

Graffiti for intellectuals



SIMON SAYS



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Si Frumkin

MYTHS, LEGENDS AND REALITY

We like to assume that history is based on facts but we are wrong. Most history, ancient as well as relatively recent, is based on myths and legends. Some myths are based on facts that, with time, were embellished. Others are intentional falsifications or unsubstantiated tales passed on for generations by poets, dreamers and demagogues. What most myths have in common is that most of them are never questioned or investigated – they become unchallenged history.

Migration – the movement of masses of people from one place to another – is a fertile source of myths. One of the better known is the saga of Mayflower pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock, making friends and sharing a turkey with the natives at the first Thanksgiving ceremony and founding the American nation. Just about everything about this story is inaccurate. It has been exposed by historical research, but it is still believed by the overwhelming majority of Americans.

Another myth that is accepted without questioning it is the belief most black Africans were transported into slavery in the United States. The fact is that of the ten million Africans who were kidnapped and sold by other black Africans to overwhelmingly Arab slave traders, less than 5 out of every hundred were taken to the U.S. – 96% were sold in Brazil and the Caribbean islands.

A more recent migration was that of about 4 million Jews from Czarist Russia between 1880 and 1917. Their descendants in the U.S. and South Africa firmly believe that their ancestors left because of pogroms and anti-Semitism, that Jews were murdered by the Cossacks daily and that they had to leave or perish.

The facts are different. Yes, there was anti-Semitism and there were pogroms but when compared to the bloody 20th century they were relatively insignificant – the infamous Kishinev pogrom of 1903 that outraged the world and gave the English language the word “pogrom”, lasted three days and was responsible for 47 Jews murdered and 92 severely injured, hardly a number to cause a flight of millions. At present, there is very little concern with much larger numbers that are murdered daily around the world.

Furthermore, most of the Jewish immigrants came from the Czarist Empire – not Russia itself where only very few Jews were

allowed to reside. Most Jews came from the Pale of Settlement, a giant ghetto that covered parts of Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and the Baltic areas where many towns and cities had Jewish majorities.

The reasons for the Jewish flight were primarily economic – as they were for the Irish and Italian emigrations – disruption by industrialization and development of urban economies. Jews were not allowed to be farmers; they were pauperized and had to eke out a living as artisans and laborers. There was no supporting community help and, in order to survive, some had to take a chance on leaving for an unknown country far away. The men came first, and later, if it was possible, brought their families as well.

And here are five contemporary myths about a contemporary immigration: the influx of Mexicans and others like them across our porous borders. So, here for your consideration, are the largely ignored facts about it:



Myth #1. *Migration is caused by lack of economic development.*

International migrations do not originate in really poor countries, but in those that are developing and growing dynamically. (See, *immigration from Czarist Empire*, above) Mexico is not a poor country. It has a trillion dollar economy, a per capita income of \$9,000, (Russia has \$9,700), a fully industrialized economy, high urbanization and high life expectancy.

Myth #2: *Rapid population growth causes migration.*

The fertility rate in Mexico is 2.3 per woman, slightly above “replacement” level. Arab and sub-Saharan countries have the highest birth rates and minimal migration.

Myth #3: *Migrants move because the wages are higher in target countries.*

Research has shown that international migration is a tool to overcome the lack of credit opportunities. Mexico has virtually no mortgage banking and a large share of money earned by Mexican workers in the U.S. is used to build or buy homes in Mexico. Six out of every hundred of Mexican immigrants buy a house in Mexico after just 1 year in the U.S.; after 5-9 years – 41% will do so, and 64% after staying more than 10 years.

Myth #4: *Mexican migrants are attracted by generous public benefits.*

Illegal immigrants are not likely to use public services. Only 10% have sent a child to a U.S. public school, 7% have received SSI and less than 5% have used food stamps, welfare or unemployment compensation. However, 60% had Social Security and income taxes withheld. Immigrants from Russia, Cuba, Vietnam, Thailand or Cambodia are more likely to use government benefits.

Myth #5: *Most Mexican immigrants want to settle permanently in the U.S.*

Mexican immigrants come and go. 80% say that they had made no more than three trips to the U.S. and 75% stayed less than two years. Most Mexican immigrants do not intend to permanently settle north of the border.

Recent research shows that about 17% of all able-bodied Mexicans between 17 and 35 are working in the U.S. This enables Mexico to maintain a viable economy and a sustainable rate of unemployment while providing a willing, cheap and, most importantly, **peaceful** working force for the U.S.

Can you imagine what the situation would be if Mexico were a Moslem country with a population eager to reoccupy Arizona, California, New Mexico and Nevada from the Gringos? The attacks of suicide bombers, riots, car burnings, bombs in supermarkets, sports stadiums and on freeways?

I think the myths are just that – myths. Let us stick to reality and be grateful for it. Ω

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casually by Africans than by Westerners. I, and I suspect most Africans, are completely injured to reports of African suffering, for whatever cause. Drought causes crops to fail, thousands face starvation? Yup, that happened many times while I was growing up. Inter-tribal rivalry and warfare causes wholesale slaughter? Yep, been happening there for millennia, long before Whitey got there. Governments becoming rich and corrupt while their populations starved? Not more than nine or ten of those. In my lifetime, the following tragedies have occurred, causing untold millions of deaths: famine in Biafra, genocide in Rwanda, civil war in Angola, floods in South Africa, famine in Somalia, civil war in Sudan, famine in Ethiopia, floods in Mozambique, wholesale slaughter in Uganda, and tribal warfare in every single country. There are others, but you get the point.

Yes, all this was also true in Europe--maybe a thousand years ago. But not any more. And Europe doesn't teem with crocodiles, ultra-venomous snakes and so on.

The Dutch controlled the floods. All of Europe controls famine--it's non-existent now. Apart from a couple of examples of massive, state-sponsored slaughter (Nazi Germany, Communist Russia), Europe since 1700 doesn't even begin to compare to Africa today. Casual slaughter is another thing altogether--rare in Europe, common in Africa.

More to the point, the West has evolved into a society with a stable system of government, which follows the rule of law, and has respect for the rights and life of the individual--none of which is true in Africa.

Among old Africa hands, we have a saying, usually accompanied by a shrug: "Africa wins again." This is usually said after an incident such as:

A beloved missionary is butchered by his congregation, for no apparent reason;

A tribal chief prefers to let his tribe starve to death rather than accepting food from the Red Cross (would mean he wasn't all-powerful, you see);

An entire nation starves to death, while its ruler accumulates wealth in foreign banks;

A new government comes into power, promising democracy, free elections etc., provided that the freedom doesn't extend to the other tribe;

The other tribe comes to power in a bloody coup, then promptly sets about slaughtering the first tribe, etc, etc, etc, ad nauseam, ad infinitum.

The prognosis is bleak, because none of this mayhem shows any sign of ending. The

conclusions are equally bleak, because, quite frankly, there is no answer to Africa's problems, no solution that hasn't been tried before, and failed.

Just go to the [CIA World Fact Book](#), pick any of the African countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi etc.), and compare the statistics to any Western country (eg. Portugal, Italy, Spain, Ireland). The disparities are appalling--and it's going to get worse, not better. It has certainly got worse since 1960, when most African countries achieved independence. We, and by this I mean the West, have tried many ways to help Africa. All such attempts have failed.

Charity is no answer. Money simply gets appropriated by the first, or second, or third person to touch it (17 countries saw a decline in real per capita GNP between 1970 and 1999, despite receiving well over \$100 billion in World Bank assistance).

Food isn't distributed. This happens either because there is no transportation infrastructure (bad), or the local leader deliberately withholds the supplies to starve people into submission (worse).

Material is broken, stolen or sold off for a fraction of its worth. The result of decades of "foreign aid" has resulted in a continental infrastructure which, if one excludes South Africa, couldn't support Pittsburgh.

Add to this, as I mentioned above, the endless cycle of Nature's little bag of tricks--persistent drought followed by violent flooding, a plethora of animals, reptiles and insects so dangerous that life is already cheap before Man starts playing his little reindeer games with his fellow Man--and what you are left with is: catastrophe.

The inescapable conclusion is simply one of resignation. This goes against the grain of our humanity--we are accustomed to ridding the world of this or that problem (smallpox, polio, whatever), and accepting failure is anathema to us. But, to give a classic African scenario, a polio vaccine won't work if the kids are prevented from getting the vaccine by a venal overlord, or a frightened chieftain, or a lack of roads, or by criminals who steal the vaccine and sell it to someone else. If a cure for AIDS was found tomorrow, and offered to every African nation free of charge, the growth of the disease would scarcely be checked, let alone reversed. Basically, you'd have to try to inoculate as many two-year old children as possible, and write off the two older generations.

So that is the only one response, and it's a brutal one: accept that we are powerless to change Africa, and leave them to sink or swim, by themselves.

It sounds dreadful to say it, but if the entire African continent dissolves into a seething maelstrom of disease, famine and brutality, that's just too damn bad. We have better things to do--sometimes, you just have to say, "Can't do anything about it."

The viciousness, the cruelty, the corruption, the duplicity, the savagery, and the incompetence is endemic to the entire continent, and is so much of an anathema to any right-thinking person that the civilized imagination simply stalls when faced with its ubiquity, and with the enormity of trying to fix it. The Western media shouldn't even bother reporting on it. All that does is arouse our feelings of horror, and the instinctive need to do something, anything--but everything has been tried before, and failed. Everything, of course, except self-reliance.

All we should do is make sure that none of Africa gets transplanted over to the U.S., because the danger to our society is dire if it does. I note that several U.S. churches are attempting to bring groups of African refugees over to the United States, European churches the same for Europe. Mistake. Mark my words, this misplaced charity will turn around and bite us, big time.

Even worse would be to think that the simplicity of Africa holds some kind of answers for Western society: remember Mrs. Clinton's little book, "It Takes A Vil-

lage"? Trust me on this: there is not one thing that Africa can give the West which hasn't been tried before and failed, not one thing that isn't a step backwards, and not one thing which is worse than, or that contradicts, what we have already.

So here's my (tongue-in-cheek) solution for the African fiasco: a high wall around the whole continent, all the guns and bombs in the world for

everyone inside, and at the end, the last one alive should do us all a favor and kill himself.

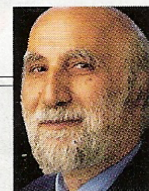
Inevitably, some Kissingerian realpolitiker is going to argue in favor of intervention, because in the vacuum of Western aid, perhaps the Communist Chinese would step in and increase their influence in the area. There are two reasons why this isn't going to happen.

Firstly, the PRC doesn't have that kind of money to throw around; and secondly, the result of any communist assistance will be precisely the same as if it were Western assistance. For the record, Mozambique and Angola are both communist countries--and both are economic disaster areas. The prognosis for both countries is disastrous--and would be the same for any other African country.

The West can't help Africa. Nor should we. The record speaks for itself. ☐



By Fouad Ajami



The Great Circle of Enmity

TRUTH BE KNOWN, AMERICAN DIPLOMACY can't reconcile the ruling order of power in Arab lands any more than it can sweet-talk the Arab "street" to accept the right of this new Iraq to its place among the nations. Hard as the Bush administration might try, there is no hope that those Arab neighbors will write off the debts incurred by Saddam Hussein in his ruinous wars. It is idle to think that the day is near when the Arab satellite channels, silent toward the misdeeds of Arab rulers, will cease the steady drumbeats against all that plays out in Baghdad.

Vice President Dick Cheney may descend on Arab capitals, as he did last week, and our secretary of state can assemble one huge diplomatic conclave after another in support of Iraq, but the great circle of enmity around this fragile Baghdad government will not be broken. We can warn the powers in Arab capitals of the dangers of failure and breakdown in Iraq, but we should understand that those neighbors may dread the prospects of Iraq's success more.

This region has been stubborn in its refusal to accept the stark verdicts of history. The State of Israel is a year away from its 60th anniversary, and still the Arab imagination denies Israel's legitimacy. Iraq is different, but a state that gives pride of place to the Shiites (and the Kurds) is still an oddity in the Arab landscape. For well over a millennium, the Shiite Arabs have not governed; they have been the stepchildren of the Arab world. But in their long years of defeat and subservience, the Shiites remained righteous in their claim to the Prophet Muhammad's mantle, in their stubborn hope that the day would come when the order of things would be righted.

True to those Shiite hopes, American power, in a moment of perfect innocence, struck into Baghdad and upended an entrenched order of power, granted the dispossessed a chance at a new history, delivered them a big country loaded with oil and possibilities.

The Sunni Arab rulers, and the angry men and women on the airwaves and in the "chat rooms" of the Arab world, insist that their animus toward this new Iraq derives from their opposition to the American presence. This is plain hypocrisy, for vast stretches of the Arab world are within the

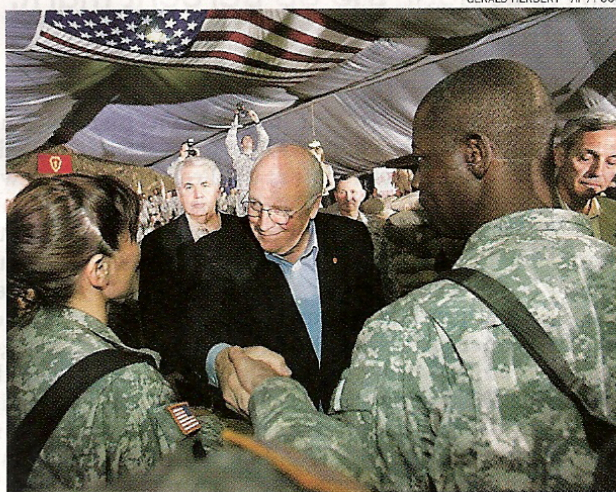
orbit of American power. Pax Americana, and the shadow and the reality of its power, underpin the security of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. In Amman, Jordan, and Cairo, American largess and security networks uphold these regimes. In the Arabian Peninsula, the American presence—military and economic and cultural—dates back decades.

Those angry preachers and pundits who take to the pages of the Arabic dailies or to the ceaseless agitation of al Jazeera television to brand Iraq's leaders American "collaborators" and stooges look past the entire edifice of American power all around them. They shout in the knowledge that America is too unschooled in Arab malice and evasions to see through their mischief and belligerence. If anything, it is the prospect that America may forge a bond with those embattled Iraqis that unsettles Iraq's Arab neighbors.

New political order. Against the background of a cruel war, and in a region addicted to failure and self-pity, American power has brought forth in Baghdad a political order alien to its habitat—a state that does not belong to a ruling caste or a single master. That state fights for its life, but a secular Kurd of great civility and learning, Jalal Talabani, is the constitutional head of state, and a modest Shiite man who has risen from the depths of Iraqi society, Nouri al-Maliki, is the head of government. Around them are political figures drawn from practically all of Iraq's checkered communities—a Kurdish foreign minister, a Sunni speaker of parliament, etc. To be sure, the Sunni Arabs are no longer masters of this turbulent country, but no one in Iraq thinks that a new, tranquil order could be had without them.

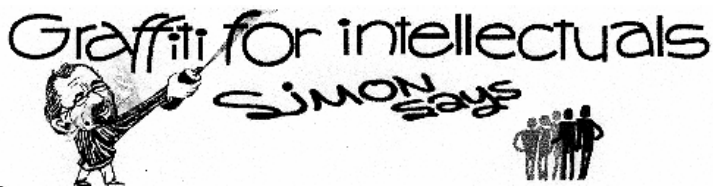
This new Iraqi history will stand or fall of its own weight; the specter of an Iranian-dominated Iraq peddled by the Arabs is a scarecrow. Now the Arab regimes are openly campaigning for nothing less than an American coup d'état against the Maliki government and for the return of interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, a man at ease with Arab rulers and intelligence services. But Allawi, who spends more time in Amman and the United Arab Emirates than in Baghdad, is anathema to his own Shiite community, and America has not waded deep into Iraq to perpetuate those old Arab ways. ●

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Vice President Dick Cheney at Camp Speicher, Iraq, last week

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LET AFRICA SINK by Kim Du Toit, a very provocative and controversial essay by an American who was born in Africa. More of his thoughts are on www.theothersideofkim.com

When it comes to any analysis of the problems facing Africa, Western society, and particularly people from the United States, encounter a logical disconnect that makes clear analysis impossible. That disconnect is the way life is regarded in the West (it's precious, must be protected at all costs etc.), compared to the way life, and death, are regarded in Africa. Let me try to quantify this statement.

In Africa, life is cheap. There are so many ways to die in Africa that death is far more commonplace than in the West. You can die from so many things--snakebite, insect bite, wild animal attack, disease, starvation, food poisoning... the list goes on and on. At one time, crocodiles accounted for more deaths in sub-Saharan Africa than gun-fire, for example. Now add the usual human tragedy (murder, assault, warfare and the rest), and you can begin to understand why the life expectancy for an African is low--in fact, horrifyingly low, if you remove White Africans from the statistics (they tend to be more urbanized, and more Western in behavior and outlook). Finally, if you add the horrifying spread of AIDS into the equation, anyone born in sub-Saharan Africa this century will be lucky to reach age forty.

I lived in Africa for over thirty years. Growing up there, I was infused with several African traits--traits which are not common in Western civilization. The almost-casual attitude towards death was one. (Another is a morbid fear of snakes.)

So because of my African background, I am seldom moved at the sight of death, unless it's accidental, or it affects someone close to me. (Death which strikes at strangers, of course, is mostly ignored.) Of my circle of about eighteen or so friends with whom I grew up, and whom I would consider "close",



only about ten survive today--and not one of the survivors is over the age of fifty. Two friends died from stepping on landmines while on Army duty in Namibia. Three died in horrific car accidents

(and lest one thinks that this is not confined to Africa, one was caused by a kudu flying through a windshield and impaling the guy through the chest with its hoof--not your everyday traffic accident in, say, Florida). One was bitten by a snake, and died from heart failure. Another also died of heart failure, but he was a hopeless drunkard. Two were shot by muggers. The last went out on his surfboard one day and was never seen again (did I men-

tion that sharks are plentiful off the African coasts and in the major rivers?). My situation is not uncommon in South Africa--and north of the Limpopo River (the border with Zimbabwe), I suspect that others would show worse statistics.

The death toll wasn't just confined to my friends. When I was still living in Johannesburg, the newspaper carried daily stories of people mauled by lions, or attacked by rival tribesmen, or dying from some unspeakable disease (and this was pre-AIDS Africa too) and in general, succumbing to some of Africa's many answers to the population explosion. Add to that the normal death toll from rampant crime, illness, poverty, flood, famine, traffic, and the police, and you'll begin to get the idea.

My favorite African story actually happened after I left the country. An American executive took a job over there, and on his very first day, the newspaper headlines read: "Three Headless Bodies Found". The next day: "Three Heads Found". The third day: "Heads Don't Match Bodies".

You can't make this stuff up.

As a result of all this, death is treated more

(Continued "AFRICA" PAGE 2)