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A Very Brief History of Capitalism, Empire, and the Yellow Peril

Unlike the propagandists that publish most of the textbooks that we brainwash our children with in the US, reality-based historians have oft observed that the history of civilization is a history of the ongoing conflict between the haves and the have-nots, the rich and the poor, the ruling class and those they would like to rule. One of the main factors that continually makes this conflict a very dynamic one that is forever unfolding in new ways is the obvious inequity of the whole thing, with a small class of rulers, owners, and landlords always trying to control a very large majority of subjects, workers and tenants. In order to maintain such a state of constant inequality, particularly in severely unequal societies/empires like the United States, strategies of divide and rule are always in play, whether we're talking about maintaining domestic tranquility, or running the global American empire.

From the time of British colonization of the Americas, the colonial rulers and later the sovereign US rulers of this land have sought to keep the bulk of the population — the tenant farmers, the small landowners, the urban workers and renters, the immigrant and the native-born, the enslaved and the free — at each other's throats, and thus distracted with fratricidal conflict, rather than united in opposition to their common oppressors. The ways society is divided and the ways the rulers seek to exploit those divisions locally and globally evolves over time, just as other things evolve, such as technology, and different forms of organization, such as corporations, unions, parliaments, and developments such as the massive US military industrial complex.

In light of these realities, it's not hard to understand scenes like President Biden going to Alabama to remember those killed by white supremacists in a church bombing in 1963, while having nothing to say about state-sanctioned pogroms being committed by organized mobs of people against Palestinians — towns being burned to the ground by mobs sanctioned by one of the biggest recipients of US military aid on the planet. In light of these realities, we can understand why the US Attorney General is once again in Ukraine, talking about prosecuting Russian war crimes in the International Criminal Court, while saying nothing about prosecuting war crimes committed by Americans, Saudis, or Israelis. In light of these realities, we can see why the State Department can justify the double-standard involved with publicly attacking the Chinese government for allegedly considering selling arms to Russia on the same day as they announce the sales of the US's most advanced fighter jets to Taiwan.

Turning on the news in the US today means hearing a constant drumbeat of anti-Russian and anti-Chinese rhetoric that is completely detached from any sense of history, and which involves less and less effort at maintaining any semblance of objectivity.

Hearing our leaders demonize Vladimir Putin and the Chinese Communist Party, one might think the leaders of the free world have only had it out for the Russians and the Chinese since Putin or Xi came to power. Or if not then, perhaps since both countries had revolutions, in 1917 and 1949, respectively. The historical reality is far more insidious.

The powers-that-be in the US have been actively vilifying Russian and Chinese migrants, while tremendously profiting from their labor, since the 19th century, just as the US military and State Department has been actively working to weaken and control Russia and China for most of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. Don't be fooled by the rhetoric about specific Russian or Chinese leaders or governments. US policies towards Russia, China, and towards Russian and Chinese people has nothing to do with that. It has to do with methods of divide and rule at home, and abroad, with geopolitical concerns around how to effectively dominate the world.

History, from the 19th century right up to today, illustrates what I'm talking about. Unfortunately, I'm pretty sure this is history that is entirely lost on the likes of Joe Biden, Antony Blinken, Merrick Garland, or the supposedly, fashionably "anti-globalist" leaders of the Republican Party, either. I'll highlight a little bit of this history.

In the 19th century the US authorities and business owners actively solicited migration of workers from Europe as well as from China, Japan, and elsewhere. In the case of Chinese and Japanese migration, it was more about guest worker programs — families not

welcome. So when we talk about the US having a whites-only immigration policy back then, this didn't include those who were brought in from China to build the railroads, and then deported afterwards, which is what happened, on a huge scale. Asian workers were super-exploited, facing discrimination of all kinds, and frequent massacres at the hands of desperate mobs of their fellow workers, many of whom had swallowed the nonsense propaganda about the Chinese as people who would always be willing to work for half the going wage. Several different Exclusion Acts were passed, aimed specifically at Asians, that prevented workers from bringing their families over, and/or forced workers to go back to Asia after the corporate barons had no more need of their labor. Exclusion laws against Asian emigration were in place until 1943.

Meanwhile in China itself, the US military participated in the Opium Wars, along with the British, the French, and the Russians, among others, which involved imperial European and American troops burning entire Chinese cities, killing tens of thousands of people, and forcing the Chinese government of the time to import addictive opium from the British-run farms in British-occupied India. This invasion which forced China to open the gates to what became a nationwide epidemic of opium addiction is what the British and the American authorities referred to as the "opening" of China to "free trade." The deadly Opium Wars were known as "trade wars."

On the east coast in particular, as the US was flooded with migrants from Ireland to Russia and most everywhere in between throughout the 19th century — actively solicited by the kingpins of American industry — those migrating from eastern and southern Europe in particular developed a reputation for being especially subversive. This reputation, of course, was actively promoted by the powers-that-be, as one more avenue for creating division among the source of their profits, and their class enemy, the working class.

In reality, the horrific conditions of the factories, mines and mills of 19th-century America made radicals out of most people who weren't killed off by those conditions, regardless of their race, gender, or national origin. But certainly the ranks of the organized workers and rebels was indeed full of Italians, Germans, and Russians, along with everybody else. So other exclusion laws were passed to target eastern and southern Europeans, which were not lifted until 1944. These laws meant that throughout the 1920s, 1930's, and well into the 1940's, Germans and Russians — Jews included — were barred from migrating to the US directly. Germans, Russians (Jewish or non-Jewish), along with Italians, were especially singled out by those in power and their media mouthpieces as undesirable

subversives. The prejudice against these groups was only amplified by events such as the Russian Revolution.

Meanwhile in Russia itself, as World War 1 was coming to an end, after the Bolsheviks had seized power, the US, the UK, and many other allied countries participated in an invasion of the Soviet Union with hundreds of thousands of soldiers, aimed at supporting the Czarist forces that were attempting to take power back from the Red Army, an effort which failed.

After the Chinese Revolution in 1949, the US and many other participating forces from other countries invaded Korea, which was basically in the course of having a popular national revolution against the dictator which the Japanese Empire had put into power, a dictator which the US backed. China supported the revolutionary forces in Korea, against the US-supported dictator. In the course of three years of active conflict, hundreds of thousands of Chinese soldiers were killed, along with tens of thousands of US soldiers.

The US empire has hundreds of military bases around the world, which have strategically, intentionally surrounded both Russia and China. The US is the only country with such military bases around the world, that can transport large numbers of troops wherever it wants to. The notion that the US authorities are concerned with the lives of Ukrainians, Taiwanese, or people in Xinjiang is just as laughable as the notion that the US authorities are concerned with the lives of Palestinians, Yemenis, or Guatemalans. We hear about the former and not the latter groups for purely cold, geopolitical, strategic reasons. Anyone who thinks otherwise is engaging in a futile exercise to put a human face on an entirely inhuman set of imperial calculations — a set of calculations which has its roots in centuries past.

I am a descendant of Russian Jewish migrants who were subject to every form of discrimination, before they left Minsk, and later in the northeastern United States. I am raising a family with a Japanese woman, and our children look visibly Asian. One doesn't need to have any personal involvement in the history of abuse of Russian or Asian migrants in this country, or the history of US imperialism in Europe or Asia, to be worried about what the future might look like, as the leadership of both parties in this country paint a rising China as somehow threatening to the US, and we hear more and more about Chinese expansionist intentions, Chinese coal plants causing climate change, Chinese surveillance apps stealing our data, Chinese subsidies to Chinese industries undermining American industry, Chinese workers undercutting American workers, Chinese spies

among us in academia and in Silicon Valley, seeking to steal our secrets, and even Chinese viruses.

One of the many things about Biden's trip to Alabama, and all his new-found rhetoric about racial equality, at least when it comes to discrimination against Black Americans, is that out of the other side of his mouth he is telling us to fear the Russians and the Chinese out there in Russia and China, as well as the ones among us who may fail to demonstrate the requisite loyalty to the American Way, and loathing of their respective governments and everything they stand for. This is how the politicians talk before the wars and the lynchings begin.

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