

Ukraine and the Pathology of America's Liberal Worldview. An African American Perspective

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Reading the March 2 editorial in the *New York Times* on the so-called revolution in Ukraine, I couldn't help but marvel at how easily elite opinion makers in the U.S. can call for the use of public resources to bail out the people and government of Ukraine without significant opposition or even serious questions. The *Times* editorial forcefully argued that in response to the "revolution" in Ukraine, Western powers must "provide prompt and substantial assistance to the Kiev government." This sentiment was also voiced by a number of conservative Republicans who normally pretend to be fiscal conservatives, at least when it comes to state expenditures for working class and poor people in the U.S.

In response, the Obama administration is calling on Congress to agree to a long-term aid package for Ukraine and announced on Tuesday a short-term billion dollar aid package.

Yet, when it comes to crisis situations like extending unemployment benefits to the 1.3 million people who lost them in December or the forced bankruptcy of Detroit, a major city that happens to have an African American majority, or maintaining food assistance for the working class and poor in the form of the food stamp program, elite opinion in both parties has embraced the "common sense" position that significant reductions in public expenditures and services at every level of government are a reasonable and unavoidable necessity.

The *Times* editorial further argued that since President Yanukovich left the Ukrainian treasury bare, the West should provide immediate assistance. But what about the people in Detroit, whose government coffers were left bare as result of the predatory looting by big banks that targeted African American families with sub-prime loans and floating interests rates that resulted in them losing their homes? Where is their relief?

And when those same banks seized the properties of more than 100,000 families through foreclosure and then refused to pay property taxes to the city of Detroit—helping to create a fiscal crisis for the city—where was the Federal assistance to replenish the city's coffers?

They call Pres. Yanukovich a dictator, but curiously, there was no outcry against the governor of Michigan when he engineered the passage of an anti-democratic piece of legislation that allowed him to impose a one-person dictatorial regime over the people of Detroit. Referred to as an "emergency manager," he was granted the power to nullify decisions of the elected city council and mayor and seize control over all institutions of local government. The main objective of the "emergency manager" is to ensure that the banks that looted the city will get a return on the 22 billion dollar debt that the city accrued.

But the elite do not call that process anti-democratic or dictatorial. Why? The explanation for this myopia an apparent inability to see a double standard is not just capitalist avarice and cynical ruling-class self-interest. It is rooted in the pathology generated by the disease of white supremacy.

Let me elaborate. What many conclude is hypocrisy—a gap between high-sounding rhetoric and actual behavior—is not hypocrisy at all, but rather a cognitive deficiency.

It is the same cognitive deficiency that allows Secretary of State John Kerry to state without any sense of irony, in response to reports that Russia might be moving troops into Crimea, that “You just don’t, in the 21st century, behave in a 19th century fashion by invading another country on completely trumped-up pretexts.” If someone had reminded Kerry that it was the “trumped-up pretext” of weapons of mass destruction that was the basis for the illegal invasion and destruction of Iraq by the U.S., he probably would not have been able to cognitively process the contradiction.

Kerry’s comments are representative of a liberal, Eurocentric consciousness in which the same standards of measurement don’t apply to Westerners because they are the standard. It is not just arrogance but an inculcated sense of omnipotence in which the Western worldview, values and interpretations don’t just reflect universal reality, they are the only reality that counts.

When President Obama and members of the corporate elite condemn the Russians for violating international law, the contradictory nature of that position is clear to those of us who are the ongoing victims of Western oppression and whose lives depend on seeing reality as it is.

From our point of view, it is absolutely bizarre that the same country that violates the sovereignty of other states worldwide with drone strikes, military interventions and political subversion can actually suggest to the Russians that it runs the risk of being a “pariah” state.

The U.S. is playing a very dangerous game by attempting to implement its strategy of encircling the Russian Federation. But the Russians also played a very dangerous game when they decided not to veto U.N. Security Council resolution 1973, which gave NATO colonial gangsters the green light to destroy the Libyan state, and then pretended to be surprised when NATO did just that. The aggressive encirclement of Russia by NATO is now a case of the chickens coming home to roost.

Perhaps the Russians did not fully understand what those of us from the African American community have always understood—that U.S. geostrategic decision-makers will ally themselves with right-wing forces if it will help them maintain the hegemony of their empire, from racist nationalists in Ukraine to rightist Islamic fundamentalists in Syria.

The rise of right-wing racist political movements is not seen as a real threat for decision-makers in the capitals of Paris, Washington and London. But when the right-wing forces that they support in the Ukraine start to pass laws that strip away the rights of people to practice their culture and use their language, the character of that revolution becomes clear for those of us who experienced the underbelly of the great “American” revolution.

The frantic mobilization of public funds to assist the “revolution,” the unrestrained political

support for an illegitimate government, and the easy dismissal of racist and anti-Semitic extremism coming from significant elements in that “revolution” all suggest that this is a bogus process that has nothing to do with justice, human progress and certainly not liberatory revolutionary change for the majority of the people in Ukraine.

A cardinal principle of the African American revolutionary tradition is to be in solidarity with people(s) engaged in struggles against oppression anywhere in the world. However, we are also always aware of the international balance of forces and the efforts by Western imperialism, our principle enemy, to confuse and ideologically disarm normally anti-imperialist forces with the appropriation of the vocabulary of social change and mass struggle. In that regard the enemy has succeeded: Employing the language of humanitarian concern and subtle appeals to a defense of the liberal state and the Western civilizational project, the ideological confusion among the left in the U.S. is total.

When U.S. radicals and progressives are unable to make a distinction between the right and the left and align themselves with a movement in Ukraine that has as its main objective to become more European and capitalist, and at the same time amplify the critiques of the rightist forces in Venezuela who want to murder the embryonic revolution in that country, the backwardness of radical thought in the U.S. is on full display.

In the U.S. where an African American is being murdered by police forces and vigilantes at a pace of one every 28 hours, where a million of our folks are entombed in the dungeons of this nation’s prisons, where state laws are being employed to deny us our democratic rights, where ex-panther Eddie Conroy is finally released from prison after 44 years, still leaving dozens of our political prisoners who are going into their fourth and fifth decades in prison, African American radicals must be clear on the principle enemy and the principle contradiction.

And for us, the enemy and the principle contradiction is not on the other side of the world in Russia.

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