

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

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## **Mainstream Media's Obsession with Venezuela The African World By Bill Fletcher, Jr. BC Editorial Board**

As the Venezuelan Presidential elections near (October 7th), the obsession of the US mainstream media with bringing down the administration of President Hugo Chavez resurfaces. The standard story line is generally the same: Venezuela is allegedly led by a dictator who is carrying out repression against his opponents. What is so striking about these allegations is not only their inaccuracy but how noticeably they contrast with the same mainstream US media's views of developments in our neighbor, Mexico.

In each of the elections President Chavez has won, since his first victory, there have been no credible charges of fraud. Wish as the US political elite might, Chavez has held onto significant popular support, illustrated not only in the elections but in on-going polls. Despite this, the mainstream US media insists on painting a picture of Chavez and his administration that can, at best, be described as caricature. That Chavez and his party - the Venezuelan United Socialist Party - wish to transform Venezuela is no secret. They believe in what they call "21st Century Socialism," which amounts to a shift of Venezuela (and Latin America) away from the domination of corporate capital and foreign control, and the creation of a socio-economic system based on popular power and social cooperation. It is not that Chavez is an autocrat, in other words, that bothers the US political elite but that he and his party wish to move the country along a very different path of development than is approved by the political elite in the USA.

Contrast this caricature with the manner in which Mexico is presented. On the one hand, we witness the near civil war like conditions between

elements of the Mexican government and the narco-terrorist gangs, and then the wars among the narco-terrorists. At the same time, the recent Mexican presidential election was filled with allegations of electoral fraud, resulting in the supposed victory of the candidate of the former ruling party (the Institutional Revolutionary Party or PRI). In the aftermath of this election, thousands of Mexicans demonstrated against what they perceived as electoral fraud and a silent coup by one of the two parties of the Mexican political elite. Despite the scale and militancy of these demonstrations, little coverage was made available in US mainstream media circles.

This bias in coverage is neither accidental nor recent. The demonization of other opponents of the US, such as Cuba, has a long history and is regularly ignored in discussions of US foreign policy. As the mainstream US media further consolidates, there are fewer opportunities for alternative views to be expressed, and fewer opportunities for broader coverage to be made available. As a result, we have to rely on independent media for a more accurate portrayal of the situation.

At the same time, it is worth contesting the portrayal of reality by the mainstream media. Progressive-minded people need to take a cue from the political Right and 'bombard' the media with our own concerns. When we see bias, such as in the case of the demonization of Venezuela, compared with the hands-off of Mexico, we need to call them on it. In our silence we let myths and distortions pass for truth. And when those myths and distortions are accepted as truth by masses of people, they can translate into support for governmental policies that not only hurt the lives and sovereignty of other countries, but also take us, in the USA, further down the road toward authoritarianism.

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