Whiteness, populism and the racialisation of the working class in the United Kingdom and the United States

Aurelien Mondon (Bath) & Aaron Winter (UEL) [1]

ABSTRACT

The election of Donald Trump and the Brexit vote were widely hailed as examples of (white) working class revolts. This article examines the populist racialisation of the working class as white and 'left behind', and representative of the 'people' or 'demos', in the campaigns and commentaries. We argue that such constructions made race central, obscured the class make-up, allowed for the re-assertion of white identity as a legitimate political category and legitimised, mainstreamed and normalised racism and the far right. Moreover, it delegitimised Black, Minority Ethnic and immigrant experiences and interests, including working class ones. We show that the construction of the votes as (white) working class revolts, and representing the 'people' and/or 'demos', is based on a partial reading of electoral data, misrepresents the votes, stigmatises the working class, and supports an ideological purpose which maintains the racial, political and economic status quo.

While much of the west has witnessed a resurgence of the far right since the end of the 2000s, 2016 marked a new step in the mainstreaming of reactionary and particularly racist, Islamophobic and xenophobic political movements, agendas and discourses (Mondon and Winter 2017). Amongst others, the Brexit victory in the United Kingdom and Donald Trump's election to the Presidency in the United States have demonstrated that these movements, agendas and discourses can now win key electoral battles. While much has already been written on these two cases and events, the aim of this article is to focus the discussion on the construction of the white working class to promote racist

---

[1] Aurelien Mondon, a.mondon@bath.ac.uk, @aurelmondon

Aaron Winter, a.winter@uel.ac.uk, @aaronzwinter

agendas, adding to a limited, but growing analysis (Bhambra 2017, Emejulu 2016, Lentin 2017, Mondon 2017, Nadeem et al. 2017, Saini 2017, Virdee and McGeever 2017, Winter 2017). Our contribution and aim is three-fold: first, to interrogate the construction of these votes, specifically as white working class revolts; second, demonstrate that the prevalent mainstream explanations about the rise of a (white) working class reaction is based on an ideological racialised construction of the working class and skewed reading of data in both cases that do not sustain even basic scrutiny; third, that such explanations and skewered data reproduce and even support a particular discourse and political agenda, legitimising Trump and Brexit, as well as racism and xenophobia, and delegitimising the working class, whether consciously or not.

To achieve so, this article examines this mainstreaming of racism, focusing on the transformation of the discourses and rhetoric about race and class. Particular attention is paid to the populist racialisation of the working class as white and indigenous in the Brexit and Trump campaigns. In doing so, the aim of this article is not to explain the reasons behind the vote for Trump or Brexit, but rather to examine such explanations and how these reproduce or even support a particular discourse and political agenda. The first section provides some context to highlight and examine the ways in which Brexit and the election of Trump were constructed as working class revolts in mainstream elite and populist discourse, essentialising the working class as white (but also predominantly male), and positing it as a reactionary proxy for the embodiment of the 'people' and, following from this, these votes as a reactionary proxy for revolution. To challenge such a deeply anchored narrative, the article takes a two-pronged approach: first, it demonstrates that the construction of these events as working class revolts, ignores the diversity of the working class to promote an essentialist narrative based on white identity, experience and interests. The article then moves on to challenge the fact that these votes were in fact working class by examining voting patterns and results and highlighting that such claims rest not only on exaggerations, but ideological assumptions and political agendas which reaffirm the campaigns. Finally, the article discusses the implications of such constructions, claims and narratives and how they reproduce, reaffirm or even support particular political discourses and agendas based in pre-existing power and privilege.

White working class revolt(s)?

In October 2016, as the US election loomed, Farage (2016) wrote in an opinion piece in The Telegraph, a symbol of his media prominence:

The similarities between the different sides in this election are very like our own recent battle. As the rich get richer and big companies dominate the global economy, voters all across the West are being left behind. The blue-collar workers in the valleys of South Wales angry with Chinese steel dumping voted Brexit in their droves. In the American rust belt, traditional manufacturing industries have declined, and it is to these people that Trump speaks very effectively….

This kind of statement was not limited to far-right politicians claiming political support from the working class, but had become common in much of the political commentary in 2016. To provide key context, the aim of this section is to present and examine a selection of statements and analyses from political actors, the media and intellectuals to illustrate the way in which Brexit and Trump's election were constructed as working class revolts. For The New Statesman, Trump and Brexit were 'a working class revolt' (Crampton 2016). In March 2016, Fox News called Trump 'the working-class candidate' (Fox News 2016). In the UK, The Daily Express talked about a 'working class revolution' (Gutteridge 2016) and Spiked! (2016) claimed 'The Brexit vote was a revolt against the establishment', its editor arguing that argued that 'Britain's poor and workless have risen up' (O'Neill 2016). In The Guardian, John Harris (2016) claimed that 'Britain is in the midst of a working-class revolt''. In The New York Times, David Brooks (2016) referred to Trump's election as a 'revolt of the masses', while Cohn (2016) claimed that Trump 'won working class whites'.

Much of the narrative which followed both the election of Trump and Brexit has been based on murky definitional grounds: the so-called 'working class' is usually painted as the socio-economically and politically disenfranchised and alienated, but also as essentially white and indigenous. This allows it to become at once particular as 'white' and 'working class' and universal as the 'people' or 'demos' (for the latter, see Todd 2015). While the populist character of the campaigns and their portrayal in the mainstream media pitted a constructed 'people' made up of workers against an out-of touch or contemptuous elite who fails to represent them, its nativist/racist/xenophobic basis pitted whites against classless immigrants, refugees and representatives of multiculturalism and diversity who threaten jobs, resources and nation. For Virdee and McGeever (2017) 'This racializing nationalism has borne a particularly defensive character since the 2008 crisis. It is defined not by imperial prowess or superiority, but by a deep sense of loss of prestige; a retreat from the damaging impact of a globalized world that is no longer recognizable, no longer British'. This operates through what has been described by Song (2014) as a culture of racial equivalence: this 'post-race' narrative does not negate race or racism, but allows for the discursive placement of whiteness in a position where it has lost its historical power (globally and domestically) and appears thus in decline, vulnerable and subject to victimisation

by others.[2] This narrative and the identification of whiteness with the working class, negates its privilege and renders it the 'people'.

In the UK, while the Conservative-led Vote Leave was the official campaign for Brexit, the UKIP-led Leave.EU received much coverage as Nigel Farage had been instrumental in leading the agenda on the issue since the 2014 European election. The nationalist argument was central to the campaign as demonstrated by its slogan: 'We want our country back: VOTE TO LEAVE ON 23RD JUNE'. For Farage, Brexit was a victory for 'ordinary people, for good people, for decent people' (Peck 2016), one which confirmed that concerns over immigration, as well as Islam, came first and economic grievances second (Hall and Maddox 2016). Often, the Leave.EU campaign tapped into far right strategies, most notably with its use of a Nazi-esque image of refugees crossing from Croatia to Slovenia in 2015, with a banner reading 'Breaking Point: the EU has failed us all' (Stewart and Mason 2016). It was therefore not surprising to see the far right rally behind Farage (Lyons 2016).

Trump's campaign was similar to Leave.EU, and UKIP's more generally, and targeted post-industrial 'red states' traditionally associated with conservative white working-class constituencies, combining protectionist rhetoric with anti-immigration tropes. His slogan, 'Make America Great Again' was a nod to an idealised industrial period of plentiful jobs, economic security and implied cultural security, but also a dog whistle to nostalgia for a pre-PC, pre-affirmative action and even pre-civil rights era when white men ruled unchallenged. As Anderson (2016, 161) points out, less than a month after Dylann Roof killed nine African-Americans at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, Trump told an audience at a GOP nomination rally 'Don't worry, we'll take our country back'. On election day, he declared: 'Today the American working class is going to strike back, finally' (Cohn 2016). Trump's nostalgia and assertations that he and his target base would take back the country and strike back, linked to his racist, Islamophobia and xenophobic rhetoric and proposed policies to do this, racialised the working class as white, with a right to the nation's past and future over others. This made it unsurprising that he received endorsements from the far right. This included Rocky Suhayda of the American Nazi Party, Don Black of Stormfront (Neiwert and Posner 2016), 'Alt-Right' figurehead Richard Spencer and former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan David Duke, as well as more mainstream right wing gateway figures and white nationalist enablers from Breitbart such as Steve Bannon and Milo Yiannopoulos (Winter 2017, 2018).

---

[2] For more on the post-racial white backlash, see: Hughley 2014 and Winter 2018.

While the far right in both the US and UK benefitted from the racialisation of the working class, it was more surprisingly taken up by part of the left, who made tackling immigration a key issue (Wearing 2017; Bush 2015; Travis 2009). For Labour MP Emma Reynolds, the message was clear: 'Trump and Brexit show that progressives cannot take white working-class voters for granted'. A number of academic analyses also participated in either reproducing, constructing or informing the narrative. Arguments about the white working class 'left-behind' became common to explain the resurgence of far right parties as it was argued right-wing populist were able to attract former left-wing voters alienated by the convergence of the mainstream left and right and their focus on the middle class. According to Ford and Goodwin (2017), support for Brexit is to be found within the working-class 'left-behind' who fear a loss of order and identity in 'a more diverse and rapidly changing Britain', championed by a homogenised and mythologised social liberal elite. A similar argument was developed by Goodhart (2013) who argued that increased diversity, through mass immigration, threatened social solidarity for the 'somewhere' in opposition to the rootless, socially liberal, middle-class, cosmopolitan 'anywhere' Goodhart (2017).

In the US, Vance (2017) argues that one must look at the economic and cultural crisis of the white working and underclass in rural America to understand Trump's support and victory. Hochschild (2016) foregrounds the 'cultural' in terms of race, gender and sexuality, arguing that, 'To white, native-born, heterosexual men,... [Trump] offered a solution to the dilemma they had long faced as the 'left behinds' of the 1960s and 1970s celebration of other identities. As Bhambra (2017) argued, 'methodological whiteness' has distorted social scientific analysis of Brexit and Trump: '[t]he politics of both campaigns was also echoed in those social scientific analyses that sought to focus on the "legitimate" claims of the "left behind" or those who had come to see themselves as "strangers in their own land"', as Hochschild phrases it, both racialised as white. This, we argue, not only accepts but legitimises the narrative of loss, disenfranchisement and victimisation, but also that of its original entitlement and the nationalism and racism that underpins and flows from it. This trend in academia is not new. As Hill (2004, 9) suggested, 'Recent scholarship on race has increasingly turned into the historical pressures now besetting the fiction Americans still insist on calling the white race. In doing so, it has marked the same attention to whiteness that made it possible for AR's [American Renaissance's] men to echo'. It was at AR that Hill (2004, 5–6) met the BNP's Nick Griffin who was targeting the white working-class vote in Britain at that time, notably in post-industrial former labour strongholds, before UKIP replaced them.

The assumption that the alienation suffered by the white working class has translated into a strong opposition to immigration and diversity has led some commentators to argue that the liberal elite's reaction and general anti-racist attitudes are in fact contempt towards the democratic voice of 'ordinary people'. This was expressed by Kaufmann (2017) in his report 'Racial self-interest' is not racism where he argued that Brexit was an expression of white, particularly working class, racial self-interest (what Goodhart terms 'White Identity Politics'). For Kaufmann, it is crucial to 'avoid using charges of racism to side-line discussions of ethno-demographic interests' in relation to issues such as opposition to immigration. According to Goodhart, cited in the report, 'The liberal reflex to tar legitimate majority grievances with the brush of racism risks deepening western societies' cultural divides'.

The conflation of anti-racism and elitism, and the representation of the white working class as the victims of elite anti-racism which slips between racialised classism and reverse racism is also central to the libertarian right's approach to Brexit and Trump. Online magazine Spiked! has been particularly active in developing this line of argumentation. As Furedi (2016) declared:

> In the eyes of too many Remain strategists, the uneducated working classes have few redeeming qualities. They were frequently portrayed as parochial xenophobes who hate immigrants, who hold on to outdated values, and who fear uncertainty and change. In the aftermath of the referendum, the hatred directed at 'those
> people' … has intensified.

Such argumentation is often accompanied by articulations and justifications of alleged working-class concerns about immigration and limits on free speech, most notably so-called 'political correctness'. Like Furedi, Milo Yiannopoulos (2017) claimed that 'Liberals have lots of theories for why working class whites abandoned them. The most obvious of which is their old standby, "they are racist"'. It is frequently framed as a response to commentators who express concern about a link between Brexit, Trump and racism, while it is in fact the response itself which reifies the link. This in turn places the blame squarely on the working class rather than on the campaigns, the way they are covered and the diversity of supporters.

Pushed to its extreme, this argument both served to delegitimise well documented evidence of spikes in far-right activities and racist attacks created by the referendum and the US election by making it about elite classism (Weaver 2016; Travis 2016; Hatewatch Staff 2016a, 2016b; Farmer 2017;

Hatewatch Staff 2017;Miller and Werner 2016). Spiked!'s Luke Gittos (2016) claimed that 'the onset of panic has revealed how the very publications and commentators who once claimed to stand up for the working class in fact view working-class people as a violent, racist horde'. In these cases, the commentators ignore the mainstreaming of racism and it is themselves who seem to think that the working class is white, are responsible for Brexit and Trump, speak as or for the people and democracy, and are the target of accusations of racism. To explore this further, we now move to examine and challenge the concept of whiteness and construction of the white working class, as well as such narratives.

Who are the (white) working class?

This section examines and interrogates the concept, construction and narrative of the white working-class revolt around Brexit and Trump. There is no doubt that the working class in Britain and America faces great inequality in a post-industrial context following the 2010 economic crisis, growing neo-liberal policies, deregulation, housing crises, austerity in the UK, and an opioid epidemic in the US. That said, the racialised construction of the working class as white, or merely the focus on the 'white working class', in revolt against the establishment presents a number of issues. The first, is the fact that the working class is not white and that the socio-economic inequality and political disenfranchisement they experience is also experienced, often to a greater degree, by Black and Minority Ethnic working class people. This construction and narrative thus ignores this intersectionality, white privilege and the effects of such racialised divide and rule on communities.

It is a distraction from an actual anti-establishment critique of and revolt against entrenched power. Linked to this, the white working class is subject to historically contingent definitions of whiteness and racialised or ethnicised divisions (e.g. Jewish, Polish and Irish Catholic), often around immigration, labour and reactionary political movements and ideologies. Thirdly, if we consider that the working class being discussed is only white and the fact that the Trump and Brexit campaigns were led by figureheads from elite and establishment backgrounds, such as Trump, Farage and Boris Johnson, as well as discourses of general white and national decline, it appears that it was whiteness, national identification and indigenous status that was at stake as opposed to socio-economic status or class.

According to Virdee (in Patel 2015),

> so much of the history and sociology of the working class of Britain had failed to integrate the experiences of the racialized fractions within this working class – the Irish Catholics, Jews,

Asians and Caribbeans. It was almost as if the working assumption of these academics and socialist historians was that the working class was wholly white.

In Race, Class and the Racialised Outsider, Virdee (2014) examines the ways in which racialised groups immigrated to Britain, were targeted racially and scapegoated, joined the working class and were central to working class history, the development of British industry, and the negotiation of both Britishness and whiteness. He argues that Jewish and Irish working-class subjects are particularly instructive: having entered the working class as racialised immigrant groups, they 'became' white, demonstrating the contingency of the concept of whiteness.

The working class in the US has been shaped through a history of slavery and racism, immigration and specifically both external and internal labour migration (e.g. from Chinese rail workers, the migration of African-Americans from the Jim Crow South to the industrial North, and Mexican labourers) which informs a racialised class system and diverse working class. As a white settler colony, and while all white people come from elsewhere, some are whiter than others. Ignatiev (1995, 1996); Frye Jacobson (1998) and Roediger (1999) have all looked at whiteness as historical, contingent and constructed. Through their study of European migration to the United States, they have demonstrated how Jews, Irish, Catholics, Southern Italians and Greeks were racialised and excluded from whiteness, but eventually became white (a concept Jacobson terms 'probationary whiteness'), through various historical processes, racial/racist differentiation, new waves of immigration and leaving the working class. Roediger (1999) argues that such groups only became white, in the Anglo-American sense, by distinguishing themselves from Black slaves and freemen, including in labour market competition. For Ignatiev (1996), the ability for them to become white Americans was linked to buying property outside the industrial working class cities and ghettos. This was not something afforded to African-Americans, Asians and Hispanic people.

Returning to the present context, the construction and mobilisation of the white working class around Brexit did not go unnoticed or unchallenged. For the Runnymede Trust (Khan and Shaheen 2017), the racialisation of the working class and focus on white interests ignored the wider diversity of the working class and inequality faced by Black and minority ethnic communities, migrants and refugees. This divide and rule politics constructed a zero-sum competition for representation and reduced resources between the 'indigenous' white working class and 'others', even though socio-economic inequality and related problems (poverty, lack of social mobility, low wages, housing and institutional representation), predominantly represented as white working class problems, 'cut across racial

groups', with ethnic minorities suffering the brunt of austerity politics (Khan 2017; see also Runnymede Trust 2015). Bassel and Emejulu (2017a, 2017b) also demonstrate the disproportionate effect of austerity on women of colour in their research on Britain and France. The gender aspect is important due to the fact that in the 'left behind' discourse, the post industrial working class is not only presumed to be white, but male. White men are posited as having lost their jobs, earning power, status and ability to support and protect their family and maintain their patriarchal and masculine power.

This can be seen in the ways in which Brexit rhetoric intersected with fears of Muslims and particularly refugees threatening British women and children and the ways in which Trump's support intersected with antifeminist, men's rights and anti-PC sexist rhetoric. The latter of which was also linked to opposition to Hillary Clinton's campaign. Support and voting patterns also highlight gender issues, particularly in relation to race, which we will return to in section three. In the United States, while de-industrialisation and recession hurt the 'rust-belt' and 'red states' (code for white working class), Black and Hispanic people remained more likely to live in poorer neighbourhoods than white people with working class incomes (Goyette and Scheller 2016). Between 2007 and 2010 (recession), Hispanic wealth fell by 44%, and black wealth by 31%, compared to 11% for white families, and it was Black people who were more likely to be targeted and affected by subprime mortgages (Eisenbrey 2014).

In contrast with this diversity, leaders of these movements were predominantly white, but not working class. The gap between the rhetoric and reality was made clearest when Farage and Trump, two wealthy businessmen, were pictured in a gold elevator in Trump Tower (Withnall 2016). Furthermore, cruder acts of racism regularly take place beyond the working class, as was the case with Rhodri Philipps, the 4th Viscount St Davids convicted in June 2017, for threatening and racist Facebook posts directed at prominent anti-Brexit activist Gina Miller and another man of immigrant background (BBC 2017). It is not surprising that this took place in a climate where newspapers owned by wealthy white men declared judges to be 'enemies of the people' for allowing MPs to have a say on triggering article 50 (Phipps 2016).

Finally, despite claims by the campaigns and commentators that these votes were expressions of working class alienation and disenfranchisement, the focus of the campaigns was immigration, Islamophobia and national culture (often code for white), rather than jobs and economics. As previously noted, economics only came coupled with protectionist racism and xenophobia: 'it was cultural anxiety – feeling like a stranger in America, supporting the deportation of immigrants, and

hesitating about educational investment' that best predicted white working class support for Trump (Green 2017). It was therefore white racist and not working class interests which were at stake. This raises the question which is the focus of the next section, who actually voted for Brexit and Trump and do they represent the working class and/or revolts?

Brexit and Trump: working-class revolutions?

In the previous section, we interrogated the construction of the 'white working class' historically, conceptually and sociologically. In this section, we test the mainstream narrative further by examining whether Brexit and Trump were indeed propelled by a white working-class revolt. Building on existing research (Runnymede Trust 2017), this section aims to demonstrate that while there is no denying that part of the working class did vote for Trump and Brexit, the mainstream narrative has exaggerated the importance of this vote, and downplayed other demographics such as race and gender.

Despite widespread coverage, claims that Brexit was a working-class revolt are untenable when looking at the geography of the vote. As demonstrated by Dorling (2016) and Sayer (2017), Brexit supporters were mostly found in the wealthier parts of the UK, with 52% of leave voters being from southern half of England. Were it simply a question of class qua income for example, Scotland (62% remain) and Northern Ireland (55.8% remain), whose gross disposable income is lower than the UK's average would have been fertile ground for Brexit.

Analysis in terms of class provides further caveats to the working class revolt. While the 'social grades' categories of the National Readership Survey (2008) are notoriously problematic (see Rubin et al. 2014), they remain the best tools at our disposal, but more importantly those used to create the narratives we are challenging. Using these and including abstention as a variable allows us to weaken such generalising claims further. Unfortunately, the Ashcroft poll (Lord 2016) does not provide estimates regarding abstention per social class, but applying the data available for the 2015 General Election regarding participation, while not ideal, raises some interesting caveats, the most obvious being the ignorance of abstention as an important vector in our democracies (Mondon 2017). The following results were thus calculated based on a similar rate of abstention within each, but adjusted with the overall turnout (27.8% vs 33.9%). With abstention taken into account, the difference between social classes is far less convincing as DE and C2 register a lower turnout than C1 and AB, leading the gap between C2 (42.34%) and AB (35.15%) to narrow from 21% to just 7%. With this calculation, the difference between C1 (38.25%) and DE (39.76%) becomes marginal, thus negating the working-class

nature of the vote. This differential between classes is further negated when taking into account the size of each of these social classes within the entire population (see Figure 1): AB (9.49%) and C1 (11.12%) become the largest purveyors of vote for Leave, above both C2 (9.02%) and DE (9.14%) (for more detail, see Mondon 2017, see also Dorling 2016). This more nuanced picture disproves further the idea that the poor/working class/ordinary people rose up against the well-off/elite.[3]
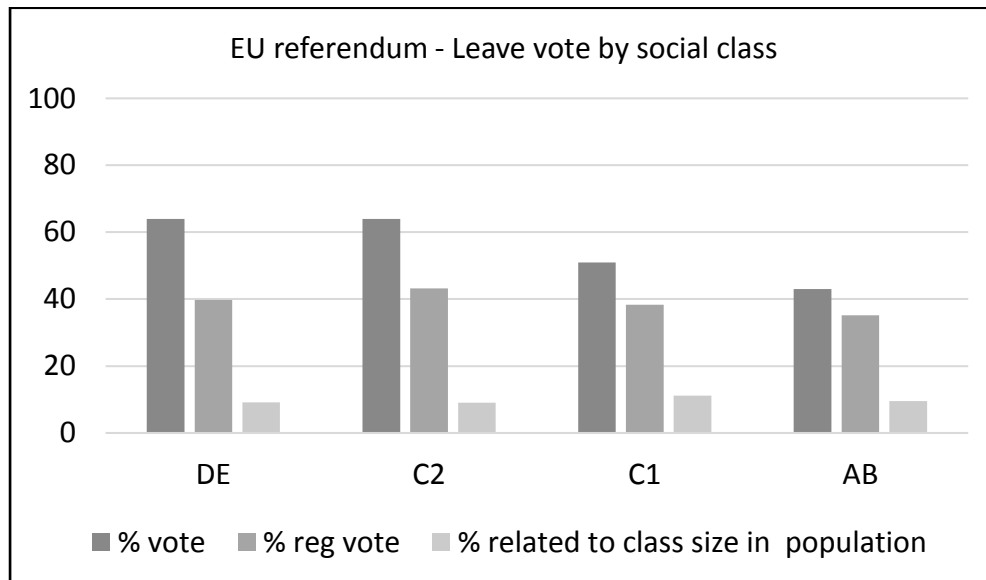

FIGURE 1: Leave vote per social class. Source (Lord Ashcroft 24 June 2016, Ipsos Mori 2015, Mondon 2017)

The picture is not dissimilar in the United States where the mainstream narrative about Trump's victory can also be nuanced. An analysis of the exit polls conducted by Edison Research for the National Election Pool (New York Times 2017) does indeed point to a strong performance of Trump with poorly educated white men (see Tables 1 and 2). Compared to the data from 2012, the shift in terms of vote by income is also striking with a much lower gap between Clinton and Trump within the two lower categories, although it must be noted that the Democrat candidate still received a majority of the vote in these categories traditionally associated with the working-class. However, what is particularly interesting here, and conspicuously absent in much of the media coverage about the white working class revolt, is to compare Trump's support with that of previous Republican candidates. While Trump did appeal to poorer voters in larger numbers than Mitt Romney or John McCain, his performance was

---

[3] There has also been some attention paid to Brexit voting from within BAME communities. Although it does challenge the 'white working class' Brexit narrative, we are not examining it as the focus of this section is white working class support. It is worth noting though that votes from within these communities is often evoked by Brexiters, along with claims about allowing commonwealth immigration instead of EU immigration post-Brexit, in order to defend against accusations that Brexit was only white and/or racist, but is challenged by racialised nostalgia for Empire, a rise in racist hate incidents and the 2018 Windrush deportation scandal.

similar to George Bush Jr's, thus suggesting that this may not be the working-class breakthrough widely advertised.

	Size of category in 2016	2016		2012		2008		2004	
		Clinton	Trump	Obama	Romney	Obama	McCain	Kerry	Bush
Under $30,000	17%	53%	41%	63%	35%	65%	32%	60%	40%
$30,000 - $49,999	19%	51%	42%	57%	42%	55%	43%	50%	49%
$50,000 - $99,999	31%	46%	50%	46%	52%	49%	49%	44%	56%
$100,000 - $199,999	24%	47%	48%	44%	54%	48%	51%	42%	57%
$200,000 or more	10%	47%	49%	44%	54%	52%	46%	35%	63%

Table 1: vote in presidential election according to income

The same seems to be true about education. Romney and McCain did particularly poorly against Obama within the least educated voter categories, making Trump's appeal within these categories appear like a real breakthrough. However, Trump's performance is again far less exceptional when compared to Bush's in 2004.

	Size of category in 2016	2016		2012		2008		2004	
		Clinton	Trump	Obama	Romney	Obama	McCain	Kerry	Bush
Some college/associate degree	32%	43%	52%	49%	48%	51%	47%	46%	54%
College graduate	32%	49%	45%	47%	51%	50%	48%	46%	52%
Postgraduate study	18%	58%	37%	55%	42%	58%	40%	55%	44%
High school graduate	18%	45%	51%	51%	48%	52%	46%	47%	52%
No high school diploma				64%	35%	63%	35%	50%	49%

Table 2: vote in presidential election according to level of education

Finally, Trump's performance with white voters is certainly strong, but again does not appear to be significantly different from previous Republican candidates (see Table 3).

	Size of category in 2016	2016		2012		2008		2004	
		Clinton	Trump	Obama	Romney	Obama	McCain	Kerry	Bush
White	70%	37%	58%	39%	59%	43%	55%	41%	58%
Black	12%	88%	8%	93%	6%	95%	4%	88%	11%
Hispanic/Latino	11%	65%	29%	71%	27%	67%	31%	53%	44%
Asian	4%	65%	29%	73%	26%	62%	35%	56%	44%
Other	3%	56%	37%	58%	38%	66%	31%	54%	40%

Table 3: vote in presidential election according to level of race

There is no denying however that Trump managed to appeal to more less educated White men than his predecessors. While Bush and Romney appealed to 61% of the 'white without a college degree electorate', McCain 58%, Trump appealed to 67% of that category. Yet Trump's 'breakthrough' is further nuanced by Kilibarda and Roithmayr (2016) analysis of the 'myth of the rust belt revolt' which demonstrates that Clinton actually lost more 'white working class' votes on Obama than Trump gained on Romney in 2012 (see also Henley 2016). It is also worth noting that Trump won the majority of white professional males with a college education and over 40% of white professional females with a college education, pointing further to race or 'whiteness' over class as a key factor, something which is traditional in the Republican vote. This is backed up by a Public Religion Research Institute survey that showed Trump's appeal could better be explained by a fear of cultural displacement (such as the loss of white male Christian privilege) than real or feared economic displacement (Chokshi 2018).

Interestingly, responses to supplementary questions in the exit poll suggest that, beyond the traditional Republican electorate or middle and upper class conservatives, Trump managed to appeal to a similar electorate than that which has underpinned the resurgence of the far right in Europe. This particular electorate feels insecure about its future, even though it remains in a relatively privileged position and is more interested about issues such as immigration and terrorism, than about the economy. Therefore, rather than a radical shift of the working class towards Trump, what we have witnessed is the development of a typical far right electorate by European standards (see amongst

others Crépon, Dézé, and Mayer 2015, Rydgren 2013). While this is certainly a concerning development, the size of this particular electorate is marginal, and would not have been sufficient for Trump to win if the Democrats had managed to retain their share of the vote. A more significant finding is that the largest share of Trump's electorate does not appear to differ from traditional Republican voters, and particularly from Bush's. This means that Trump is more the confirmation of a trend which has seen a radicalisation of the Republican electorate, with racism being increasingly normalised in American politics, and the resurgence of the far right rather than a real break from politics as usual.

Misusing class and its implications

The first part of this article highlighted the way in which mainstream political discourse constructed a narrative around Brexit and Trump's election as white working-class revolts. To challenge this narrative, we have used a two-pronged approach: first, we demonstrated that there is a long history of whitening the working class and ignoring its diversity, thus promoting an essentialist narrative based on white (male) experience. This led us to conclude that, while racism is indeed present in the working class, its diverse nature should not be ignored and the racism present in upper classes should not be downplayed, particularly when the so-called revolt is led by the privileged (both in terms of race and wealth). We then took a more electoral approach and demonstrated that the working class revolts for both Trump and Brexit were in fact far less obvious than the coverage of both electoral contests showed. The working-class nature of these two votes is marginal and can be challenged.

Therefore, we see the white working class narrative as problematic in four ways. The first is that it racialises the working class as white and pits an elusive 'white working class' against racialised minorities and immigrants, who are denied working class status, in a competition for scarce, deregulated and casualised employment and ever dwindling resources in neo-liberal Britain and America. Second, it constructs the 'white working class' as privileging their racial interests above class ones and as being racist, which results in the very stigma right-wing populist and libertarian advocates, who are themselves often part of the elites, falsely and opportunistically claim to oppose. Third, it normalises and mainstreams racism in both discourse and practice by portraying it as a popular demand, thus potentially fuelling hate crime. Finally, in addition to not addressing the inequality faced by 'white' working class people, it exacerbates the inequality and vulnerability faced by racialised and migrant working class peoples and actually serves establishment political and economic interests.

This framing of Brexit and Trump as working class revolts also informed the ways in which responses and reactions to them were constructed. The reaction with regard to the role played by the working class in the events has tended to be split into two distinct camps: those celebrating the working class revolts, and those lamenting the rise of racism within this part of the population. While there is no denying that racist sentiment is on the rise within the working class and that many voted for Trump and Brexit for this reason, our analysis has demonstrated that the working class quality of both votes is not evident and that the majority of supporters for the nativist option came from better off sections of the population traditionally associated with the middle class. The white working class revolt narrative mobilised by the populist far right and hyped by elite discourse (Glynos & Mondon 2016) has ignored not only elite driven racism (e.g. in politics, academia and the media) as well as the more structural, institutional and systemic operation of racism in our societies. For the US, this is supported by the analysis undertaken by Metzgar (2016) and Hubbs (2014) that 'class-based blame-shifting ("It's not us, it's them!") actually supports racist and other systems of oppression'. While those in positions of power (whether political or discursive) have often argued that they are merely responding to what 'the people' want, they have carefully ignored or downplayed the role they play as gate-keepers and shapers of public discourse and their proven influence as agenda-setters. Therefore, rather than 'the people' suddenly reverting to racist attitudes, we argue that it is the widespread and widely publicised acceptance, based on skewed evidence, that 'the people' has turned racist, that perversely led to the legitimisation of a racism as it began to be discussed as a popular feeling, rather than a construction fuelled by elite discourse.

References

Anderson, C. 2016. White Rage: The Unspoken Truth about Our Racial Divide. New York: Bloomsbury.

Bassel, L., and A. Emejulu. 2017b. "Whose Crisis Counts? Minority Women, Austerity and Activism in France and Britain." In Gender and the Economic Crisis in Europe, edited by J. Kantola, and E. Lombardo, 185-208. London: Palgrave.

Bassel, L., and A. Emejulu. 2017a. Minority Women and Austerity: Survival and Resistance in France and Britain. Bristol: Policy Press.

BBC. 2017. "Aristocrat Guilty over "Menacing" Gina Miller Facebook Post." BBC, July 11. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-40574754

Bhambra, G. 2017. "Brexit, Trump, and 'Methodological Whiteness': On the Misrecognition of Race and Class." British Journal of Sociology: Special Issue on the Trump/Brexit Moment: Causes and Consequences 68 (S1): S214–S232.

Brooks, D. 2016. "Revolt of the Masses." New York Times, June 28. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/28/opinion/revolt-of-the-masses.html

Bush, S. 2015. "Labour's Anti-Immigrant Mug: The Worst Part Is, It Isn't a Gaffe." The New Statesman, March 28. http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/03/labours-anti-immigrant-mug-worst-part-it-isnt-gaffe

Chokshi, N. 2018. "Trump Voters Driven by Fear of Losing Status, Not Economic Anxiety, Study Finds." New York Times, April 24. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/24/us/politics/trump-economic-anxiety.html

Cohn, N. 2016. "Why Trump Won Working Class Whites." New York Times, November 10. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/10/upshot/why-trump-won-working-classwhites.html

Crampton, C. 2016. "Voting for Trump and Brexit: What the Working Class Revolt Is Really About." The New Statesman, November 9. http://www.newstatesman.com/world/north-america/2016/11/voting-trump-and-brexit-what-working-class-revoltreally-about

Crépon, S., A. Dézé, and N. Mayer, eds. 2015. Les Faux-Semblants Du Front National: Sociologie D'un Parti Politique. Paris: Sciences Po Les Presses.

Dorling, D. 2016. "Brexit: The Decision of a Divided Country." BMJ 354. doi:10.1136/bmj.i3697.

Eisenbrey, R. 2014. "Detroit's Bankruptcy Reflects a History of Racism." Economic Policy Institute, February 25. http://www.epi.org/blog/detroits-bankruptcy-reflectshistory-racism/

Emejulu, A. 2016. "On the Hideous Whiteness of Brexit: "Let Us Be Honest about Our past and Our Present if We Truly Seek to Dismantle White Supremacy"." Verso

Books Blog, June 28. https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2733-on-the-hideouswhiteness-of-brexit-let-us-be-honest-about-our-past-and-our-present-if-we-trulyseek-to-dismantle-white-supremacy

Farage, N. 2016. "The Little People Have Had Enough." The Telegraph, October 9. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/10/09/the-little-people-have-hadenough—not-just-here-but-in-america/

Farmer, B. 2017. "Far-Right and neo-Nazi Terror Arrests Double." The Telegraph, March 9. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/09/far-right-neo-nazi-terror-arrestsdouble/

Ford, R., and M. Goodwin. January, 2017. "Britain After Brexit: A Nation Divided." Journal of Democracy 28: 17–30. https://kar.kent.ac.uk/60489/4/Ford_Goodwin_A_Nation_Divided_AAM.pdf

Furedi, F. 2016. "Revolt of the Others." Spiked!, June 30. https://www.spiked-online.com/2016/06/30/revolt-of-the-others/

Gittos, L. 2016. "Britain Has Not Become Racist Overnight." Spiked! June 28. http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/britain-has-not-become-racist-overnightbrexit-eu/18511#.WN9eI_nytPY

Glynos, J., and A. Mondon. 2016. "The Political Logic of Populist Hype: The Case of Right Wing Populism's 'Meteoric Rise' and Its Relation to the Status Quo." Populismus working paper series no. 4.

Goodhart, D. 2013. The British Dream: Successes and Failures of Post-War Immigration. London: Atlantic Books.

Goodhart, D. 2017. The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics. London: C. Hurst.

Goyette, B., and A. Scheller. 2016. "15 Charts That Prove We're Far From Post-Racial". Huffington Post: Black Voices, February 7. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/02/civil-rights-act-anniversary-racism-charts_n_5521104.html

Green, E. 2017. "It Was Cultural Anxiety that Drove White, Working-Class Voters to Trump." The Atlantic, May 9. https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/05/white-working-class-trump-cultural-anxiety/525771/

Gutteridge, N. 2016. "Working Class Revolution? Reports of Huge EU Referendum Turnout Which 'Would Favour Leave'." The Express, June 24. http://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/682890/EU-referendum-Reports-huge-EU-referendum-turnout-favour-Leave-Brexit

Hall, M., and D. Maddox 2016. "Nigel Farage Today Warned that Controlling Mass Immigration while Britain Remains in the EU Is Simply Impossible." The Express, April 29. http://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/665446/Nigel-Farage-Ukipcontrol-immigration-leave-EU-referendum-June

Harris, J. 2016. "Britain Is in the Midst of a Working-Class Revolt." The Guardian, June 17. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/17/britain-workingclass-revolt-eu-referendum doi:10.3310/pgfar04170

Hatewatch Staff. 2016a. "Update: More than 400 Incidents of Hateful Harassment and Intimidation since the Election." Southern Poverty Law Center, November 15. https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2016/11/15/update-more-400-incidentshateful-harassment-and-intimidation-election

Hatewatch Staff. 2016b. "Update: 1094 Bias Related Incidents in the Month following the Election." Southern Poverty Law Center, December 16. https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2016/12/16/update-1094-bias-related-incidents-month-followingelection

Hatewatch Staff. 2017. "Hate Groups Increase for Second Consecutive Year as Trump Electrifies Radical Right." Southern Poverty Law Center, February 15. https://www.splcenter.org/news/2017/02/15/hate-groups-increase-second-consecutive-yeartrump-

electrifies-radical-right

Henley, J. 2016. "White and Wealthy Voters Gave Victory to Donald Trump, Exit Polls Show." The Guardian, November 9. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/09/white-voters-victory-donald-trump-exit-polls

Hill, M. 2004. After Whiteness: Unmaking an American Majority. New York: New York University Press.

Hochschild, A. R. 2016. Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right, 230. New York: New Press.

Hubbs, N. 2014. Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music. Jackson: University of California Press.

Hughley, M. W. 2014. "White Backlash in the 'Post-Racial' United States." Ethnic and Racial Studies 37 (5): 721–730. doi:10.1080/01419870.2014.886710.

Ignatiev, N. 1995. How the Irish Became White. London: Routledge.

Ignatiev, N. 1996. "Immigrants and Whites." In Race Traitor, edited by N. Ignatiev, and J. Garvey, 17. London: Routledge.

Ipsos Mori. 2015. "How Britain Voted in 2015." London: Ipsos

Jacobson, M. F. 1998. Whiteness of a Different Colour. 1998. London: Routledge.

Kaufmann, E. 2017. "Racial Self-Interest Is Not Racism: Ethno-Demographic Interests and the Immigration Debate." Policy Exchange, https://policyexchange.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2017/03/Racial-Self-Interest-is-not-Racism-FINAL.pdf

Khan, O. 2017. "Who Cares About The White Working Class?" Huff Post UK, March 21. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dr-omar-khan/white-working-classdisadvantages_b_15494046.html

Khan, O., and F. Shaheen 2017. "Minority Report: Race and Class in post-Brexit Britain, Runnymede Trust and Class." Runnymede Trust and CLASS, March. http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/Race%20and%20Class%20Post-Brexit%20Perspectives%20report%20v5.pdf

Kilibarda, K., and D. Roithmayr. 2016. "The Myth of the Rust Belt Revolt." Slate, December 1. http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2016/12/the_myth_of_the_rust_belt_revolt.html

Lentin, A. 2017. "On Class and Identity Politics." Inference Review. V.3, #2, http://inference-review.com/article/on-class-and-identity-politics

Lord, A. 2016. How the United Kingdom Voted on Thursday… and Why. London: Lord Ashcroft Polls. June 24.

Lyons, J. 2016. "Farage Campaign Courted Far Right." The Sunday Times, May 22. http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/farage-campaign-courted-far-right-njrqxhkqb

Metzgar, J. 2016. "Misrepresenting the White Working Class: What the Narrating Class Gets Wrong." Working Class Perspectives, March 14. https://workingclassstudies.wordpress.com/2016/03/14/misrepresenting-the-white-working-class-what-thenarrating-class-gets-wrong/

Miller, C., and A. Werner. 2016. "Ten Days After: Harassment and Intimidation in the Aftermath of the Election." Southern Poverty Law Center, November 29. https://www.splcenter.org/20161129/ten-days-after-harassment-and-intimidationaftermath-election

Mondon, A. 2017. "Limiting Democratic Horizons to a Nationalist Reaction: Populism, the Radical Right and the Working Class." Javnost/The Public: Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture 24 (3): 355-374.

Mondon, A., and A. Winter. 2017. "Articulations of Islamophobia: From the Extreme to the Mainstream?" Ethnic and Racial Studies Review 40 (13): 2151-2179.

Nadeem, S., R. B. Horowitz, V. T. Chen, M. W. Hughley, J. Eastman, and K. J. Cramer. 2017. "Viewpoints: Whitewashing the Working Class." Contexts, June 23. https://contexts.org/articles/whitewashing-the-working-class/

National Readership Survey. 2008. "National Readership Survey [Online]." Accessed 13 June 2017. http://www.nrs.co.uk/

Neiwert, D., and S. Posner. 2016. "Meet the Horde of Neo-Nazis, Klansmen, and Other Extremist Leaders Endorsing Donald Trump." Mother Jones, September 21. http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/09/trump-supporters-neo-nazis-whitenationalists-kkk-militias-racism-hate

News, Fox. 2016. "Fox Business". Fox News, March 16. https://www.spiked-online.com/2016/06/30/revolt-of-the-others/

O'Neill, B. 2016. "Brexit Voters are Not Thing, Not Racist: Just Poor." The Spectator, July 2. http://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/07/brexit-voters-are-not-thick-not-racistjust-poor/

Patel, J. 2015. ""Both Racism and Anti-Racism Were Present in the Making of the English Working Class": An Interview with Satnam Virdee." Media Diversified, November 18. https://mediadiversified.org/2015/11/18/both-racism-and-antiracism-were-present-in-the-making-of-the-english-working-class/

Peck, T. 2016. "Nigel Farage's Triumphalist Brexit Speech Crossed the Borders of Decency." The Independent, June 24. http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-recession-economy-what-happens-nigel-farage-speech-a7099301.html.

Phipps, C. 2016. "British Newspapers React to Judges' Brexit Ruling: "Enemies of the People"." The Guardian, November 4. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/nov/04/enemies-of-the-people-british-newspapers-react-judges-brexit-ruling

Roediger, D. 1999. The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class. New York: Verso.

Rubin, M., N. Denson, K. E. Matthews, T. Stehlik, and D. Zyngier. 2014. ""I Am Working-class": Subjective Self-Definition as a Missing Measure of Social Class and Socioeconomic Status in Higher Education Research." Educational Researcher 42 (4):196–200.

Runnymede Trust. 2015. "The 2015 Budget Effects on Black and Minority Ethnic People." Runnymede Trust, http://www.runnymedetrust.org/projects-and-publications/employment-3/budget-2015-impact-on-bme-families.html

Runnymede Trust. 2017. "Race and Class." Runnymede Trust, March 21. http://www.runnymedetrust.org/projects-and-publications/employment-3/race-andclass.html

Rydgren, J. 2013. Class Politics and the Radical Right. Abingdon: Routledge. http://libproxy.bath.ac.uk/login?url=http://lib.myilibrary.com?id=423226.

Saini, R. 2017. "Racial Self-Interest' Is Not Racism: Populist Correctness Gone Mad?." Media Diversified, March 23. https://mediadiversified.org/2017/03/23/racial-selfinterest-is-not-racism-populist-correctness-gone-mad/

Sayer, D. 2017. "White riot—Brexit, Trump, and Post-Factual Politics." Journal of Historical Sociology 30 (1): 92–106. doi:10.1111/johs.v30.1.

Song, M. 2014. "Challenging a Culture of Racial Equivalence." British Journal of Sociology 65: 107–129. doi:10.1111/1468-4446.12054.

Spiked! 2016. "The Brexit Vote Was a Revolt against the Establishment." Spiked!/WorldBytes, August 24. http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/the-brexit-votewas-a-revolt-against-the-establishment/18693#.WWZEVYjytPY

Stewart, H., and R. Mason. 2016. "Nigel Farage's Anti-Migrant Poster Reported to Police." The Guardian, June 16. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/nigel-farage-defends-ukip-breaking-point-poster-queue-of-migrants

Todd, S. 2015. The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class. London: John Murray.

Travis, A. 2009, "Denham Takes Aim at White Working-Class Resentment." The Guardian, October 14. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2009/oct/14/denham-white-working-class-resentment

Travis, A. 2016. "Lasting Rise in Hate Crime after EU Referendum, Figures Show." The Guardian, September 7. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/sep/07/hatesurged-after-eu-referendum-police-figures-show

Vance, J. D. 2017. Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of A Family and Culture in Crisis. London: Harper.

Virdee, S. 2014. Race, Class and the Racialised Outsider. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Virdee, S., and B. McGeever. 2017. "'Racism, Crisis, Brexit'." In Ethnic and Racial Studies: Race and Crisis Special Issue, edited by Virdee and Gupta, 1802-1819. 41/10.

Wearing, D. 2017. "Labour Has Slipped Rightwards on Immigration. That Needs to Change". The Guardian, July 25. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/25/labour-immigration-jeremy-corbyn-attitudes?CMP=share_btn_tw

Weaver, M. 2016. "'Horrible Spike' in Hate Crime Linked to Brexit Vote, Met Police Say." The Guardian, September 28 https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/sep/28/hate-crime-horrible-spike-brexit-vote-metropolitan-police

Winter, A. 2017. "Brexit and Trump: On Racism, the Far Right and Violence." Institute for Policy Research (IPR) Blog, April 3. http://blogs.bath.ac.uk/iprblog/2017/04/03/brexit-and-trump-on-racism-the-far-right-and-violence/

Winter, A. 2018. "The Klan Is History: A Historical Perspective on the Revival of the Far-Right in "Post-Racial" America." In Historical Perspectives on Organised Crime and Terrorism, edited by J. Morrison, A. Silke, J. Windle, and A. Winter, 109–132. Abingdon: Routledge.

Withnall, A. 2016. "Donald Trump Says Nigel Farage Would Make a 'Great' US Ambassador." The Independent, November 22. http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/donald-trump-nigel-farage-us-ambassador-make-great-a7431166.html

Yiannopoulos, M. 2017. "Milo on Why the Democrats Lost the White Working Class." Breitbart, January 26. http://www.breitbart.com/milo/2017/01/26/full-textmilo-democrats-lost-white-working-class/