wallace noticed similar tendencies among more rank and file progressives. In a fun, if somewhat glib, send up of political correctness, he writes that educated liberals have gradually fallen prey to the illusion that “a society’s mode of expression is productive of its attitudes rather than a product of those attitudes.”[5] This fallacy sets them off on quibbles over whether, for instance, the poor should be described as “low-income” or “economically disadvantaged”, as though coming up with the perfect term would, like the wave of a magic wand, make the pain and humiliation associated with poverty disappear. I’m perhaps naïve enough to believe that more than sociological confusion is at hand when we pay attention to whether the language we use conveys proper respect and sensitivity towards the economically disadvantaged and other marginalized folks. Yet, to the extent that his remarks ring true, they help to underscore the continuity between postmodernism and what’s come increasingly to pass in public life for socially progressive engagement.

While the heavyweights of postmodernism may nearly all have passed away, it’s really not that hard to see their enduring influence on, among others, young writers and activists in the online world today. In articles peppered with postmodernist watchwords like “deconstruct”, “artificial construct”, and “problematize”, writers for publications like VICE, Jezebel, and Everyday Feminism write critically about cultural appropriation, the politics of language, and micro-aggressions. At its best, this sort of criticism helps force into the light all sorts of degrading behaviors woven into everyday life that previous generations of activists took far too much for granted. But for every few timely, even urgent, articles on the complicity of “locker-room talk” with rape culture or on institutional racism in schools, there’s one with a title like “I Was Taught to Be Proud of My Tight Asian P*ssy—Here’s Why I Wish I Hadn’t Been”, “The Most Offensive Halloween Costumes of 2011”, or “Racist Teens Forced to Answer for Tweets About the ‘Nigger’ President”. It might come off as a stretch to trace this clickbait back to the highfalutin *pensées* of Derrida and Foucault. And yet, precisely because of its gossipy air and sensationalism, it’s tempting to see these sort of pieces as the logical extreme of postmodernism’s politicization of the personal and of the representational.[1]

It’s not only its superficiality that makes this “call-out” activism frustrating; it’s also its unmistakable bullying streak. In the last of the articles I just mentioned, a Jezebel author names and defames a number of high school students who posted racist comments to social media after Obama’s 2012 reelection. Today such call-out tactics seem commonplace in the world of Internet politics, where those guilty of far lesser offences could easily wake up to find that something nasty they’ve Tweeted or been recorded saying has gone viral and made them the target of a crusade of online ridicule, doxxing, and even death threats. Of course, it’s true that the targets of such crusades often have much to be ashamed of. But social psychologists suggest that rubbing this in is unlikely to get us anywhere.[6] Angry people, it seems, don’t respond well to humiliation.

It’s the *démodé* view of this author that there’s only one tactic capable of compelling someone to earnestly abandon a viewpoint, racist or otherwise, and that’s making persuasive, reasonable arguments against that viewpoint. Those who resist this sort of talk relish pointing out when a straight, white male, like me, pushes it. They assume that the capacity to keep one’s head and barrel on logocentrically in a debate is most enjoyed by those who, by virtue of their racial and gender privilege, remain relatively insulated from the toxic effects of prejudice. This is a constructive point. Were I transgender or Black, I’m not sure I’d be coolly seeking out dialogue with someone calling me the wrong pronoun deliberately or the n-word to my face. But the insights of positionality go both ways. Being “woke” to the intersectional webs of oppression that structure contemporary society can also be a form of privilege. This is especially true when this awareness is bestowed by a liberal arts education too unaffordable and unemployable to be sensibly pursued these days by nearly anyone

except children of well-to-do families.

Being faithful to the insights of positionality demands that we see our less socially tolerant interlocutors as more than mouthpieces of problematic text to be deconstructed or called-out. It means seeing them as people with reasons, however misguided and socially conditioned, for holding the views they do. I'm aware that the racist high school students called out by Jezebel, like most of the alt-right, are probably even less interested in the adventures of reasonable interlocution than the online activists I'm grumbling about. But that shouldn't encourage us to emulate their hit-and-run tactics. Whatever help theory can offer us with the goal I'm promoting, I'm doubtful we'll find it from those postmodernists who, for all the fascination they continue to exercise, raise such exaggerated suspicions about rationality, the notion of the subject, and the relevance of authorial intent.

It would be unfair to pin the tendency to pass off titillation as socially conscious commentary on young activists alone. After all, it was widely exhibited by some of the most influential media outlets in their coverage of this past election cycle. To the extent that CNN, for instance, seemed interested in scrutinizing the substance of Trump's campaign platform, it was usually as a backstory to the main story: Trump's a racist and sexist piece of garbage. Hence their fixation on proposals like The Wall and the Muslim Ban, rather than his equally bonkers stances on the environment, financial regulation, and taxation. To be sure, Trump's present muzzling of the press, which his administration excuses by engaging in exaggerated accusations about the rampancy of "fake news", is ominous. But the media's sensational treatment of his campaign, and to a lesser extent of the current administration, has done little to reverse the so-called "post-truth" trend in today's political discourse, in which the age-old struggle between public reason and emotional appeals appears to be increasingly decided in favour of the latter.

Today, the media can't help but pay rapt attention to Trump's political agenda. And yet insofar as they're analyzing his economic platform, there's a lingering tendency to depict him as a protectionist, and to disparage him as such. This is unfortunate, not just because it encourages the perception of Trump as a beleaguered champion of working people, but also because it's actually pretty misleading. While Trump's stances on trade may be crudely protectionist, this term evokes a tradition that has always been the bugaboo of neoliberals and laissez-faire capitalists. And yet on so many issues, Trump's economics represent a grotesque, but relatively faithful adoption of neoliberal mandates. By understanding this point, we can be more candid about the outcomes his economic plan portends for working Americans based on historical precedent. And it's this neoliberal legacy that more than any gadflies on the cultural left has served, in a perverse sort of feedback loop, to precipitate the rise of Trump and the radical right.

Neoliberalism—whose storming in the 1970s and 1980s of the academic and political world was surely made easier by the cultural left's simultaneous withdrawal from political economy—is generally associated with three core political initiatives: deregulation, minimal taxes, and privatization. Historically, their implementation has tended to be most forceful in right-wing authoritarian regimes, as abetted by Chicago School trained economists and Washington policy-makers. Although, in American political life, the neoliberal turn also oversaw the steady dismantlement of Keynesian and New Deal policies at the hands of Democratic and Republican politicians alike. After the crash of 2008 and Obama's election, we witnessed a moderate return to Keynesian policies, tailored for contemporary times, the most important of which Trump's administration is poised to reverse and replace with a program of neoliberalism so extreme it almost appears as a caricature.

So far, we know that Trump has approved the Republican healthcare program, which would continue to rely on private insurance but distribute far fewer subsidies than Obamacare did; begun his legislative assault on Dodd-Frank, which he also threatens, if somewhat unrealistically, to repeal in

its entirety; endeavoured to stack his cabinet with Tea Party politicians and corporate elites; spoken enthusiastically about charter schools; endorsed the anti-union Right to Work bill; and promised the largest tax cuts for the wealthy since Reagan. When Trump aligns the prosperity of ordinary Americans with such counterreforms, he can only be evoking the old rising-tide hypothesis, which holds that economic growth through laissez-faire practices brings greater wealth and living standards to everyone in society. It was also in this spirit that Reagan mounted an aggressive assault on unions and issued momentous financial deregulations and income tax cuts for the wealthy, who it was imagined would use these freed up earnings to hike up their personal investments, proliferating jobs and opportunities for those beneath them.

American productivity has risen by about three quarters since Reagan took office, but even conservative analysts disagree about the extent to which this growth is attributable to tax cuts. Uncontroversial by now, of course, is that the gains of this growth, far from trickling down as promised, have disproportionately been enjoyed by the rich. Adjusted for inflation, the average after-tax income of the 1 percent has more than doubled since Reagan first took office.[7] Over this same period median household income has grown by less than 10 percent, and all only during the very first few years.[8] The period in question has been particularly unforgiving for the working class. Their average work-hours, when they weren't being swallowed up by recession-induced layoffs, have increased[9] while their average wages have fallen.[10]

All of this has contributed to a situation in which, as widely reported, the richest 1 percent of Americans now owns more wealth than the bottom 80 percent.[11] For all the emphasis by the Left in recent decades on reducing the stigmas associated with race and poverty, since the 1970s the percentage of Americans actually living below the poverty line hasn't significantly diminished[12], and relative to whites the wages of Black and Hispanic people have scarcely improved.[13] The last time America experienced inequality of this magnitude coupled with economic stagnation, President Roosevelt issued unprecedented tax hikes on the wealthy to finance perhaps the most robust job-creating and infrastructure program in the history of democracy. Trump also promises to unfold a massive infrastructure program, a private investing scheme based on offering billions in tax breaks to businesses. But even fiscally conservative analysts are skeptical that this program creates the incentives needed to stimulate investment in many areas where public need is greatest.[14]

The story the familiar facts I've been discussing tell is one in which the American Dream has again become the stuff of Horatio Alger mythmaking—a mirage for millions of working Americans. It may seem ironic that the anger this situation has inflamed was most frantically on display among supporters of Trump, the presidential candidate least likely to guide America out of this crisis. Yet, after reminding ourselves of the racist air often surrounding this anger it becomes less surprising. The correlations between economic stagnation and escalating displays of chauvinism are widely discussed in the social sciences. They should also be apparent to anyone with some sense of the conditions underlying Brexit and the original rise of fascism nearly a century ago. This connection does not absolve the nativists and racists for their bigotry. But it should sharpen our awareness of the power of right-wing ideologues to exploit the anxieties of the public when diminishing opportunities and social services intensify competition and resentment at the middle and bottom of the social scale.

Only time will tell whether the parallels between Trumpism and fascism have been exaggerated. But insofar as Trump has sought to shift blame for the economic woes of working Americans towards minorities, evoking an essentializing dichotomy between what the white Christians of the Tea Party would call "real America" and their brown-skinned usurpers, he's used a tactic uncanny in its similarities to the anti-Semitic propaganda of modern Europe's darkest period. If, tragically, millions of Trump's supporters take his bait, so in their way have scores of Democrats and progressives. The xenophobia and racism emanating from Trump's movement are real. However, by framing his

supporters' anti-immigration sentiments narrowly in terms of these prejudices, progressives effectively gaslight all those whose reservations about immigration stem from natural concerns about its destructive effects on their wages and opportunities. In this way, many progressives participate in the same sort of dichotomizing just described, parting the country into minorities, victimized by race but not so much by class, and the white "deplorables" who antagonize them. Pretending, as hawkers of #alllivesmatter do, that American society is not already divided by racial inequalities and tensions is disingenuous. Racial and gender differences are not only real, ignoring them in favour of some color-blind and neutered vision of the individual is also one of the historical strategies of neoliberalism to avoid redressing racial and gender inequities.

Still, there's something fishy about the way the cultural left has habitually depicted the nature of these differences. Contemporary identity politics is supposed to have shed the shackles of essentialism. And yet by entertaining postmodernist conceits about the "constructedness" of human nature and the incommensurability of our cultural "language games", it deprives us of a theoretical basis on which to assert common interests among people regardless of their gender and race. Thankfully, no theorizing is required, however, to safely assume that everyone has a fundamental interest, for instance, in access to quality healthcare. So, we should take it for granted that nearly everyone would benefit from a single payer healthcare system simply because globally its track record, in terms of its efficiency as well as its accessibility, puts America's more or less privatized system to shame. It would be silly to hope that this and other urgently needed social democratic reforms, like ensuring that everyone has access to free or affordable quality education, would phase out racism and xenophobia within the ranks of the middle and working class once and for all, as they certainly haven't in Scandinavia. Effectively administered, however, such reforms would help to quell major sources of material conflicts among working Americans by distributing social benefits and economic opportunities downwards.

We are entering what may well be the most socially backward, plutocratic, and environmentally catastrophic presidency in the history of the American republic—to say nothing of the threat to international stability posed by Trump's unpredictable isolationism. If I've been partially blaming the Foucault-reading, "politically correct" left for cultivating the seedlings from which these *fleurs du mal* have sprung, it's not merely to engage in the sort of political infighting that the Left excels at. It's also been in a clumsy attempt to illuminate a path out of this awful morass. To the extent that intellectuals have a role to play in building the sort of future for America that their grandchildren won't recall with shame, I share Rorty's conviction that they should spend less time in cloistered discussions about cultural and linguistic politics and more time sermonizing about economic injustice. This advice could be extended to many of the "Social Justice Warriors" I've been complaining about, that army of online activists whose praxis seems to have too much to do with humiliating those who haven't fully adopted their jargon and social attitudes. But it's reassuring to observe that at the grassroots level, a broad, if still fragmentary, movement for radical economic reform has gradually been taking shape since about 2011. It's represented not only by the remnants of the Occupy movement and the beleaguered Sanders-wing of the Democratic Party, but also, of course, by a cross-generational coalition of union and labour activists, who, while not as visible as they were, say, in the 1950s, are more pissed off and articulate than ever. Its energies are present in the Women's Marches, which, being far more than a big stink about Trump's sexist piggishness, were awash with signs protesting the gender pay gap, sexist employment discrimination, and barriers to women's reproductive and healthcare rights.

But if any group is at the forefront of this groundswell of progressive economic populism, right now it's Black Lives Matter. Non-hierarchical and decentralized in its organization, the international movement has nevertheless produced one of the most widely circulated platforms for radical reform in recent memory. Most of its calls to actions aim to redress grievances experienced uniquely or

especially by Black communities. But at the heart of this manifesto is the recognition, shared by so many leaders of the civil rights movement, that because poverty is a problem that disproportionately affects persons of colour, racial emancipation depends crucially on socialistic reform. Thus, for a movement that's had its occasional run-ins with Bernie Sanders and his supporters, many of BLM's demands sound a lot like Sanders' campaign talking points. BLM promotes, for instance, establishing free healthcare and education for all, reinstating Glass-Steagall, restructuring the tax-code along progressive lines, enhancing a variety of labour rights, ending TPP, and supporting the development of economic cooperatives.

There is much speculation, supported by some polls, that many of Trump's supporters viewed Sanders' campaign favourably, and may have even switched sides had Sanders' name been on the Democratic ticket. In any case, much of the economic left simply regards it as a truism, with more than a little historical evidence in their favour, that most of the initiatives just mentioned would go a long way in improving the prospects of those in the bottom two or three quintiles of income distribution. In addition to millions of American persons of colour, this group includes many, perhaps most, of the non-college educated and Rust Belt whites who voted in record number for Trump. This overlap seems to underscore that one of the crucial contingents largely absent from the progressive economic movement gathering steam is, in a striking reversal of historical norms, blue-collar whites.

There are many reasons to be cynical about the Democratic Party leadership's big talk of reasserting themselves as the party of labour. But what's certain is that no sweeping democratic transformation can ever take place without first building broad public consensus around common goals. One need not sympathize with Trump's working class supporters—though you should probably try—to appreciate this point and also that consensus aren't won when abusing your opponent substitutes for persuading them. Broad working class solidarity may be as elusive today as it was when Adorno, disheartened by the failures of a proletarian revolution to materialize and defeat the rise of fascism, helped lead an intellectual retreat from political economy towards the lofty pursuits of *kulturkritik*. But so long as individual self-interest persists, the talking points of Sanders' and BLM's socialistic platforms, advanced politely but relentlessly, may still—who knows?—make economic progressives out of millions of Trump supporters.

I'm afraid the sort of cross-party diplomacy I've been recommending will nonetheless sound aloof from the social justice concerns of Muslims, women, LGBTQ*, and persons of colour at a moment when these concerns resonate with more urgency than ever. As so many of Trump's directives make all too clear, these groups are deservedly anxious about what his presidency portends for their futures. They're also right to be nervous about what message his behaviour sends to the sort of thug who's been waiting for his moment to attack those who do not meet his definition of "real Americans". But I simply can't square the image of this thug with what I know of the average Trump supporter. She's someone who may not enthusiastically share our commitments to affirmative action, same-sex marriage, and transforming all public spaces into safe spaces for transgender people, but she's hardly a brown-shirt in the making. All the same, such differences concern matters of principle central to a progressive vision of America. Those of us striving to establish class alliances with more moderate socially conservatives like her face an ongoing dilemma: whether to change the conversation back to economic injustice when divisive social issues come up, or to get ready for a fight. To the extent that such arguments are inevitable, even necessary, I've suggested we should avoid the bullying tactics radiating from certain corners of the Left. But I can't pretend to offer a more enlightened playbook for confronting everyday intolerance apart from vague nods in the direction of civility and deliberativeness. My hope is that by doing our homework in political economy we'll be compelled to take better take account of the reality that racism and xenophobia can't always be explained as the ideological and linguistic fog emanating from our traditions. Sometimes they're instead rooted in material and economic conflicts of a variety that, perhaps not

by coincidence, tend to elude the personal experiences of successful journalists and middle-class activists.

The postmodernist writers who came into vogue during the era of mounting inequality I've been discussing are prone to claiming that judging the conditions of minorities or "the other" according to the standards of the dominant society is Eurocentric and problematic. But when considered in the context of this same history, when so many Hispanic and Black Americans continue to suffer from crippling poverty, this argument sounds particularly callous. Ironically, for a movement so apt at tracing out the role of progressive discourses in preserving hierarchy, the cultural left has sometimes acted as a guardian of the economic status quo at the expense of the very marginalized groups it seeks to protect. All this by way of saying that the mainstream rehabilitation of labour politics and political economy, far from being a struggle only for the soul of America's white working class, also pursues the unfulfilled social justice goals promoted by the cultural left. With Trump now unleashing the closest thing to a fascist presidency ever seen in America, it seems no exaggeration to say that the welfare of America's poor and marginalized, and the sound conscience of everyone else, depends in large part upon the fate of this revival.

[1] I believe that Rorty's distinction between an old-fashioned, reformist left and a more fashionable cultural left captures a rift that persists among contemporary progressives. It's a distinction on which I'll be relying, but is nevertheless oversimplifying. For instance, it seems to imply that political concerns about language can't possibly lead to the sort of legislative reform that could meaningfully improve the lives of minorities and women. Today, advocacy regarding the abusive nature of cultural stereotyping and tone-policing, however important this advocacy may be, often seems disconnected from rights struggles and electoral politics. But this isn't always true of the politics of language. For instance, because so many failures to accommodate transgender people stem from society's unwillingness to even recognize the legitimacy of their identity, it's natural that transgender activism often concerns the right of transgender people to be identified according to their preferred gender pronouns, such as in government-issued identification. Similarly, Canada's colonial legacy has meant that the languages and cultures of their Indigenous peoples, now officially recognized as equal partner nations in Canada's foundation, have faced severe repression, even attempted annihilation, by the state and civil society throughout Canadian history. Among the initiatives demanded as reparations for these crimes include recognizing the right of Indigenous people to receive education and other social services in their native languages.

*Conrad Sweatman is a writer, arts administrator, and musician. He admits to having written poorly for at least one of the media publications he criticizes in this article.

[2] Richard Rorty, *Achieving our Country* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 81.

[3] Rorty, *Achieving our Country*, 83-91

[4] Iris Murdoch. "Derrida and Structuralism" in *Metaphysics as a guide to morals*. (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 183

[5] David Foster Wallace, "Democracy, English, and the wars over usage", *Harper's*, April 2011, http://instruct.westvalley.edu/lafave/DFW_present_tense.html

[6] Source: German Lopez, "Research says there are ways to reduce racial bias. Calling people racist isn't one of them", *Vox*, November 15, 2016, accessed March 5, 2017, <http://www.vox.com/identities/2016/11/15/13595508/racism-trump-research-study>

[7] Joseph Stiglitz, "Inequality and economic growth", *The Political Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (December 2015): 135

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] See discussion in Figure 3 in Lawrence Mishel, Elise Gould, and Josh Bivens, "Wage Stagnation in Nine Charts", Economic Policy Institute, January 6, 2015, accessed March 5, 2017, <http://www.epi.org/publication/charting-wage-stagnation/>

[11] Barack Obama, State of the Union Address, January 28, 2014, The American Presidency Project, accessed March 5, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=104596>

[12] See Chart 1 in Robert Rector and Rachel Sheffield, "The War on Poverty after 50 years", Heritage Foundation, <http://www.heritage.org/poverty-and-inequality/report/the-war-poverty-after-50-years>, accessed March 5, 2017

[13] See Figure 1 in Steven Perlberg, "American Median Incomes By Race Since 1967", *Business Insider*, at: <http://www.businessinsider.com/heres-median-income-in-the-us-by-race-2013-9>, accessed March 5, 2017

[14] John Lowy and David A. Lieb, "Trump's infrastructure plan has huge risks", *Business Insider*, February 7, 2017, accessed March 4, 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/ap-trump-advisers-tax-credit-plan-for-infrastructure-has-risks-2017-2>

Editors' note: In this article's original, the author referred critically to a racial slur, written uncensored in quotation marks. At the author's recommendation, this quotation was substituted in 2023 with a euphemism. Where the author refers to online articles with titles containing offensive or racist language, these have been left uncensored for bibliographic accuracy.