

Woke Imperialism

Woke culture, devoid of class consciousness and a commitment to stand with the oppressed, is another tool in the arsenal of the imperial state.



Chris Hedges ✓
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Identity Politics - by Mr. Fish

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The brutal [murder](#) of Tyre Nichols by five Black Memphis police officers should be enough to implode the fantasy that identity politics and diversity will solve the social, economic and political decay that besets the United States. Not only are the former officers Black, but the city’s police department is headed by Cerelyn Davis, a Black woman. None of this helped Nichols, another victim of a modern-day police lynching.

The militarists, corporatists, oligarchs, politicians, academics and media conglomerates champion identity politics and diversity because it does nothing to address the systemic injustices or the scourge of [permanent war](#) that plague the U.S. It is an advertising gimmick, a brand, used to mask mounting social inequality and imperial folly. It busies liberals and the educated with a boutique activism, which is not only ineffectual but exacerbates the divide between the privileged and a working

class in deep economic distress. The haves scold the have-nots for their bad manners, racism, linguistic insensitivity and garishness, while ignoring the root causes of their economic distress. The oligarchs could not be happier.

Did the lives of Native Americans improve as a result of the legislation mandating assimilation and the revoking of tribal land titles [pushed](#) through by Charles Curtis, the first Native American Vice President? Are we better off with Clarence Thomas, who [opposes](#) affirmative action, on the Supreme Court, or Victoria Nuland, a [war hawk](#) in the State Department? Is our perpetuation of [permanent war](#) more palatable because Lloyd Austin, an African American, is the Secretary of Defense? Is the military more humane because it accepts transgender soldiers? Is social inequality, and the surveillance state that controls it, ameliorated because Sundar Pichai — who was born in India — is the CEO of Google and Alphabet? Has the weapons industry improved because Kathy J. Warden, a woman, is the CEO of Northrop Grumman, and another woman, Phebe Novakovic, is the CEO of General Dynamics? Are working families better off with Janet Yellen, who [promotes](#) increasing unemployment and “job insecurity” to lower inflation, as Secretary of the Treasury? Is the movie industry enhanced when a female director, Kathryn Bigelow, makes “Zero Dark Thirty,” which is [agitprop](#) for the CIA? Take a look at this recruitment ad [put out](#) by the [CIA](#). It sums up the absurdity of where we have ended up.

Colonial regimes find compliant indigenous leaders — “Papa Doc” François Duvalier in Haiti, Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua, Mobutu Sese Seko in the Congo, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in Iran — willing to do their dirty work while they exploit and loot the countries they control. To thwart popular aspirations for justice, colonial police forces routinely carried out atrocities on behalf of the oppressors. The indigenous freedom fighters who fight in support of the poor and the marginalized are usually forced out of power or assassinated, as was the case with Congolese independence leader [Patrice Lumumba](#) and Chilean president [Salvador Allende](#). Lakota chief [Sitting Bull](#) was [gunned](#) down by members of his own tribe, who served in the reservation’s police force at Standing Rock. If you stand with the oppressed, you will almost always end up being treated like the oppressed. This is why the FBI, along with Chicago police, [murdered](#) Fred Hampton and was almost certainly involved in the murder of Malcolm X, who referred to impoverished urban neighborhoods as “internal colonies.” Militarized police forces in the U.S. function as armies of occupation. The police officers who killed Tyre Nichols are no different from those in reservation and colonial police forces.

We live under a species of corporate colonialism. The engines of white supremacy, which constructed the forms of institutional and economic racism that keep the poor *poor*, are obscured behind attractive political personalities such as Barack Obama, whom Cornel West [called](#) “a Black mascot for Wall Street.” These faces of diversity are vetted and selected by the ruling class. Obama was groomed and promoted by the Chicago political machine, one of the dirtiest and most corrupt in the country.

“It’s an insult to the organized movements of people these institutions claim to want to include,” [Glen Ford](#), the late editor of The Black Agenda Report [told me](#) in 2018. “These institutions write the script. It’s their drama. They choose the actors, whatever black, brown, yellow, red faces they want.”

Ford called those who promote identity politics “representationalists” who “want to see some Black people represented in all sectors of leadership, in all sectors of society. They want Black scientists. They want Black movie stars. They want Black scholars at Harvard. They want Blacks on Wall Street. But it’s just representation. That’s it.”

The toll taken by corporate capitalism on the people these “representationalists” claim to represent exposes the con. African-Americans have [lost](#) 40 percent of their wealth since the financial collapse of 2008 from the disproportionate impact of the drop in home equity, predatory loans, foreclosures and job loss. They have the second highest rate of poverty at 21.7 percent, after Native Americans at 25.9 percent, followed by Hispanics at 17.6 percent and whites at 9.5 percent, [according](#) to the U.S. Census Bureau and the Department for Health and Human Services. As of 2021, Black and Native American children [lived](#) in poverty at 28 and 25 percent respectively, followed by Hispanic children at 25 percent and white children at 10 percent. Nearly 40 percent of the nation’s [homeless](#) are African-Americans although Black people [make up](#) about 14 percent of our population. This figure does not include people living in dilapidated, overcrowded dwellings or with family or friends due to financial difficulties. African-Americans are [incarcerated](#) at nearly five times the rate of white people.

Identity politics and diversity allow liberals to wallow in a cloying [moral superiority](#) as they castigate, censor and deplatform those who do not linguistically conform to politically correct speech. They are the new Jacobins. This game disguises their passivity in the face of corporate abuse, neoliberalism, permanent war and the curtailment of civil liberties. They do not confront the institutions that orchestrate social and economic injustice. They seek to make the ruling class more palatable. With the support of the Democratic Party, the liberal media, academia and social media platforms in Silicon Valley, demonize the victims of the [corporate coup d’etat](#) and deindustrialization. They make their primary political alliances with those who embrace identity politics, whether they are on Wall Street or in the Pentagon. They are the useful idiots of the billionaire class, moral crusaders who widen the divisions within society that the ruling oligarchs foster to maintain control.

Diversity is important. But diversity, when devoid of a political agenda that fights the oppressor on behalf of the oppressed, is window dressing. It is about incorporating a tiny segment of those marginalized by society into unjust structures to perpetuate them.

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A class I [taught](#) in a maximum security prison in New Jersey [wrote](#) “Caged,” a play about their lives. The play ran for nearly a month at The Passage Theatre in Trenton, New Jersey, where it was sold out nearly every night. It was subsequently [published](#) by Haymarket Books. The 28 students in the class insisted that the corrections officer in the story not be white. That was too easy, they said. That was a feign that allows people to simplify and mask the oppressive apparatus of banks, corporations, police, courts and the prison system, all of which make diversity hires. These systems of internal exploitation and oppression must be targeted and dismantled, no matter whom they employ.

My book, “[Our Class: Trauma and Transformation in an American Prison](#),” uses the experience of writing the play to tell the stories of my students and [impart](#) their profound understanding of the repressive forces and institutions arrayed against them, their families and their communities. You can see my two-part interview with Hugh Hamilton about “Our Class” [here](#) and [here](#).

[August Wilson](#)’s last play, “[Radio Golf](#),” foretold where diversity and identity politics devoid of class consciousness were headed. In the play, Harmond Wilks, an Ivy League-educated real estate developer, is about to launch his campaign to become Pittsburgh’s first Black mayor. His wife, Meme, is angling to become the governor’s press secretary. Wilks, navigating the white man’s universe of privilege, business deals, status seeking and the country club game of golf, must sanitize and deny his identity. Roosevelt Hicks, who had been Wilk’s college roommate at Cornell and is a vice president at Mellon Bank, is his business partner. Sterling Johnson, whose neighborhood Wilks and Hicks are lobbying to get the city to declare blighted so they can raze it for their multimillion dollar development project, tells Hicks:

You know what you are? It took me a while to figure it out. You a Negro. White people will get confused and call you a nigger but they don’t know like I know. I know the truth of it. I’m a nigger. Negroes are the worst thing in God’s creation. Niggers got style. Negroes got . A dog knows it’s a dog. A cat knows it’s a cat. But a Negro don’t know he’s a Negro. He thinks he’s a white man.

Terrible predatory forces are eating away at the country. The corporatists, militarists and political mandarins that serve them are the enemy. It is not our job to make them more appealing, but to destroy them. There are amongst us genuine freedom fighters of all ethnicities and backgrounds whose integrity does not permit them to serve the system of [inverted totalitarianism](#) that has destroyed our democracy, [impoverished the nation](#) and perpetuated endless wars. Diversity when it serves the oppressed is an asset, but a con when it serves the oppressors.

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