

Racism's triple-whammy



by Lev Tsitrin

The talk of systemic racism is so ubiquitous that one is hard pressed not to find it in say, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. You don't need to tell me that both the Ukrainians and the Russians are white, and that racism has nothing to do with the conflict between them. I know that. And yet, I would argue that in some round-about, but very tangible way, that conflict, along with many others, was caused by racism – American racism, for that matter.

Let's start at the beginning – not with what racism is, but with what is wrong with it. Firstly, it gets the human history wrong. Whether you are a follower of Darwin and to you, the human ancestors are the upright-standing, ape-like couple from somewhere in Africa whose image I saw in a glass vitrine in the Museum of Natural History in New York, or whether you are a creationist envisioning our ancestors as Michelangelo depicted them on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, God animating Adam with a touch of His finger, and fashioning Eve out of Adam's rib, one thing is certain: we all descended from the same set of ancestors, and though we do not know the exact degree of relationship, we all are blood relatives. The thought that Hitler is my cousin, perhaps a thousand times removed, but a cousin nonetheless, is not a comfortable one – and yet, it is inescapable if one is to honestly apply the notion of our common ancestry. Name any human monster, living

or dead – Stalin, Mao, Kim, Pol Pot, bin Laden, Ayatollah Khomeini – and I have no choice but to admit that I am related to him.

And I am related by blood to everyone else, too – irrespective of their race. Again, I do not know the exact degree of relation – the birth certificates from thousands of years ago did not survive, and perhaps were not even issued in the first place, precluding an effort to figure out our common ancestors (though biblical family trees give a hint of the origin of peoples) – but the very fact that we are all related is unquestionable. By treating people of other races as being outside of the family, racism negates the basic reality – with dire consequences.

One of them is, that human talent goes underutilized whenever a talented person is denied opportunity because of racial discrimination. Not only is this unfair to that particular individual; it does great disservice to the humanity as a whole by denying us the discoveries and inventions that would have otherwise made our lives easier.

Equally pernicious is the opposite extreme, brought about by our acute repentance of the racism of the past: the desire to overcompensate for it by bending backwards and putting people from racial minorities in positions of responsibility and power even when their competence is highly questionable.

Such was the case of Barack Obama, who was elected president not because he was competent to lead the country, and the free world – but because, sensationally, he was black: given his well-documented naivety, it would never have occurred to anyone to treat him as a viable contender if he were white. His race worked for him both in primaries, allowing him to edge out Hillary by capitalizing on racial solidarity, as well in the general elections, the electorate being determined to show its anti-racist bona fides by electing a black man as President of the United States, whatever his qualifications

for the job.

As was to be expected from his past statements, it soon became obvious to everyone willing to see that Obama was indeed monumentally incompetent. If support of freedom is a fundamental American value, than how to explain Obama's refusal to support Iranians demonstrating against the ayatollahs in 2009, at the dawn of his presidency? How to explain his accommodation of the ayatollahs via the infamous Iran "deal" that traded fifteen years of fleeting time for international legitimacy granted to Iran's nuclear project, allowing Iran to build the bomb shortly after 2030 – the capacity amply illustrated by the speed with which Iranians began enriching uranium to near bomb-grade purity in 2021? How to explain that, the moment he attained presidency, he pressured the Israelis into unconscionable concessions to the Palestinians? How to explain his betrayal, at the onset of the "Arab spring," of America's ally in Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, whom he allowed to fall from power and be replaced with an Islamist regime? How to explain his reaction to Syria's Assad when, instead of enforcing the no-fly zone over Syria after Assad used chemical weapons against the rebels, Obama backed off his own "red line," opening the door to the Middle East for Russia – and gave Putin, by signalling that America is a spent force in retreat, the idea that Russia could act with impunity against Ukraine, eroding its sovereignty in its eastern regions, and invading Crimea?

Obama replaced projection of America's strength, and her determination to defend world's freedom, with apologies for America's presumed past sins – as he did in his Cairo speech, thinking that his repentance and professions of good will to all (and especially, to those deemed historically oppressed), backed by his radiant smile and the goody-goody platitudes read from the teleprompter in a mellifluous voice would charm the world into being nice and good, convincing countries to behave considerately towards one another, thus allowing the

messianic golden age of global peace to finally arrive,

This is not how Putin, Khomeini, and Xi saw it, however – politics abhors vacuum just as the nature does, and in the shift of tectonic plates of American power they smelled opportunity for expansion. It is thanks to Obama's utter incompetence that Iran is now firmly entrenched in Iraq and Syria, as well as in Yemen, arming its proxies with the most advanced precision-guided rockets and drones, and planning for the future in which it is a nuclear-armed power, determined to expand Shia domination world-wide. It is due to Obama that Russian forces now encircle Ukraine, and demand unconscionable concessions from the West.

So here we have it: racism gave us Obama's presidency, and Obama's utter incompetence gave us the present-day crises. So isn't it racism that is at the bottom of what goes on around Ukraine – though both the Ukrainians and the Russians are white?