

The Obama U.K. Visit and “Shared History”

By Arnold August, October 2011

The conditions for Obama’s May 2011 address to the U.K. parliament focusing on the U.S.–U.K. age-old alliance were prepared by the Queen. The previous day she toasted “our [U.K.–U.S.] shared history, our common language,” completely ignoring the role of British colonialism in slavery and the genocide of the Indigenous peoples, a tradition followed by the Thirteen Colonies. To speak of a “common language” and “shared history” when applied to the U.S. and its democracy, even in this second decade of this century, is to flout the descendents of slavery and the continual consequences of this scourge in the country. The discourse also discounts the rapidly growing Latino population in the U.S. whose mother tongue and history is not shared with that of the U.S. and the U.K. Many Latinos, in fact, have been forced to flee to the U.S. from their countries of origin because of U.S.-led economic activities, such as free-trade agreements, to the detriment of Mexicans. Others have taken flight because of U.S.-led political persecution and repression for many decades, such as in El Salvador. Obama toasted in virtually the same words as the Queen, in reference to the U.S. and the U.K., “our values,” “common language, common history.”¹

¹ Obama, Barack. 2011. “Remarks by President Obama and Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom in Dinner Toasts.” White House (May 24). At <<http://whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/24/remarks-president-obama-and-her-majesty-queen-united-kingdom-dinner-toas>>.