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MICHEL DEGRAFF: So you think that the ultimate reason for these policies is racism? So racism on its own is the driving factor? Because there's been arguments that perhaps the racism itself is a result of other factors, like economic control.

Think in the case of Haiti, right? Or the Caribbean in general. So what came first? Was it the racism first, or then the need for slaves, which in turn triggered racism?

NOAM CHOMSKY: It's a complicated story. I mean, racism grew partly out of the Enlightenment.

If you go back to the 16th century, say in Europe. We're talking about Europe now. There was the beginnings of the age of exploration, exploring the world. The Spanish going to South America and so on.

One of the things that was happening was that Europeans-- recall that you go back a little further, to say St. Augustine. It was widely believed in Europe that nobody could live south of the equator.

For one thing, they would be standing upside down. That would be impossible. So the idea that there were actually people there was kind of novel, anyhow. But as the age of exploration continued, Europeans were finding creatures of a kind that they had never seen before, like orangutans. And Africans-- blacks and so on. And there was a crucial question.

Remember, these were deeply religious societies. You either had a soul or you didn't have a soul. That's critical. So the question arose, which of these creatures have souls? Can be converted to Christianity and saved? That was the dominant issue.

And was there a distinction between, say, orangutans and black natives who they saw? How do you distinguish them? Can you distinguish them? And there were all kind of debates, including language.

In fact, one of my favorite comments was by Louis Racine. He's the son of the famous dramatist who argued that apes did have language and they were more intelligent than humans. And he had a proof, actually. He said the proof is they don't speak. And it's a good argument.

He said, they don't speak because they know that if they spoke, we would turn them into slaves.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Wow.

NOAM CHOMSKY: So therefore, they keep quiet, but they're really smarter than we are. But that's the kind of argument that was taken seriously.

So what came first? What does it mean? The all integrate-- Take right now the racism that's surfacing is in considerable measure a reaction to the neoliberal policies of the last generation, which have simply undermined a very large part of the population. In fact, for a majority of the population, conditions have stagnated or declined during the period that began basically with Reagan. So just take a look at the numbers.

So in 2007-- that's right before the crash. And if you go back to that time, there was great euphoria among economists and intellectuals about the wonderful economy that we had. Everything had been solved. There's no more problems. Great moderation, perfect, and so on.

1979. Real wages for American workers were actually lower than they had been in 1979 before this grand experiment was initiated. And you see the same in Europe.

Now, that's a large part of the reason for the anger, the contempt for institutions. The fear, and so on. And a lot of it shows up in racism.

The racism is kind of an underlying phenomenon, but it surfaces when you have to blame somebody. And there's very interesting work on this. If you haven't seen it, there's a really fine book by a sociologist named Arlie Hochschild. I forget exactly what it's called, but she's a Berkeley University of California sociologist comes from a liberal background. She really wanted to understand, to see if she could understand what has always been regarded as a strange paradox, that the people who are suffering the most from these neoliberal policies are the ones who most support them.

It's very striking when you look. We saw it in the last election, in fact. The people who voted for Trump-- the working people-- are voting for their class enemy who's kicking them in the face at every opportunity. And the more he kicks them in the face, the more they support him.

So what's going on? And it's very widespread. She went and lived and she picked an ultra-red county in Mississippi. The Bayou area of Mississippi. And she went to live there for, I think, five or six years. And just integrated herself into society. Got to know the people. Had respect for them. And she should, instead of contempt. She became part of the society. And she got to understand the way they were looking at things.

And the way they were looking at things, she describes with an image that they accepted as accurate. The image of people standing in a line. So we're all standing in line. Behind us are our parents and our grandparents. And

they worked hard. They did everything the right way. They're religious. They're conservative. They had families. Each generation gets a little better. That's the American way. But all of a sudden, the line stalled. We've stopped. Now, there are people ahead of us who are shooting into the stratosphere. Multimillionaires. But that's OK. That's the American way.

The problem is the people behind us. The federal government, its role is to take those people who are behind us, who don't want to work, who are worthless, and so on. And the federal government takes them and puts them in front of us with affirmative action programs, and soup kitchens, and things like that.

I mean, it's all a complete fantasy, but this is the way people see the world. And you can understand why they see the world that way. These are people who heard Ronald Reagan, an extreme racist incidentally, give his disquisitions about welfare queens driving in limousines to the welfare office-- black, of course-- to pick up your hard-earned money. They're just saturated with that kind of stuff from talk radio, from Fox, everything they hear. So these people behind us are being pushed by the federal government in front of us. And we're stalled.

Well, they are stalled, but it's not because of those people behind them. And you take a look at that amalgam and you can see why these people hate the government. We don't want the government, even though the government is keeping us alive. In fact, if you look at it, they're getting more subsidies from the government than anyone.

Like Mississippi is subsidized by New York. It's the way transfers take place. But these are all kind of hidden. You don't see the subsidies. What you see is these people behind us who are maybe getting some Medicaid, let's say, something like that. That's what you see. A well-designed doctrinal system, propaganda system, can focus your attention on that.

I think we're going to see more of that. Trump, his promises about bringing jobs back, obviously not going to work. What happens when his constituency recognizes that they're just getting kicked in the face? Well, what's going to happen is scapegoating. It's going to be necessary to turn their attention to somebody who's doing that to them.

The Jews, the Muslims, the immigrants, the blacks, whoever it may be. And that could lead to a really ugly period unless there's some reaction, strong reaction. And the reaction ought to begin before it takes place, not after it takes place. But you can see what's very likely to happen.

And there's plenty of examples in history, like the Nazis for example. Plenty of examples in our own history. Many. Race riots back in our own history are often like this.

Take, say, the Irish. When the Irish came in the late 19th century, they were regarded as black, dark-skinned. They were treated like blacks. There were signs in Boston restaurants saying, no dogs or Irish, things like that. They finally whitened, became integrated into the society. But the racist treatment of Irish was miserable.

In fact, there are some hidden stories there, which aren't so pretty. Like take gynecology. Gynecology was developed by professors at Harvard Medical School. Their pictures are up on the walls and so on.

How did they do it? Well, you had to experiment. So who'd you experiment with? People who were good subjects. Black women, of course, and Irish women. They were the experimental subjects who were used to develop the modern scientific understanding of gynecology. This kind of thing just runs all through history. Everywhere you look, you find one or another aspect of it.

And getting back to Michel's question, I don't think there's a chicken/egg issue. They all interact.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: One other place where they interact is with language, right? So you mentioned the one drop rule. In Haiti now, when you look at, say, the politics there. Let's say it's put on a zenith. And you can see how based on the way you speak, what you say is being discarded. And we could call it the one accent rule. So if you shoot any creole phonemic pattern in your French, then you're discarded.

And I think that's also true in the US. So in the US, there was this famous case of Rachel Jeantel, when she was testifying in the trial of Zimmerman, who had killed Trayvon Martin. That's how the Black Lives Matter movement got launched. And she was discarded by the jury.

Why? Because she spoke with black English accent. And she was judged to be untrustworthy. And the jury never mentioned the testimony. And she was a star witness for the trial. So there is a linguist at Stanford, John Rickford, and one of his students who wrote a beautiful piece, actually showing how because of the way she spoke, what she said was given no credibility by the jury.

And this is why I think that perhaps one could think of race alongside language as one of these tools that you can use to create this illusion of hierarchies. And maybe you're right. The two might reinforce each other, but perhaps this push for economic control and imperialism in the case of the Caribbean colonization and slavery, they become enlisted by these larger forces to impose these hierarchies. If you go say in French, the [french] that the French came up with, which we saw coming back up with Marine Le Pen, for example.

NOAM CHOMSKY: We've all seen that in our own experience.

When I was in college, one of my fellow students was one of the rare black students, who had managed to develop not just a straight American accent, but an elite to American accent. So when he talked over the phone, you thought you were talking to a Harvard professor, or an Oxford professor, or something.

We brought him to MIT. We appointed him, in fact. But when he came, he was staying in our apartment while he

was looking for a place to live. And he would call places that were for rent around Cambridge. And they'd say, sure. Come over. But as soon as he went over, it suddenly turned out that the place had just been rented five minutes ago.

But over the phone, he was fine. But not in person. The picking up of a fake acc-- it shows up in many strange ways.

So for example, at Harvard in the early 1950s, there was a wave of Anglophilia. And people-- men, of course. No women-- dressed in English clothes and affected British accents.

And if you kind of just listened and walked around, you might have thought you're maybe in Oxford, not in Cambridge. But these things happen all the time. They can be very pernicious when it's a part of the population that's vulnerable and deprived and under external pressures for other reasons.

Of course, African Americans, as I said, it's 400 years. It's not something sudden.