

Thursday 26th May 2016

Donald Trump, Presidential Politics and the Legacy of Obama

In 1963 Malcolm X was suspended from the Nation of Islam for referring to the assassination of JFK as a case of “chickens coming home to roost”. On closer inspection Malcolm argued that the racial violence and Cold War tactics instigated and tolerated by the American establishment at home and abroad had polluted the political bloodstream of America and endorsed a narrow and bigoted defence of the status quo. Similarly in 2016 at the end of the Obama presidency, the post 911 political consensus, racialised police brutality, anti-immigration and the spectre of Islamic extremism finds American society at a similar crossroads where social unrest, racial and religious tension, coincide with the global context American foreign policy has helped to create.

On the domestic front President Obama has argued that the intense vitriol of Republican opposition towards democrats and his presidency has fuelled an irrational and sensationalist brand of oppositional politics. Indeed the crass and blistering politics exemplified by the Republican candidacy of Donald Trump is symptomatic of this caustic re-alignment of American politics. It is also noteworthy that early in the Obama presidency Trump played a pivotal role in prompting the Tea Party and birther movement to embark on a neo-racial and coded assault on the Obama White House, that laid the basis for Trumps current ascendancy. While Hilary Clinton and Bernie Sanders are locked in an (historic) and increasingly tight race for the Democratic nomination, it is Trump’s aggressive grassroots politics, the antithesis of Obama’s outwardly savvy and intellectual approach, that has provoked the ire of the Republican and Democratic political establishment.

In sum while America’s elite politicians fear the rise of a grassroots proletariat galvanised by an unpredictable outsider like Trump, the left is in disarray due to Obama’s failure to fulfil the prophetic vision of Dr King’s legacy and his administration’s failure to definitively depart from domestic and foreign policies akin to his Republican predecessor.

This symposium poses challenging questions regarding the current trajectory of American power, by addressing but also transcending the personality politics associated with the rise of Trump and Obama in order to evaluate the contemporary political values of the USA and to provide insight into the legacy of the Obama administration.

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Event Programme

Timetable

- 10.25 Introduction to the Event - Dr M Ledwidge (Canterbury Christ Church University)
- 10.30 **Roundtable I** commences
Title: Donald Trump, Neo-racism, Reform or Common Sense Politics
Chair: Professor Louise Wilkinson (Canterbury Christ Church University)
Participants:
1030 Professor Inderjeet Parmar (City University London)
1045 Professor Philip Davies (Eccles Centre, British Library)
1100 Dr. Gabriella Beckles-Raymond (Canterbury Christ Church University)
- 1115 Questions and Answers / Discussions
- 1215 Roundtable I finishes
- 1230 Lunch
- 1330 **Roundtable II** commences
Title: Barack Obama, American Identity and Beyond
Chair: Dr. David Grummitt, Head of Humanities (Canterbury Christ Church University)
Participants:
1330 Professor Robert Beckford (Canterbury Christ Church University)
1345 Professor Lee Marsden (University of East Anglia)
1400 Dr. Poonam Madar (Surrey University)
1415 Dr. Mark Ledwidge (Canterbury Christ Church University)
- 1430 Questions and Answers / Discussions
- 1530 Roundtable II finishes
- 1530 Closing – Dr Mark Ledwidge
- 1600 Event ends