“If we are to keep the enormity of the forces aligned against us from establishing a false hierarchy of oppression, we must school ourselves to recognize that any attack against Blacks, any attack against women, is an attack against all of us who recognize that our interests are not being served by the systems we support. Each one of us here is a link in the connection between antipoor legislation, gay shootings, the burning of synagogues, street harassment, attacks against women, and resurgent violence against Black people.” —Audre Lorde, “Learning from the 60s"

Donald J. Trump’s election was a national trauma, an epic catastrophe that has left millions in the United States and around the world in a state of utter shock, uncertainty, deep depression, and genuine fear. The fear is palpable and justified, especially for those Trump and his acolytes targeted—the undocumented, Muslims, anyone who “looks” undocumented or Muslim, people of color, Jews, the LGBTQ community, the disabled, women, activists of all kinds (especially Black Lives Matter and allied movements resisting state-sanctioned violence), trade unions. . . . the list is long. And the attacks have begun; as I write these words, reports of hate crimes and racist violence [2] are flooding my inbox.

The common refrain is that no one expected this. (Of course, the truth is that many people did expect this, just not in the elite media.) At no point, this refrain goes, could “we” imagine Trump in the Oval Office surrounded by a cabinet made up of some of the most idiotic, corrupt, and authoritarian characters in modern day politics—Rudolph Giuliani, Chris Christie, Newt Gingrich, Sarah Palin, John Bolton, Ben Carson, Jeff Sessions, David “Blue Lives Matter” Clarke, Joe Arpaio, to name a few. Meanwhile, paid professional pundits are scrambling to peddle their analyses and to normalize the results—on the same broadcast media that helped deliver Trump’s victory by making him their ratings-boosting spectacle rather than attending to issues, ideas, and other candidates (e.g., Bernie Sanders or Jill Stein). They deliver the same old platitudes: disaffected voters, angry white men who have suffered economically and feel forgotten, Trump’s populist message represented the nation’s deep-seated distrust of Washington, ad infinitum. Some liberal pundits have begun to speak of President-Elect Trump as thoughtful and conciliatory, and some even suggest that his unpredictability may prove to be an asset. The protests are premature or misplaced. All of this from the same folks who predicted a Clinton victory.

But the outcome should not have surprised us. This election was, among other things, a referendum on whether the United States will be a straight, white nation reminiscent of the mythic “old days” when armed white men ruled, owned their castle, boasted of unvanquished military power, and everyone else knew their place. Henry Giroux’s new book America at War With Itself [3] made this point with clarity and foresight two months before the election. The easy claim that Trump appeals to legitimate working-class populism driven by class anger, Giroux argues, ignores both the historical link between whiteness, citizenship, and humanity, and the American dream of wealth
accumulation built on private property. Trump’s followers are not trying to redistribute the wealth, nor are they all “working class”—their annual median income is about $72,000. On the contrary, they are attracted to Trump’s wealth as metonym of an American dream that they, too, can enjoy once America is “great” again—which is to say, once the country returns to being “a white MAN’s country.” What Giroux identifies as “civic illiteracy” keeps them convinced that the descendants of unfree labor or the colonized, or those who are currently unfree, are to blame for America’s decline and for blocking their path to Trump-style success.

For the white people who voted overwhelmingly for Trump, their candidate embodied the anti-Obama backlash. Pundits who say race was not a factor point to rural, predominantly white counties that went for Obama in 2008 and 2012, but now went for Trump, and to the low black and Latinx voter turnout. However, turnout was down overall, not just among African Americans. Post-election analysis shows that as a percentage of total votes the black vote dropped only 1 percent compared with the 2012 election, even while the number of black ballots counted decreased by nearly 11 percent. (Why this happened is beyond the scope of this essay, but one might begin with Greg Palast’s findings about voter suppression and the use of “crosscheck” to invalidate ballots.) Moreover, claims that nearly a third of Latinx went for Trump have been disputed by the website Latino Decision, whose careful research puts the figure at 18 percent. The turnout does not contradict the fact that Trump drew the clear majority of white votes. This is not startling news.

If history is our guide, “whitelash” usually follows periods of expanded racial justice and democratic rights. In the aftermath of Reconstruction, there were many instances in which southern white men switched from the biracial, abolitionist Republicans to the “redeemers,” whether it be the Democrats or, in states like Texas, the “White Man’s Party.” (No ambiguity there.) Or in the 1880s and ‘90s, when white Populists betrayed their Black Populist allies in a united struggle to redistribute railroad land grants to farmers, reduce debt by inflating currency, abolish private national banks, nationalize railroads and telegraphs, and impose a graduated income tax to shift the burden onto the wealthy, among other things. Many of these one-time white “allies” joined the Ku Klux Klan, defeated the Lodge Force Bill of 1890 which would have authorized federal supervision of elections to protect black voting rights, and led the efforts to disfranchise black voters.

Or the late 1960s, when vibrant struggles for black, brown, American Indian, Asian American, gay and lesbian, and women’s liberation, the anti-war movement, and student demands for a democratic revolution were followed by white backlash and the election of Richard Nixon—whose rhetoric of “law and order” and the “silent majority” Trump shamelessly plagiarized.

Of course, Hilary Clinton did win the popular vote, and some are restoring to the easy lament that, were it not for the arcane Electoral College (itself a relic of slave power), we would not be here. One might add, too, that had it not been for the gutting of the Voting Rights Act opening the door for expanded strategies of voter suppression, or the permanent disfranchisement of some or all convicted felons in ten states, or the fact that virtually all people currently in cages cannot vote at all, or the persistence of misogyny in our culture, we may have had a different outcome. This is all true. But we cannot ignore the fact that the vast majority of white men and a majority of white women, across class lines, voted for a platform and a message of white supremacy, Islamophobia, misogyny, xenophobia, homophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-science, anti-Earth, militarism, torture, and policies that blatantly maintain income inequality. The vast majority of people of color voted against Trump, with black women registering the highest voting percentage for Clinton of any other demographic (93 percent). It is an astounding number when we consider that her husband’s administration oversaw the virtual destruction of the social safety net by turning welfare into workfare, cutting food stamps, preventing undocumented workers from receiving benefits, and denying former drug felons and users access to public housing; a dramatic expansion of the border patrol, immigrant detention centers, and the fence on Mexico’s border; a crime bill that escalated the war on drugs and accelerated mass incarceration; as well as NAFTA and legislation deregulating financial institutions.

Still, had Trump received only a third of the votes he did and been defeated, we still would have had ample reason to worry about our future.

I am not suggesting that white racism alone explains Trump’s victory. Nor am I dismissing the white
working class’s very real economic grievances. It is not a matter of disaffection versus racism or sexism versus fear. Rather, racism, class anxieties, and prevailing gender ideologies operate together, inseparably, or as Kimberlé Crenshaw would say, intersectionally. White working-class men understand their plight through a racial and gendered lens. For women and people of color to hold positions of privilege or power over them is simply unnatural and can only be explained by an act of unfairness—for example, affirmative action. White privilege is taken for granted to the point where it need not be named and can’t be named. So, as activist/scholar Bill Fletcher recently observed [8], even though Trump’s call to deport immigrants, close the borders, and reject free trade policies appealed to working-class whites’ discontent with the effects of globalization, Trump’s plans do not amount to a rejection of neoliberalism. Fletcher writes,

“Trump focused on the symptoms inherent in neoliberal globalization, such as job loss, but his was not a critique of neoliberalism. He continues to advance deregulation, tax cuts, anti-unionism, etc. He was making no systemic critique at all, but the examples that he pointed to from wreckage resulting from economic and social dislocation, resonated for many whites who felt, for various reasons, that their world was collapsing.”

Yet Fletcher is quick not to reduce white working-class support for Trump to class fears alone, adding, “This segment of the white population was looking in terror at the erosion of the American Dream, but they were looking at it through the prism of race.”

A New York Times poll [9] shows that Trump supporters identified immigration and terrorism, not the economy, as the two most important issues in the campaign. Immigration and terrorism are both about race—Mexicans and Muslims. That there are “illegal” immigrants from around the globe, including Canada, Israel, and all over Europe doesn’t matter: anti-immigrant movements target those who can be racially profiled. And while Trump’s America fears “terrorism,” it does not disavow homegrown terrorist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, despite the fact that white nationalist movements are responsible for the majority of violent terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. On the contrary, Trump was not only endorsed by white nationalists and U.S.-based fascists, but during the campaign he refused to renounce their support, and Trump’s leading candidate for attorney general, Rudy Giuliani, has openly called [10] Black Lives Matter “terrorists.”

So where do we go from here? If we really care about the world, our country, and our future, we have no choice but to resist. We need to reject a thoroughly bankrupt Democratic Party leadership that is calling for conciliation and, in Obama’s words, “rooting for [Trump’s] success.” Pay attention: Trump’s success means mass deportation; massive military spending; the continuation and escalation of global war; a conservative Supreme Court poised to roll back Roe v. Wade, marriage equality, and too many rights to name here; a justice department and FBI dedicated to growing the Bush/Obama-era surveillance state and waging COINTELPRO-style war on activists; fiscal policies that will accelerate income inequality; massive cuts in social spending; the weakening or elimination of the Affordable Care Act; and the partial dismantling and corporatization of government.

What must resistance look like? There are at least five things we have to do right now:

**Build up the sanctuary movement**

In the 1980s, when nearly one million refugees fled U.S.-backed dictatorships in Guatemala and El Salvador, churches offered shelter, sanctuary, and assistance to those seeking political asylum, and over thirty cities were subsequently designated “sanctuary cities” by their local governments. The Obama administration’s deportations of undocumented workers rebooted the sanctuary movement, along with a vibrant immigrant rights movement that pushed the president to use executive authority to launch the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA). Trump has vowed to end both programs, leaving some five million immigrants vulnerable to deportation and identifiable through their applications, and he has promised to immediately cut all federal funding for sanctuary cities.

To those who argue that millions of undocumented people are not “political refugees,” I counter that Trump’s war on immigrants is driven entirely by his quest to take power—they will become
casualties of his political machinations. Some states have already outlawed the longstanding principle of sanctuary status, but this should not deter us from strengthening and expanding the sanctuary movement to other institutions. For example, many of us who work in the University of California system are working to turn our campuses into sanctuaries—preferably with legal and administrative backing. But even without the law behind us, we must act on moral principle.

**Defend all of our targeted communities**

We must defend against hate crimes, Islamophobia, anti-black racism, attacks on queer and trans people, and the erosion of reproductive rights. There is no need to reinvent the wheel since there are already hundreds of organizations across the country dedicated to the fight, including [INCITE: Women of Color Against Violence](#), [Radical Women](#), the [Immigrant Solidarity Network](#), the [Praxis Project](#), the [Praxis Center](#), [CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities](#), the [Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA)](#), [the African American Policy Forum](#), the [Network Against Islamophobia](#), and [Causa Justa](#), to name only a few. One of the main targets of attack, of course, is the [Movement for Black Lives](#), along with the dozens of organizations upon which it was built—Black Lives Matter, the Dream Defenders, Million Hoodies, Black Youth Project 100, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, We Charge Genocide, and Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity (BOLD), among others.

We need to support these movements and institutions, financially and by doing the work. And we must defend the political and cultural spaces that enable us to plot, plan, build community and sustain social movements. Here in Los Angeles this means spaces such as the L.A. Black Workers Center, the Labor/Community Strategy Center and its new community space, Strategy and Soul, the L.A. Community Action Network, the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, the Community Coalition, and Revolutionary Autonomous Communities, among many others.

In New York we can point to Decolonize This Place; in Detroit, the Boggs Center; in St. Louis, Organization for Black Struggle, and so on. There are literally hundreds of centers around the country building for local power, and while none were immune to state surveillance in the past, we can expect heightened monitoring and outright attacks under this extreme right-wing regime. Now is not the time to retreat to our identity silos. We need solidarity more than ever, recognizing that all solidarities are imperfect, often fragile, temporary, and always forged in struggle and sustained through hard work. In our state of emergency, political disagreements, slights, misunderstandings, and microaggressions should not prohibit us from fighting for people’s rights, privileges, and lives.

**Stop referring to the South as a political backwater, a distinctive site of racist right-wing reaction**

First, white supremacy, homophobia, and anti-union attitudes are national, not regional, problems. Second, black and multiracial groups in the South are at the forefront of resisting Trump’s authoritarian agenda and building power outside the mainstream Democratic Party. Among them are [Project South](#), [Southerners on New Ground (SONG)](#), the Moral Mondays Movement, [Kindred: Southern Healing Justice Collective](#), [Jackson Rising](#) in Mississippi, Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) in Louisville, Asian Americans Advancing Justice in Atlanta, and the Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights.

The frontline battles that preceded Trump’s election must not be abandoned. On the contrary, they need to be strengthened. We must redouble our fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline and support the Standing Rock Sioux Nation’s historic resistance. There is no question that Trump’s election has further empowered the corporation behind the pipeline—the Texas-based Fortune 500 company Energy Transfer Partners—to continue the build no matter what the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers or the Obama Justice Department says. We need to recognize Standing Rock as not only a struggle for environmental justice but an episode in Native people’s five-hundred-year resistance to colonialism. And speaking of colonialism, the crisis in Puerto Rico has not abated—not in the least. As I write, Puerto Ricans on the island and in the U.S. mainland are using every means at their disposal to resist [PROMESA](#), the U.S. plan that empowers a seven-member, unelected board to impose austerity measures as a way of restructuring its debt—measures that include wage reductions,
selling off public assets, altering retirement plans for public employees, and fast-tracking changes even if they violate existing laws.

**Support and deepen the anti-Klan and anti-fascist movement.**

We must especially support groups such as Southern Poverty Law Center [27], which has been on the frontlines of this movement for decades. Although the fight against white supremacist organizations has been continual since the 1860s, the federal government has never successfully outlawed the Klan and similar vigilante groups (although in the 1950s the state of Alabama succeeded in outlawing the NAACP). With Trump’s election we are likely to see a surge in white nationalist and other right-wing terrorism, including attacks on black churches, synagogues, mosques, abortion clinics; and against non-white, queer, and trans people and immigrants. Some on the left will argue that resisting the so-called “alt-right” is a secondary issue since these are fringe movements and building class unity across racial lines ought to be our priority. But with the memory of Colorado Springs and Charleston seared into our memory, this argument rings hollow. And while President Obama’s poignant rendition of “Amazing Grace” at Reverend Clementa Pinckney’s funeral moved much of the nation, the truth is that it is easier to pass laws criminalizing organizations that support the boycott of businesses and institutions complicit in Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestine than it is to outlaw the Ku Klux Klan.

**Rebuild the labor movement**

As obvious as this may seem, the entire labor movement is under attack on a global scale. Today labor unions are portrayed as corrupt, bloated, a drain on the economy, and modern-day cartels that threaten workers’ “liberty.” Corporations and the CEOs who run them are portrayed as the most efficient and effective mode of organization. In our neoliberal age, emergency financial managers are sent in to replace elected government during real or imagined economic crises; charter schools organized along corporate lines are replacing public schools; universities are being restructured along corporate lines with presidents increasingly functioning like CEOs; and a businessman with a checkered record, a history of improprieties and legal violations and allegations of sexual assault, and no experience whatsoever in government is elected president.

Today’s economic debates focus not on alternatives to capitalism but on what kind of capitalism—capitalism with a safety net for the poor or one driven by extreme free-market liberalization? A capitalism in which the state’s role is to bail out big banks and financial institutions, or one where the state imposes (or rather restores) greater regulation in order to avoid economic crises? In both of these scenarios, a weakened labor movement is a given.

The once-powerful unions are doing little more than fighting to restore basic collective bargaining rights and deciding how much they are going to give back. Union leaders are struggling just to participate in crafting austerity measures. In the New Deal era, the state’s efforts to save capitalism centered on Keynesian strategies of massive state expenditures in infrastructure, job creation, a social safety net in the form of direct aid and social security, and certain protections for the right of unions to organize. All these measures were made possible by a strong labor movement. There was a level of militant organization that we did not see in our post-2008 collapse, in spite of Occupy Wall Street. While Occupy was massive, international, and built on preexisting social justice movements, it lacked the kind of institutional power base and political clout that organized labor had in the 1930s. Of course, labor unions have also been powerful engines of racial and gender exclusion, working with capital to impose glass ceilings and racially segmented wages, but the twenty-first-century labor movement has largely embraced principles of social justice, antiracism, immigrant rights, and cross-border strategies.

Obviously there is much missing here, like abolishing the Electoral College and continuing to wage a fight for local power in the legislative and electoral arenas as well as in the streets. Local campaigns to raise the minimum wage, for example, have not only produced key victories but served to mobilize people around issues of injustice and inequality. The sites of resistance will become clearer as the political situation becomes more concrete, especially after January 20.

But I want to return to the white working class and how we might break the cycle of “whitelash.”
First, we cannot change this country without winning over some portion of white working people, and I am not talking about gaining votes for the Democratic Party. I am talking about opening a path to freeing white people from the prison house of whiteness. True, with whiteness comes privilege, but many of the perceived privileges are inaccessible to most, which then generates resentment. Exposing whiteness for what it is—a foundational myth for the birth and consolidation of capitalism—is fundamental if we are to build a genuine social movement dedicated to dismantling the oppressive regimes of racism, heteropatriarchy, empire, and class exploitation that is at the root of inequality, precarity, materialism, and violence in many forms. I am not suggesting we ignore their grievances, but that we help white working people understand the source of their discontent—real and imagined.

Is this possible? The struggle to recruit the white working class is an old story. Black movement leaders have been trying to free white working people from the paltry wages of whiteness since Reconstruction, at least, and it seems to always end badly. This history is not necessarily legible because we tend to conflate populism and fascism with what Henry Giroux astutely identifies as authoritarianism. Populism is the idea that ordinary people ought to have the power to control their government and their communities, especially along lines that benefit the collective. In the 1880s and ‘90s, the black populist movement adopted a vision of a new society based on cooperative economics.

The great writer and activist Timothy Thomas Fortune gave their unique vision eloquent voice and plans for action in his book *Black and White: Land, Labor and Politics in the South* [28] (1884), which offered a path for the emancipation of the nation as a whole, not just black people. He attacked America’s betrayal of Reconstruction, identified monopoly and private ownership of land as the central source of inequality, and articulated a vision of a democratic, caring political economy based on equity and fairness. The National Colored Alliance members had advanced beyond printing more money or demanding free silver, adopting instead a more radical redistribution of wealth and power. They wanted more than a short-term alliance just to raise wages for picking cotton or reducing debt. But Fortune understood that a genuine cooperative commonwealth is not possible unless white workers and farmers join the movement.

“The hour is approaching,” he wrote, “when the laboring classes of our country, North, East, West and South, will recognize that they have a common cause, a common humanity and a common enemy; and that, therefore, if they would triumph over wrong and place the laurel wreath upon triumphant justice, without distinction of race or of previous condition they must unite!” Whatever unity they managed to create proved ephemeral. As in so many other scenarios, most whites chose white supremacy over liberation.

The lessons here are crucial. We cannot build a sustainable movement without a paradigm shift. Stopgap, utilitarian alliances to stop Trump aren’t enough. I concur with Giroux, who calls on all of us to wage “an anti-fascist struggle that is not simply about remaking economic structures, but also about refashioning identities, values, and social relations as part of a democratic project that reconfigures what it means to desire a better and more democratic future.”

* Robin D. G. Kelley, who teaches at UCLA, is the author of the biography *Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Original* [29] (2009) and most recently *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times*, [30][2012]. He is a contributor to *Killing Trayvons: an Anthology of American Violence* [31]. This column originally appeared in the *Boston Review* [32].

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Article-Summary:
Trump’s success means mass deportation, massive military spending, continuation and escalation of global war, a conservative Supreme Court, a justice department and security system dedicated to growing the Bush/Obama-era surveillance state and waging war on activists; fiscal policies that will accelerate income inequality; massive cuts in social spending, and a lot more. Concrete strategies for popular organizing are needed to resist this.

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