

USA: If you like AOC, you should like Bernie too

Thursday 19 December 2019, by [SUNKARA Bhaskar](#) (Date first published: 19 October 2019).

Ocasio-Cortez is endorsing Sanders on Saturday because they share a vision of working-class politics. And that's more important than tribalism

On the face of it, it's not so surprising. A longtime democratic socialist runs an inspiring campaign for office around popular demands for economic justice; a young organizer joins that campaign, embraces that vision of change, and runs for office herself. Four years later, the longtime democratic socialist gives it another try and the newcomer endorses the effort.

That's the short version of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's "stunning" embrace of Bernie Sanders. She'll officially [endorse the Vermont senator](#) on Saturday at a rally in Queens, after [telling him of her decision](#) while Sanders recovered in a Nevada hospital.

Yet the decision baffled some commentators. Jane Eisner, a director at Columbia's Journalism School, tweeted: "I find it fascinating that women of color overlook female and minority candidates to endorse a white guy." It was a more opaque version of MSNBC pundit Tisch Sussman opining in late September: "If you are still supporting Sanders as opposed to Warren, it's kind of showing your sexism."

Those remarks tell us a lot about politics in 2019, and the world that the professional class inhabits. Today, for many liberals, the idea of inherent conflict between those with power and wealth and those deprived of it – the language of class struggle – has been thoroughly rejected. In its place, we have a glib tribalism. "Women" (a majority of the world) and "women of color" (a plurality of it) are said to have a common bond based on their identity. It doesn't, apparently, matter whether you're a female executive or you're cleaning toilets at a corporate headquarters.

The small clique that runs the world is no longer identified as a "ruling class", their control of the economy is no longer called "capitalism" but instead they're merely identified as "white guys". Forget the fact that more than one in three Americans are "white guys" – "white guys" exploited at their workplaces, "white guys" facing declining life expectancies, "white guys" utterly ignored by political elites. "White guys", after all, are your real enemies.

When [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#) came to national prominence a year and a half ago, she had a narrative – an outsider, Latina bartender taking on the Democratic establishment and winning. The narrative naturally touched upon her identity, where she was from, what she dealt with going up, and her unlikely rise. Everybody, especially Americans, loves an underdog story.

But that tale was backed up by substance. Ocasio-Cortez has *continued* to matter, not because of who she is, but because of what she stands for. She is an open democratic socialist, she talks about prioritizing the needs of working people of all races, and she's presented bold new proposals like the Green New Deal to build a better future for them.

Ihan Omar, who's also endorsing Sanders, has done much the same. For her, "the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work," and Trump's racist populism is an effort to "prevent the solidarity of working people". These are not radical sentiments – they're things that any socialist or social democrat would have said throughout the last century and a half. But they absolutely befuddle a media class who can only see politics through the lens of identity.

For them, despite Ocasio-Cortez, Omar and Rashida Tlaib's far longer-standing ties to Sanders and closer ideological affinities, a Warren endorsement would be more logical, because she also happens to be a woman. For them, the division in society isn't between the have and have-nots, but between members of a dominant "white male" tribe and everyone else.

Such analysis underestimates the extent to which the progressive surge that [Bernie Sanders](#) inspired is ideologically coherent, has a popular audience, and is geared toward a polarization against corporate control both inside and outside the Democratic party. As the Hill.tv host Krystal Ball puts it, this is about "class power over girl power".

It's been no doubt inspiring to many to see minority women take on a prominent political role in a country that has long shut them out. But that inspiration has to be tied to tangible efforts to improve the lot of millions that will never reach such prominence. The Squad, in an important sense, represents the proper way to use identity – to bolster narratives that aren't about personal branding, but are about connecting with people and galvanizing them to struggle against oppression and exploitation on their own behalf.

When on the phone with Sanders last week, Ocasio-Cortez told him: "I have so much trust and confidence in you that you are the one who will fight the fight that I believe in. I'm with you." Sanders, unlike Warren, isn't a lone technocrat doing battle against special interests. He's the leader of a movement with clear objectives and a unifying theory of change. And whenever Sanders calls it quits (be it in July, November, or after years of executive power), Ocasio-Cortez has positioned herself to be his successor.

At the very least, her bold statement on Saturday should put an end to corporate Democrats saying that they "love her" but hate her "interrupting", "yelling", old white male mentor.

Bhaskar Sunkara

[Click here](#) to subscribe to our weekly newsletters in English and or French. You will receive one email every Monday containing links to all articles published in the last 7 days.

P.S.

The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/19/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-bernie-sanders-endorsement>