

Why Do They Flee?

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

- *The current mass exodus of people from Central America to the United States, with the daily headline-grabbing stories of numerous children involuntarily separated from their parents, means it's time to remind my readers once again of one of the primary causes of these periodic mass migrations.*

Those in the US generally opposed to immigration make it a point to declare or imply that the United States does not have any legal or moral obligation to take in these Latinos. This is not true. The United States does indeed have the obligation because many of the immigrants, in addition to fleeing from drug violence, are escaping an economic situation in their homeland directly made hopeless by American interventionist policy.

It's not that these people prefer to live in the United States. They'd much rather remain with their families and friends, be able to speak their native language at all times, and avoid the hardships imposed upon them by American police and other right-wingers. But whenever a progressive government comes to power in Latin America or threatens to do so, a government sincerely committed to fighting poverty, the United States helps to suppresses the movement and/or supports the country's right-wing and military in staging a coup. This has been the case in Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua and Honduras.

The latest example is the June 2009 coup (championed by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton) ousting the moderately progressive Manuel Zelaya of Honduras. The particularly severe increase in recent years in Honduran migration to the US is a direct result of the overthrow of Zelaya, whose crime was things like raising the minimum wage, giving subsidies to small farmers, and instituting free education. It is a tale told many times in Latin America: The downtrodden masses finally put into power a leader committed to reversing the status quo, determined to try to put an end to two centuries of oppression ... and before long the military overthrows the democratically-elected government, while the United States – if not the mastermind behind the coup – does nothing to prevent it or to punish the coup regime, as only the United States can punish; meanwhile Washington officials pretend to be very upset over this “affront to democracy” while giving major support to the coup regime. The resulting return to poverty is accompanied by government and right-wing violence against those who question the new status quo, giving further incentive to escape the country.

Talk delivered by William Blum at the Left Forum in New York, June 2, 2018

We can all agree I think that US foreign policy must be changed and that to achieve that the mind – not to mention the heart and soul – of the American public must be changed. But what do you think is the main barrier to achieving such a change in the American mind?

Each of you I'm sure has met many people who support American foreign policy, with whom

you've argued and argued. You point out one horror after another, from Vietnam to Iraq to Libya; from bombings and invasions to torture. And nothing helps. Nothing moves these people.

Now why is that? Do these people have no social conscience? Are they just stupid? I think a better answer is that they have certain preconceptions. Consciously or unconsciously, they have certain basic beliefs about the United States and its foreign policy, and if you don't deal with these basic beliefs you may as well be talking to a stone wall.

The most basic of these basic beliefs, I think, is a deeply-held conviction that no matter what the US does abroad, no matter how bad it may look, no matter what horror may result, the government of the United States means well. American leaders may make mistakes, they may blunder, they may lie, they may even on many occasions cause more harm than good, but *they do mean well*. Their intentions are always honorable, even noble. Of that the great majority of Americans are certain.

Frances Fitzgerald, in her famous study of American school textbooks, summarized the message of these books:

"The United States has been a kind of Salvation Army to the rest of the world: throughout history it had done little but dispense benefits to poor, ignorant, and diseased countries. The U.S. always acted in a disinterested fashion, always from the highest of motives; it gave, never took."

And Americans genuinely wonder why the rest of the world can't see how benevolent and self-sacrificing America has been. Even many people who take part in the anti-war movement have a hard time shaking off some of this mindset; they march to spur America – the America they love and worship and trust – they march to spur this noble America back onto its path of goodness.

Many of the citizens fall for US government propaganda justifying its military actions as often and as naively as Charlie Brown falling for Lucy's football.

The American people are very much like the children of a Mafia boss who do not know what their father does for a living, and don't want to know, but then they wonder why someone just threw a firebomb through the living room window.

This basic belief in America's good intentions is often linked to "American exceptionalism". Let's look at just how exceptional America has been. Since the end of World War 2, the United States has:

1. Attempted to overthrow more than 50 foreign governments, most of which were democratically-elected.
2. Dropped bombs on the people of more than 30 countries.
3. Attempted to assassinate more than 50 foreign leaders.
4. Attempted to suppress a populist or nationalist movement in 20 countries.
5. Grossly interfered in democratic elections in at least 30 countries.
6. Led the world in torture; not only the torture performed directly by Americans upon foreigners, but providing torture equipment, torture manuals, lists of people to be tortured, and in-person guidance by American teachers, especially in Latin America.

This is indeed exceptional. No other country in all of history comes anywhere close to such a record. But it certainly makes it very difficult to believe that America means well.

So the next time you're up against a stone wall ... ask the person what the United States would have to do in its foreign policy to lose his or her support. What for this person would finally be TOO MUCH. Chances are the US has already done it.

Keep in mind that our precious homeland, above all, seeks to dominate the world. For economic reasons, nationalistic reasons, ideological, Christian, and for other reasons, world hegemony has long been America's bottom line. And let's not forget the powerful Executive Branch officials whose salaries, promotions, agency budgets and future well-paying private sector jobs depend upon perpetual war. These leaders are not especially concerned about the consequences for the world of their wars. They're not necessarily bad people; but they're amoral, like a sociopath is.



Take the Middle East and South Asia. The people in those areas have suffered horribly because of Islamic fundamentalism. What they desperately need are secular governments, which have respect for different religions. And such governments were actually instituted in the recent past. But what has been the fate of those governments?

Well, in the late 1970s through much of the 1980s, Afghanistan had a secular government that was relatively progressive, with full rights for women, which is hard to believe, isn't it? But even a Pentagon report of the time testified to the actuality of women's rights in Afghanistan. And what happened to that government? The United States overthrew it, allowing the Taliban to come to power. So keep that in mind the next time you hear an American official say that we have to remain in Afghanistan for the sake of the women.

After Afghanistan came Iraq, another secular society, under Saddam Hussein. And the United States overthrew that government as well, and now the country has its share of

crazed and bloody jihadists and fundamentalists; and women who are not covered up properly are sometimes running a serious risk.

Next came Libya; again, a secular country, under Moammar Gaddafi, who, like Saddam Hussein, had a tyrant side to him but could in important ways be benevolent and do some marvelous things. Gaddafi, for example, founded the African Union and gave the Libyan people the highest standard of living in Africa. So, of course, the United States overthrew that government as well. In 2011, with the help of NATO, we bombed the people of Libya almost every day for more than six months.

Can anyone say that in all these interventions, or in any of them, the United States of America meant well?

When we attack Iran, will we mean well? Will we have the welfare of the Iranian people at heart? I suggest you keep such thoughts in mind the next time you're having a discussion or argument with a flag-waving American.

In case you haven't noticed

No evidence of "Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election" has yet been presented. And we still await even a believable explanation of how the supposedly advanced American nation of 138 million voters could be so crucially influenced by a bunch of simplistic, often-crude, postings on Facebook and elsewhere on the Internet.

In May, the House Intelligence Committee began releasing the text of numerous of these postings as evidence of Russian interference. The postings dealt with both sides of many issues, including football players who knelt during the national anthem to bring attention to issues of racism, and pro- and anti-Trump and Clinton messages. Most did not even mention Trump or Clinton; and many were sent out before Trump was even a candidate.

So what did any of this have to do with swaying the result of the election? The committee did not say. However, Cong. Adam Schiff (Calif.), the top Democrat on the committee, stated:

"They sought to harness Americans' very real frustrations and anger over sensitive political matters in order to influence American thinking, voting and behavior. The only way we can begin to inoculate ourselves against a future attack is to see first-hand the types of messages, themes and imagery the Russians used to divide us."

Aha! So that's it, dividing us! Imagine that - the American people, whom we all know are living in blissful harmony and fraternity without any noticeable anger or hatred toward each other, would become divided! Damn those Russkis!

Many of the Facebook postings were done well after the presidential election. That alone should have made the congressmen think that perhaps the ads had nothing to do with the US election, but that is not what they wanted to think.

This all lends credence to the suggestion that what actually lay behind the events was a so-called "click-bait" scheme wherein certain individuals earned money based on the number of times a particular website is accessed. The mastermind behind this scheme is reported to

be a Russian named Yevgeny Prigozhin of the Internet Research Agency of St. Petersburg, which is referred to by the House committee as “Kremlin-sponsored”, without explanation.

The organization has been named in an indictment issued by special counsel Robert Mueller’s investigating committee, but as the *Washington Post* reported:

“The indictment does not accuse the Russian government of any involvement in the scheme, nor does it claim that it succeeded in swaying any votes.”

In the new Cold War, as in the old one, the powers-that-be in America seldom miss an opportunity to make Russia look bad, even to the point of farce. Evidence is no longer required. Accusation is sufficient.

Another charming example of American exceptionalism

The *Washington Post* coverage of the football World Cup in Russia couldn’t allow all the joy and good vibes to go unchallenged of course. So they found “a pipe worker named Alexander” who had a joke to tell: “An adviser comes to Putin and says, ‘I have good news and bad news. The good news is that you were elected president. The bad news is that no one voted for you.’”

Now let’s imagine an American adviser coming to President Trump and saying: “I have good news and bad news. The good news is that you were elected president. The bad news is that you didn’t get the most votes.”

This has now happened five times in the United States, five times that the “winner” received fewer popular votes than any of his opponents; this insult to democracy and common sense has now happened twice within the most recent five presidential elections.

And I find the worst news is that a year and a half after Trump’s election I haven’t heard or read a word of anyone in the US Congress or a state legislature who has taken the first step in the process of modifying the US Constitution to finally do away with the stupid, completely outmoded Electoral College system. If it’s such a good system, why doesn’t the United States use it for local and state elections? Why doesn’t it exist anywhere else in the world? Is it to be regarded as part of our beloved “American exceptionalism”?

The other “n” word is even more prohibited

The city of Seattle on June 12 voted to repeal a tax hike on large employers that it had instituted only weeks before. The new tax would have raised \$48 million annually to combat Seattle’s homelessness and affordable-housing crisis. The Seattle area has the third-largest homeless population in the country.

The plan had passed the City Council unanimously but was fiercely opposed by Amazon.com and much of the city’s business community.



Many American cities are sincerely struggling to deal with this problem but are faced with similar insurmountable barriers. The leading causes of homelessness in the US are high rents and low salaries. A report released June 13 by the National Low Income Housing Coalition stated that there is nowhere in the country where someone working a full-time minimum-wage job could afford to rent a modest two-bedroom apartment. Not even in Arkansas, the state with the cheapest housing. More than 11.2 million families wind up spending more than half their paychecks on housing. How did America, “the glorious land of opportunity” wind up like this?

The cost of rent increases inexorably, year after year, regardless of tenants’ income. Any improvement in the system has to begin with a strong commitment to radically restraining, if not completely eliminating, the landlords’ profit motive. Otherwise nothing of any significance will change in society, and the capitalists who own the society – and their liberal apologists – can mouth one progressive-sounding platitude after another as their chauffeur drives them to the bank.

But to what extent can landlords be forced to accept significantly less in rents? Very little can be done. It’s the nature of the beast. Rent control in some American cities has slowed down the steady increases, but still leaving millions in constant danger of eviction or crippling deprivation. The only remaining solution is to “nationalize” real estate.

Eliminating the profit motive in various sectors, or all sectors, in American society would run into a lot less opposition than one might expect. Consciously or unconsciously it’s already looked down upon to a great extent by numerous individuals and institutions of influence. For example, judges frequently impose lighter sentences upon lawbreakers if they haven’t actually profited monetarily from their acts. And they forbid others from making a profit from their crimes by selling book or film rights, or interviews. It must further be kept in mind that the great majority of Americans, like people everywhere, do not labor for profit, but for

a salary. The citizenry may have drifted even further away from the system than all this indicates, for American society seems to have more trust and respect for “non-profit” organizations than for the profit-seeking kind. Would the public be so generous with disaster relief if the Red Cross were a regular profit-making business? Would the Internal Revenue Service allow it to be tax-exempt? Why does the Post Office give cheaper rates to non-profits and lower rates for books and magazines which don’t contain advertising? For an AIDS test, do people feel more confident going to the Public Health Service or to a commercial laboratory? Why does “educational” or “public” television not have regular commercials? What would Americans think of peace-corps volunteers, elementary and high-school teachers, clergy, nurses, and social workers who demanded well in excess of \$100 thousand per year? Would the public like to see churches competing with each other, complete with ad campaigns selling a New and Improved God? Why has American Airlines just declared “We have no desire to be associated with separating families, or worse, to profit from it.”

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This article was originally published on [The Anti-Empire Report](#).

Notes

1. See Mark Weisbrot, “[Top Ten Ways You Can Tell Which Side The United States Government is On With Regard to the Military Coup in Honduras](#).” Also see William Blum, *Killing Hope*, chapters on Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador.

2. *Moon of Alabama*, “[Mueller Indictment – The ‘Russian Influence’ Is A Commercial Marketing Scheme](#)”, February 17, 2018

3. *Washington Post*, June 23, 2018

4. *Washington Post*, June 9 and 16, 2018

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