

HILLARY IS WHITE

Zillah Eisenstein
Ithaca New York
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It seems clear that Barack Obama will be the Democratic nominee for president this fall.¹ Nevertheless, it is crucial to clarify how wrong-headed Hillary Clinton's campaign has been so that the legacy she leaves does no more damage to a multi-racial, multi-class based feminism/womanism both here and abroad.

None of the pundits and journalists appears to be wondering and worrying about black women in this post-Indiana-North-Carolina-West-Virginia moment. Instead, all eyes, and especially Hillary and Bill's are on the so-called "white-hard-working working class". Hillary's pre-occupation with white voters is a dead give-away of how she thinks about gender, and being a woman. Gender is white to her, like race is black. Bill and Hillary Clinton have thrown African-Americans to the wind because they thought they could play the gender card with its history of whiteness and win.

And here lies the rub. Hillary Clinton presents herself to the electorate as a woman. She argues that she wants to break the glass ceiling of/for gender. But the truth is that she is not simply a woman but *both* a woman and also white. The very fact that she ignores her own race, in a way that Obama cannot, is proof of the normalized privileging of whiteness. In this instance white is not a color, but *the* color, *the* standard, by which others are judged. So she silently, inadvertently but knowingly, uses her color to write her meanings of gender and mobilize older white women and angry white men by doing so. She presents herself as a woman but her real power here is as white. Misogyny—the fear, hatred, punishment, and discrimination towards women—ensures that Hillary's privilege is her whiteness.

Most often the term white is not spoken alongside the term woman; there is no need. One only specifies color when it is *not white*. Women are assumed to be white if not specified otherwise, especially if you are speaking about gender or women's rights, or feminism. Forget the *fact* that it was a group of black women that initially challenged the Supreme Court in the first sex discrimination case in this country years ago.

Hillary speaks of herself as a woman, and then speaks separately about race, as though she does not embody both at the same time. She has as much 'race' as Barack, but her race is not a problem for her. It is for him, even though it may not be as much as a problem as she is trying to make it. As such, Hillary, as a (white) woman pits herself against Barack (as black) with a race so to speak. So Hillary (as a woman) is falsely, wrongly, pitted against Barack (as black). Her whiteness privileges and pits gender against race. She encodes her whiteness as though it is central to her gender, and to her kind of feminism without saying a word. She re-awakens and rewrites the history of 19th century U.S. feminism that pitted black men getting the vote before white women had that right. More recently, women's rights rhetoric was used to justify the bombing of the Taliban and brown people in Afghanistan and Iraq. Feminism has a history of being bankrupt on this issue so this is nothing new. What is forgotten here is that women's rights come, or should come, in all colors.

Barack Obama has said he wants to embrace the new notions of race and the racial progress that has occurred. He is not post-racist, but recognizes the newly raced relations as they exist at present. Nevertheless, he must give a speech on race although he says he does not want to be a racial candidate. He recognizes that the country has new-old racial hierarchies with complex identities and that he himself represents white and African blackness, whatever this might mean for him. Meanwhile Hillary says she is running as a woman, and never gives a speech on gender because white angry men and women, would not be pleased by this. So patriarchy, or sexual discrimination, or the structural hierarchy of masculinity with its racialized and class aspects is never mentioned in her campaign. She uses whiteness as her weapon and pretends to be speaking about gender. *But she never once mentions the unacceptable misogyny of this country, or the sexual hierarchy of the labor force, or any of the great racial and class inequities that define women's lives today.* This is a misuse and abuse of her gender.

Feminisms of all sorts have moved beyond the idea that feminism is a white woman's thing; or that feminisms should be particularly beholden to the white mainstreamed part of the U.S. women's movement. Large numbers of women, especially women of color, but many white women as well, know that race and gender are inseparable and that is why most of these women, whatever their color, are voting for Barack Obama. Hillary should not be allowed to push feminism backwards for her own political ambition. It is not surprising that it is older white women who disproportionately support her. They identify with old notions of womanhood—a homogenized notion that all females share an identity, and race and class are *not* connected issues to be named and spoken. This is why younger women and progressive women from the civil rights and women's movements, some of whom are older, disproportionately support Obama.

My thoughts about Hillary Clinton have their own history, which also coincide with her history. I have not been a fan of hers. I have written critically of her for more than a decade now.² She has never spoken on behalf of women or as a candidate with a woman's agenda, let alone as a feminist when she was in the White House. Many of us who are her contemporaries were active in the Civil Rights Movement and Women's Movements and Anti-Vietnam War movement—while she chose not to be. Her one speech addressing the exploitation of women was delivered in Beijing, China, as though it is women outside, but not inside the U.S. who face untold discrimination. Now she runs for president and has become a gun-toting, war mongering white woman who asks for your vote if you are an angry white Reagan Democrat. Maybe she thinks manly gender is the answer for breaking glass ceilings for women.

I would argue that she is not breaking gender boundaries but rather has embraced and extended masculine/misogyny for females. And misogyny always comes in racialized form. She remains female in body and hence parades as a decoy for feminist claims. And her white self is central to this decoy status. Susan Faludi wrote in the New York Times that Hillary is having a success with white male support because she is willing to battle, and engage in rough play like one of the boys. She is supposedly willing to “join the brawl” and as such has won their confidence. She has “broke through the glass floor and got down with the boys” opening the way for women to finally make it “through the glass ceiling and into the White house”.³ Barbara Ehrenreich in The Nation hesitantly embraces this assessment and then more forcefully criticizes Clinton for her

ruthlessness. Ehrenreich writes that Clinton has “smashed the myth of innate female moral superiority in the worst possible way...demonstrating female moral inferiority.”⁴

Hillary has proven that sometimes the best man for the job may be a female posing to be a man. In other words, Hillary has simply clothed herself in men’s tactics and strategies. She can nuke with the best of them. Hillary not only authorized the war in Iraq but she repeatedly continued to do so for several more years—up until the time she began running for president. She allowed, along with Bill Clinton, the egregious trade blockade against Iraq as hundreds of thousands of children starved to death after the ‘91 war. She more recently has supported Israel’s terror bombing of Lebanon and has newly endorsed “the total obliteration” of Iran.

But this is just part of the sad story. Hillary’s embrace of a masculinist machismo embraces the very misogyny that most feminists want to dismantle. Instead of challenging the gender divide Hillary simply slides over to the other side of it. Instead of offering a new vision of what it might mean to have a female president she offers us old versions of white privilege and war mongering. But the structural privilege of patriarchy is ignored and obfuscated with Hillary’s race card. Nevertheless many (white) women write, like Marie Cocco in the Washington Post (May 15, ‘08) that she won’t miss the misogyny of the campaign when its over—she lists the sexist T-shirts, and array of commercial goods circulating at present. While I abhor any form of degradation of girls and women, or any human being for that matter, I am also hesitant to see this as a sufficient critique of the problem.

Hillary Clinton should never be demeaned for being a woman. But being a woman comes in all colors and classes. Hillary has done the unforgivable. She has used race—the whiteness card—on behalf of gender. We, the big ‘we’—the huge diversely defined feminisms in this country and across the globe—are better than this. Black feminists in this country, during the 1970’s and ‘80’s women’s movement made sure to break open the race/gender divide and clarify that gender is always racialized and race is always gendered. No person ever experiences one with out the other. Only when whiteness parades as an invisible standard can you think that gender and race can be separate. As such Hillary is white and a female and Barack is black and male. They are each both. Everyone is.

Hillary’s manipulation and misrepresentation of her gender reveals her sexual decoy status. Being female is not enough to allow one to claim their gender as a political tactic. Such claims must be rooted in a commitment to end gender discrimination and their racial and class formulations; not pit races and classes against each other in the hopes of being the first woman president. Clinton does not share a political identity with women of all classes and colors and nations simply because she has a female body. She first needs to claim that body and demand rights for it—reproductive, day care, health, education, etc. She has no multi-racial woman’s agenda because she has no anti-racist agenda.

Meanwhile she is thrilled that she won big in West Virginia. West Virginia is “almost heaven” to Hillary. She says it shows the country that she can win the “hardworking white Americans” in November. But West Virginia is not heaven, nor is it like much of the rest of the country. It may look like what the U.S. used to be, but that is exactly the point. It does not have the diversity of color, age, culture that defines the U.S. today. Neither does Hillary’s vision.

Hillary is a sexual decoy. She looks like a woman but is not a feminist nor does she speak for or on behalf of most women. She speaks for white people while identifying with her gender, as a woman. But she has trumped herself here. If a female prepares to bully the rest of the world with war and white privilege hopefully we—the big `we`—the `we` that spans across our differences will defeat the political forces she represents. And this means building a coalition for the November elections that makes sure that a non-misogynist agenda is part of the anti-racist politics of the Obama campaign.

Zillah Eisenstein is professor of politics at Ithaca College, a feminist anti-racist activist, and author of ten books in feminisms and feminist theories across the globe. Her most recent book is *SEXUAL DECOYS, GENDER RACE AND WAR IN IMPERIAL DEMOCRACY*, (London: Zed Books, 2007).

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² See my website: www.ithaca.edu/zillah for a listing of books and writings on Hillary Clinton

³ Susan Faludi, "The Fight Stuff", *New York Times*, May 9, 2008, p. A27.

⁴ Barbara Ehrenreich, "Hillary's Gift to Women", *The Nation*, May 12, 2008, p. 9.