

Hillary vs. Bernie: Their Two Opposite Views of the Presidency

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Whereas Bernie Sanders claims to represent the bottom 99%, Hillary Clinton claims to represent a coalition of groups who are victimized by bigots (racists, sexists, etc.: she aims at women, homosexuals, Blacks, etc.).

Whereas Bernie seeks to mobilize the bottom economic 99% against the top 1% who have scooped up [almost all of the economic benefits that Americans have gained since 1993](#), Hillary seeks to mobilize all bigotry-victims against all of the many types of bigots. These pitches are fundamentally different from one-another. In fact, they're diametrically opposite diagnoses of the biggest ailment threatening the U.S. future: our perilous economy.

At the close of [the Wisconsin Democratic debate on February 11th](#), Hillary Clinton made an appeal to members of labor unions, and then said:

I think that a lot of what we have to overcome to break down the barriers that are holding people back, whether it's poison in the water of the children of Flint, or whether it's the poor miners who are being left out and left behind in coal country, or whether it is any other American today who feels somehow put down and oppressed by racism, by sexism, by discrimination against the LGBT community, against the kind of efforts that need to be made to root out all of these barriers, that's what I want to take on. ... Yes, does Wall Street and big financial interests, along with drug companies, insurance companies, big oil, all of it, have too much influence? You're right. But if we were to stop that tomorrow, we would still have the indifference, the negligence that we saw in Flint. We would still have racism holding people back. We would still have sexism preventing women from getting equal pay. We would still have LGBT people who get married on Saturday and get fired on Monday.

Bernie Sanders closed instead with:

This campaign is not only about electing someone who has the most progressive agenda, it is about bringing tens of millions of people together to demand that we have a government that represents all of us and not just the 1 percent, who today have so much economic and political power.

Hillary Clinton is saying that what's "holding people back" is bigotry.

Bernie Sanders is saying that what's holding people back is concentration of too much power in too few people — not meaning a concentration of too much power in a *freely and democratically elected government* (which Republicans constantly attack as having *too much power*), but instead meaning a concentration of too much power in the richest 1% who

buy the government, and who use it to make American workers compete *against* the workers in Haiti, Honduras, Vietnam, etc., so as to benefit the global stockholders of international corporations by lowering wages, instead of to benefit American workers by increasing wages.

He's attacking a system that benefits global stockholders by lowering wages everywhere to some lowest common denominator, so as to increase profits and stock-values and executive compensation everywhere. Workers don't receive the benefits of that; the stockholders and executives in international corporations do. That's the "1%", though actually it's even more concentrated in the top 0.1%.

Hillary Clinton is saying that the main problem in America is America's bigots — it's no economic motivation, by billionaires who essentially buy the government, nor by anyone else. This political view, in which there are essentially no economic classes, but only bigots and their victims, is fundamentally different from Sanders's view. It's so different that in some other countries they would constitute two different political parties.

Sanders is saying that the main problem in America is actually America's corruption — a system that he says has been very successfully gamed by "the billionaire class."

That's what the Democrats' Presidential choice comes down to.

This choice is a stark one. Democratic voters are being asked which is the primary issue for government to overcome: countervailing excessive greed by the super-rich, or countervailing all bigotry by anyone? Both greed and bigotry are bad, but which is more the main function of government to countervail? That's the question.

Hillary Clinton is saying that what American workers are pitted against is, essentially, bigots, individuals who are bigoted — bigoted against gays, against women, against Blacks, against Hispanics, etc.; they're *not* pitted against the controlling stockholders who are collectively represented by their corporation's management and who want higher profits from paying lower wages. Hillary Clinton focuses on the cultural divide, the various types of inter-ethnic conflicts, as being "what we have to overcome to break down the barriers that are holding people back."

Bernie Sanders is saying that the big problem American workers are up against isn't bigots — rich and poor — as much as it's the unlimited greed of the controlling stockholders who are represented by management (even if they're *not* bigots). His diagnosis is that not only should workers have the collective-bargaining right against the corporation's owners, just like those corporate owners themselves already possess the collective-bargaining right via managers they hire, but that workers should also be more the focus of government's concern and sympathy than stockholders are, because there are far more workers than owners, and because a one-person-one-vote democracy is far better than a one-dollar-one-vote 'democracy' (the latter of which is otherwise called an "oligarchy" or an "aristocracy"), the latter of which is what Sanders campaigns to put *astop* to.

Hillary Clinton is saying that there is *no common and shared enemy that oppressed employees have*: instead, the main problem is racist bigots in the case of Blacks; it's homophobic bigots in the case of homosexuals; it's misogynist bigots in the case of females, etcetera; and, if a Black happens *also* to be a homophobe, or a homosexual happens to be also an anti-Black racist, then each one of those victim-groups will be fighting against the

bigoted members of the *other* victim-groups. The chief job of the government, led by the U.S. President, is then somehow to punish all types of bigots equally, regardless of their *particular* group, so as to minimize the complaints about bigotry from, and by, all Americans. That's a balancing of groups against groups — a balancing of ethnicities. This is Clinton's diagnosis and cure for America's economic problems.

Hillary's diagnosis isn't economic or systemic, but instead cultural and individual — it's actually individual against individual, instead of stockholders against employees. And, just as a particular victim of bigotry can also be a bigot (for example, a Black can be homophobic, sexist, or etc.), a particular employee can also be a stockholder; some individuals stand on both sides at once, there too; but those are all individual matters, *not* systemic matters, and so they're not really authentic issues of governmental policy. Hillary Clinton says that they are the *main* issues of governmental policy — that people's problems are mainly *individual* problems, against bigots; *not* systemic problems, against stealers-of-the-public's-government — and she says that the government should focus on individuals' problems, not on systemic problems. That's her view, which she expresses on almost every occasion, though she doesn't put it in quite this way — a systematic way.

Bernie Sanders, in contrast to Hillary Clinton, is saying that the oppressed *do* have a *common and shared (a systemic) enemy*. Here is how he expressed this in [a speech to the Democratic National Committee](#) on 28 August 2015: "*We need a political movement which is prepared to take on the billionaire class and create a government which represents all Americans, and not just corporate America and wealthy campaign donors.*" He was saying this to individuals — specifically, to the Democratic Party's chief political agents — most of whose own career success has largely depended *upon* that "billionaire class," but Sanders was up-front to them about it. He even calls this "movement" a "revolution." He's not trying to hide his opposition to the status-quo.

The Democratic Party's Presidential contest isn't really a contest between 'idealism' versus 'pragmatism,' such as some propagandists claim. To characterize either candidate as 'the idealist' versus 'the pragmatist' is false. That characterization of this contest is actually deeply deceptive, because it focuses on vague abstractions, whereas the real issue in the Democratic Party primaries now is totally nitty-gritty, and it concerns two alternative diagnoses of what has been going wrong with America's economy in recent decades.

In Bernie's view, American democracy is now in the emergency room; in Hillary's view, complainers (against anything *other than* bigots) are like mere hypochondriacs who simply don't understand the experts who say that things aren't so bad, and that therefore no "revolution" is needed.

Is America's basic governmental problem bigotry (i.e., certain cultural and 'values' problems), as Hillary says; or is it instead corruption (i.e., certain economic and governmental problems), as Bernie says?

These are two very different conceptions of what the U.S. Presidency is about.

And that's the central choice in the Democratic Presidential primaries. More than anything else, that's what the choice between Clinton and Sanders comes down to.

Investigative historian Eric Zuesse is the author, most recently, of [They're Not Even Close: The Democratic vs. Republican Economic Records, 1910-2010](#), and of [CHRIST'S](#)

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