

# The BLACK C o m m e n t a t o r

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## **Obama's Peace**

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For his continued wars against Pakistanis, Afghans, and Iraqis, his support for the overthrow of democracy in Honduras, his abetting dictatorships across the Arab and Muslim worlds (which his government finances, arms and trains in torture methods), his planning for a possible invasion of Iran, and his enthusiastic support for the racist Israeli settler colony (and its colonial wars and occupations against Palestinians), US President Barack Obama received the Nobel "Peace" Prize. This comes as no surprise, as Obama joins a long list of recipients of this sham of a prize, who are distinguished for similar "peaceful" pursuits. These include terrorists like Menachem Begin, war criminals like Henry Kissinger, ethnic-cleansing colonial generals like Yitzhak Rabin, dictators like Anwar Sadat, corrupt politicians like Yasser Arafat, and imperial presidents like Jimmy Carter. Granting this overambitious power-hungry man the recognition of the Nobel committee is therefore most apt.

Obama's most recent pursuit of peace has been to force the corrupt Palestinian Authority to discard the United Nations-issued Goldstone Report which detailed the war crimes committed by Israel in its murderous war against Palestinian civilians in Gaza ten months ago. Indeed, the first black American president has just enjoined the Palestinians and Arab and Muslim countries from the pulpit of the UN to recognize Israel's right to be a racist "Jewish State." One wonders what the American reaction would be if Palestinian and Arab leaders would call on Obama and on African Americans to recognize the right of the US to be a white state.

This is the same Obama whose hubris was of such caliber that when he gave his infamous speech in Cairo several months ago he did not grieve the tens of thousands

of Arab, including Egyptian, civilians killed by Israel's six decade-long wars and massacres against them; nor did he show solidarity with the millions of Arabs who were rendered refugees (including one million Egyptians during the War of Attrition) by Israel's barbaric bombings. Instead, Obama chose to give Arabs a lesson in European Jewish history and enjoined them to appreciate the holocaust committed by European Christians against European Jews and not the ongoing Nakba committed by European Jewish colonial settlers against Arabs. He has even forbidden Palestinians or other Arabs from ever attempting to destroy Israel's racist structures to end its racist rule. Indeed, Obama threatened Arabs that any attempt by them to destroy the racist basis of the Jewish state would be seen as tantamount to a holocaust. One wonders if he thinks ending segregation in the US and apartheid in South Africa were tantamount to the extermination of white people! This is also the same Obama who, in order to fend off the accusation of being Muslim, told us during his electoral campaign that not only was he a Christian, but that he prays to Jesus every night and that the blood of Jesus Christ will redeem him.

But general wisdom in the US has it that the election of Obama, even if it did not instantiate any change in US imperial policy abroad, has been the best thing that happened to most Americans, or at least to white liberal Americans and all African Americans, at the domestic level. This is a largely mistaken conclusion. Obama in my estimation is the worst thing that happened in recent years to African Americans, who continue to face institutional, structural, economic, cultural, social and personal discrimination on a daily basis. The racism that informs US domestic policy and causes the poverty of African Americans is not unrelated to the racism that informs US imperial policies that impoverish Egyptians, Palestinians, Hondurans, Iraqis and Afghans.

Obama's election has been best for white liberal Americans whose conscience can be assuaged by pretending that they are not racist at all and that indeed America is no longer a racist place evidenced by the election of a black man to the presidency. The fact that today African Americans are less educated and poorer than they were in the 1960s is immaterial to this self-congratulatory logic. Neither is the fact that there are more African American men today (in relative and absolute numbers) in America's racist jails than there had been at the height of apartheid in South Africa. As for Obama's ongoing policies on education and racialized crime, they of course continue the policies of his white predecessors in pushing for more corporatization of schools and jails and busting teachers unions in the interest of the white business class.

But Obama is the culmination of white liberal hopes entertained since the early '70s when the language of racism was transformed, as an effect of the cooptation of the Civil Rights movement, into a culturalist language. Black people were not inferior racially, white liberals averred, "their problem" was diagnosed as "cultural." The feeling was that if black Americans would simply speak and act like a fantasized white middle class and adopt its social and cultural values, they would cease to face discrimination and they would break the "cycle of poverty." Reform, it was decided, should aim to effect such transformation. The black middle class, formed in the late 19th century in the wake of the abolition of slavery, though a small minority among African Americans, was seen as a model to be emulated. Indeed white liberal remedies like Affirmative Action (the largest beneficiaries of which were and still are white women and not African Americans) when it benefited any blacks at all, it did so by benefiting the established small black middle class. It was conservative members of this class who, after reaping its benefits, would advocate against Affirmative Action. Thus, white women and middle class African Americans benefited from a program that improved little in the lives of most African Americans, while the latter would increasingly be blamed for benefiting from it at the expense of white men -- a refrain used by most

white conservatives and not a few white liberals!

As Derrick Bell has eloquently demonstrated, Affirmative Action is a cover for a system by which racism continues to be institutionalized and African Americans continue to be blamed for refusing to improve their lives despite alleged Herculean efforts on their behalf. Some of the culturalist arguments of white liberals centered on Affirmative Action's production of white-acting black folks who would join the ranks of "hard-working Americans," a racist code that refers to white people which Obama often invokes in his speeches. The fantasy of low-grade American television programs in the late 1970s and 1980s like "Different Strokes" and "Webster" was to demonstrate that if white families were afforded the opportunity to raise black kids, these kids would end up as model citizens; indeed, they could grow up to become presidents one day. It was culture, you see, not race!

Obama was of course not only raised by his white Christian mother and her family (something he -- and Joe Biden -- never tired of reminding us during his electoral campaign to fend off his paternal Muslim contamination), but even his black father was African and not African American. Passing him off as an example of what happens when African Americans are raised the "right way" is the pride and joy of white liberals enamored of their own culturalist-cum-racist ideology and inebriated by virulent American nationalism. Obama's continuation of America's imperial wars and aggressions is proof that if you put an African American in office who is raised "the right way," he will perform his imperial duties as well as any white president. Obama's winning the Nobel Peace Prize was therefore a major gain for white liberal Americans who can bask in the sun of their achievement. For after all, producing a few African Americans in the form of Barack Obama can and will silence whoever can still muster the courage to criticize this thoroughly racist system dubbed "American democracy" which continues to victimize most African Americans and much of the Third World.

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