

Obama's War Record Fuels Leftist Critics

“Why are liberals so desperately unhappy with the Obama presidency?” asks New York Magazine’s Jonathan Chait, a self-proclaimed “Obama apologist.”

He answers his own question: “Liberals are dissatisfied with Obama because liberals, on the whole, are incapable of feeling satisfied with a Democratic president.”

See? It isn't Obama's fault. It's something in the so-called liberal, or progressive, psyche.

“Liberalism” originally meant a philosophy of maximum individual freedom, free markets, and minimum government, not today's support for intrusive, comprehensive bureaucratic management.)

One wades through the 5,000-word essay hoping to witness Chait at least acknowledge that Obama has let his supporters down with his “war on terror” policies. But all we get is this:

Obama ... has enjoyed a string of foreign-policy successes—expanding targeted strikes against Al Qaeda (including one that killed Osama bin Laden), ending the war in Iraq, and helping to orchestrate an apparently successful international campaign to res-

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Sheldon Richman

cue Libyan dissidents and then topple a brutal kleptocratic regime.

Excuse me? Progressives — who properly savaged George W. Bush for his autocratic presidency, civil-liberties flouting PATRIOT Act, undeclared war on Iraq, use of detention and torture at Guantanamo and elsewhere, and warrantless surveillance — are supposed to be happy with Barack Obama, who has essentially carried on most Bush policies, even kicking them up a few notches?

If we listen to Chait, there is nothing at all disappointing about Obama's expansion of drone attacks in Pakistan and Somalia, with their routine “collateral damage” to innocents; his flagrant violation of the War Powers Resolution (not to mention the Constitution and his campaign promise) with his intervention in Libya; his intensification of the war in Afghanistan; his sanctions (an act of war) against Iran; his broken pledge to close Guantanamo; his support of indef-

inite detention without charge; his policy of assassinating even American citizens abroad without due process; his renewal of the PATRIOT Act; his placement of Marines in Australia with the words, “The United States is a Pacific power, and we are here to stay”; his failed attempt to lift the UN ban on cluster bombs; or his invocation of state secrets to keep torture victims out of court.

Chait thinks Obama should get credit for “ending the war in Iraq”

force will likely be left behind at the humongous embassy in Baghdad.

For Chait and his ilk, these all must count as “foreign policy successes.”

And what about torture? Nothing upset Progressives more during the Bush years. Toward the end of the administration, the criminal policy was abandoned and was forsworn by Obama. Yet the detention center at Bagram airbase in Afghanistan has been

have the right to be represented by a lawyer, aren't given fair trials, and the U.S. claims it is not even obligated to explain why these people are caged.

A U.S. special operations “black site” at Bagram features “sleep deprivation, holding detainees in cold cells, forced nudity, physical abuse, detaining individuals in isolation cells for longer than 30 days, and restricting the access of the International Committee of the Red Cross,” according to Jonathan Horowitz's investigation for the Open Society Institute.

Finally, in a move that bodes ill for the future, Obama refuses to criminally or civilly investigate Bush administration officials for illegal torture of prisoners. He won't even empanel a “truth commission” to bring the facts before the American people. Future administrations will thus have little to fear when they break the law.

Most progressives are silent about Obama's shameful record. But it may explain the disappointment Chait can't understand.

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— but hold on. The December 31, 2011, withdrawal date is set in the Status of Forces Agreement negotiated between the Iraqi government and the Bush administration. Obama tried — but failed — to persuade Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to let U.S. troops stay longer. As it is, they will simply be moved down the road to Kuwait, and a large contract mercenary

called “worse than Guantanamo” by Daphne Eviatar, an attorney for Human Rights First. Adds John Glaser of Antiwar.com,

There are now 3,000 detainees in Bagram, up from 1,700 since June (!) and five times the amount there when Barack Obama took office. Many of them have not been charged, have seen no evidence against them and do not

Standing with the Occupy Wall Street Movement

I have been noticing a number of commentaries that in looking at the Occupy Wall Street/Occupy Together movement (OWS for short) conclude that African Americans are not particularly interested, or that this movement is irrelevant to the Black Experience. I disagree.

The OWS movement has been an exciting development on the US political stage. It has shaken this country in ways that it needed to be shaken raising the matter of wealth and income inequality and the depravity of the rich. It has called into question the policies of Wall Street, but also the political allies of Wall Street—both Republican and Democrat—who are more concerned with protect-



TRANS AFRICA

Bill Fletcher Jr.

through which they participated in the student movement and/or the anti-war movement.

Where I have seen this play out differently, however, is in some sections of organized labor. I have seen some serious trade union demonstrations and actions that are very multi-racial/multi-ethnic. But part of what makes

this possible is that there is a critical mass of a particular group—in our case, African Americans—who can see themselves in the actions. In other words, when they look at an action, they see a critical mass of us.

In OWS many of us, regardless of whether we support the cause, do not necessarily see ourselves represented. While some of us will nevertheless participate, others will sit back and support from the sidelines. My suggestion is that we need to organize our participation. Here are a few examples. We could ask our minister, priest, Imam, etc., to organize a delegation from our religious institution to participate. What the OWS is doing is completely consistent with religious doctrines that overwhelmingly speak to the poor and the dispossessed. A second thing would be to have one of

our organizations, such as the NAACP, a black student union or a chapter of a labor union in which we are active, to participate together.

There is something else that we can do. We can organize our own actions that protest not only the

income inequality but the growing RACIAL inequality that is crushing working people of color.

Let's stop worrying about whether white people reach out to us. We have our own reasons to be integrally involved in movements like OWS.

Sound like a plan?

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ing the rich than they are with the common person.

Yet, it is true that these “actions” have been largely white. My first response: so what? I am actually quite pleased to see white people challenging a system that is crushing us all.

But my second response is a bit different. The reality is that spontaneous movements in the USA tend to be unbalanced racially. The student movement against the Vietnam War in the 1960s, for instance, was very white. This did NOT mean that Blacks were absent. What it often meant, however, is that African Americans formed their own organizations

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