

NEO-FASCISM IN HAITI AND THE CARIBBEAN, November 5, 2014
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Present:

Introduction and interests in the class:

- Jovan is from Haiti and has done a lot of work there recently.
- Kwame works for WRFG (the Beyond Borders show), Friends of the Congo, and other groups.
- The two of us have shared a discussion about neo-fascism, including the connections between neo-fascism, feminist, and neo-colonialism as seen in the Caribbean.

The “F” Word

- Fascism as “the real F word,” both taboo and too quickly used.
- People throw it around in many ways, not always appropriately.
- It still causes visceral reactions. No one wants to be called “a fascist.”

Classical Definitions of fascism:

- A political attitude which puts the nation-state and/or race in the center of power and disregards the rights of individuals or humanity.
- Corporate control of the government; a dictatorship of the extreme right, merging the state and business elites.
- Henry Wallace in 1944 (U. S. Vice President from 1941 to 1944): Fascists pay “lip service to democracy and the common welfare, in their insatiable greed for money and the power which money gives” and “do not hesitate surreptitiously to evade the laws designed to safeguard the public from monopolistic extortion.” With “deliberate perversion of truth and fact....they use every opportunity to impugn democracy.” <http://newdeal.feri.org/wallace/haw23.htm>

Round Robin for our personal definitions of fascism:

- Denying the rights of the individual for the sake of money and power for a few
- Dictatorship; the U.S. government making a spooky claim of democracy without really helping people
- Actions of the government involving monitoring of people’s private conversations by the police and others, with no excuses; financial aspects of our society; last night’s victory of the Republican spear campaigns by comparing candidates to Obama
- Emphasis on supposed distinctions between supposedly superior and inferior races/castes; evil. Some people can be so committed to power over those with whom they disagree that their fascistic tendencies can show in their eyes.
- The right wing now
- Financial aspects
- Smear campaigns
- Corporations
- In Trinidad, I felt a hetero-womantive perspective which saw me as out and on display. I felt aggressiveness from people. I would not go back to that area where it was so hard to be myself. I had planned to go to school there. Even the night scene was gendered . A club would not let me go in dressed as I was.
- Male-dominated heterosexuality. Caribbean culture can be hostile toward non-traditional gender and sexual behavior. Houses have been burned because of this.

Jovan on The Fourteen Defining Characteristics of Classical Fascism from a study of Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, Suharto, and several Latin American regimes (see handout):

- The Dominican Republic and Haiti included two of the most fascist governments (Rafael Trujillo and Papa Doc Duvalier)
- Duvalier's rule involved total control of the military, a violent secret police, fake elections, rampant sexism, use of religion to protect a narrow sense of the family, and suppression of labor to allow the elite to siphon off funds.
- By the late 18th century, Haiti (Saint-Domingue) was the wealthiest colony in the Caribbean because of the labor by enslaved Africans on sugar plantations. When Great Britain defeated the French in 1763, they almost chose Guadeloupe and Martinique (two very small islands with sugar plantations) rather than French Canada.
- After the Haitian Revolution, the French reinvaded and burned down the country. With the use of military force, they forced Haiti to buy its freedom with reparations worth today \$21 billion.
- The U. S. Marines invaded and occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934 and the Dominican Republic from 1916 to 1924.
- The Cold War allowed both Papa Doc Duvalier (from 1957 to his death in 1971) and Rafael Trujillo (from 1930 to his death in 1961) to stay in power. The U.S. supported any regime that accepted their policies instead of those of the supposedly evil Soviet Empire.
- Large segments of the population saw Duvalier as positive. Baby Doc's son is in the current government. There were some collaborators from Haitian society.
- Kwame: These dictators cannot sustain power without native collaborators.
- The government after Aristide was seemingly very patriotic.
- Les: Light-skinned people were at the top and set themselves aside from other Haitians.
- It has followed the classic cycle of revolution overturning oppression and then being coopted and losing power. The U.S. came in and took over the Haitian national debt, so City Bank of New York received Haitian taxes.
- After Grenada became independent in 1974, Eric Gairy, the Prime Minister until 1979 used an oppressive police force called the Mongoose Squad to keep power. He had been made a knight of the British Empire. He established a fascist state that used the military against the people in the interest of the elite class that was backed by the U.S. and the United Kingdom. Gairy collaborated with fascist states like Chile. Haitian police trained the Grenadian police. Grenada had strategic importance in the Caribbean. Gairy also collaborated with the fascists in South Korea (some of them CIA trained).
- After Maurice Bishop led a revolt overturning Gairy's government and establishing a relatively successful socialist government, the Reagan Administration invaded Grenada in 1983 and overturned the Bishop government.
- The U. S. uses client states to do things that the U. S. cannot do for itself.
- As the Cold War ended, the U. S. had less excuse to support the fascist regimes. Duvalier wasn't so useful any more. There was a shift to neo-fascism control over Haiti.

Neo-Fascism (Jovan):

- A more subtle version of fascism that is not expressed so clearly.
- A shift in the language of how the regimes were being supported.
- See the handout on the Six Faces of Neo-Fascism.
- No real democracy. Total, absolutist rule. Only one voice of power, connected to the U. S. State Department.
- When Aristide was elected in Haiti, he was attacked as soon as he took a baby step against the United States.

- 1: He made a number of choices that spoke to social reform, angering Bill Clinton. He refused to go along with the official U. S. values.
- Kwame: A key value of Haiti for the U. S. is labor. The ways the Disney Corporation exploited Haitian workers is shown in a video, "Mickey Mouse Goes to Haiti." Disney has influence over American foreign policy.
- When Aristide threatened the corporate interests, he was kicked out the first time. The second time was for a minor raise in the minimum wage.
- Even the U. S. admits the minimum wage in Haiti does not support life. But the State Department still says it should stay that way.
- Parliament there is a talk shop. The real work of running the country is done by a highly paid group of civil servants.
- 2: This sounds like what I just read about a shadow government in this country.
- There are secret CIA budgets. Secret courts allowing secret trials without the Bill of Rights.
- We hesitate to say we live under fascist conditions. We do, however, have many elements of it.
- The legal and constitutional face, using the face to keep people down.
- No respect for rule of law.
- Kwame: The military is supposed to protect the integrity of the territory. Caribbean military protects the elite from the people.
- The government is there to gain wealth for the elite. It involves conning people into supporting practices that are not really in their interest.
- How do we see these fascist faces at play in the Caribbean?
- There is a shift to a conversation about the drug war as a rationalization for funding the Haitian police and military forces. The U.N. has been in Haiti since 2004, not because of the earthquake. The new identification of the enemy: the drug lords.
- 3: The CIA in Central America has taken drugs to the U. S.
- Kwame: The funding goes from the U.S. to the military elite. Immunity in the United Nations.
- There is also training support: the School of the Americas (now the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) trained Noriega, the Haitian military elite, Central Americans, Chile, and many others.
- Protection of corporate interests. Digicell, a private entity, runs cell services in the Caribbean with an Irish owner. It sponsors sports and much else.
- Kwame: There are limited opportunities for young people in the Caribbean. They need to go either to the U.S. or to the U. K. When at Sandhurst in England, they return ready to cooperate with the military because they can gain from it. It's sick sometimes.
- Half the neo-fascist faces show up. You have to look behind the neo-fascist pseudo-democratic mask to see the extent of the fascism.
- Even the Haitian government now supported by the U.S. cannot raise the idea of a higher minimum wage without the U. S. government stepping in and raising threats, as when Aristide was shipped out to South Africa. They have fraudulent elections.
- It's rampant colonialism.

Round Robin: Neo-fascism in our lives.

- Drug War. Putting out the stereotypes of people connected to drugs.
- Constructing stereotypes.
- Ideology about "the rule of law" is often used to hide the seizing of plunder, a term used for the loot that pirates seize. Imperialists are pirates.
- United Fruit Company/Chiquita/etc. Ruben's point about the Caribbean and the U. S. South having more in common historically than the U. S. and most other states. The European Union blocking things to have access to monopolizing fresh fruit. The drug element, marijuana

production as a way to survive. Like Coca leaves in Bolivia. Destroying those fields destroys personal economic security and cultural traditions.

- Neo fascism, surveillance of radical political education spaces. We're free to have this discussion, but the powers that be often tap into this kind of meeting. At Georgia State, as a graduate student, I still had to sign a pledge that I wasn't in certain organizations.
- I studied journalism and was turned off by the control of the media. Only six corporations control almost all of it. A small number of businesses merging and doing business with each other. Controlling internet access. They realize we can learn more about other countries through the internet, so they try to stop that or put out a different version.
- Media telling people what to think about. The false representation of brown people in the media. When I took some white kids to the West End for a performance, they were so terrified. A 45 year old man said that some of them were "so ghetto." When he heard an ambulance, he said, "Shots fired." When there was no much about Mike Brown's death on Facebook, they put up other pictures and then took away the Mike Brown pictures. Some friends lost the ability to communicate. We think we have the freedom to communicate, but we have these corporations that work in their interest.
- On islands, gunships can come in. Some communities here are also isolated and can be surrounded. I-285 is a border for many people who have never been outside it. They're comfortable in their islands. I flood my timeline with Mike Brown information daily. One black man in a graduation gown had a sign, "Educated Black man: the scariest thing in America." I can get amped up here and then be suspicious of someone I don't recognize in the group. I could find myself in Guantanamo Bay. No one questioned Bush's claim to be trying to stop terrorism. Calling someone a terrorist can make other people feel safe at night.
- One definition of fascism is "Imperialism turned in." Neo-fascism is neo-colonialism turned in. Imperialism is fascism.
- How has fascism fought in the past? How is it doing now? Historically, it used to be clearer when the forces in the U.S. had strong connections to those who were fighting against fascism. Black Power had international connections.
- There are examples before Black Power of folks within the empire expressing solidarity against fascism, including the Abraham Lincoln Brigade when white and black radicals fought in Spain to try to stop Franco's fascists, who were receiving aid from Hitler.
- 4: Black communities used to celebrate Haitian Liberation Day.
- Facebook as a space created by the government.
- Julius Nyere said you cannot pay for African liberation with the American dollar.
- When Mussolini invaded Ethiopia, many black people from the Caribbean went to defend Ethiopia.
- Paul Robeson was involved in this worldwide movement.
- The fight is happening all over the world. Nation states are actively struggling against imperialism. Cuba's long struggle. Venezuela. Chavez failed in armed revolt and then went another direction. We need to strategize about how to have fight back without an anti-U.S. nation to be an ally. The USSR was not even a great option back then. Aristide, when he was there. Cuba provides most of the doctors in Haiti, fighting ebola the most. Venezuela supported Cuba by barter system, sending cheaper oil in exchange for food.
- Kwame: Chavez said the oil we have was not for Venezuelans. A radical ship took resources to share. Instead of God bless me. Cubans went to West Africa. Solidarity with the common people, that's how we fight fascism.
- Jovan: Venezuela sent cheap heating home to the Bronx, even knowing their voice for socialism would not be heard.

Small group questions:

- How can we combat fascism in our communities today?
- How do we build solidarity as part of an international movement?

Group One:

- We need to spread awareness, particularly to people who have nothing but still identify with the Republicans and Fox News, going against their self-interest.
- What are ways to fight class war? Opposing whatever supports class distinctions.
- The Smedley Butler quote as evidence of U.S. fascistic imperialism to benefit the capitalists.
- We can't get anywhere if people think we are free.
- Make it international that every war we have fought has been for the capitalists.
- Retired Marine Major General Smedley Butler summarized all of that:
<http://fas.org/man/smedley.htm>
- Ways in which people seek clouds of safety: not letting themselves see realities that scare them. Thinking they are superior to particular groups they are pitted against in order to feel better about themselves. Holding onto guns as a form of pseudo-security.

Group Two:

- Building community and solidarity amongst each other.
- Accepting people where they are. Talking to our moms.
- Connect what we describe about fascism to our lived experiences.
- When an American factory was shut down to reopen in China, some workers blamed the Chinese.
- Civil disobedience.
- Political education.
- Take steps toward liberation.

Closing Action

- November 21-23: The School of the Americas Watch at Fort Benning, near Columbus. The U.S. government has kept the school going in spite of the bad publicity about the dictatorial perpetrators of violence trained there, including the Salvadorian soldiers who assassinated nuns..
- The organizers of the annual Watch make contact with the people behind the walls. Don't underestimate the resistance being done on the ground. Solidarity cannot be paternalistic. Go in to counter fascist attitudes.