

'Race, Class, Gender'—The Left Now Only Has 2 of the 3

"Race, class, gender."

For more than a generation now, the academic left has relied on these as hermeneutical keys for interpreting just about everything. I recall the great historian of Victorian England Gertrude Himmelfarb, speaking wryly at a 1980's convention of the American Historical Association: "Professors might as well create a keyboard shortcut for the words 'race, class, and gender,' since it would make the writing of articles and books much quicker." I can't recall whether the boos or hisses in the room were louder. But she was right.

So what happens now, when it appears that the left may be left with only race and gender?

An astonishing development reflected by this week's U.S. presidential election and the summer's Brexit vote is that the *political* left has for now lost the working class. In fact, as many analysts point out, the victorious coalitions in these contests appear to think that the left now represents only "elite" class interests. Jay Z, Beyonce, Mark Zuckerberg, and Miley Cyrus may represent a coalition of some sort, but it's not of the downtrodden.

Some of us can remember a time when the left sought support from coal miners instead. "It is an embarrassment, I think, to the entire Democratic Party that millions of white working-class people decided to vote for Mr. Trump," Bernie Sanders said on November 10, "which suggests that the Democratic message of standing up for working people no longer holds much sway among workers in this country."

And it's not only about white working people. The *Washington Post* [reports today](#) (November 11) that "Trump got more votes from people of color than Romney did." While more analysis is needed to determine the socio-economic makeup of those additional voters, it seems likely, given Trump's widespread characterization by the media and the left as a racist and xenophobe, that they were voting economic interests.

So, what are potential impacts of a nascent political realignment of working people, one that favors a populist center-right political vision over a leftist one? Herewith some thoughts:

1) Working people may be far less interested in, indeed offended by, leftists obsessing on race and gender, sensing that it comes at their expense. Whatever the merits of gay marriage and transgender rights, these are seen more as "one-percenter" than "99-percenter" issues. And the endless slicing and dicing of people by race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity are seen as mocking any idea that ordinary Americans could actually be "stronger together." The left used to speak of "solidarity" more convincingly.

2) Working people may be tired of being condescended to as "deplorables." Arthur C. Brooks of the American Enterprise Institute [argued](#) that "the relevant gap [in the election] wasn't income. It was dignity. Too many Americans have lost pride in themselves. We sense dignity by creating value with our lives, through families, communities, and especially work." The left used to champion the special dignity of the working person, but is seen no longer to do so.

3) Working people may sense that institutions that veer left—the media, the entertainment industry, the education establishment, and higher education—deplore them largely

because they don't know them. Charles Murray captured these cultural divisions in [Coming Apart](#), and they are well illustrated in J.D. Vance's [Hillbilly Elogy](#). Peggy Noonan [characterized](#) the division as between the "protected," those with good jobs, schools, and social capital; and the "unprotected," namely those without. The left used to know and speak for workers.

It will be important to learn more about whether the realignments we seem to be witnessing are deep and long-term. If it proves they are, it will have significant implications not only for politics and economics. It may require that professors reduce their decades-old keyboard shortcuts to two words.

—

Todd R. Flanders is Headmaster of [Providence Academy](#) in Plymouth, Minnesota