

# The Meaning of 'Humanitarian Aid'

A poem by the late Salvadoran radical Roque Dalton helps to clarify what is going on in Venezuela, writes Vijay Prashad.

By **Vijay Prashad**

*Tricontinental: Institute  
for Social Research*



**A**s the United States and its allies put pressure on Venezuela, a poem by the Salvadoran radical Roque Dalton (1935-1975) clarifies the structure of politics in Latin America.

Dalton came from one of Latin America's smallest countries, El Salvador, which he used to call the little finger (*pulgarcito*). A deeply compassionate poet, Dalton was also a militant of the People's Revolutionary Army, whose internal struggles claimed his short life. El Salvador, like so many other Latin American states, struggles to carve out its sovereignty from the tentacles of U.S. power. That hideous Monroe Doctrine (1823) seemed to give the U.S. the presumption that it has power over the entire hemisphere; "our backyard" being the colloquial phrase. People like Dalton fought to end that assumption. They wanted their countries to be governed by and for their own people – an elementary part of the idea of democracy. It has been a hard struggle.

Dalton wrote a powerful poem – OAS – named for the Organization of American States (founded in 1948). It is a poem that acidly catalogues how democracy is a farce in

Latin America.

*The president of my country  
for the time being is Colonel Fidel Sanchez Hernandez  
but General Somoza, president of Nicaragua  
is also the president of my country.  
And General Stroessner, president of Paraguay,  
is also kind of the president of my country, though not as  
much as the president of Honduras,  
General Lopez Arellano, but more so than the president of  
Haiti,  
Monsieur Duvalier.  
And the president of the United States is more the  
president of my country  
Than is the president of my country,  
The one whose name, as I said,  
is Colonel Fidel Sanchez Hernandez, for the time being.*

Is the president of Venezuela the president of Venezuela or is the president of the United States the president of Venezuela? There is absurdity here.

Collapsed oil prices, reliance upon oil revenues, an economic war by the United States and complications in raising finances has led to hyperinflation and to an economic crisis in Venezuela. To deny that is to deny reality. But there is a vast difference between an economic crisis and a humanitarian crisis.

Most of the countries on the planet are facing an economic crisis, with public finances in serious trouble and with enormous debt problems plaguing governments in all the

continents. This year's meeting of the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland, focused attention on the global debt crisis – from the near-trillion-dollar deficit of the United States to the debt burdens of Italy. The IMF's David Lipton warned that if interest rates were to rise, the problem would escalate. "There are pockets of debt held by companies and countries that really don't have much servicing capacity, and I think that's going to be a problem."

Hyper-inflation is a serious problem, but punitive economic sanctions, seizure of billions of dollars of overseas assets and threats of war are not going to save the undermined *Bolivar*, Venezuela's currency.

Eradication of hunger has to be the basic policy of any government. According to the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization, 11.7 percent of the Venezuelan people are hungry. Hunger rates in other parts of the world are much higher – 31.4 percent in Eastern Africa. But the world's attention has not been focused on this severe crisis, one that has partly generated the massive migration across the Mediterranean Sea.



The picture above, is from the European Parliament in Strasbourg, where – in 2015 – activists laid out the 17,306 names of people who have died attempting that crossing (the number is now close to 40,000 drowned). Members of the European parliament had to walk to their session over these names. They are harsh in their attitude to start a war against Venezuela, but cavalier about the serious crises in Africa and Asia that keep the flow of migrants steady.

## Venezuela's Anti-Hunger Programs

The government of Venezuela has two programs to tackle the problem of hunger:

1. Comité Local de Abastecimiento y Producción (CLAP). The Local Committees for Supply and Production are made up of local neighborhood groups who grow food and who receive food from agricultural producers. They distribute this food to about 6 million families at very low cost. Currently, the CLAP boxes are being sent to households every 15 days.
2. Plan de Atención a la Vulnerabilidad Nutricional. The most vulnerable of Venezuelans – 620,000 of them – receive assistance. The National Institute of Nutrition has been coordinating the delivery of food to a majority of the country's municipalities.

These are useful, but insufficient. More needs to be done. That is clear. Through CLAP, the Venezuelan government distributes about 50,000 tons of food per month. The “humanitarian aid” that the U.S. has promised amounts to \$20 million – which would purchase a measly 60 tons of food.

On the issue of “humanitarian aid” to Venezuela, the international media has become the stenographers of the U.S. State Department and the CIA. It focuses on the false claims made by the U.S. government that it wants to deliver aid, which the Venezuelans refuse. The media does not look at the facts, even at this fact – that \$20 million is a humiliating gesture, an amount intended to be used to establish the heartlessness of the government in Venezuela and therefore seek to overthrow it by any means necessary. This is what

the U.S. government did in the Dominican Republic in 1965, sending in humanitarian aid accompanied by US marines.

Vijay Prashad responds to U.S. economic squeeze on Venezuela on *Democracy Now*.

The U.S. has used military aircrafts to bring in this modest aid, driven it to a warehouse and then said that the Venezuelans are not prepared to open an unused bridge for it. The entire process is political theatre. U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio went to that bridge – which has never been opened – to say in a threatening way that the aid “is going to get through” to Venezuela one way or another. These are words that threaten the sovereignty of Venezuela and build up the energy for a military attack. There is nothing humanitarian here.

The term “humanitarian” has been shredded of its meaning. It has now come to mean a pretext for the destruction of countries. “Humanitarian intervention” was the term used to destroy Libya; “humanitarian aid” is being used to beat the drum for a war against Venezuela.

Meanwhile, we forget the humanitarian solidarity offered by the Venezuelan government to the poorer nations and to poorer populations. Why is Haiti on fire now? It had received reduced-price oil from Venezuela by the PetroCaribe scheme (set up in 2005). A decade ago, Venezuela offered the Caribbean islands oil on very favorable terms so that they would not be the quarry of monopoly oil firms and the IMF.

The economic war against Venezuela has meant a decline in PetroCaribe. Now the IMF has returned to demand that oil subsidies end, and monopoly oil firms have returned to demand cash payments before delivery. Haiti's government was forced to vote against Venezuela in the OAS. That is why the country is aflame. If you don't let us breathe, say the Haitian people, we won't let you breathe.

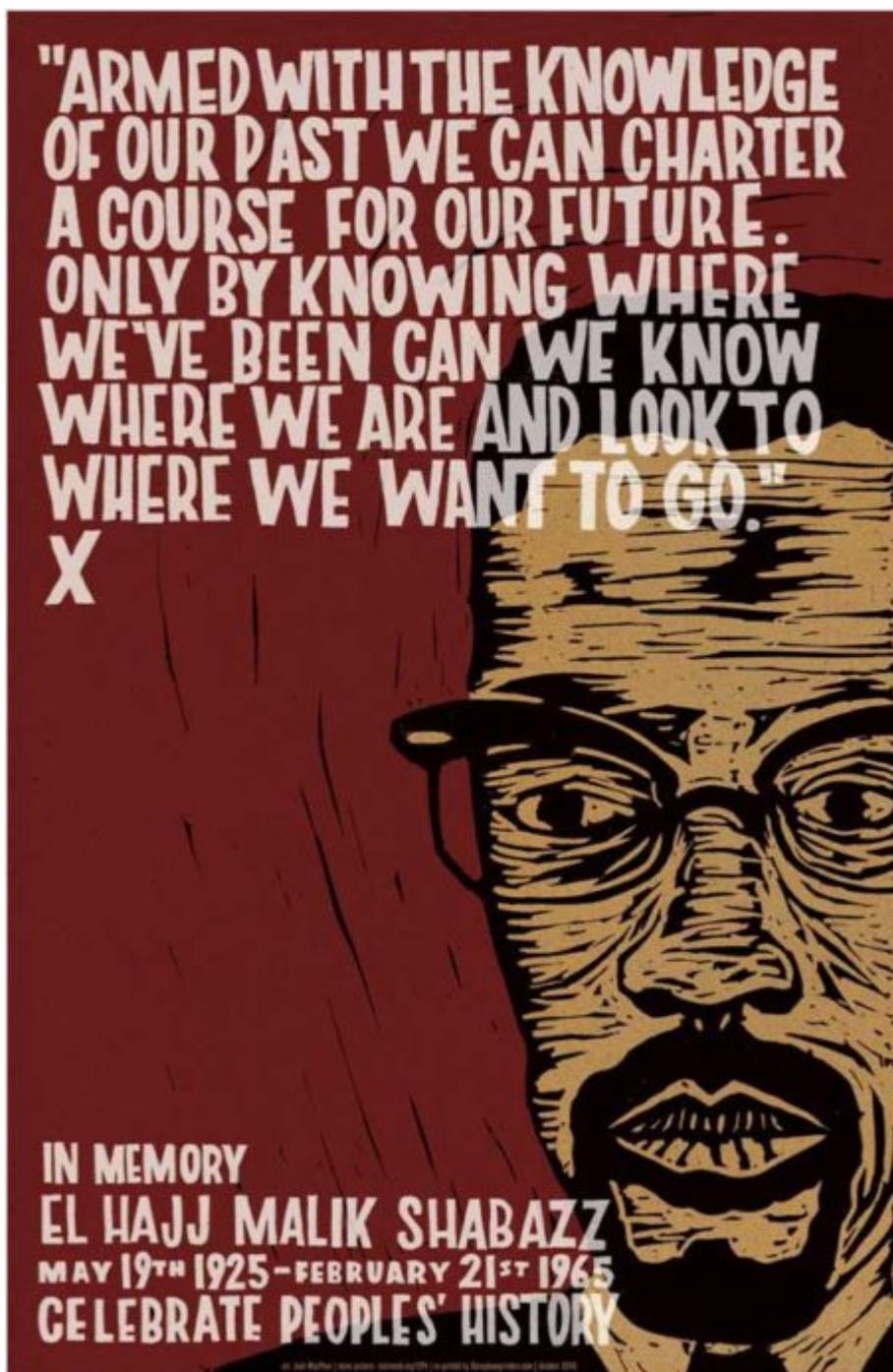
In 2005, the same year as Venezuela set up the PetroCaribe scheme, it created the PetroBronx scheme in New York. Terrible poverty in the South Bronx galvanized community groups such as Rebel Diaz Arts Collective, Green Youth Cooperative, Bronx Arts and Dance, and Mothers on the Move.

They worked with CITGO, the Venezuelan government's U.S. oil subsidiary to develop a cooperative mechanism to get heating oil to the people.

Ana Maldonado, a sociologist who is now with the Frente Francisco de Miranda (Venezuela), was one of the participants in the PetroBronx scheme. She and her friends created the North Star to be a community organization that helped deliver the resources to the very poorest people in the United States. "People had to wear their coats inside their homes during the winter," she told me. That was intolerable. That is why Venezuela provided the poor in the United States with subsidized heating oil.

The South Bronx and Harlem, the privations produced by racism – all this is familiar territory in Latin America.

In 1960, Fidel Castro came to New York to attend the United



Nations General Assembly. He was refused a hotel in the city. Malcolm X, a leader of the African American community, came to his aid, bringing the Cuban delegation to Harlem's Hotel Theresa, whose owner – Love B. Woods – warmly welcomed Fidel and his comrades. Four years later, at a meeting in Harlem, Malcolm X said in connection with his meeting with Fidel, “Don't let somebody else tell us who our enemies should be and who our friends should be.”

**Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian, journalist, commentator and a Marxist intellectual. He is the executive director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research and the chief editor of LeftWord Books.**

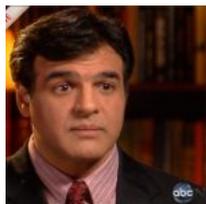
---

## JOHN KIRIAKOU: Washington Insider Taken Down a Peg

A quintessential DC insider is likely going to jail on a minor charge and it's good he's not getting away with it, says John Kiriakou.

By **John Kiriakou**

*Special to Consortium News*



Federal prosecutors last month stepped up their investigation of Washington super-lawyer Greg Craig in what they called an “off-shoot” of the Paul Manafort investigation. The accusation against Craig was that he failed to register as a lobbyist for work he did on behalf of the Ukrainian government in

2012. His former firm, the internationally-renowned Skadden Arps, reached a \$4.6 million settlement with prosecutors, but Craig may still face charges.

The accusation that Craig violated FARA, or the Foreign Agent Registration Act, isn't a big deal in the greater scheme of things. It means he did some work for a foreign government and didn't fill out the necessary Justice Department paperwork. He's also accused of making false and misleading statements to the department's FARA unit.

More importantly, it points to the impunity with which Washington big-shots normally operate. Manafort thought he was untouchable because he was the great Republican strategist, the legendary co-founder of Black, Manafort, and Stone, the most important Republican political operatives of the 1980s and 1990s. Craig is the same. He was Barack Obama's White House counsel. And he's former Secretary of State John Kerry's best friend. Like Manafort (and the Podestas, Hillary Clinton, John Edwards and a host of other big muckety mucks) he thought he was above the law.

### **Dem's Fixer**

Craig has made a career of being the go-to guy for Democrats, and especially for Democrats in trouble. First of all, the guy is crazy smart. He got a bachelor's from Harvard, graduating Phi Beta Kappa. He earned a master's from Cambridge and did his law degree at Yale. It was there that he was a classmate of Bill and Hillary Clinton. His career was made before he finished his education.

After graduation, Craig joined the Washington law firm of Williams and Connolly, one of the biggest and most important

legal players in the capital. He took time off to be director of policy planning in the Clinton State Department and to serve as general counsel to Senator Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.)

Craig was one of five attorneys who defended Clinton during his impeachment hearings and was the legal team's overall coordinator. When he returned to Williams and Connolly in 2000, he represented a myriad of high profile people from the father of Elian Gonzalez, the child who was eventually returned to Cuba after being brought to the U.S. by his mother, who drowned on the way; to Richard Helms, the former CIA director who lied to Congress about CIA involvement in the overthrow of Chilean President Salvador Allende. Craig even represented former Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega.

It was this pedigree that landed Craig back in the White House as Obama's general counsel. When he left the White House for the second time he cashed in on his experience. Who wouldn't, especially in Washington? And his reputation was fearsome.

I had my own brush with Craig in 2011 when I was working for John Kerry on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff. I had done the initial legwork on an investigative report on poverty in Haiti. I concluded that the country's seven largest merchant families, all of whom happened to be white, had conspired to keep the citizenry in poverty because Haitian goods, especially textiles, were so cheap that any price inflation only further enriched the merchant families.

I sent the initial draft of the report to Kerry, who killed it on the spot. Why? I asked. The answer was clear. "Because

Greg Craig represents those families and he's my best friend." The report was never published. Collecting riches on the backs of the oppressed wasn't important to John Kerry. Offending or alienating one of the most powerful men in Washington was.

### **Enmeshed in Ukraine**

Craig finally got himself into some trouble in 2012, when he bit off more than he could chew in Ukraine. He worked on an investigation commissioned by President Viktor Yanukovich (later overthrown with U.S. support in 2014) to conduct an investigation of Yanukovich's political enemy, former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, who narrowly lost the 2010 presidential election to Yanukovich. Yanukovich eventually arrested and charged Tymoshenko with corruption and abuse of power and she was sent to prison. (Tymoshenko had been a leader of the U.S.-backed Orange Revolution that overturned Yanukovich's 2004 election.)

Craig worked on a written report, paid for by Yanuklovych, justifying her arrest. Craig concluded that, while Tymoshenko had been denied access to legal counsel at critical parts of her trial, the evidence against her was solid, and her conviction should be sustained. The human rights community was outraged, calling it a "whitewash."

Yanukovich had paid Paul Manafort \$4 million for the report. It's unclear how much of that made it to Craig, but the payoff was thought to be substantial. Craig was asked to leave Skadden Arps when one of the attorneys under his supervision, Alex van der Zwaan, was charged with lying to the FBI about the report and about the firm's relationship

with the Ukrainian government.

I don't mean for this to sound like gloating, but I'm glad that Craig, Manafort, and others are taking it on the chin in the Mueller investigation. It's about time. Why should the rest of us have to follow the rules if the special people in Washington don't? Why are so many prosecutions so selective? Justice is supposed to be blind. Maybe in this case that will be true. Sure, Craig just forgot to fill out a form. But tough luck. That's the law.

Mueller shouldn't be blamed for focusing on something minor. If there is going to be criticism, it should be leveled at Congress, which has made us one of the most over-criminalized and over-regulated countries on the planet. Why pass a law if it's not going to be respected or prosecuted?

Greg Craig is probably not going to go to prison for failing to register. But he is going to be knocked down a peg or two. It's symbolic. But it's good for the country.

**John Kiriakou is a former CIA counterterrorism officer and a former senior investigator with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. John became the sixth whistleblower indicted by the Obama administration under the Espionage Act—a law designed to punish spies. He served 23 months in prison as a result of his attempts to oppose the Bush administration's torture program.**

*If you enjoyed this original article, please consider making a donation to Consortium News so we can bring you more stories like this one.*

---

---

# Haiti and America's Historic Debt

**From the Archive:** President Trump says his “tough” language on immigration, which reportedly included decrying “shithole” nations, didn’t apply to Haiti but he appears to know little of America’s debt to Haiti, which Robert Parry described in 2010.

By Robert Parry (First published on Jan.13, 2010)

In 2010, when announcing emergency help for Haiti after a devastating 7.0-magnitude earthquake, President Barack Obama noted America’s historic ties to the impoverished Caribbean nation, but few Americans understand how important Haiti’s contribution to U.S. history was.

In modern times, when Haiti does intrude on U.S. consciousness, it’s usually because of some natural disaster or a violent political upheaval, and the U.S. response is often paternalistic, if not tinged with a racist disdain for the country’s predominantly black population and its seemingly endless failure to escape cycles of crushing poverty.

However, more than two centuries ago, Haiti represented one of the most important neighbors of the new American Republic and played a central role in enabling the United States to expand westward. If not for Haiti, the course of U.S. history could have been very different, with the United States possibly never expanding much beyond the Appalachian Mountains.

In the 1700s, then-called St. Domingue and covering the western third of the island of Hispaniola, Haiti was a French colony that rivaled the American colonies as the most valuable European possession in the Western Hemisphere. Relying on a ruthless exploitation of African slaves, French plantations there produced nearly one-half the world’s coffee and sugar.

Many of the great cities of France owe their grandeur to the wealth that was extracted from Haiti and its slaves. But the human price was unspeakably high. The French had devised a fiendishly cruel slave system that imported enslaved Africans for work in the fields with accounting procedures for their amortization. They were literally worked to death.

The American colonists may have rebelled against Great Britain over issues such as representation in Parliament and arbitrary actions by King George III. But black Haitians confronted a brutal system of slavery. An infamous French method of executing a troublesome slave was to insert a gunpowder charge into his rectum and then detonate the explosive.

So, as the American colonies fought for their freedom in the 1770s and as that inspiration against tyranny spread to France in the 1780s, the repercussions would eventually reach Haiti, where the Jacobins' cry of "liberty, equality and fraternity" resonated with special force. Slaves demanded that the concepts of freedom be applied universally.

When the brutal French plantation system continued, violent slave uprisings followed. Hundreds of white plantation owners were slain as the rebels overran the colony. A self-educated slave named Toussaint L'Ouverture emerged as the revolution's leader, demonstrating skills on the battlefield and in the complexities of politics.

Despite the atrocities committed by both sides of the conflict, the rebels known as the "Black Jacobins" gained the sympathy of the American Federalist Party and particularly Alexander Hamilton, a native of the Caribbean himself and a fierce opponent of slavery. Hamilton, the first U.S. Treasury Secretary, helped L'Ouverture draft a constitution for the new nation.

### **Conspiracies**

But events in Paris and Washington soon conspired to undo the promise of Haiti's new freedom. Despite Hamilton's sympathies, some Founders, including Thomas Jefferson who owned 180 slaves and owed his political strength to agrarian interests, looked nervously at the slave rebellion in St. Domingue. Jefferson feared that slave uprisings might spread northward.

"If something is not done, and soon done," Jefferson wrote in 1797, "we shall be the murderers of our own children."

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, the chaos and excesses of the French Revolution led to the ascendance of Napoleon Bonaparte, a brilliant and vain military commander possessed of legendary ambition. As he expanded his power across Europe, Napoleon also dreamed of rebuilding a French empire in the Americas.

In 1801, Jefferson became the third President of the United States and his interests at least temporarily aligned with those of Napoleon. The French dictator was determined to restore French control of St. Domingue and Jefferson was eager to see the slave rebellion crushed.

Through secret diplomatic channels, Napoleon asked Jefferson if the United States would help a French army traveling by sea to St. Domingue. Jefferson replied that "nothing will be easier than to furnish your army and fleet with everything and reduce Toussaint [L'Ouverture] to starvation."

But Napoleon had a secret second phase of his plan that he didn't share with

Jefferson. Once the French army had subdued L'Ouverture and his rebel force, Napoleon intended to advance to the North American mainland, basing a new French empire in New Orleans and settling the vast territory west of the Mississippi River.

In May 1801, Jefferson picked up the first inklings of Napoleon's other agenda. Alarmed at the prospect of a major European power controlling New Orleans and thus the mouth of the strategic Mississippi River, Jefferson backpedaled on his commitment to Napoleon, retreating to a posture of neutrality. Still terrified at the prospect of a successful republic organized by freed African slaves Jefferson took no action to block Napoleon's thrust into the New World.

In 1802, a French expeditionary force achieved initial success against the slave army, driving L'Ouverture's forces back into the mountains. But, as they retreated, the ex-slaves torched the cities and the plantations, destroying the colony's once-thriving economic infrastructure.

L'Ouverture, hoping to bring the war to an end, accepted Napoleon's promise of a negotiated settlement that would ban future slavery in the country. As part of the agreement, L'Ouverture turned himself in. Napoleon, however, broke his word.

Jealous of L'Ouverture, who was regarded by some admirers as a general with skills rivaling Napoleon's, the French dictator had L'Ouverture shipped in chains back to Europe where he was mistreated and died in prison.

### **Foiled Plans**

Infuriated by the betrayal, L'Ouverture's young generals resumed the war with a vengeance. In the months that followed, the French army already decimated by disease was overwhelmed by a fierce enemy fighting in familiar terrain and determined not to be put back into slavery.

Napoleon sent a second French army, but it too was destroyed. Though the famed general had conquered much of Europe, he lost 24,000 men, including some of his best troops, in St. Domingue before abandoning his campaign. The death toll among the ex-slaves was much higher, but they had prevailed, albeit over a devastated land.

By 1803, a frustrated Napoleon denied his foothold in the New World agreed to sell New Orleans and the Louisiana territories to Jefferson. Ironically, the Louisiana Purchase, which opened the heart of the present United States to American settlement, had been made possible despite Jefferson's misguided collaboration with Napoleon.

Jefferson also saw the new territory as an opportunity to expand slavery in the

United States, creating a lucrative new industry of slave-breeding that would financially benefit Jefferson and his plantation-owning neighbors. But nothing would be done to help Haiti. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Thomas Jefferson: America's Founding Sociopath](#)."] ]

"By their long and bitter struggle for independence, St. Domingue's blacks were instrumental in allowing the United States to more than double the size of its territory," wrote Stanford University professor John Chester Miller in his book, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery*.

But, Miller observed, "the decisive contribution made by the black freedom fighters went almost unnoticed by the Jeffersonian administration."

The loss of L'Ouverture's leadership dealt a severe blow to Haiti's prospects, according to Jefferson scholar Paul Finkelman of Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

"Had Toussaint lived, it's very likely that he would have remained in power long enough to put the nation on a firm footing, to establish an order of succession," Finkelman told me in an interview. "The entire subsequent history of Haiti might have been different."

Instead, the island nation continued a downward spiral. In 1804, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the radical slave leader who had replaced L'Ouverture, formally declared the nation's independence and returned it to its original Indian name, Haiti. A year later, apparently fearing a return of the French and a counterrevolution, Dessalines ordered the massacre of the remaining French whites on the island.

Though the Haitian resistance had blunted Napoleon's planned penetration of the North American mainland, Jefferson reacted to the shocking bloodshed in Haiti by imposing a stiff economic embargo on the island nation. In 1806, Dessalines himself was brutally assassinated, touching off a cycle of political violence that would haunt Haiti for the next two centuries.

### **Jefferson's Blemish**

For some scholars, Jefferson's vengeful policy toward Haiti like his personal ownership of slaves represented an ugly blemish on his legacy as a historic advocate of freedom. Even in his final years, Jefferson remained obsessed with Haiti and its link to the issue of American slavery.

In the 1820s, the former President proposed a scheme for taking away the children born to black slaves in the United States and shipping them to Haiti. In that way, Jefferson posited that both slavery and America's black population could be phased out. Eventually, in Jefferson's view, Haiti would be all black

and the United States white.

Jefferson's deportation scheme never was taken very seriously and American slavery would continue for another four decades until it was ended by the Civil War. The official hostility of the United States toward Haiti extended almost as long, ending in 1862 when President Abraham Lincoln finally granted diplomatic recognition.

By then, however, Haiti's destructive patterns of political violence and economic chaos had been long established continuing up to the present time. Personal and political connections between Haiti's light-skinned elite and power centers of Washington also have lasted through today.

Recent Republican administrations have been particularly hostile to the popular will of the impoverished Haitian masses. When leftist priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide was twice elected by overwhelming margins, he was ousted both times first during the presidency of George H.W. Bush and again under President George W. Bush.

Washington's conventional wisdom on Haiti holds that the country is a hopeless basket case that would best be governed by business-oriented technocrats who would take their marching orders from the United States.

However, the Haitian people have a different perspective. Unlike most Americans who have no idea about their historic debt to Haiti, many Haitians know this history quite well. The bitter memories of Jefferson and Napoleon still feed the distrust that Haitians of all classes feel toward the outside world.

"In Haiti, we became the first black independent country," Aristide once told me in an interview. "We understand, as we still understand, it wasn't easy for them American, French and others to accept our independence."

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).**

---

## Obama Re-imposes Neoliberalism in Latin America

President Obama's chief "accomplishment" in Latin America was

not restoring diplomatic ties to Cuba; it was his administration's "regime change" strategy re-imposing "neoliberal" economic orthodoxy on the region, as Ted Snider explains.

By Ted Snider

Shortly after taking office, President Barack Obama promised to change the way America does business with Latin America, a recognition of the appalling history of interference and regime change dating back to the Nineteenth Century, from Thomas Jefferson's hostility toward Haiti's slave rebellion to William McKinley's betrayal of Cuba after "liberating" it from Spain.

Then, there was the case of Theodore Roosevelt severing Panama from Colombia in 1903 for the purpose of building the Panama Canal. And another case in 1908 when the U.S. government cooperated in the ouster of Venezuelan President Juan Vicente Gómez. And, in 1909, when William Taft removed Nicaragua's José Santos Zelaya because he insisted that U.S. companies in Nicaragua honor their agreements and tried to make his country less dependent on the U.S. by borrowing from European, not American, banks.

In the modern era, Dwight Eisenhower had the CIA overthrow Guatemala's Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 and – before leaving office – Eisenhower started the covert action aimed at removing Fidel Castro as Cuba's leader, a process continued under John Kennedy with the Bay of Pigs invasion and beyond. Then, there was the 1964 coup in Brazil to overthrow Joao Goulart, and the political action to encourage the removal of Guyana's Chedi Jagan undertaken the same year.

In 1971, Richard Nixon destabilized Chile, encouraging a bloody coup against Salvador Allende. Ronald Reagan sponsored a covert war to oust Nicaragua's Sandinista government while also throwing U.S. military support behind various brutal and repressive regimes in Central America. In 1989, George H.W. Bush destroyed civilian neighborhoods in Panama City in an invasion to arrest Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega.

And impoverished Haiti periodically showed up on Washington's radar. With the backing of the Bush-41 and Bush-43 administrations, coup

plotters removed Haiti's popular leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide, twice. George W. Bush also supported a short-lived coup in 2002 to oust Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez. And this is only a partial list of U.S. interventions in its "backyard."

So, it is important to evaluate Obama's performance on his promise to change this tragic and shameful history. Yet, it didn't take long to see that nothing really had changed. It appears that the Obama administration adopted an eight-year-long strategy of rolling back what has been called the Pink Tide of progressive or socialist leaders who dared challenge Washington's neoliberal economic model for the hemisphere.

The Obama administration favored a more subtle approach to regime change than some predecessors. Unlike the military coups sponsored by earlier administrations, Obama's coups didn't require tanks in the streets. Rather, they were disguised as domestic political clashes, starting with civil unrest and media accusations of abuses by the targeted leader, followed by legislatures or courts using impeachment or other "constitutional" means to effect the regime change. These were silent or "soft" coups carried out in democratic disguise.

An early example came on June 28, 2009, when Honduras' democratically elected and liberal President Manuel Zelaya was accused of plotting a constitutional amendment that would permit more than one term for a president. At the instructions of his political opponents on the Supreme Court, the military seized him at gunpoint and whisked him away in a plane that refueled at a U.S. military base.

That would have been a good moment for Obama to show that he meant business, that he placed democracy and social progress at the center of his regional agenda. Instead, he allowed his State Department to send signals that the U.S. was privately delighted with Zelaya's ouster.

After the coup, the American ambassador was not recalled; the U.S. refused to join the demand of the United Nation's General Assembly and the Organization of American States (OAS) for the return of the elected president; and the word "coup" was banned from the State

Department's lexicon.

Although the OAS refused to recognize the new coup president, the State Department under Secretary Hillary Clinton went in the opposite direction, recognizing the coup government as the winner of controversial new elections. U.S. military support increased, too.

Yet, despite the Obama administration's linguistic gymnastics in not publicly labeling Zelaya's removal at gunpoint a coup, Obama's White House knew that it was a coup. By July 24, 2009, less than a month after the coup, the White House was in receipt of a [cable](#) sent from the U.S. embassy in Honduras informing President Obama of the facts.

In an almost comical lack of subtlety that was clearly never meant to be public, the cable is called "Open and Shut: the Case of the Honduran Coup." In it, the embassy reported, "There is no doubt that the military, Supreme Court and National Congress conspired on June 28 in what constituted an illegal and unconstitutional coup."

The conclusion could not be clearer. But just in case there were any remaining doubt, the cable added that "none of the . . . arguments [of the coup defenders] has any substantive validity under the Honduran constitution."

In the most generous interpretation of Obama's action or inaction, you could say he permitted the coup to succeed by maintaining his silence. More likely, however, his administration was a supportive participant, holding a dialogue with the Honduran military up to the day of the coup and by recognizing the coup government as legitimate soon afterwards. Zelaya has always insisted that "the coup came from the north from the U.S."

In the heat of the coup, the plane that was carrying the kidnapped president landed at the U.S. military base of Palmerola for 15 to 20 minutes while it refueled. The U.S. chose not to intervene.

In her memoir, *Hard Choices*, [Clinton admitted that she aided the new leadership](#) by short-circuiting any efforts to restore Zelaya to power. "In the subsequent days [after the coup] I spoke with my counterparts around the hemisphere, including Secretary [Patricia]

Espinosa in Mexico. We strategized on a plan to restore order in Honduras and ensure that free and fair elections could be held quickly and legitimately, which would render the question of Zelaya moot," she wrote.

### **Ecuador in the Crosshairs**

After the coup against Zelaya, Ecuador's popularly elected president, Rafael Correa, said, "We have intelligence reports that say that after Zelaya, I'm next." He may have been right. The year after the Honduran coup, there was an attempted coup against Correa. Although the action failed, Latin American expert Mark Weisbrot said it was clearly an attempted coup to overthrow Correa's government.

Correa had renegotiated oil contracts and demanded a larger share of the big oil companies' revenue for the people of Ecuador. He also opposed a free trade agreement with the U.S. and closed the U.S. military base in Ecuador. And, he joined Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia and Ecuador in the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) and successfully defaulted on over \$3 billion of foreign debt that was illegitimately contracted by Ecuadorian leaders who Correa said were CIA-supported dictators.

The U.S. had started action against Correa during George W. Bush's presidency. An October 2005 embassy cable sent by U.S. Ambassador Linda Jewell outlined action for "desirable political and economic change in Ecuador." In 2006, she cabled that a Correa election would "derail" U.S. hopes as the embassy expects Correa to join Chavez and other nationalist South American leaders. In the same cable [06QUIT02150], Jewell said that the U.S. has "actively discouraged potential alliances" with Correa. She admitted [06QUIT02991] to "working in concert with other Ecuadorians and groups who share our vision."

During the Obama years, the U.S. would continue to intervene in Ecuador. In March 2009, Ecuador expelled Mark Sullivan, an American official who was accused of being the CIA station chief in Quito and of playing a role in the suspension of U.S. assistance to a special investigative police unit when Ecuador named a new chief of whom the

U.S. didn't approve.

On Oct. 30, 2010, the attempted coup that Correa had been expecting came. The coup leader was a graduate of the School of the Americas. A government-appointed commission found that "foreign actors" had participated. One of members of the commission announced his belief that the U.S. State Department and the CIA had been involved in the failed attempt to remove Correa from power.

## **Haiti, Again**

In 2010, Obama failed another test when Washington bankrolled the Haitian elections at the cost of \$14 million, a price tag that presumably gave America significant say. Yet, Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) banned 14 parties from running, including Fanmi Lavalas, the party of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who had twice been removed in U.S.-backed coups.

Haiti's largest and most popular party, Fanmi Lavalas has won every election that it has been allowed to participate in. But in this U.S.-sponsored election, Fanmi Lavalas was not allowed to compete. In other words, the Obama administration financed the election that specifically excluded the party the people wanted to elect.

The next indicator of Obama's failing grade came in Paraguay, where in June 2012, Fernando Lugo, the democratically elected leader of Paraguay was removed in a coup. The right-wing opposition opportunistically capitalized on a skirmish over disputed land that left at least 11 people dead to unfairly blame the deaths on President Lugo. It then impeached him after giving him only 24 hours to prepare his defense and only two hours to deliver it.

The Latin American organizations Unasur and Mercosur suspended the new Paraguayan government, but the U.S. government spent the day of the coup negotiating a new military base in Paraguay. As with Honduras, U.S. officials publicly avoided using the word "coup."

Yet, as early as 2009, a U.S. embassy [cable recognized](#) that Lugo's political opposition has as its goal to "Capitalize on any Lugo missteps" and to "impeach Lugo and assure their own political

supremacy.” The cable noted that to achieve this goal, the opposition was willing to “legally” impeach Lugo “even if on spurious grounds,” a so-called “soft coup.”

### **Focus on Venezuela**

The next year, 2013, the focus moved to Venezuela in the wake of Hugo Chavez’s death from cancer. Against the wishes of the United States, Hugo Chavez’s successor, Nicolás Maduro, won the right to continue the Bolivarian Revolution by winning the next national election. The U.S. was the only country in the world to [refuse to recognize the election results](#), though 150 electoral monitors from around the world observed Venezuela’s election, including delegations from the Union of South American Nations and the Carter Center.

The Obama administration’s pressure on Venezuela’s government has been unrelenting. American money – totaling at least \$90 million since 2000 – has been pumped into Venezuela to fund groups who oppose the Chavezista movement with the U.S.-backed opposition attempting another coup in 2015, which Maduro blamed on the U.S. government.

Though mocked by the U.S. government and the mainstream U.S. news media, the accusation was not an empty one. Venezuelan officials produced a significant volume of evidence that the events constituted a failed coup that had U.S. support, including a recording of a communique that was to be issued after the Maduro government was removed from power. Maduro’s government has also shown confessions by military officials. And, there was a recorded phone conversation between opposition leaders discussing the coup and involving Caracas Mayor Antonio Ledezma, who is known to have made phone calls to a U.S. phone number.

Lucas Koerner of Venezuelanalysis.com added that the [aircraft](#) to be used as part of the failed coup has links to the notorious American security firm Academi (formerly Blackwater). And it has been reported that a number of the coup leaders obtained [U.S. visas](#) from the American embassy to facilitate escape should the coup fail.

And, just this past May, President Maduro declared a state of

emergency, accusing the U.S. of once again conspiring with right-wing groups in Venezuela to overthrow his government. [Maduro said](#) that “Washington is activating measures at the request of Venezuela’s fascist right.”

### **The Ebbing Pink Tide**

The cumulative effect of all this pressure on progressive leaders in Latin America has been a noticeable ebbing of the Pink Tide movement, which had to its credit a significant improvement in the living standards of the region’s poorest citizens, although many of those gains are now being reversed.

Perhaps the sharpest blow to Latin America’s attempts to reduce poverty and structure economies more for the benefit of average people, not the wealthy, came just this year in Brazil when another “soft coup” was organized to remove Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff from office and replace her with a right-wing regime.

Again the evidence of a coup was obvious with opposition parties seizing on a budgetary dispute to overturn the voters’ will in South America’s largest country and biggest economy. The evidence included the publication of a [transcript](#) of the call between Romero Jucá, who was a senator at the time of the call, and former oil executive Sergio Machado, discussing “a national pact” to remove Rousseff and install Michel Temer as president. Jucá revealed that not only opposition politicians but members of the military and Supreme Court were in on the conspiracy.

Regarding the military’s role, Jucá says, “I am talking to the generals, the military commanders. They are fine with this, they said they will guarantee it.” And, as for the Supreme Court, Jucá admitted that he “spoke with and secured the involvement of numerous justices on Brazil’s Supreme Court,” [according](#) to journalist Glenn Greenwald who is based in Brazil. Jucá further boasted that “there are only a small number” of Supreme Court justices that he had not spoken to. (Jucá has since become planning minister in Temer’s new government.)

So confident was Michel Temer that he had U.S. support for his coup that he was comfortable to openly boast about it in New York in front of an audience of business and foreign policy leaders in September. Temer confirmed to his American audience that Rousseff was removed from power because she refused to implement a pro-business economic plan, which featured cuts to health, education and welfare spending as well as increased emphasis on privatization and deregulation.

Temer said, “many months ago, while I was still vice president, we released a document named ‘A Bridge to the Future’ because we knew it would be impossible for the [Rousseff] government to continue on that course. We suggested that the government should adopt the theses presented in that document called ‘A Bridge to the Future.’ But, as that did not work out, the plan wasn’t adopted and a process was established which culminated with me being installed as president of the republic.”

As Inacio Vieira [reported](#) for The Intercept, “[Temer’s sales pitch](#) was chock full of standard neoliberal euphemisms and buzzwords, including the ‘universalization of the Brazilian market,’ ‘reestablishing trust,’ ‘extraordinary political stability,’ public-private partnerships, and the implementation of ‘fundamental reforms’ in areas like labor law, social security and public spending.”

And if there was any remaining doubt about the coup government’s motivation – ostensibly its indignation at Rousseff’s fiscal maneuver – there is the fact that one of the coup government’s first acts of legislation was to explicitly [legalize](#) the very budgetary act that they had impeached Rousseff for two days earlier.

### **American Satisfaction**

While direct American participation in the Brazilian coup has not been established, Obama’s satisfaction with the coup was clear from his silence over the reversal of one more democratic result, occurring in the most important economic country in Latin America.

Considering how his administration denounces supposedly undemocratic developments in, say, Russia, Obama’s unwillingness to protest another

severe blow to democracy in the Western Hemisphere suggests a happiness with the imposition of a new neo-liberal economic agenda in Brazil.

That is also the conclusion of many analysts close to the Brazilian scene. “There is no doubt that the biggest players in this coup attempt – people like former presidential candidates José Serra and Aécio Neves – are U.S. government allies,” according to Latin American expert Mark Weisbrot.

And Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Professor of Sociology at the University of Coimbra in Portugal and Distinguished Legal Scholar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said Brazil is awash in financing from American sources, including “CIA-related organizations.”

The day after the impeachment vote, Sen. Aloysio Nunes, a significant player in the coup government, began a three-day [visit to Washington](#). Nunes scheduled meetings with, among others, the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Bob Corker and Ben Cardin, as well as with Undersecretary of State and former Ambassador to Brazil Thomas Shannon.

Though Nunes denies it, there were reports that his trip to Washington was ordered by Michel Temer. The willingness to go ahead with the planned meetings with Nunes right after the impeachment vote demonstrated, once again, at least tacit approval on the part of Washington. If the U.S. government wanted to send a message of disapproval, the trip could have been canceled.

The cumulative impact of Obama’s presidency on Latin America has been the steady rollback of the Pink Tide as socially progressive governments around the hemisphere were either removed via “soft coups” or placed under enormous economic pressure, reversing many of the social gains that occurred in the previous decade.

Ironically, progressive Latin American governments made greater strides when Obama’s predecessor, George W. Bush, was in office because his administration was focused more on the Middle East and the “war on terror.”

So, Obama's presidency represented less a new page in the history of U.S. relations toward its Latin neighbors than a repeat of old chapters in which the U.S. government teamed up with local oligarchs and right-wing ideologues to create an economic climate favorable to outside investors and the traditional local elites.

Obama's approach may have been more subtle than that of earlier U.S. presidents – using “soft coups” rather than deploying tanks in the streets – but the effect has been much the same, imposing U.S. economic and political domination over the region and casting aside democratic governments that dared put their people's interests first.

**Ted Snider writes on analyzing patterns in U.S. foreign policy and history.**

---

## How Human Rights Can Build Haiti

American interventions in Haiti are often sold as paternalistic charity for a basket-case country, but the U.S. interference has often done more harm than good for the impoverished nation where two lawyers have tried to a different approach, building human rights, writes Marjorie Cohn.

By Marjorie Cohn

Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world. It has suffered a devastating earthquake followed by a deadly cholera epidemic, both set in the backdrop of a history of oppression by corrupt rulers and foreign exploitation. In spite of incredible challenges, two intrepid human rights attorneys one Haitian and one American have worked diligently to vindicate the rights of the people of Haiti, with some notable successes.

Fran Quigley's important book, *How Human Rights Can Build Haiti*, tells the story of Mario Joseph and Brian Concannon, whose Bureau des Avocats Internationaux (BAI) has given hope to untold numbers of Haitians. They opt for a “bottom-up” rather than a “top-down” approach.

Their preference is to help to empower the Haitian people to make change themselves, instead of relying on outside groups particularly the United States and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which establish “rule of law programs”

and provide charity, generally with strings attached.

Often called the leading human rights lawyer in Haiti, Mario Joseph is president of BAI. "We had an earthquake, yes, but far too many people died in this earthquake. And that is because we in Haiti have no respect for the rule of law," he says, attributing the deaths to poorly built homes crowded onto steep hillsides. It is estimated that more than 200,000 were killed, 300,000 were injured, and two million were rendered homeless by the earthquake.

Joseph has developed a reputation in Haiti as a fearless advocate, in the face of numerous death threats. While court proceedings take place in French, Joseph speaks Creole so his clients can understand the proceedings. "The justice system is unaffordable for the people of Haiti," Joseph observes, "but if you are rich or important and your rights are not respected, you can find justice. Conversely, if you are powerful and you abuse human rights, you can find ways to avoid the consequences of your actions."

### **Brian Concannon**

Joseph's counterpart in the United States is Brian Concannon, who directs the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (IJDH) in Boston. Concannon, also fluent in Creole, worked in Haiti for nine years, including the successful case he and Joseph filed after the Raboteau massacre. Concannon returned to the United States and founded IJDH, BAI's sister organization in 2004. Known as a "tireless worker who makes the transition from human rights lawyer to political strategist to movement organizer as the needs of the Haitian dictate," Concannon has developed a reputation with congresspersons, who "clearly look to him as the definitive voice on Haiti justice issues," according to Nicole Lee, former BAI lawyer, now executive director for TransAfrica Forum.

### **A legacy of exploitation**

Quigley outlines Haiti's tragic history, starting with the occupation by the United States in 1915. After occupying Cuba and Puerto Rico, the United States sent Marines to invade Haiti, the only nation born from a successful slave rebellion. The United States declared martial law, seized control of the treasury, and arrested the editors of a newspaper critical of U.S. actions. Haitian opposition to the U.S. occupation grew for the next 20 years, and in 1934, the Marines left Haiti.

Haitian President Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier exploited the bitterness of the people of Haiti about U.S. domination. But his anti-communism endeared him to the United States and led to U.S. endorsement of his presidential campaign and his successful election in 1956. For the next 30 years, Papa Doc presided over a

reign a terror in Haiti, backed by the United States. U.S. support continued during the oppressive tenure of Papa Doc's son, Jean-Claude Duvalier ("Baby Doc").

Haiti's fragile economy was further weakened by the neoliberal "structural adjustment" program foisted upon it by its international creditors, including the International Monetary Bank. Wages and social services were kept at a minimal level as taxes and tariffs were lifted. By 1986, 300 U.S. corporations were located in Haiti. People migrated from the countryside to seek low-wage jobs in the city.

In 1990, Jean-Bertrand Aristide became Haiti's first democratically elected president, winning more than 67 percent of the vote and defeating a neoliberal former World Bank official. When Aristide attempted to reverse the neoliberal policies foisted on Haiti, the United States strongly resisted. Less than one year later, Aristide was ousted by officers of the Haitian army who had been trained at the U.S. School of the Americas and/or were on the CIA payroll.

President Bill Clinton helped restore Aristide to power only after the Haitian president promised to cut government programs for the poor and lower tariffs on food. Clinton regrets that condition to this day. The United States also blocked a \$146 million loan to Haiti from the Inter-American Development Bank, money earmarked to improve the water infrastructure system. That move would prove to have devastating consequences in the cholera outbreak in 2010.

In 2004, Aristide was forced to leave Haiti in what many thought was a kidnapping by U.S. Army Special Forces as part of a U.S.-backed coup d'état. The Bush administration then saw to it that Aristide's progressive policies were reversed.

That same year, the United Nations mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) arrived but UN peacekeeping troops did little to protect civilians targeted by the new coup government. In fact, MINUSTAH troops helped facilitate political violence, causing resentment among the Haitian people. Cables obtained by WikiLeaks confirm that MINUSTAH protected U.S. interests and global capital.

After the 2004 coup, Haiti descended into lawlessness as the coup government instituted a system of repression with torture, disappearances, summary arrests and executions, rape and drug trafficking. Only a tiny fraction of those in prison had been convicted of a crime and prison conditions were deplorable.

When Quigley visited one of the prisons, "[a]ll the prisoners were shirtless and barefoot, very thin, and wearing as little as possible," he says. "The startling sight of near-naked dark-skinned men crammed together and crouching on a bare

floor evoked images of Africans chained in the hold of a slave ship.”

Haiti had “endured a full thirty-two coups and a near-constant state of military dominance over civilians,” Quigley writes. “The government of Haiti made disastrous choices in loans and alliances, and has never been able to develop an economy that is independent of foreign powers, particularly the United States.”

The earthquake in 2010 triggered an overwhelming global response. But since aid was administered by NGOs instead of the Haitian government, much of the pledged money never reached the people of Haiti. And because, writes Quigley, “the military and the media mischaracterized post-earthquake Port-au-Prince as a security crisis rather than a humanitarian crisis, the Haitian people paid dearly.”

The United States sent soldiers instead of humanitarian workers, and many food and supplies were not distributed to the victims. “[M]ost of the USAID dollars spent for Haiti went to top U.S. contractors, most based in Washington, DC, area. Less than one percent of U.S. government expenditures have gone to Haitian businesses or organizations.”

Shortly after the earthquake, an outbreak of cholera claimed more than 8,600 lives, and 684,000 became ill. The World Health Organization describes cholera as “an easily treatable disease.” Dr. Paul Farmer, founder of Haiti-based Partners in Health, notes that chronic poverty and deficiencies in the infrastructure made Haiti vulnerable to disasters such as earthquakes and infectious disease. The cholera infection was traced to the dumping of sewage near a river by troops in a camp where the MINUSTAH was based. Bill Clinton admitted that UN peacekeepers were the “proximate cause” of the cholera epidemic.

### **A Human Rights-based Approach**

In 2011, BAI lawyers filed more than 5,000 claims against the UN and a petition for relief on behalf of cholera victims, requesting compensation. The UN had concluded a status of forces agreement (SOFA) with the government of Haiti in 2004, granting UN troops immunity from civil and criminal claims.

But Concannon told Quigley that the UN forfeited its immunity by failing to establish a commission to hear claims of cholera victims, as required by the SOFA. In 2013, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon refused to receive BAI’s claims. BAI then filed a lawsuit against the UN in a New York federal court. That suit is now pending.

Joseph and Concannon won the most important human rights court verdict in Haitian history in 2000. As a result of their work, 53 military and paramilitary

officers and soldiers were convicted of human rights violations during the 1994 massacre in Raboteau. They were ordered to pay the victims \$140 million.

In other lawsuits, Joseph and Concannon are advocating prosecution of Baby Doc's collaborators for financial crimes and political repression during the brutal Duvalier regime. And the work of BAI and IJDH in responding to the epidemic of rapes in the IDP (internally displaced persons) camps following the earthquake has been exemplary.

They have helped to empower the victims, challenged law enforcement, established security patrols and know-your-rights training, pushed prosecutions, and developed an international campaign through the media. As a result, sexual assaults have decreased dramatically, and women are now willing to file complaints. Joseph says, "Where the rule of law does not exist, you have to build it."

Quigley describes how these two courageous lawyers are creating a template for an effective human rights-focused strategy to end global poverty and failed states. He writes, "[t]heir docket includes community-based programs on rape accountability and prevention, housing rights, and prisoners' rights, along with international advocacy for fair elections in Haiti, earthquake response, and immigration rights for the Haitian diaspora. BAI helps organize street-blocking protests by camp dwellers facing eviction, and loud, aggressive demonstrations in protest of the UN's cholera response."

Joseph and Concannon work indefatigably to give voice to the voiceless and vindicate their human rights. They seek justice both inside and outside the courtroom.

This excellent book combines careful research with personal observations and interviews to paint a graphic portrait of the reality in Haiti and the critical work of Joseph and Concannon. Far from a dry history, it is a gripping tale of two courageous lawyers working to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds to better the lives of the Haitian people. This is a must-read for all those concerned about human rights both in Haiti and elsewhere.

**Marjorie Cohn is a professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, and deputy secretary general of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers. Her latest book is *Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues*.**

---

---

# Haiti and America's Historic Debt

**From the Archive:** Some Americans view Haiti through a lens of racial bigotry, seeing the poverty-stricken Caribbean country as proof that black people can't govern themselves. But there is a very different historical narrative regarding America's profound debt to Haiti, as Robert Parry described in 2010.

By Robert Parry (First published on Jan.13, 2010)

In 2010, when announcing emergency help for Haiti after a devastating 7.0-magnitude earthquake, President Barack Obama noted America's historic ties to the impoverished Caribbean nation, but few Americans understand how important Haiti's contribution to U.S. history was.

In modern times, when Haiti does intrude on U.S. consciousness, it's usually because of some natural disaster or a violent political upheaval, and the U.S. response is often paternalistic, if not tinged with a racist disdain for the country's predominantly black population and its seemingly endless failure to escape cycles of crushing poverty.

However, more than two centuries ago, Haiti represented one of the most important neighbors of the new American Republic and played a central role in enabling the United States to expand westward. If not for Haiti, the course of U.S. history could have been very different, with the United States possibly never expanding much beyond the Appalachian Mountains.

In the 1700s, then-called St. Domingue and covering the western third of the island of Hispaniola, Haiti was a French colony that rivaled the American colonies as the most valuable European possession in the Western Hemisphere. Relying on a ruthless exploitation of African slaves, French plantations there produced nearly one-half the world's coffee and sugar.

Many of the great cities of France owe their grandeur to the wealth that was extracted from Haiti and its slaves. But the human price was unspeakably high. The French had devised a fiendishly cruel slave system that imported enslaved Africans for work in the fields with accounting procedures for their amortization. They were literally worked to death.

The American colonists may have rebelled against Great Britain over issues such as representation in Parliament and arbitrary actions by King George III. But black Haitians confronted a brutal system of slavery. An infamous French method of executing a troublesome slave was to insert a gunpowder charge into his rectum and then detonate the explosive.

So, as the American colonies fought for their freedom in the 1770s and as that inspiration against tyranny spread to France in the 1780s, the repercussions would eventually reach Haiti, where the Jacobins' cry of "liberty, equality and fraternity" resonated with special force. Slaves demanded that the concepts of freedom be applied universally.

When the brutal French plantation system continued, violent slave uprisings followed. Hundreds of white plantation owners were slain as the rebels overran the colony. A self-educated slave named Toussaint L'Ouverture emerged as the revolution's leader, demonstrating skills on the battlefield and in the complexities of politics.

Despite the atrocities committed by both sides of the conflict, the rebels known as the "Black Jacobins" gained the sympathy of the American Federalist Party and particularly Alexander Hamilton, a native of the Caribbean himself and a fierce opponent of slavery. Hamilton, the first U.S. Treasury Secretary, helped L'Ouverture draft a constitution for the new nation.

### **Conspiracies**

But events in Paris and Washington soon conspired to undo the promise of Haiti's new freedom. Despite Hamilton's sympathies, some Founders, including Thomas Jefferson who owned 180 slaves and owed his political strength to agrarian interests, looked nervously at the slave rebellion in St. Domingue. Jefferson feared that slave uprisings might spread northward.

"If something is not done, and soon done," Jefferson wrote in 1797, "we shall be the murderers of our own children."

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, the chaos and excesses of the French Revolution led to the ascendance of Napoleon Bonaparte, a brilliant and vain military commander possessed of legendary ambition. As he expanded his power across Europe, Napoleon also dreamed of rebuilding a French empire in the Americas.

In 1801, Jefferson became the third President of the United States and his interests at least temporarily aligned with those of Napoleon. The French dictator was determined to restore French control of St. Domingue and Jefferson was eager to see the slave rebellion crushed.

Through secret diplomatic channels, Napoleon asked Jefferson if the United States would help a French army traveling by sea to St. Domingue. Jefferson replied that "nothing will be easier than to furnish your army and fleet with everything and reduce Toussaint [L'Ouverture] to starvation."

But Napoleon had a secret second phase of his plan that he didn't share with

Jefferson. Once the French army had subdued L'Ouverture and his rebel force, Napoleon intended to advance to the North American mainland, basing a new French empire in New Orleans and settling the vast territory west of the Mississippi River.

In May 1801, Jefferson picked up the first inklings of Napoleon's other agenda. Alarmed at the prospect of a major European power controlling New Orleans and thus the mouth of the strategic Mississippi River, Jefferson backpedaled on his commitment to Napoleon, retreating to a posture of neutrality. Still terrified at the prospect of a successful republic organized by freed African slaves Jefferson took no action to block Napoleon's thrust into the New World.

In 1802, a French expeditionary force achieved initial success against the slave army, driving L'Ouverture's forces back into the mountains. But, as they retreated, the ex-slaves torched the cities and the plantations, destroying the colony's once-thriving economic infrastructure.

L'Ouverture, hoping to bring the war to an end, accepted Napoleon's promise of a negotiated settlement that would ban future slavery in the country. As part of the agreement, L'Ouverture turned himself in. Napoleon, however, broke his word.

Jealous of L'Ouverture, who was regarded by some admirers as a general with skills rivaling Napoleon's, the French dictator had L'Ouverture shipped in chains back to Europe where he was mistreated and died in prison.

### **Foiled Plans**

Infuriated by the betrayal, L'Ouverture's young generals resumed the war with a vengeance. In the months that followed, the French army already decimated by disease was overwhelmed by a fierce enemy fighting in familiar terrain and determined not to be put back into slavery.

Napoleon sent a second French army, but it too was destroyed. Though the famed general had conquered much of Europe, he lost 24,000 men, including some of his best troops, in St. Domingue before abandoning his campaign. The death toll among the ex-slaves was much higher, but they had prevailed, albeit over a devastated land.

By 1803, a frustrated Napoleon denied his foothold in the New World agreed to sell New Orleans and the Louisiana territories to Jefferson. Ironically, the Louisiana Purchase, which opened the heart of the present United States to American settlement, had been made possible despite Jefferson's misguided collaboration with Napoleon.

Jefferson also saw the new territory as an opportunity to expand slavery in the

United States, creating a lucrative new industry of slave-breeding that would financially benefit Jefferson and his plantation-owning neighbors. But nothing would be done to help Haiti. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Thomas Jefferson: America's Founding Sociopath](#)."]

"By their long and bitter struggle for independence, St. Domingue's blacks were instrumental in allowing the United States to more than double the size of its territory," wrote Stanford University professor John Chester Miller in his book, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery*.

But, Miller observed, "the decisive contribution made by the black freedom fighters went almost unnoticed by the Jeffersonian administration."

The loss of L'Ouverture's leadership dealt a severe blow to Haiti's prospects, according to Jefferson scholar Paul Finkelman of Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

"Had Toussaint lived, it's very likely that he would have remained in power long enough to put the nation on a firm footing, to establish an order of succession," Finkelman told me in an interview. "The entire subsequent history of Haiti might have been different."

Instead, the island nation continued a downward spiral. In 1804, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the radical slave leader who had replaced L'Ouverture, formally declared the nation's independence and returned it to its original Indian name, Haiti. A year later, apparently fearing a return of the French and a counterrevolution, Dessalines ordered the massacre of the remaining French whites on the island.

Though the Haitian resistance had blunted Napoleon's planned penetration of the North American mainland, Jefferson reacted to the shocking bloodshed in Haiti by imposing a stiff economic embargo on the island nation. In 1806, Dessalines himself was brutally assassinated, touching off a cycle of political violence that would haunt Haiti for the next two centuries.

### **Jefferson's Blemish**

For some scholars, Jefferson's vengeful policy toward Haiti like his personal ownership of slaves represented an ugly blemish on his legacy as a historic advocate of freedom. Even in his final years, Jefferson remained obsessed with Haiti and its link to the issue of American slavery.

In the 1820s, the former President proposed a scheme for taking away the children born to black slaves in the United States and shipping them to Haiti. In that way, Jefferson posited that both slavery and America's black population could be phased out. Eventually, in Jefferson's view, Haiti would be all black

and the United States white.

Jefferson's deportation scheme never was taken very seriously and American slavery would continue for another four decades until it was ended by the Civil War. The official hostility of the United States toward Haiti extended almost as long, ending in 1862 when President Abraham Lincoln finally granted diplomatic recognition.

By then, however, Haiti's destructive patterns of political violence and economic chaos had been long established continuing up to the present time. Personal and political connections between Haiti's light-skinned elite and power centers of Washington also have lasted through today.

Recent Republican administrations have been particularly hostile to the popular will of the impoverished Haitian masses. When leftist priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide was twice elected by overwhelming margins, he was ousted both times first during the presidency of George H.W. Bush and again under President George W. Bush.

Washington's conventional wisdom on Haiti holds that the country is a hopeless basket case that would best be governed by business-oriented technocrats who would take their marching orders from the United States.

However, the Haitian people have a different perspective. Unlike most Americans who have no idea about their historic debt to Haiti, many Haitians know this history quite well. The bitter memories of Jefferson and Napoleon still feed the distrust that Haitians of all classes feel toward the outside world.

"In Haiti, we became the first black independent country," Aristide once told me in an interview. "We understand, as we still understand, it wasn't easy for them American, French and others to accept our independence."

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).**

---

---

# America's Staggering Hypocrisy

**Exclusive:** Official Washington is in deep umbrage over Russia's intervention in Ukraine after a U.S.-backed coup overthrew the democratically elected president. Some top neocons want a new Cold War, but they don't want anyone to note their staggering hypocrisy, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Since World War II and extending well into the Twenty-first Century the United States has invaded or otherwise intervened in so many countries that it would be challenging to compile a complete list. Just last decade, there were full-scale U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, plus American bombing operations from Pakistan to Yemen to Libya.

So, what is one to make of Secretary of State John Kerry's pronouncement that Russia's military intervention in the Crimea section of Ukraine at the behest of the country's deposed president is a violation of international law that the United States would never countenance?

Kerry decried the Russian intervention as "a Nineteenth Century act in the Twenty-first Century." However, if memory serves, Sen. Kerry in 2002 voted along with most other members of the U.S. Congress to authorize President George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was also part of the Twenty-first Century. And, Kerry is a member of the Obama administration, which like its Bush predecessor, has been sending drones into the national territory of other nations to blow up various "enemy combatants."

Are Kerry and pretty much everyone else in Official Washington so lacking in self-awareness that they don't realize that they are condemning actions by Russian President Vladimir Putin that are far less egregious than what they themselves have done?

If Putin is violating international law by sending Russian troops into the Crimea after a violent coup spearheaded by neo-Nazi militias ousted Ukraine's democratically elected president and after he requested protection for the ethnic Russians living in the country's south and east then why hasn't the U.S. government turned over George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and indeed John Kerry to the International Criminal Court for their far more criminal invasion of Iraq?

In 2003, when the Bush-Cheney administration dispatched troops halfway around the world to invade Iraq under the false pretense of seizing its non-existent weapons of mass destruction, the U.S. touched off a devastating war that killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and left their country a bitterly divided mess.

But there has been virtually no accountability.

And, why haven't many of the leading Washington journalists who pimped for those false WMD claims at least been fired from their prestigious jobs, if not also trundled off to The Hague for prosecution as propagandists for aggressive war?

Remarkably, many of these same "journalists" are propagandizing for more U.S. wars today, such as attacks on Syria and Iran, even as they demand harsh penalties for Russia over its intervention in the Crimea, which incidentally was an historic part of Russia dating back centuries.

### **The WPost's Double Standards**

A stunning example of the U.S. media's double standards is the Washington Post's editorial-page editor Fred Hiatt, who pushed for the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 by treating the existence of Iraq's non-existent WMD as "flat fact," not an allegation in dispute. After the U.S. invasion and months of fruitless searching for the promised WMD caches, Hiatt finally acknowledged that the Post should have been more circumspect in its claims about the WMD.

"If you look at the editorials we write running up [to the war], we state as flat fact that he [Saddam Hussein] has weapons of mass destruction," Hiatt said in an interview with the Columbia Journalism Review. "If that's not true, it would have been better not to say it." [CJR, March/April 2004]

Yes, that is a principle of journalism, if something isn't true, we're not supposed to say that it is. Yet, despite the enormous cost in blood and treasure from the Iraq War and despite the undeniable fact that the U.S. invasion of Iraq was a clear violation of international law nothing happened to Hiatt. He remains in the same job today, more than a decade later.

His editorials also continue to state dubious points as "flat fact." For instance, the Post's belligerent editorial on Monday, entitled online as "President Obama's foreign policy is based on fantasy," resurfaces the discredited claim that the Syrian government was responsible for a chemical weapons attack outside Damascus on Aug. 21, 2013.

The Post wrote, "Since the Syrian dictator crossed Mr. Obama's red line with a chemical weapons attack that killed 1,400 civilians, the dictator's military and diplomatic position has steadily strengthened."

Note how there is no attribution or doubt expressed regarding either the guilt of the Syrian government or the number of casualties. Just "flat fact." The reality, however, is that the U.S. government assertions blaming the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad for the poison gas attack and the death tally of 1,400

have both crumbled under examination.

The U.S. casualty figure of "1,429" always was regarded as a wild exaggeration, since doctors on the scene cited a much lower death toll of a few hundred, and the Wall Street Journal later reported that the strangely precise number was ascertained by the CIA applying facial recognition software to images of dead bodies posted on YouTube and then subtracting duplicates and those in bloody shrouds.

The problems with this "methodology" were obvious, since there was no way to know the dates when the YouTube videos were taken and the absence of bloody shrouds did not prove that the cause of death was poison gas.

More significantly, the U.S. claims about where the missiles were launched more than nine kilometers from the impact site turned out to be false, since expert analysis of the one missile that was found to carry Sarin gas had a maximum range of around two kilometers. That meant that the launch site was within territory controlled by the Syrian opposition, not the government. [See Consortiumnews.com's ["The Mistaken Guns of Last August."](#)]

Though it remains unclear which side was to blame for the chemical attack, the Syrian government's guilt surely was not a "slam dunk" anymore than the Iraqi government's possession of WMD in 2003. In such a case especially on sensitive matters of war or peace responsible journalists reflect the uncertainty, not simply assert an allegation as "flat fact."

However, since Hiatt was never punished for his earlier journalistic violation even though it contributed to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, including some 4,500 U.S. soldiers he is still around to commit the same offenses again, in an even more dangerous context, i.e., a confrontation between the United States and Russia, two nuclear-armed states.

### **Pushing for a New Cold War**

And, what do Hiatt and other neocons at the Washington Post say about confronting the Russians over the Ukraine crisis, which was stoked by neocon holdovers in the U.S. State Department, such as Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, and the U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy, which was founded in 1983 to replace the CIA in the business of destabilizing targeted governments? [See Consortiumnews.com's ["What Neocons Want from Ukraine Crisis."](#)]

The Post is demanding a new Cold War with Russia in retaliation for its relatively non-violent interventions to protect pro-Russian provinces of two countries that were carved out of the old Soviet Union: Georgia where Russian troops have protected South Ossetia and Abkhazia since 2008 and in Ukraine where

Russian soldiers have taken control of Crimea. In both cases, the pro-Russian areas felt threatened from their central governments and sought Moscow's assistance.

In the case of Ukraine, a neo-Nazi-led putsch representing the interests of the western part of the country overthrew the democratically elected president, Viktor Yanukovich, who came from the eastern region. Then, under the watchful eye of the neo-Nazi storm troopers in Kiev, a rump parliament voted unanimously or near unanimously to enact a series of draconian laws offensive to the ethnic Russian areas in the east and south.

Having fled Kiev for his life, Yanukovich asked Russia for help, which led to Putin's request to the Russian parliament for the authority to deploy troops inside Ukraine, essentially taking control of Crimea in the south, an area that has been part of Russia for centuries.

Though the Russian case for intervention in both Georgia and Ukraine is much stronger than the excuses often used by the United States to intervene in other countries, the Washington Post was apoplectic about Russia's "violation" of suddenly sacred international law.

The Post wrote, "as long as some leaders play by what Mr. Kerry dismisses as 19th-century rules, the United States can't pretend that the only game is in another arena altogether. Military strength, trustworthiness as an ally, staying power in difficult corners of the world such as Afghanistan, these still matter, much as we might wish they did not."

The Post also laments what it sees as a "receding" tide of democracy around the world, but it is worth noting that the U.S. government has a long and sorry record of overthrowing democratic governments. Just a partial list since World War II would include: Mossadegh in Iran in 1953, Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, Allende in Chile in 1973, Aristide in Haiti twice, Chavez in Venezuela briefly in 2002, Zelaya in Honduras in 2009, Morsi in Egypt in 2013, and now Yanukovich in Ukraine in 2014. The next target of a U.S.-embraced "democratic" coup looks to be Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela.

Perhaps the closest U.S. parallel to the Russian intervention in Ukraine was President Bill Clinton's decision to invade Haiti in 1994 to reinstall Haiti's elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide to office, though Russia has not gone nearly that far regarding Yanukovich in Ukraine. Russia has only intervened to prevent the fascist-spearheaded coup regime in Kiev from imposing its will on the country's ethnic Russian provinces.

Also, in the case of Aristide, the U.S. role wasn't as pro-democratic as

Clinton's invasion on his behalf might suggest. Clinton ordered the action to reverse a 1991 military coup that ousted President Aristide with the support of President George H.W. Bush. Aristide was deposed a second time in 2004 in a coup partly engineered by the administration of President George W. Bush.

In other words, Clinton's intervention on behalf of a popularly elected leader in Haiti was the anomaly to the more typical U.S. pattern of collaborating with right-wing military officers in the overthrow of elected leaders who don't comply with Washington's wishes.

Thus, the overriding hypocrisy of the Washington Post, Secretary Kerry and indeed nearly all of Official Washington is their insistence that the United States actually promotes the principle of democracy or, for that matter, the rule of international law. Those are at best situational ethics when it comes to advancing U.S. interests around the world.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).**

---

## Racism and the American Right

**Exclusive:** From the start of the Republic to today's Republican ranting against Barack Obama, racism has been a central element of the American Right. But this ugly feature of U.S. history has often come concealed behind words praising traditions, liberty and states' rights, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

Racism has been a consistent thread weaving through the American Right from the early days when Anti-Federalists battled against the U.S. Constitution to the present when hysterical Tea Partiers denounce the first African-American president. Other factors have come and gone for the Right, but racism has always been there.

Though definitions of Right and Left are never precise, the Left has generally been defined, in the American context, by government actions mostly the federal

government responding to popular movements and representing the collective will of the American people seeking to improve the lot of common citizens and to reduce social injustice.

The Right has been defined by opposition to such government activism. Since the Founding, the Right has decried government interference with the “free market” and intrusion upon “traditions,” like slavery and segregation, as “tyranny” or “socialism.”

This argument goes back to 1787 and opposition to the Constitution’s centralizing of government power in the hands of federal authorities. In Virginia, for instance, the Anti-Federalists feared that a strong federal government eventually would outlaw slavery in the Southern states.

Ironically, this argument was raised by two of the most famous voices for “liberty,” Patrick Henry and George Mason. Those two Virginians spearheaded the Anti-Federalist cause at the state’s ratifying convention in June 1788, urging rejection of the Constitution because, they argued, it would lead to slavery’s demise.

The irony of Henry and Mason scaring fellow Virginians about the Constitution’s threat to slavery is that the two men have gone down in popular U.S. history as great espousers of freedom. Before the Revolution, Henry was quoted as declaring, “Give me liberty or give me death!” Mason is hailed as a leading force behind the Bill of Rights. However, their notion of “liberty” and “rights” was always selective. Henry and Mason worried about protecting the “freedom” of plantation owners to possess other human beings as property.

At Virginia’s Ratification Convention, Henry and Mason raised other arguments against the proposed Constitution, such as concerns that Virginia’s preeminence might not be as great as under the weak Articles of Confederation and that population gains in the North might erode Virginia’s economic welfare.

But the pair’s most potent argument was the danger they foresaw regarding the abolition of slavery. As historians Andrew Burstein and Nancy Isenberg wrote in their 2010 book, *Madison and Jefferson*, the hot button for Henry and Mason was that “slavery, the source of Virginia’s tremendous wealth, lay politically unprotected.”

### **The Slavery Card**

At the center of this fear was the state’s loss of ultimate control over its militia which could be “federalized” by the President as the nation’s commander in chief under the new Constitution.

“Mason repeated what he had said during the Constitutional Convention: that the new government failed to provide for ‘domestic safety’ if there was no explicit protection for Virginians’ slave property,” Burstein and Isenberg wrote. “Henry called up the by-now-ingrained fear of slave insurrections the direct result, he believed, of Virginia’s loss of authority over its own militia.”

Henry floated conspiracy theories about possible subterfuges that the federal government might employ to deny Virginians and other Southerners the “liberty” to own African-Americans. Describing this fear-mongering, Burstein and Isenberg wrote:

“Congress, if it wished, could draft every slave into the military and liberate them at the end of their service. If troop quotas were determined by population, and Virginia had over 200,000 slaves, Congress might say: ‘Every black man must fight.’ For that matter, a northern-controlled Congress might tax slavery out of existence.

“Mason and Henry both ignored the fact that the Constitution protected slavery on the strength of the three-fifths clause, the fugitive slave clause, and the slave trade clause. Their rationale was that none of this mattered if the North should have its way.”

At Philadelphia in 1787, the drafters of the Constitution had already capitulated to the South’s insistence on its brutal institution of human enslavement. That surrender became the line of defense that James Madison, a principal architect of the new governing structure, cited in his response to Mason and Henry.

Burstein and Isenberg wrote, “Madison rose to reject their conspiratorial view. He argued that the central government had no power to order emancipation, and that Congress would never ‘alienate the affections five-thirteenths of the Union’ by stripping southerners of their property. ‘Such an idea never entered into any American breast,’ he said indignantly, ‘nor do I believe it ever will.’

“Madison was doing his best to make Henry and Mason sound like fear-mongers. Yet Mason struck a chord in his insistence that northerners could never understand slavery; and Henry roused the crowd with his refusal to trust ‘any man on earth’ with his rights. Virginians were hearing that their sovereignty was in jeopardy.”

Despite the success of Mason and Henry to play on the fears of plantation owners, the broader arguments stressing the advantages of Union carried the day, albeit narrowly. Virginia ultimately approved ratification by 89 to 79. However, the South’s obsession over perceived threats to its institution of slavery

remained a central factor in the early decades of the Republic.

### **Arming Whites**

Though today's Right pretends that the Second Amendment was devised to give individual Americans the right to own and carry any weapon of their choice so they can shoot policemen, soldiers and other government representatives in the cause of anti-government "liberty" it was primarily a concession to the states and especially to the South's fears that were expressed at the Virginia convention.

Approved by the First Congress as part of the "Bill of Rights," the Second Amendment explained its purpose as the need to maintain "the security of a free State," an echo of Mason's concerns about "domestic safety," i.e. a Southern state's ability to maintain slavery by force and defend against slave uprisings.

As the amendment emerged from various committee rewrites, it stated: "A well-regulated Militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." But that right, of course, did not extend to all people, not to people of color.

The Second Congress put substance to the structure of state militias by passing the Militia Acts, which specifically mandated that "white men" of military age obtain muskets and other supplies for participation in state militias. At the time, the concerns were not entirely over rebellious slaves, but also over rebellious poor whites.

Part of the backdrop of the Constitutional Convention in 1787 had been Shays' Rebellion in western Massachusetts in 1786-1787, an uprising of white farmers led by a former Continental Army officer, Daniel Shays. After ratification of the Constitution, the first significant use of federalized militias was in 1794 to crush an anti-tax revolt in western Pennsylvania led by poor whites known as the Whiskey Rebellion.

That uprising was treated as an act of treason as defined by the U.S. Constitution, although President Washington used his pardon power to spare rebel leaders from execution by hanging. Similar mercy was not shown when Southern states confronted actual or suspected slave revolts. In 1800, Virginia Gov. James Monroe called out the militia to stop an incipient slave uprising known as Gabriel's Rebellion. Twenty-six alleged conspirators were hanged.

### **Jeffersonian Influences**

Of course, slavery and racism were not the only defining characteristics of the Right during the country's early years, as economic interests diverged and

political rivalries surfaced. James Madison, for instance, had been a key protégé of George Washington and an ally of Alexander Hamilton during the fight for the Constitution.

Madison had even advocated for a greater concentration of power in the federal government, including giving Congress the explicit power to veto state laws. However, after the Constitution was in place, Madison began siding with his Virginian neighbor (and fellow slave-owner) Thomas Jefferson in political opposition to the Federalists.

In the first years of the constitutional Republic, the Federalists, led by President Washington and Treasury Secretary Hamilton, pushed the limits of federal power, particularly with Hamilton's idea of a national bank which was seen as favoring the financial interests of the North to the detriment of the more agrarian South.

The Jeffersonians, coalescing around Jefferson and Madison, fiercely opposed Hamilton's national economic planning though the differences often seemed to be driven by personal animosities and regional rivalries as much as by any grand ideological vision regarding government authority. The Jeffersonians, for instance, were sympathetic to the bloody French Revolution, which made a mockery of the rule of law and the restraint of government power.

Nevertheless, history has generally been kind to Jefferson's enthusiasm for a more agrarian America and his supposed commitment to the common man. But what is left out of this praise for "Jeffersonian democracy" is that Jefferson's use of the word "farmers" was often a euphemism for his actual political base, the slave-owning plantation aristocrats of the South.

At his core, despite his intellectual brilliance, Jefferson was just another Southern hypocrite. He wrote that "all men are created equal" (in the Declaration of Independence) but he engaged in pseudo-science to portray African-Americans as inferior to whites (as he did in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*).

His racism rationalized his own economic and personal reliance on slavery. While desperately afraid of slave rebellions, he is alleged to have taken a young slave girl, Sally Hemings, as a mistress.

Jefferson's hypocrisy also surfaced in his attitudes toward a slave revolt in the French colony of St. Domingue (today's Haiti), where African slaves took seriously the Jacobins' cry of "liberty, equality and fraternity." After their demands for freedom were rebuffed and the brutal French plantation system continued, violent slave uprisings followed.

Hundreds of white plantation owners were slain as the rebels overran the colony. A self-educated slave named Toussaint L'Ouverture emerged as the revolution's leader, demonstrating skills on the battlefield and in the complexities of politics.

### **The 'Black Jacobins'**

Despite the atrocities committed by both sides of the conflict, the rebels known as the "Black Jacobins" gained the sympathy of the American Federalists. L'Ouverture negotiated friendly relations with the Federalist administration under President John Adams, and Alexander Hamilton, a native of the Caribbean himself, helped L'Ouverture draft a constitution.

But events in Paris and Washington soon conspired to undo the promise of Haiti's emancipation from slavery. Despite the Federalist sympathies, many American slave-owners, including Jefferson, looked nervously at the slave rebellion in St. Domingue. Jefferson feared that slave uprisings might spread northward. "If something is not done, and soon done," Jefferson wrote in 1797, "we shall be the murderers of our own children."

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, the chaos and excesses of the French Revolution led to the ascendance of Napoleon Bonaparte, a brilliant and vain military commander possessed of legendary ambition. As he expanded his power across Europe, Napoleon also dreamed of rebuilding a French empire in the Americas.

In 1801, Jefferson became the third President of the United States and his interests at least temporarily aligned with Napoleon's. The French dictator wanted to restore French control of St. Domingue and Jefferson wanted to see the slave rebellion crushed. President Jefferson and Secretary of State Madison collaborated with Napoleon through secret diplomatic channels. Napoleon asked Jefferson if the United States would help a French army traveling by sea to St. Domingue. Jefferson replied that "nothing will be easier than to furnish your army and fleet with everything and reduce Toussaint [L'Ouverture] to starvation."

But Napoleon had a secret second phase of his plan that he didn't share with Jefferson. Once the French army had subdued L'Ouverture and his rebel force, Napoleon intended to advance to the North American mainland, basing a new French empire in New Orleans and settling the vast territory west of the Mississippi River.

### **Stopping Napoleon**

In 1802, the French expeditionary force achieved initial success against the slave army, driving L'Ouverture's forces back into the mountains. But, as they

retreated, the ex-slaves torched the cities and the plantations, destroying the colony's once-thriving economic infrastructure. L'Ouverture, hoping to bring the war to an end, accepted Napoleon's promise of a negotiated settlement that would ban future slavery in the country. As part of the agreement, L'Ouverture turned himself in.

But Napoleon broke his word. Jealous and contemptuous of L'Ouverture, who was regarded by some admirers as a general with skills rivaling Napoleon's, the French dictator had L'Ouverture shipped in chains back to Europe where he was mistreated and died in prison.

Infuriated by the betrayal, L'Ouverture's young generals resumed the war with a vengeance. In the months that followed, the French army already decimated by disease was overwhelmed by a fierce enemy fighting in familiar terrain and determined not to be put back into slavery. Napoleon sent a second French army, but it too was destroyed. Though the famed general had conquered much of Europe, he lost 24,000 men, including some of his best troops, in St. Domingue before abandoning his campaign. The death toll among the ex-slaves was much higher, but they had prevailed, albeit over a devastated land.

By 1803, a frustrated Napoleon denied his foothold in the New World agreed to sell New Orleans and the Louisiana territories to Jefferson, a negotiation handled by Madison that ironically required just the sort of expansive interpretation of federal powers that the Jeffersonians ordinarily disdained. However, a greater irony was that the Louisiana Purchase, which opened the heart of the present United States to American settlement and is regarded as possibly Jefferson's greatest achievement as president, had been made possible despite Jefferson's misguided and racist collaboration with Napoleon.

"By their long and bitter struggle for independence, St. Domingue's blacks were instrumental in allowing the United States to more than double the size of its territory," wrote Stanford University professor John Chester Miller in his book, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery*. But, Miller observed, "the decisive contribution made by the black freedom fighters went almost unnoticed by the Jeffersonian administration."

Without L'Ouverture's leadership, the island nation fell into a downward spiral. In 1804, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the radical slave leader who had replaced L'Ouverture, formally declared the nation's independence and returned it to its original Indian name, Haiti. A year later, apparently fearing a return of the French, Dessalines ordered the massacre of the remaining French whites on the island. Jefferson reacted to the bloodshed by imposing a stiff economic embargo on Haiti. In 1806, Dessalines himself was brutally assassinated, touching off a cycle of political violence that would haunt Haiti for the next two centuries.

Even in his final years, Jefferson remained obsessed with Haiti and its link to the issue of American slavery. In the 1820s, the former president proposed a scheme for taking away the children born to black slaves in the United States and shipping them to Haiti. In that way, Jefferson posited that both slavery and America's black population could be phased out. Eventually, in Jefferson's view, Haiti would be all black and the United States white.

While the racism of Jefferson and many of his followers may be undeniable, it is not so easy to distinguish between Right and Left in those early years of the American Republic. Though Hamilton was more open-minded toward freedom for black slaves, there were elements of his government intervention on behalf of the fledgling financial sector that might today be regarded as "pro-business" or elitist as there were parts of Jefferson's attitude toward greater populism that might be seen as more "democratic."

### **Stumbling toward War**

Yet, as the first generation of American leaders passed away and the nation expanded westward, the issue of slavery remained a threat to America's unity. The South's aggressive defense of its lucrative institution of slavery opened violent rifts between pro-slave and pro-free settlers in territories to the west.

The modern distinctions between America's Right and Left also became more pronounced, defined increasingly by race. The North, building a manufacturing economy and influenced by the emancipationist movement, turned increasingly against slavery, while the South, with a more agrarian economy and much of its capital invested in slaves, could see no future without the continuation of slavery.

Politically, those distinctions played out not unlike what Anti-Federalists George Mason and Patrick Henry had predicted at Virginia's ratification convention in 1788. The North gradually gained dominance in wealth and population and the South's barbaric practice of slavery emerged as a hindrance to America's growing reputation in the world.

So, a key divide of U.S. politics between Right and Left became the differences over issues of slavery and race. The racist aspects of the Anti-Federalists and the "Jeffersonian democrats" became a defining feature of the American Right as captured in the argument for "states' rights," i.e., the rights of the Southern states either to nullify federal laws or to secede from the Union.

Though the concentration of power in Washington D.C. gave rise to legitimate questions about authoritarianism, the federal government also became the guiding

hand for the nation's economic development and for elimination of gross regional injustices such as slavery. Federal action in defense of national principles regarding justice eventually helped define the American Left.

But the slave-owning South would not go down without a fight. After the election of Republican Abraham Lincoln in 1860, 11 Southern states seceded from the Union and established the Confederate States of America with the goal of perpetuating slavery forever. It took four years of war to force the Southern states back into the Union and finally bring slavery to an end.

However, the Southern aristocracy soon reclaimed control of the region's political structure and instituted nearly a century more of racial oppression against blacks. During this Jim Crow era, racism and the cruel enforcement of racial segregation remained central elements of the American Right.

### **An Anti-Government Coalition**

In the latter half of the Nineteenth Century and the early Twentieth Century, other political and economic factors bolstered the Right, particularly a class of Northern industrialists and financiers known as the Robber Barons. Their insistence on laissez-faire economics in the North and their opposition to reformers such as Theodore Roosevelt dovetailed with anti-federal attitudes among the South's white aristocracy.

That coalition, however, was shattered by a string of Wall Street panics and other economic catastrophes culminating in the Great Depression. With millions of Americans out of work and many facing starvation, Franklin Roosevelt's administration initiated the New Deal which put people back to work building national infrastructure and imposing government regulations on the freewheeling ways of Wall Street.

Under Roosevelt, laws were changed to respect the rights of labor unions and social movements arose demanding greater civil rights for blacks and women. The Left gained unprecedented ascendancy. However, the old alliance of rich Northern industrialists and Southern segregationists saw dangers in this new assertion of federal power. The business barons saw signs of "socialism" and the white supremacists feared "race-mixing."

After World War II with the United States now a world superpower the continued existence of institutionalized racism became an embarrassment undermining America's claim to be a beacon of human freedom. Finally, spurred on by Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights activists, the federal government finally moved against the South's practice of segregation. That reignited the long-simmering conflict between federal power and states' rights.

Though the federal government prevailed in outlawing racial segregation, the Right's anger over this intrusion upon Southern traditions fueled a powerful new movement of right-wing politicians. Since the Democratic Party led the fight against segregation in the 1960s, Southern whites rallied to the Republican Party as their vehicle of political resistance.

Opportunistic politicians, such as Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, deftly exploited the white backlash and turned much of the Dixie-crut South into solid Republican Red. This resurgence of white racial resentments also merged with a reassertion of "libertarian" economics as memories of the Great Depression faded. In essence, the late Nineteenth Century alliance between segregationist whites in the South and laissez-faire businessmen in the North was being reestablished.

This right-wing collaboration reached a new level of intensity in 2008 after the election of the first African-American president whose victory reflected the emergence of a multi-racial electorate threatening to end the historic white political domination of the United States. With the election also coming amid a Wall Street financial collapse – after years of reduced government regulation – Barack Obama's arrival also portended a renewal of federal government activism. Thus, the age-old battle was rejoined.

Yet, given the cultural tenor of the time, the Right found it difficult to engage in overt racial slurs against Obama, nor could it openly seek to deny voting rights to black and brown people. New code words were needed. So Obama's legitimacy as an American was questioned with spurious claims that he had been born in Kenya, and Republicans demanded tighter ballot security to prevent "voter fraud."

Today's Right also recognized that it could not simply emphasize its Confederate heritage. A more politically correct re-branding was needed. So, the Right shifted its imagery from the "Stars and Bars" battle flag of the Confederacy to the "Don't Tread on Me" flag of the American Revolution. That way, Americans who don't overtly see themselves as racist could be drawn into the movement. [See Consortiumnews.com's ["The Right's Re-Branding: 1860 to 1776."](#)]

However, the historical narrative that the Right constructed around the nation's Founding was not the one that actually happened. In seeking to present themselves as the true defenders of the Constitution, the Right had to air-brush out the failed experiment with the Articles of Confederation, which had made the states "sovereign" and "independent" with the central government just a "league of friendship."

The Constitution represented the nation's greatest transfer of power into

federal hands in U.S. history, as engineered by Washington, Madison and Hamilton. Indeed, Madison favored even greater dominance by the central government over the states than he ultimately got in the Constitution.

However, in the Right's revisionist version, the Articles of Confederation are forgotten and the Framers were simply out to create a governing system with strong states' rights and a weak federal government. That fabrication played well with an uneducated right-wing base that could then envision itself using its Second Amendment rights to fight for the Framers' vision of "liberty."

As this right-wing narrative now plays out, Barack Obama is not only a black Muslim "socialist" oppressing liberty-loving white Christian Americans but he is a "tyrant" despoiling the beautiful, nearly divine, God-inspired Constitution that the Framers bestowed upon the nation – including, apparently, those wonderful provisions protecting slavery.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).**

---