

America's "Duopoly Party System", Central to Understanding Power and Domination

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The 2016 presidential election did not only expose the political process and the duopoly political party system as a major mechanism of control, but exposed how the Democratic Party and their liberal supporters act as collaborators in upholding the status quo.

This is not to say that the Republican Party is vastly different, but to say that there is a well-known belief, largely uncontested that the Democratic Party is the party that supposedly champions the common man/women, the oppressed, and the exploited causes. Yet, this narrative does not appear to be supported by overwhelming evidences.

In fact, the Democratic Party and their liberal supporters appear to validate of the current arrangement of power and wealth and derive tremendous benefit from it. This is opposed to the image of "fighters" for real change. The party functions as a powerbroker that is committed to its own political party's survival and prestigious position. To this end, they attempt to incorporate the grievances of protest movements, which includes its leadership, and to fan the flames of narrow identity politics in order to retain its support base. However, the latest presidential election appears to expose this party's complicity in the continuation of the status quo. In addition, as Wikileaks revealed there is a particular elite mindset within this party that is adrift from the common people's issues and a dogged commitment to their own power and wealth.

Rather than exposing the political process and the duopoly party system by critically analyzing it and illustrating how both parties firmly support U.S. empire and have a firm commitment to preserving the current arrangement of power and wealth in the U.S. as well as in the world, many within the academic establishment discredited themselves as cheerleaders for one party over another. According to Gore Vidal:

There is only one party in the United States, the Property Party...and it has two wings: Republican and Democrat. Republicans are a bit stupider, more rigid, more doctrinaire in their laissez-faire capitalism than the Democrats, who are cuter, prettier, a bit more corrupt...until recently...and more willing than the Republicans to make small adjustments when the poor, the black, the anti-imperialists get out of hand. But, essentially, there is no difference between the two parties. (1977).

This astute observation is certainly not unique and can be seen as part of a long critical tradition found in sociology and other disciplines that claim such figures as Karl Marx and Max Weber as part of their foundations and have power and its reproduction as their key emphasis. C. Wright Mills who was a prominent sociologist, for example, was relentless in exposing the dominant ideas behind political pluralism by arguing that power resides in a

power elite (1956)

Many of us take seriously our training in sociology and other critical disciplines and have used them as guidance in understanding power and dominance. In other words, the outcome of the recent election did not serve as a defining moment that awoken us from a liberal stupor, or create symptoms associated with PTSD. Many of us were already dealing with power and domination and its various mechanisms of control. So for many of us, many if not all roads do indeed lead to Rome or stated more precisely.

Most social problems lead to capitalism and imperialism as root causes for a multitude of inequalities (class, ethno-racial, and gender, to just name a few). Therefore, it is along this line of inquiry that we examine such issues of the political process and political party politics. These critical stances are in keeping with the fundamental principle in critical disciplines that upholds the idea that nothing is sacred (e.g., national identity or political party affiliation) when it comes to peeling back the layers of socialization in the quest to understand power; its arrangement and its reproduction.

As Glen Ford stated it is extremely difficult to defend the Democratic Party after witnessing the continuation of George W. Bush policies within the Obama administration (2016). It appears that millions of others feel the same way, especially if we are to accept the explanation that a large part of Donald Trump's victory was the result of a voters' revolt against the democratic and republican establishments. Bernie Sanders, stated, what many have attributed to his own campaign, that Trump had "tapped into the anger of a declining middle class that is sick and tired of establishment economics, establishment politics and the establishment media" (Levin, et al. 2016)

Of course, a fuller explanation also includes race and gender and their intersectionality with class. Furthermore, what needs to be done and is being done today is the development of a deeper analysis, which is largely being conducted outside of the established institutions of academia and the media that is attempting to explain the conditions that brought about a Trump victory. This is without doubt a difficult endeavor considering Trump's platform, which many consider filled with hatemongering rhetoric, which some have state overlook his appeal for his anti-neoliberal, anti-neoconservative interventionism, "drain the swamp," and "Make American Great Again" promises, which appear to have won many people over. This may, as many have predicted with end in the same way that "Hope and Change" and "Hope we can believe in" did with great disappointment. If history is a guide, we understand that individual personality, political platforms, and political party affiliation means almost nothing in terms of the overall continuation of the arrangement of power and wealth in the U.S. and its imperialist global policies. Trump's cabinet selection process appears to make this fact clear, as the recycling of establishment politicians unfold.

It may be too cynical to say that there is "not a dime worth of difference" between the two party duopoly, but a basic understanding of the power structure in the U.S. informs us that those with power will fight "tooth and nail" to retain their personal, party, and class as well as their U.S. global position of power. In particular historical moments, political parties have supported social movements, especially when threatened, will make concessions (e.g., the New Deal and Great Society provisions) (Piven and Cloward 1977), or at moments in which the elite are divided (Tilly 1978). It is at this moment, that a political party will champion the grievances of a social movement in order to gain their support, especial electorally (as was the case with JFK's administration taking up the cause for civil rights).

The fear of a right turn in the U.S. as a result of Trump's presidency because of campaign promises to deport undocumented immigrants and to deny entry to Muslims as evidence of the ascendance of fascism may be a little overblown if one does not have the critical sense to understand that the infrastructure for a police state has been in the making since at least the late 1960s and earlier 1970s with the bipartisan passage of the Omnibus Crime Bill in 1968, which set the foundation for a militarized police force, counterinsurgency, surveillance, and the erosion of civil liberties (Parenti 1999: 8-10). From the passage of this Act emerged, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), which can be seen as the foundation for the keys pillars that would anchor the police state in which billions of dollars annually allocated to.

To just name a few of the pillars:

the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (Clinton); the USA Patriot Act 2001 (Bush); and National Defense Authorization Act of 2011 (Obama).

All the above Acts have to varying degrees served to enhance the state's ability to control perceived threats to its social order. If one wanted to look at one key legislation that provides the "legal" right to repeatedly violate other nation-states national sovereignty it is Authorization for Use of Military Force of 2001, which was used to invade Afghanistan and Iraq under the Bush administration and to intervene in such nation-states such as Libya, Syria, Pakistan, and Yemen under the Obama administration. This Law, under the guise of pursuing the "terrorists" responsible for the 9/11 attack, has added tremendous power to the state, in its pursuit to maintain and expand empire.

Where were the democrats and their supporters while millions of individuals were being killed and displaced as a result of neoliberal and imperium policies, many whom undoubtedly find themselves today as immigrants? Lastly, upwards to 2.5 million undocumented immigrants have been deported from the U.S. for having criminal infractions, the most in U.S. history.

The result has been what William Robinson has called the growth of the "Immigrant Military-Prison-Industrial-Detention Complex" that is tasked with the maintenance of a flexible, super-exploited immigrant workforce, which is highly vulnerable to the threat of deportation, and therefore super-exploitable (2013). The management of this complex has generated vast new opportunities for profit-making, consider that rise of private ran detention centers (William 2013).

The real questions is! Where was all the eruptions of protest during the current democratic administration?

A great amount of the protest that had gained momentum under the Bush administration had mainly either died or faded away once a democrat won the presidency in 2008 and 2012. Yet, within time, acting against calls to give Obama a chance, identity politics, and an endless chorus of the liberal and pseudo left apologists from academia that pointed to the obstructions of republicans for not delivering on his promises, emerged the Occupy Wall Street, Immigrant, Black Lives Matter, and Dakota Pipeline protest and movements that challenged the democratic party. These protest/movements nevertheless faced or face repressive measures from a democratic administration that has claimed itself the guardian of the oppressed and exploited.

Historically, as well as in the above cases, the Democratic Party has channeled grievances into the political process thereby legitimizes the system by serving as the champion of the oppressed and the exploited. This can be seen in the case with the civil rights movement and the labor unions. Therefore, rather than acting as a transformative agent that addresses root cause issues such as capitalism and imperialism, the democrats act to legitimize the system and thereby legitimizing themselves as a powerbroker in the continuation of the status quo.

When we understand power; its arrangement, and reproduction, we are less likely to be sidelined as cheerleaders for one particular political party over another. Because rather than point out how the political process is but one mechanism of control that is designed to win over or manufacture control every four years, we validate this process by advancing such arguments for voting against the “worst of the evil.” Some of us even do worse by parading this farce in classrooms. Every four years we are told that this election really matters, because the other party will be even worse. The problem with this argument is that it has been worst for many for a long time. Just ask the indigenous people, the ancestors of slaves, the millions of colonized and exploited people who inhabit the United States.

As the late Howard Zinn argued,

“the establishment cannot survive without the obedience and loyalty of millions of people who are given small reward to keep the system going: the soldiers and police, teachers and ministers, administrators and social workers, technicians and production workers, doctors lawyers, nurses, transport and communications workers, garbage men and firemen. These people -the employed, the somewhat privileged-are drawn into alliance with the elite. They become the guards of the system, buffers between the upper and lower classes. If they stop obeying, the system fails” (1995: 622).

This line of critical thinking alerts us to how the system of inequality maintains and reproduces itself through sophisticated and complex mechanisms of control that certainly include the democratic party and the republican party and their elaborate systems that breed collaboration.

Besides U.S. state use of various modes of repression that are anchored in the vast national security state and the police/prison nexus, it also utilizes various facilitative modes that are designed to incorporate, bribe, and otherwise conquer and divide individuals and groups of individuals (Montes 2009, 2016). Certainly, elite promotion among the oppressed and exploited, the channeling of protest and social movement grievances to the electoral process, the distribution of social aid provisions, and employment distribution are but some of the modes in which elite and the U.S. state facilitates the incorporation of millions of individuals into the system. What appears to be center to an effective analysis of power is to understand the role of the Democratic Party in the continuation of a system that is rooted in inequality. As Zinn argued the “U.S. system is the most ingenious system of control in world history” (1995: 618).

This is largely based on its ability to use its resources and wealth to pacify and co-opt troublesome minorities and lower classes. Besides having obtained resources and wealth by land usurpation, a system of slavery, and exploitation, the U.S. economic global domination and imperialist policies have amassed incredible amounts of wealth providing it many repressive and facilitative options for maintaining and legitimizing its authority.

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