



Misrepresenting the White Working Class: Self-Fulfilling Prophecies and McDowell County

Posted on November 15, 2016 by Daniel Sidorick

The Guardian's West Coast bureau chief paid a quick visit to McDowell County, West Virginia in October to film a video for the news organization's website titled "[Why the poorest county in West Virginia has faith in Trump](#)." The video's description promised it would explain why "Donald Trump was more popular in McDowell County—the poorest county of West Virginia—then anywhere else in America during the Republican primaries." The video dutifully showed what the *Guardian's* readers would expect: poor working-class whites in an economically devastated county, left behind by the winds of change and the global economy. The Trump phenomenon growing in its native soil. The video in fact did a great job of showing how working people have been abandoned when they can no longer contribute to the profits of corporate America. What it totally failed to show was that McDowell people were open to, even preferred, a real alternative to Trump and Clinton.

Trump's alleged popularity was based on the presidential [primary results](#), in which the Republican candidate won a total of 785 votes. Yes, 785 voters were enough to paint McDowell County as the poster child of regressive right-wing populism. Nowhere in the

video or the accompanying webpage were the actual primary numbers presented, nor was it mentioned that Bernie Sanders won 1,488 votes in the same primaries—almost twice as many as Trump! Nor that in 2008 a large majority voted for Obama in the general election.

Why are the Democratic party elites so determined to disavow the party's largest core constituency since the New Deal? Apparently because their strategists have concluded that basing their electoral strategy on identity politics will win them a large and ever-growing share of the American electorate, while a [class-based approach](#), though it would directly address the needs and concerns of all working people—working-class whites and especially minorities and immigrants—would be an anachronistic dead end. Their media allies reinforced their comforting illusions with videos like this one that omit any mention of downtrodden working people's openness to leftist alternatives. That McDowell's residents cast far more ballots for a self-described socialist than all other candidates in the primaries should not be all that surprising in a county that took part in the [Battle of Blair Mountain](#), the largest labor uprising in American history. Many of the comments to the video, however, as expected, denounced the poor white Neanderthals there for their obvious misogynist and fascist sympathies: "Ignorant foolish people"; "These are Clinton's 'deplorables.'"; "Now WV men can grope and rape at will"; "The nativist, racist and outright fascist language of Il Trumpolini and his promise the [sic] Make Them Great Again - based on their skin tone, unfortunately appeals to far to [sic] many there." Would they still have made these comments if the Guardian had let them know twice as many McDowell residents voted for Bernie as for Trump?

Trump's victory came from many segments of America, including some who embrace his proto-fascist rantings. But for millions of Americans who have been suffering due to the policies of both parties over the last few decades, many of their votes were a direct result of his promises, regardless of how bogus they are, to attack trade deals that hurt the working class, bring back jobs, and protect Social Security, along with his middle finger allegedly aimed at the elites and their establishment politics. The Democratic leaders made his job easy for him by derailing Sanders' bid for the nomination and doubling down on their anti-working-class neoliberal agenda, aided inexplicably and [shamefully](#) by most of the top leadership of the unions.

Well, the media got what it wanted. On November 8, McDowell County, in the absence of a left alternative, voted 75% to 23% for Trump. For anyone who wants to build a movement to resist a Trumpian future, providing a real alternative politics to the millions who are suffering in our economy will be absolutely essential.

Author



• Daniel Sidorick