Reflections on the 2016 Elections from the APC/GSWS Community

I am not sure it is apt to call the mix of panic, grief, and anger that I’ve been feeling since the election thinking. Like many others, I’ve been tormented by an obsessive curiosity that doesn’t seem all that productive: I feel the need to understand what happened, but I know that reading human interest stories profiling every single Trump voter is not helping (even as I keep reading them). Big picture, we know: the toxic racism, nationalism, homophobia, and misogyny that are constants in the US were amplified by increasing economic inequality, market segmentation, the demonization of Islam, the defunding of public education, geographical isolation, the scapegoating of immigrants, environmental havoc, the echo chamber of social media, and more. It turns out to be very hard to think overdetermination or the confluence of multiple causes, which is why so many articles follow the lead of this headline in The Independent: “Why Did Trump Win? — ‘Whitelash’ or economic frustration?” If these are my only options, I’m going with dumpster fire, which does capture the pile-up better than

All of the Above

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these endless games of either/or. For those of us who teach some version of intersectionality, it’s been sobering to see how inaccessible this knowledge is when we need it most.

It is clear that many feel emboldened now to bring their hatred into the open, and soon these wildcat strikes will receive the official imprimatur of an administration committed to shredding civil rights and public institutions. The university is of course one of the most significant of these institutions—and now that it has become clear how determining having a 4-year degree was in voter decisions, it has a spotlight (or a bulls-eye) on it. The fact that hate crimes spiked on Penn’s campus in the immediate aftermath of the election makes it even more evident how crucial the university will be in the struggle to come. The most pressing task is to come together to work on behalf of the most vulnerable members of our community—the undocumented, students of color, women, first-generation students, students with disabilities, queer and genderqueer students.

At the same time, we must use all our tools—thinking and feeling, reading and listening, learning and unlearning—as we continue to push the boundaries of “what democracy looks like.”