

Like the Diana Story, Meghan's Fight with the Royals Will Ensure Nothing Really Changes

By [Jonathan Cook](#)

Global Research, March 10, 2021

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [History](#)

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Oprah Winfrey's interview with Meghan and Harry is a perfect case study of how an important political debate about the corrupting role of the monarchy on British life gets shunted aside yet again, not just by the endless Royal soap opera but by supposedly progressive identity politics.



As so often, a focus on identity risks not only blunting our capacity for critical thinking but can be all too readily weaponised: in this case, as the media's main [take-away](#) from the Oprah interview illustrates, by providing an implicit defence of class privilege.

The racism directed at Markle – sorry, the Duchess of Sussex – and baby Archie is ugly, it goes without saying (but maybe more to the point, *must* be stated to avoid being accused of ignoring or trivialising racism).

The concern expressed by a senior royal during Markle's pregnancy about Archie's likely darker skin colour does indeed reveal how deeply ingrained racism is in the British establishment and how much it trickles down to the rest of British society, not least through the billionaire-owned media.

Princely 'birthright'

But more significant is how the racism demonstrated towards Markle and Archie has played out in the media coverage of the interview and the resulting “national conversation” on

social media – nowadays, the only real barometer we have for judging such conversations.

The problem is that, via Oprah, the Sussexes get to frame the significance of the House of Windsor's racism: both in the threat that, when Charles ascends to the throne, grandson Archie will be deprived of his princely "birthright" because he is of mixed race; and in the fact that Harry and Meghan have been hounded from Palace life into celebrity-style exile in the US.

Let's be clear: only someone still deeply immersed in a lifetime of propaganda would be cheerleading one side or the other in this royal soap opera. It's an endless drama designed to obscure the fact that the system itself ensures privilege for some, exploitation for others <https://t.co/TDq0yuAoym>

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [March 8, 2021](#)

In the process, an important, democratic conversation has yet again been supplanted about why Britain still maintains and reveres these expensive relics of a medieval system of unaccountable rule based on a superior (if no longer divine) blood line.

Instead, the conversation initiated by Oprah is a much more politically muddled one about whether it is right that a "commoner" woman of colour and her mixed-race son are obstructed from fully participating in this medieval system of privilege.

Image makeover

A real political debate about privilege – one that demands greater equality and an end to racist presumptions about blood lines – has been obscured and trivialised once again by a row of the kind preferred by the corporate media: whether most of the Royal Family are too racist to realise that a woman of colour like Meghan could help them with a twenty-first-century image makeover.

As a result, we are presented with a false binary choice. Either we cheer on the Royal Family and implicitly condone their racism; or we cheer on Meghan and implicitly support her battle to better veil the feudal ugliness of the British monarchy.

It ought to be possible to want Archie to live a life equal to "white" babies in the UK without also wanting him to live a life of pomp and circumstance, designed to ensure that other babies – white, black and brown – grow up to be denied the privileges he enjoys by virtue of royal birth.

This is your reminder that Versailles gets double the number of visitors compared to Buckingham Palace.

The way for the country to really get an economic boost from the royal family is therefore to chop all their heads off.

— Craig Murray (@CraigMurrayOrg) [March 8, 2021](#)

Divisive and enervating

What the Oprah interview does – is designed to do – is derail the intersection of class and race in politically damaging ways.

A meaningful democratic struggle prioritises class unity as the battering ram against establishment power that long ago learnt to protect itself by dividing us through our competing identities. Class struggle does not ignore race; it embraces it and all other socially constructed identities used by power to rationalise oppression. Class subsumes them into a collective struggle strengthened by numbers.

Struggle based on identity, by contrast, is inherently divisive and politically enervating, as the Meghan Markle case illuminates. Her challenge to Royal “tradition” alienates those most invested in ideas of monarchy, “Britishness” or white identity. And it does so while offering no more than a sop to those invested in breaking glass ceilings, even of the kind that aren’t worth smashing in the first place.

Meghan’s fight for the first mixed-race British prince is no more politically progressive than the celebration by the media two years ago of the news that for the first time [women were in charge](#) of the military-industrial complex – the one that rains down death and destruction on “Third World” men, women and children.

“Women controlling the military-industrial complex is not feminism, it’s toxic masculinity. The fruit of a sick valuing system that is poisoning our environment and risking nuclear annihilation, writes Caitlin Johnstone.” ~ via [@consortiumnewshttps://t.co/GPqItPJClh](https://t.co/GPqItPJClh)

— Caitlin Johnstone ☐ (@caitoz) [January 7, 2019](#)

Value for money

Strange as it is to recall now – in an age of social media, when anyone can comment on anything, and the “mainstream” media’s billionaire gatekeepers have supposedly been sidelined – ordinary Britons discussed abolishing the monarchy far more in the 1970s, when I was a child, than they do nowadays.

Getting rid of the Royal Family – like getting rid of nuclear weapons, another topic no one talks about seriously any more – was mainstream enough then that Royalists were often forced on to the defensive. As the mood soured among a vocal section of the population, the Queen’s defenders were forced hurriedly to switch from arguments rooted in deference and tradition to more utilitarian claims that the Royals offered “value for money”, supposedly boosting commerce and tourism.

Prince Charles’ engagement in 1981 to a beautiful, demure teenage “English rose”, Princess Diana, looked to many, even at the time, suspiciously like a move to reinvigorate a tired, increasingly unpopular brand.

The media spectacle of a fairytale romance and wedding, followed by years of controversy, disillusionment and betrayal, culminating in divorce and finally Diana’s death / murder, very effectively distracted the British public for the next 16 years from the question of what purpose a Royal Family served. It became only too clear what role they played: they kept us engrossed in a real-life, better-than-TV drama.

Champions of identity

Diana's supposed struggle to grow from adolescence to womanhood in the glare of media intrusion and under the strictures of "The Firm" created the prototype for a new type of apolitical, Mills and Boon-style identity politics.

Following Diana's escapades - from the secular saint who cleared landmines to the raunchy princess who had illicit sex with her riding instructor, an army major no less - was far more thrilling than the campaign to end the monarchy and the regressive landed class it still represents.

Diana's life story helped pave the way to the reinvention of the left through the 1990s - under **Tony Blair** in the UK and **Bill Clinton** in the US - as champions of a new social issues-obsessed non-politics.

Both were ushered into power after reassuring the newly triumphant corporate elite that they would harness and divert popular energy away from dangerous struggles for political change towards safe struggles for superficial social change.

In the UK, that was achieved most obviously in Blair's [assiduous courtship](#) of media mogul **Rupert Murdoch**. Importantly, Blair persuaded Murdoch that, as prime minister, he would not only preserve the economic legacy of the Thatcher years but head further down the path of deregulation.

Murdoch - himself no fan of a British monarchy that had always looked down on him as a vulgar Australian - also understood that the inevitable soap opera quality of exceptional individuals battling the UK's rigid hierarchy of privilege, spurred on by Blair's New Labour, would prove great for sales of his newspapers. Just as Oprah knows that the only tangible consequence of the Harry and Meghan interview is that it will [rake in](#) many more millions for her own media empire.

Sticking It to the Man

In the new era of identity-saturated non-politics, demands for equality mean removing obstacles so that more women, people of colour and the LGBT community can participate in institutions that represent power and privilege.

These battles are not about overthrowing those systems of privilege, as earlier identity-based struggles such as the Black Panthers' were. Success serves simply to placate identity-focused groups by helping those of most "merit" elbow their way into the preserves of established power.

Those achievements started with the most visible, least significant areas of the economy, such as sport and celebrity, and led over time to greater access to the professions.

The current excitement among some on the left at Meghan's "Sticking It to the Man" appears to derive from the disruptive threat she poses to the House of Windsor - not to its economic, social and political power, but to its status as the last hold-out against Blair's identity-fuelled "revolution".

she secretly abused to give herself a unique right, decades ago, to conceal from the public the scale of her vast private wealth.

Pluocracy still rules in the UK <https://t.co/LZaDEU6PSd>

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [February 8, 2021](#)

Narrative twist

Diana's emancipation story helped distract us for nearly two decades from confronting central questions about the nature and role of the British establishment in preserving and veiling power.

Now Meghan Markle is expanding the identity story in a new direction, one that once again embraces the story of a young, "headstrong" woman scorned by the Royal Family for snubbing tradition. But this time there is an alluring contemporary twist to the narrative: the Family's resistance to diversity and its refusal to own its racist past.

Unlike Diana who stood alone and seemingly fragile, Meghan and Harry offer a more relevant, modern picture of a confident, professional young couple standing and fighting together for what is fair, for what should be theirs by right.

This feels important, bold and empowering. But it is the precise opposite. It is more Mills and Boons, but this time with diversity thrown in to generate more appeal on one side and more hostility on the other.

Meghan's story will continue to work its magic: fascinating, infuriating and pacifying us in equal measure as we focus on what is private, unknowable and can be endlessly contested rather than what is universal, visible and impossible to refute.

Meanwhile, the Royal Family, the perpetuation of privilege and the erosion of democracy will march on as before, in the same long and glorious British tradition.

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This essay first appeared on Jonathan Cook's blog: <https://www.jonathan-cook.net/blog/>

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