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Hypocrisy Empire (I)

Back to Roots: American Democracy and Slavery

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There have been many pretenders to world domination. They have all aspired to hegemony and claimed to have a unique mission to accomplish but each of them had special traits. What is the main specific feature of the American Empire to distinguish it from other empires in history? I believe it's unparalleled hypocrisy penetrating the life in America and the country's foreign policy.

There is nothing new here. The phenomenon has been described by Machiavelli and many others. At that the history teaches that rulers normally understood that being an absolute hypocrite did not stand them in good stead so they stopped at some point. The American

politicians and state leaders do not realize the extent of double standards practiced by the United States and based on the principle *Quod licet Jovi non licet bovi* («Gods may do what cattle may not» or «what is permitted to one person or group, is not permitted to everyone»). They find it normal to combine the blind faith in America as an example of real democracy with the conduct on the international scene which is incompatible with the principle of freedom. The inconsistency has always been a specific feature of US history forming the world vision of America's ruling circles and it is deeply enrooted in conscience. The double standard mindset was formed because since its birth the United States has always existed simultaneously in what appears to be two parallel worlds. On the one hand, it was the most modern state structure, a kind of «a shining city on a hill», on the other hand, the US was an egregious example of horrible slavery. Those times defined the mindset which allows for being a democrat with modern thinking and a slave owner treating people like cattle at the very same time. Recently archeologists have unearthed the remains a hidden passageway used by slaves at the estate of George Washington's presidential home. It was designed so Washington's guests would not see slaves as they slipped in and out of the main house. Washington lived and conducted presidential business at the house in the 1790s, when Philadelphia was the nation's capital. They also found a large basement with chains and tools for torture to punish the slaves. If the founder of the United States tortured people, then why not torture them at Guantanamo? It's worth to note that 59% of Americans support such methods of interrogation in case the people to be tortured are allegedly involved in terrorist activities. But it matters who is going to hand down a ruling and decide that the accusations were substantiated or not. The issue of slavery was not even taken into consideration when the US Constitution was written. Instead the founding fathers resorted to hypocritical circumlocutions. The section 2 of the Article IV states that «The Citizens of each State shall be entitled to all Privileges and Immunities of Citizens in the several States». (1) The people are still divided into blacks and whites as the events in Fergusson and other American cities confirm.

Democracy in America, (*De la Démocratie en Amérique*) by Alexis de Tocqueville was published in two volumes, the first in 1835 and the second in 1840. It is the most well-known globally and still unparalleled publication devoted to US political system, a kind of Holy Scripture for many generations of liberals. The book provides a brilliant description of the way the people's mindset was formed in America. Alexis de Tocqueville emphasized that it expedient to read his book along with the study *Marie, ou, L'esclavage aux Etats-Unis* (Marie or Slavery in the United States) published by his friend Gustave de Beaumont, a novel describing the separation of races in a moral society and the conditions of slaves in the USA. In 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont, two liberal-minded French aristocrats, were sent by the French government to study the American prison system. In his later letters Tocqueville indicates that he and Beaumont used their official business as a pretext to study American society instead. They spent nine months traveling the United States collecting information on the country, including its religious, political, and economic character. It should be noted that the book by Alexis de Tocqueville is recommended for study in the US universities while *Marie, ou, L'esclavage aux Etats-Unis*, a fictional study, was first translated into English (or any foreign language) and saw light as a small-circulation publication only in 1958 - in the times of Martin Luther King. The both books were elements of one comprehensive fundamental study. At that only the part more palatable to the national consciousness was offered to public. It's a pity the book written by Beaumont has never been published in Russian language to make the Russian

intelligencia more reserved in its admiration of American civilization.

The main idea of the study is stated in the introductory part. The author believed that the racial prejudice which presupposed that people can be categorized as an inferior race doomed to live in slavery would have fatal consequences for American society, «Each day it deepens the abyss which separates the two races and pursues them in every phase of social and political life; it governs the mutual relations of the whites and the colored men, corrupting the habits of the first, whom it accustoms to domination and tyranny, and ruling the fates of the Negroes, whom it dooms to the persecution of the whites; and it generates between them hatreds so violent, resentments so lasting, clashes so dangerous, that one may rightly say it will influence the whole future of American society». (2) The author wrote that the American blacks lived in inhumane conditions and it ran contrary to God's purpose and the natural rights of individuals. Over and over again Beaumont repeats that slavery corrupts free people making them inclined to double thinking - something that puts their lives under risk. According to the author, evidently sooner or later the conditions would change to make slaves take revenge for their humiliation. (3)

Beaumont dissipates the widely spread myth that the disgrace of slavery took place only in the American South while the North was consistent in its fight for the rights of Blacks. According to the author, slavery was forbidden in the North for very pragmatic reasons. There were few colored people living there and the North had no desire to introduce slavery because it would inevitably increase their numbers. At the same time, life showed that «in the most enlightened Northern states, the antipathy separating one race from the other remains the same, and, what is worthy of note, several of these states have decreed in their laws the inferiority of the blacks». (4) Even free blacks did not enjoy the same rights as whites. There was a long list of what was forbidden and inaccessible for them. Beaumont describes the numerous cases when blacks were subject to bloody pogroms for trying to exercise the most fundamental rights in such «free» cities as New York and Philadelphia. As a result, colored people escaped in a great quantity being afraid for their lives and, subsequently, trying to find a refuge wherever it was possible, «Thus, the Negroes, freed by the North, are forced by tyranny into the Southern states, and find refuge only in the midst of slavery» (5). The habit to view others as soulless agricultural tools led to callous tyranny practiced by masters towards their slaves. As the author puts it, «It is the coldest and most intelligent tyranny ever exercised by the master over the slave». (6) Beaumont thought that it couldn't last forever, he believed that «The storm is visibly gathering, one can hear its distant rumblings; but none can say whom the lightning will strike». (7) The Alexis de Tocqueville's book is perceived almost as an eulogy to the American system. But he shared the opinion of his friend in regard to the slavery in the United States. Simply his study was devoted to other issues. At that he noted those the book written by Beaumont was recommended for those who wanted to understand how extremely cruel could become those who defied the laws of nature and humaneness. (8)

Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that «Generally speaking it requires great and constant efforts for men to create lasting ills; but there is one evil which has percolated furtively into the world: at first it was hardly noticed among the usual abuses of power; it began with an individual whose name history does not record; it was cast like an accursed seed somewhere on the ground; it then nurtured itself, grew without effort, and spread with the society that accepted it; that evil was slavery». (9) Trying to look into the future he noted that «The moderns, then, after they have

abolished slavery, have three prejudices to contend against, which are less easy to attack, and far less easy to conquer, than the mere fact of servitude: the prejudice of the master, the prejudice of the race, and the prejudice of color. It is difficult for us, who have had the good fortune to be born among men like ourselves by nature, and equal to ourselves by law, to conceive the irreconcilable differences which separate the negro from the European in America. But we may derive some faint notion of them from analogy. France was formerly a country in which numerous distinctions of rank existed, that had been created by the legislation. Nothing can be more fictitious than a purely legal inferiority; nothing more contrary to the instinct of mankind than these permanent divisions which had been established between beings evidently similar. Nevertheless these divisions subsisted for ages; they still subsist in many places; and on all sides they have left imaginary vestiges, which time alone can efface. If it be so difficult to root out an inequality which solely originates in the law, how are those distinctions to be destroyed which seem to be founded upon the immutable laws of nature herself?» He added, «I see that in a certain portion of the territory of the United States at the present day, the legal barrier which separated the two races is tending to fall away, but not that which exists in the manners of the country; slavery recedes, but the prejudice to which it has given birth remains stationary. Whosoever has inhabited the United States, must have perceived, that in those parts of the Union in which the negroes are no longer slaves, they have in nowise drawn nearer to the whites. On the contrary, the prejudice of the race appears to be stronger in the states which have abolished slavery, than in those where it still exists; and nowhere is it so intolerant as in those states where servitude has never been known». (10)

Of course, as the men of vision, the both Frenchmen wrote that slavery gave rise to double conscience and influenced the internal evolution of US people. But the home-grown hypocrisy of American politicians rapidly spread on foreign policy. That's why they behave like masters towards other peoples (the sounds of whip used by slave owner is heard behind them) and practice double standards in international relations. The history provides plenty of such examples. Slavery is the main driving force behind the gradual process of turning the United States of America into a total empire of hypocrisy with no historic analogues.

(1) archives.gov

(2) Beaumont Gustave de, Marie, or, Slavery in the United States: a novel of Jacksonian America, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1999, p. 5-6

(3) Ibid, p.210

(4) Ibid, p.214

(5) Ibid, p.252

(6) Ibid, p.200

(7) Ibid, p.216

(8) Alexis de Tocqueville. Democracy in America.

(9) Ibid, p.253

(10) Ibid, p.254