

# Obama: The Most Effective of Two Evils

## Interview with Arnold August Part II

By [Julie Lévesque](#)

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

### *Part I: ["Cuban Democracy" versus "American Democracy"](#)*

*Arnold August is a political scientist, author and lecturer living in Montreal. He is the author of [Democracy in Cuba and the 1997-98 Elections](#) (Editorial José Martí). He has also contributed a chapter entitled "Socialism and Elections" for the volume [Cuban Socialism in a New Century: Adversity, Survival and Renewal](#) (University Press of Florida). His latest book is [Cuba and Its Neighbours: Democracy in Motion](#).*

Julie Lévesque: In regards to U.S. democracy, in your book *Cuba and Its Neighbours: Democracy in Motion* you talk about the notion of the lesser of two evils and the illusion of change. Could you give us an overview of your analysis of Barack Obama?

Arnold August: In this book I chronicle in a very detailed manner what I call "the Obama case study" because one of my main fears and preoccupations is not so much from the so called "right", but rather the illusions that exist among liberals and among some people on the left with regards to Obama. So I dissected everything that Obama wrote in his first two books, his book of 2004 as he was running for senate and his book of 2008, just before he was nominated. Now looking into that, it very clearly indicates that Obama, with the support of others who were responsible for building the image of change, gave the right signals to the oligarchy that he is not in favour of changing the status quo. At the same time, he provided some indications that people might look to him as a source of change.

Now, if one looks at his books very carefully, on key issues, for example on Vietnam, he stood firmly in favour of U.S. aggression of Vietnam. He ridiculed people on the left, liberals who took a stand against the Vietnam war.

JL: Like Doctor Martin Luther King.

AA: Exactly. He took a stand against Vietnam. He didn't ridicule Martin Luther King but he ridiculed people on the left who took a stand. On the issue of Chile for example, he complained in his book about people on the left, or liberals, being so concerned about the need to support the struggle of the people in Chile against Pinochet, when at the time, Obama asserted, they ignored that there was a dictatorship in the Soviet Union and other countries in the Eastern Bloc. And so he indicated clearly to the ruling circles that, as far as the basic fundamentals of U.S. foreign policy and domestic policy were concerned, that he is their man. At the same time, he gave the impression that he was in favour of change. Now he had a very specific assistant in this whole attempt to present him as the person of change, David Axelrod, who has very close ties to the ruling circles. He specializes in getting Afro-Americans elected in positions of power. He did that with the mayor of Washington D.C. and then his next customer was Obama.

JL: You explain in your book that Barack Obama was used to reduce the credibility gap among the African Americans. Could you tell us how that was done?

AA: That is really important. For example, Brzezinski who was Bill Clinton's advisor, very cleverly pointed out – he was right – that there was a major credibility gap for the American ruling circles with regards to Latin America, with countries such as Venezuela and the new movement there; and with regards to the Middle East, before the eruption took place in Egypt; and with other parts of the world. And they had to put a new face on the American foreign policy in order to recuperate that credibility and that's why he said "I am proposing Obama; he could do it."

The same thing goes for domestic policy. I think that one of the main things was that the United States has always been, and rightly so, very fearful of an African American revolt against the ruling circles. Now, when Obama made his famous speech, I believe it was for senator, he said that there is no Afro-America, no Latino-America, that there is just one United States of America. In other words, let's forget about racism especially if I get elected to the White House. And so the the most effective of two evils, is an important point.

JL: Because when one criticises Obama, a lot of people say "well, he's better than Bush". But that is not an argument and it's a way to avoid any criticism.

AA: That's right. Well, this is exactly what the problem is. Especially among people who call themselves liberals or, unfortunately, many people on the left say "well, he's better than Bush, he is the lesser of two evils." Now, I am from Montreal, and I am not an American, so in order to deal with criticism of Obama and that usual way of looking at things, I have investigated carefully other writers from the United States, for instance [Black Agenda Report](#) in the United States, based in California. They represent what is the best among African Americans, that revolutionary progressive tradition that goes back from the time of the struggle against slavery, to the 1960's and 1970's.

JL: And they are very critical of Barack Obama.

AA: Yes, because there is a major pressure from the ruling circles to declare: "We people, on the left, or liberals or progressive, we cannot criticise Obama because he is being criticized by the right." So, I ally myself if you like, with Black Agenda Report and other American scholars, intellectuals concerned with civil liberties, African American lawyers such as Michelle Alexander who wrote an excellent book on the situation of African Americans today. And I agree with Black Agenda Report that Obama, far from being the lesser of two evils, is the most effective of the two evils. One of the main themes in that chapter of my book is that Obama does not really represent a continuation of Bush policies. Quite the contrary; he represents an offensive, a new offensive on behalf of the U.S. ruling circles, domestically as well as internationally.

JL: All that while giving an illusion of positive change?

AA: Yes and it still works, because the second time around, a lot of people were still claiming "well, he is better than Romney." But he represents an offensive, if you just take for example, the upsurge among the Wall Street Movement not long after Egypt, Madison, Wisconsin and Spain, three countries in a row, which followed up on the Egyptian revolution. Now there were a lot of positive things about the Occupy Wall Street movement, and it's not a homogeneous movement, it was not then, it is not now; some are openly against the two-

party system, some are not, some make themselves unwittingly easy prey for the Obama administration. But the movement is mainly based on white middle class or lower middle class people of the United States. So you could imagine if the African American population at that time had been liberated from this illusion that Obama being in the White House means salvation to African Americans and instead join the Occupy Wall Street movement, it would have been a major problem for the U.S. ruling circles. So this is what Brzezinski had in mind, credibility gap internationally as well as domestically.

The health care reform is another example. It was just another way of increasing the profit of the insurance companies – there was nothing more than that, another offensive on the part of the ruling circles. And while providing the image that he is in favor of change, he is the one who plays the African American card every single day. Every time something happens, let's say they are honoring Martin Luther King or Rosa Parks, he says "if it was not for Martin Luther King" or "Rosa Parks, I would not be here." He never misses an occasion to raise the fact that he is an African American. At the same time, when African Americans are being killed on the streets, he has nothing to say. So in fact, and I quote some people, American scholars and people involved in legal rights and civil rights, he in fact assists in the killing of African Americans by, on the one hand, giving the impression that they are safe, because there is an African American in the White House, and at the same time not saying anything when they are killed.

If you take the example of the famous issue of the so called gun control, I wrote in my book published before the Newtown shooting that the killings are going to carry on because no one in the ruling circles raises the issue that the second amendment is a major problem. Now they have this false debate going, for or against gun control, but the competition between the Obama forces on the one hand and the so called "right forces" on the other side, merely revolves around which of these two forces are more faithful to the second amendment. None of them even think or hint at the necessity to challenge the second amendment because, in my view, the real question which should be asked in relation to gun control is "how come, in the United States, we are allowed to have an arms manufactory industry with no control, that companies can just manufacture arms of all kinds, the most devastating arms and sell them on the market?" But neither the Obama nor the other forces challenge this.

Obama keeps on saying "our Constitution is the oldest democratic Constitution in the world." It's true that it's a very old constitution, but that's a negative thing. Is it not time for the constitution to be updated? That people should have a say about what the constitution should be in the United States of America? The basic clauses such as the right to be armed should be rethought in order to eliminate this whole plague on American society?

JL: You also talk about the fact that the military industrial complex as well is never challenged by any of the two parties.

AA: Now, for example there is – if you watch CNN or any other U.S. broadcast – they keep on repeating continuously that in the United States you have democrats/republicans – left/right – liberals/conservatives. They keep giving the impression there's two opposing forces in the United States of America. But it isn't the case. It is basically the same force which changes its appearance from time to time. When one force gets discredited, they put the other in its place.

JL: You mean the same economic interests are behind the two parties?

AA: That's right. Now there has been a lot of debate over the last while regarding budget, amounts of money necessary, but there are several American academics, which I mention in my book, who say that you can say anything about the U.S. budget or U.S. spending, but you cannot touch upon the issue of military spending. I think that one of the weaknesses of the Occupy Wall Street movement is that they talk about the banks in general without putting in perspective or without highlighting the proportion of military spending due to the fact that the United States is an imperial power. As a result of this imperialism, therefore, the U.S is necessarily spending money on armaments, and there is the fusion of the military, the industries and the banks resulting in military spending. The whole economy in the United States is built on military spending but no one challenges that, including Obama. They can make some adjustments, a few dollars less here, a few dollars more here, but addressing the reasons why a very important portion of American spending goes on the military is not allowed to enter into the discussion.

JL: And if both parties agree on that issue, does that not mean that when it comes to foreign policy, they agree that America needs to maintain and increase its military power everywhere on the globe?

AA: That's exactly it. In fact Obama, right from the beginning, said that the United States taking it from the puritans at the end of the 18th century is a light for the world; it is the most powerful country in the world, it is the best nation in the world, even after the American soldiers would commit atrocities against people in Iraq or Afghanistan or anywhere, he would say "We have the best army in the world – the best nation in the world." And sometimes he's been accused of being against "American exceptionalism", the idea that America is an exceptional country. But that is not true that he is against this concept. He even said he agrees with American exceptionalism, that this was born at the end of the 18th century with the puritans. He said "We are an exceptional nation and we have a special role to play in the world to bring democracy, civilization and culture to the people in the world."

So there is no difference between him and people such as Palin, Romney or McCain. The only difference is that the Obama approach as manufactured by Axelrod and others is much more effective in pulling the wool over the eyes of many people; and my basic conclusion is that democracy in the U.S. now works very well, it is not in crisis. They are able to recuperate themselves after Bush, to put an entirely new face on a policy that is increasing the attacks on a world scale on behalf of Obama. Just look at what he's done over the last five years from Iraq, Afghanistan, and other attacks in several countries; Soon after he was elected for his first mandate, a coup d'état took place in Honduras. Bush, McCain, Palin would not have been able to get away with it, but Obama got away with doing this coup d'état because there was still – even still now amongst some Latin American, progressive circles – a certain degree of illusion regarding Obama, that he was different from the Republicans or the right. But he really worked in favour of this Honduras coup d'état using with the better Ivy League language, and body talk, to give the impression that he's not really behind it. But what did he say during the Honduras coup? Once Zelaya, the president was kidnapped, taken out of Honduras and then people were on the streets for over 100 days, risking their lives to demonstrate against the coup d'état and the American-backed military there, Obama kept on saying (and also Clinton and the others) that both sides have to use restraint. That's very interesting. You have the military in power there, Zelaya outside of the country, people with their bare hands trying to resist, and he puts both sides on the same level – both sides have to use restraint.

JL: He tried to look neutral?

AA: Right. But in fact Obama never agreed that Zelaya should return to Honduras as a president. He said "I am against the coup, it's no good, I am against the military, it's no good," but he would always oppose the return of Zelaya , who was elected, to Honduras. So that's how they operate, that's how the United States got away with it.

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