

Brazil: Democracy, Libya, Selective History and the African-American President

By Arnold August, October 2011

In Brazil, the first leg of a March 2011 Latin American trip, Obama stressed his opinion that the U.S. and Brazil are “the hemisphere’s two largest democracies and the two largest economies.”¹ Exactly two hours and forty-five minutes later, Obama organized a press conference in Brasilia in which he announced, “Today I authorized the Armed Forces of the United States to begin a limited military action in Libya in support of an international effort to protect Libyan civilians. The action has now begun.”²

The next day, March 20, in Rio de Janeiro, he was afforded the opportunity to address the entire Brazilian population. He said the U.S. and Brazil “began in similar ways ... home to ancient and indigenous peoples.... The Americas were discovered by men who sought a New World, ... settled by pioneers who pushed westward.... We became colonies claimed by distant crowns, but soon declared our independence.”³ The question remains: how is it possible to compare a country like the U.S., whose settled inhabitants, even more so than the British colonists, pushed westward and committed genocide against the Indigenous peoples? Who actively encouraged slavery and began expansion toward Latin America as part of the manifest destiny of a chosen people, the beacon on the hill for the whole world, stemming from the very foundation of the Thirteen Colonies in 1620? Brazil is part of this Latin America, also a victim like the other countries in the region, after Portuguese colonialism, of U.S. domination and exploitation. Brazil has also taken a strong stance against the 2009 military coup d’état in Honduras, which was supported by Obama; Brazil opposes the U.S. blockade of Cuba and demands its complete elimination, which Obama steadfastly opposes. These are two different worlds, the First World and the Third World, each with its own traditions, values and international stands, a history completely distorted by Obama.

Obama spoke about how Brazil fought against “two decades of dictatorship,” referring to the 1964 coup, to move toward a democracy.⁴

However, who sponsored and supported the military coup in Brazil in 1964? It was the U.S. under the presidencies of none other than the Democratic Party presidents J.F. Kennedy and L.B. Johnson. As it later came to light through the investigation of Presidential Libraries and archives, these presidents were

instrumental in the 1964 military coup and the subsequent support for it against “communist” and “left-wing dangers.” Moreover, it was the U.S. military attaché Vernon Walters, a CIA veteran troubleshooter, and later President Ronald Reagan’s UN Ambassador, who coordinated matters with the Brazilian military.⁵ This is one example of how Obama tries to falsify history in order to attempt to distance himself from the role not only of his country, but of his own political party. At the same time, it explains Obama’s penchant for Ronald Reagan as narrated in his second book. Eduardo Galeano’s famous book *Open Veins of Latin America* was given to Obama as a gift by Chávez during the 2009 Trinidad and Tobago Summit. In this classic, the Uruguayan author details how U.S. mining interests were directly involved in the Brazilian military coup and the dictatorship that followed.⁶ Regarding this book, Obama’s main adviser for the 2009 Summit and his 2011 Latin America trip, Daniel Restrepo, said,

He has not read it and I doubt that I will read it ... and I doubt if the President has time to focus on the book ... but obviously it is a book out of a past which we would like to leave behind us.⁷

Obama further distanced himself from the previous administrations while, at the same time, giving a boost to the American Dream as personified in his person and to the U.S. multi-party democracy deception. In this manner, he attempted to enhance his chances in the next (2012) presidential elections. Thus Obama deftly played the African-American card in Brazil. A carefully orchestrated media visit to the favelas (the poorest shantytowns in Rio) was organized, with the photo ops concentrating on the Obama family kicking around a soccer ball with African-Brazilians. A review of a sample of the major press in Spanish and English based in Latin America, the U.S. and the U.K., the latter two with international repercussions, proves to be quite instructive. Only a very infinite minority mentioned, in passing, that there were demonstrations in Brazil against Obama’s presence and his interest in the oil reserves and other advantages. Virtually all the press made exclusive use of the favela visit “with the pictures and videos [the Obama trip] needed” to demonstrate that Obama is different, representing change. This was illustrated with ample quotes from Brazilians sporting Obama 2008 presidential campaign “Vote Obama” T-shirts, shouting his “Yes We Can” slogan, expressing how proud they were to have one of “their own” as president of the U.S.^{8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13}

After the morning favela visit, during his nationally broadcast speech from Rio that afternoon, Obama stated, quoting a resident, “People have to look at favelas not with pity, but as a source of presidents and lawyers.”¹⁴ This is a cruel manner of exporting and applying the American Dream to Brazil. Not only does it not apply to U.S. society, but even less so to a Third World country, especially its favelas. However, this example of the American Dream in the context of Brazil illustrates in a glaring manner that the American Dream serves as an alternative to progressive ideas and forms of struggle by the majority, whether in the U.S. or in Brazil.

Brazilian President Rousseff went out of her way to be diplomatic by toasting Obama in the following way: “We should celebrate that the first woman president of Brazil will receive today and host the first president of Afro descent of the United States of America.”¹⁵ However, the U.S. “new face” did not reciprocate in a diplomatic manner. On the contrary, Obama could not hide the arrogance of the interests he represents. He announced the war in Libya in the very country that had taken a stand against U.S. interference and bullying in the hemisphere and the world since the advent of Lula as president. Brazil is also a key country that opposed by abstaining in the 2011 U.S.-sponsored United Nations Security Council Resolution initiating the war in Libya.

¹ Obama, Barack. 2011a. “Remarks by President Obama and President Rousseff of Brazil in Brasilia, Brazil.” White House (March 19). At <<http://whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/19/remarks-president-obama-and-president-rousseff-brazil-brasilia-brazil>>.

² ———. 2011b. “Remarks by the President on Libya.” White House (March 19). At <<http://whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/19/remarks-president-libya>>.

³ ———. 2011c. “Remarks by the President to the People of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.” White House (March 20). At <<http://whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/20/remarks-president-people-brazil-rio-de-janeiro-brazil>>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Cockcroft, James D. 1996. *Latin America: History, Politics, and U.S. Policy.* (2nd ed.). Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, p. 641–53.

⁶ Galeano, Eduardo. 1997. *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent.* NY: Monthly Review Press, p. 135–36.

⁷ Vásquez, Carlos Chirinos. 2009. “EE.UU se siente bienvenido.” BBC Mundo (April 19). At <http://bbc.co.uk/mundo/america_latina/2009/04/090418_0349_entrevista_restrepo_gm.shtml>.

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- ⁸ Taylor, Guy. 2011. “What’s Driving Obama’s Latin America Trip.” World Politics Review (March 22). At <<http://worldpoliticsreview.com/trendlines/8275/whats-driving-obamas-latin-america-trip>>.
- ⁹ Cabral, Paulo. 2011. “Obama Woos Brazil in Bid to Build Better Ties.” BBC News, Rio de Janeiro (March 21). At <<http://bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-12802978>>.
- ¹⁰ ABC. 2011. “Samba, capoeira y fútbol para Obama en la Ciudad de Dios.” ABC digital (March 21). At <<http://abc.com.py/nota/samba-capoeira-y-futbol-para-obama-en-la-ciudad-de-dios/>>.
- ¹¹ Voz de América. 2011. “Los Obama visitan el Cristo Redentor.” (March 20). At <<http://voanews.com/spanish/news/latin-america/rio-janeiro-Obama-rousseff-gira-118312809.html>>.
- ¹² Globovisión. 2011. “Obama juega fútbol en Ciudad de Dios.” (March 20). At <<http://globovision.com/news.php?nid=181704>>.
- ¹³ Moura, Helena de. 2011. “Obama Charms Brazilians During Two-Day Visit, Observers Say.” CNN (March 20). At <http://articles.cnn.com/2011-03-20/world/brazil.obama_1_brazilian-culture-first-lady-michelle-obama-environment-minister-marina-silva?_s=PM:WORLD>.
- ¹⁴ Obama. 2011c, op. cit.
- ¹⁵ Taylor. 2011, op. cit.