

GET THE POINT

Membership or Leadership? America and the World

By Fritz Pointer

The rulers, and the incoming Biden/Harris administration of the United States of America, must decide America's place in the world. Along with the faulty idea of U.S. "exceptionalism" the U.S. must abandon the paradoxical and harmful concept of "first among equals." Sounds clever, typical of the British, but is not helpful at all for today's international community. "Membership" most simply implies, "belonging to" or "being a part or branch of" a family, community, nation, humanity.

This new U.S. administration would be wise to choose "Membership" and "Partnership" with the world instead of "Leadership." Recently, Joe Biden wrote an article in *Foreign Affairs* entitled "Why America Must Lead Again." When introducing his national security nominees, he said that "America is back, ready to lead the world." A brazen assumption that America should be the planetary leader, despite the vast majority of those who live on Earth not being consulted.

By leadership, of course, is meant "the first or foremost place," being "at the head of" and "to control a group of people." By what criteria does the U.S.A. deserve such a position? When, even recently, has America shown a commitment to global welfare and human rights? Usually, *leaders* have *followers*, or people they control. When the U.S. withdrew from the Paris climate agreement, not one other country followed; when the U.S. withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal, no other country followed; when the U.S. withdrew from the World Health Organization, not a single country followed (in fact, France and Germany promised to increase their contributions); when the U.S. withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations, the United Nations Human Rights Council, and, the

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization...no other countries followed it.

U.S.: GREATEST PURVEYOR OF VIOLENCE IN THE WORLD TODAY

In the words of Peter Beinart, in an article for the *NY Times* “The U.S. Doesn’t Have to ‘Lead’ the World”: “This (the above) isn’t the record of a country that has earned the right to global leadership. It is the record of a country that should work on global membership first.” And that “membership” that “partnership” is desirable if not vital, to this global choir, but not as the singular fat-bellied conductor.

The areas the U.S. leads in, today, are not very attractive: the leading arms dealer in the world, and according to a study by Brown University’s Watson Institute for International Affairs, America’s wars after 9/11 have displaced 37 million people, the U.S. refused to ratify international treaties that ban land mines, cluster bombs and nuclear weapons production; enable prosecution of genocide and war crimes; and safeguard the rights of women, children and people with disabilities. The only country to mock every single treaty. That’s not the behavior of a leader, it’s a bully and even worse. And as Dr. King said in his 1967 speech opposing the Vietnam War, and it is still true today in 2020, the United States government is “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today.” Such a government should not pretend “it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them.”

DYING OF WHITENESS

Now this brings me to our current malaise with Covid-19. What country today, in its right and sane mind would follow the lead of the United States? Especially, when it comes to Health Care. The naive American public has taken literally, it seems, the expression: “Better Dead than Red.” And they are getting their wish. Rather than learn from the Chinese who, with a population of 1.4 billion people, at the most recent December 2020 calculations had 4,634 deaths to date; compared to the United States, population of 331 million, that just surpassed 300,000 deaths.

It is arrogance, hubris, and racism that sent the U.S. into an abyss of corona disaster of hundreds of thousands of Covid-19 deaths and trillions of economic losses with no end in sight...300,000 vs 4,634!!! A stupefying difference! Because Americans think they have everything to teach others and nothing to learn. Yeah, “better dead” than do what the Communists do: China, Cuba, Vietnam. Don’t know if the dead agree with that.

It is the same kind of senseless “proud” deaths many white Americans are experiencing due to their attitudes about Universal Health Care. According to the book, *Dying of Whiteness* by Jonathan M. Metzl, white Americans would rather deny healthcare to themselves if it would mean admitting equality with African, Latinx and other people. Metzl says, for example: “When politics demands that people resist available health care, amass arsenals, cut funding for schools that their own kids attend, or make other decisions that might feel emotionally correct but are biologically perilous, these politics are literally asking people to die for their whiteness” (18). Better dead than equal.

PEOPLE FOLLOW LEADERS WHO NEVER DECEIVE THEM

White Males, along with cheerleading white females, having created the myth, the lie of White Supremacy and applied it to every human institution and field of endeavor, from Science to Sports, to advantage themselves, are the ones who must dismantle it. “Cheerleaders” is how, in *Travels With Charlie*, John Steinbeck identifies the women spectators at a lynching he witnessed during his travels. From this we get the language of “Firsts”: the first African, Asian, Latin American or woman to do or be selected for this that or the other; being permitted into some “exclusive” (because they made it so) white male domain. The deceptive myth of white supremacy is persistent and pernicious. The Chinese, in confronting the coronavirus as one people, had no need to mock standard, universally accepted protocols to try and prove some genetic superiority myth or make a profit.

China contained and is containing the virus because their universal medical ,care and planned economic system is science based and intensely cooperative. Sara Flounders notes: “By January 12 China announced to the world the genetic sequence of the virus and freely shared that sequence in order to aid the world in the mass building of diagnostic kits...Wuhan, with a population of 11 million, was under strict lockdown for 76 days. In less than two weeks, over 40,000 medics came from all over China to Wuhan to assist...quarantine measures were put in place in the whole country. Industries, schools, theaters, parks, sports and all social gatherings had been shut down...wages were guaranteed and essential services continued. Rent, mortgage and credit card payments were frozen” (11). Apparently, they trusted their government leaders. There were no threats to government officials for demanding basic protocols like wearing masks. There

were no street brawls about government demanded protocols concerning social gatherings; it was like requiring a seat belt while driving.

Their leaders did not advocate drinking Clorox or injecting themselves with bleach as a solution for the Coronavirus. At this point, it should prove beneficial and edifying to bring Dr. W.E.B. Dubois into this discussion. In 1959, DuBois spent 10 weeks in China as a guest of Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai and from that experience (a bit longer than Fox or MSNBC talking heads) wrote, “The Vast Miracle of China Today.” Concerning “Leadership” Dubois says the Chinese people “follow their leaders because these leaders have never deceived them. Their officials are incorruptible” (193). China, he observes, “has leaders of learning and genius, scientists of renown, artisans of skill and millions who know and believe this and follow where these men lead” (193). “I saw” he says, “happy people; people with faith that needs no church nor priest” (192).

THE NEED FOR A GLOBAL HEALTH SYSTEM

Alanna Shaikh, in a TedTalk entitled “Why Covid 19 is Hitting Us Now and How to Prepare for the Next Outbreak” assures us that “we can get better at quarantines and travel restrictions, and we should, but they're not our only option, and they're not our best option for dealing with these situations.” And that, “The real way for the long haul to make outbreaks less serious is **to build the global health system to support core health care functions in every country in the world** so that **all countries**, even poor ones, are able to rapidly identify and treat new infectious diseases as they emerge. China's taken a lot of criticism for its response to COVID-19. But the fact is, what if COVID-19 had emerged in Chad, which has three and a half doctors for every hundred thousand people? What if it had emerged in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which just released its last Ebola patient from treatment?”

She elaborates, “If we really want to slow down these outbreaks and minimize their impact, we need **to make sure that every country in the world** has the capacity to identify new diseases, treat them and report about them so they can share information. A **global health system** would have been prepared for COVID-19, China would have identified the outbreak faster. They would have been ready to provide care to infected people without having to build new hospitals. They would have shared honest information with their citizens and the globe so that we didn’t see these crazy rumors spreading on social media. They would have shared information with **global health authorities** so that they could start reporting to national health systems and getting ready for when the virus spread.”

Finally, we must improve health care in America and everywhere; invest in health infrastructure and disease surveillance so that we know when the new diseases come. We must build **health systems all over the world**. “We must” Alanna Shaikh insists, “be guided by equity and fairness, because in our present situation, like so many, equity and fairness is actually in our own self-interest.” Concomitantly, we must be aware that with hardly a blink, the Democratic-controlled House voted for a \$740-billion military budget for 2021. While tens of millions of Americans are staring into the abyss of Christmas misery from poverty and disease, these twisted priorities show an American political system that is sick beyond repair.

Dr. King also argued in that speech opposing the war on Vietnam that the United States should show “solidarity” with the world: first to stop doing harm and by curbing its own unrelenting contribution to global misery, and second by joining in “partnership” with other countries to battle “poverty, insecurity and injustice.” A **World Health System** supported by each country of the world: from each country according to its ability, must be a part of the new world order.

References

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