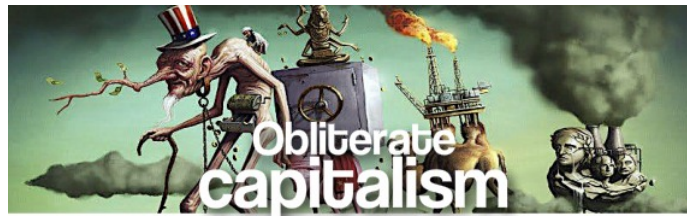


Voices in the fog: The Performative Political BS Has To Stop

Please make sure these dispatches reach as many readers as possible. Share with kin, friends and workmates and ask them to do likewise.

EDITOR'S NOTE



Xenografts: Scathing, spot on analysis from unexpected sources.

Shannon Keating, a senior culture editor at BuzzFeed, recently delivered a piece that I find impeccable in terms of fact and logic. Point after irrefutable point, Shannon serves a withering critique of establishment worthies pretending to embrace the struggle of the people. Disgusted by the blatant hypocrisy, she is saying something that all genuine progressives probably agree with, and that needs to be said. Obviously Shannon is no dullard. But, after you read her piece (and I hope you do, excerpts below) the question that arises is this: What is a super bright writer like Shannon K. doing by giving editorial respectability to a shameless imperialist disinformation tool like BuzzFeed? Her piece rightly belongs on Black Agenda Report, or here, on this platform (admittedly far less powerful than BuzzFeed), where there would be no

editorial dissonance. And you wonder why confusion reigns.

Let's make something clear. On Syria alone, to give just one example, BuzzFeed has eagerly run many pieces straight from the State Dept.'s hybrid war playbook. Like this little gem in March 2018:

[CLICK→Here's Why You Probably Won't Read This Article About Syria](#)

The piece, including as illustration the notorious British intel propaganda asset White Helmets as heroes, is one of many items dripping with the sickening cynicism deployed by the empire to put pressure on Damascus and the Russians to stop their bombing, as they struggled to liberate Syria from precisely the bloodthirsty jihadists injected into that nation by the US and its Gulf allies. The US goal in this sordid enterprise was never to liberate Syria from some putative tyranny and human rights abuses (about which the US has never really given a damn, as witness what we did in Vietnam, Central America or Indonesia, for that matter) but to impose a Washington-controlled failed regime a la Libya ready to do America and Israel's bidding. Further, for those who remain stubbornly naive about America's intentions, as other pieces of this ilk, the outcry to halt the bombing "to spare the innocent and the children" is actually designed to give the Washington-backed fanatics a reprieve—yea, those admirable head-chopping "moderate rebels"—so they may regroup and continue indefinitely their brutal mayhem in Syria, which suits the neocons in Washington, London, Paris and Tel Aviv just fine.

So the question remains, what is a certifiable progressive like Shannon Keating doing in such company? In her righteous lucidity, Shannon reminds us of Caitlin Johnstone, the Aussie firebrand. It's a confusing world, isn't it?

—PG

Excerpts

The Performative Political BS Has To Stop

As Black Lives Matter protests yield results, it's become harder to ignore the gulf between well-meaning but ultimately worthless gestures and real, radical change.



[Shannon Keating Senior Culture Writer & Editor](#)

Posted on June 10, 2020



IDENTITY POLITICS A OUTRANCE: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other Democratic lawmakers take a knee and observe a moment of silence on Capitol Hill for George Floyd and other victims of police brutality, June 8. (Brendan Smialowski / Getty Images)

On Monday, June 8, a couple dozen congressional Democrats, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, attempted to honor the memory of George Floyd by kneeling for [8 minutes and 46 seconds](#) in the Capitol's Emancipation Hall; they were all wearing stoles of kente cloth. It made for a marvelously cringey spectacle, though an apt one.

All around the country, hundreds of thousands of protesters have risked [coronavirus](#) infection and escalating police brutality [by taking to the streets](#), successfully building on decades of abolitionist organizing to [dramatically shift the Overton window](#) on the idea of [defunding](#) and [demilitarizing](#) police departments across the United States. Meanwhile, these lawmakers – as they announced a police reform bill that activists are calling [woefully insufficient](#), and just a few days before Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden proposed spending \$300 million to [“reinvigorate community policing”](#) – decided to stop short at using African cloth as a [political prop](#) to demonstrate their commitment to the cause.

Identity representation politics and gestures of symbolic support for Black lives (and queer lives, and poor lives) aren't going to cut it; they never did to begin with. But Democrats are still trying to win their battle against Trump by playing his games.

. Doreen St. Félix, in an [essay](#) on the performance for the New Yorker, wrote that she found it “akin to historical images of white political leaders preening in the exotic ‘garb’ of people living in countries they are exploiting. Inadvertently,

the cloth emphasized the sense that black Americans are foreign in their own land.”

This well-intentioned stunt, an idea that originated [from the Congressional Black Caucus](#), was appreciated by [some of its audience](#) but widely [flamed on Twitter](#) as a parody of congressional showmanship and ineptitude – something that [could have been dreamed up in the Veep writers room](#). Ultimately, it reads as just the latest bit of performative absurdity from powerful people who’ve long avoided real accountability for causing or excusing Black suffering.

For many, it is no longer enough for those in power to make mere gestures of solidarity with Black people without also doing the work.

Sometimes – a lot of the time, really – these performances work. For most (white) Americans, or at least those who aren’t activists or organizers or obsessive politicians, it’s often enough for leaders to at least look like they’re doing or saying the right things. Democrats and Republicans alike who find themselves longing for the guidance of presidents past – who still think there’s a world in which we could conceivably [“go back to normal”](#) – aren’t so much hungering for better policies, but for better optics. Trump, though he’s finally lost the support of some [Republican leaders who say they won’t back his reelection](#), has nonetheless faithfully (if oafishly) executed [much of the Republican agenda](#), from rollbacks of [LGBTQ rights](#) and [environmental protections](#) to [flooding the courts with conservatives](#). Meanwhile, the [liberals who wish Obama were still in power](#) are banking on the symbolic promise of our first Black president, even though, as Cornel West put it to Anderson Cooper in a recent [viral CNN clip](#), “the Black Lives Matter movement emerged under a Black president and a Black attorney general ... and they still couldn’t deliver.

So why all this nostalgia? Why are people like Katie Couric [longing for Obama and George W. Bush to jointly address the nation](#) as if the problems we’re facing today – born from systemic racism and unchecked corporate greed – didn’t flourish under both of their tenures? Why has Biden been able

to run a successful campaign practically fueled by Obama-era reminiscence? It's nostalgia not for policy so much as performance – for men who were more “presidential” and respectable than Trump, with his openly racist clownery, and for leaders [who knew better than to say the quiet parts out loud](#).

Identity representation politics and gestures of symbolic support for Black lives (and queer lives, and poor lives) aren't going to cut it; they never did to begin with. But Democrats are still trying to win their battle against Trump by playing his games. The kente cloth debacle isn't so different, after all, from the president's Bible-wielding photo op in front of a DC church – though to their credit, Pelosi and co. [didn't tear gas a bunch of peaceful protesters](#) to make it happen.



[READ THIS ARTICLE IN ITS ENTIRETY HERE](#)



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– Ben Norton (@BenjaminNorton) [April 9, 2020](#)

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