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(Anti)Blackness, Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution, and Guaidó's Attempted Coup

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On January 23, 2019 with the support of US Vice President Mike Pence, Juan Guaidó, a white supremacist, anti-people, opposition "leader" declared himself interim president of Venezuela under the pretense that Nicolás Maduro, the pro-people candidate, had stolen the 2018 election. Shortly thereafter the white supremacist, anti-people alliance including Canada, Israel, several European countries, and various Latin American nations known as the Lima Group followed suit in recognizing Guaidó. Since then Guaidó, co-conspirator Leopoldo López, and Venezuela's splintered right-wing opposition have waged attempt after unsuccessful attempt to remove the duly elected Nicolás Maduro from his position as President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Those who have not followed Venezuelan politics or the ebbing and flowing of Latin America's Pink Tide over the past few decades might wonder what is truly at stake in this latest coup attempt. There are many answers to this question, the most obvious of which is the extraction of oil for exploitative capitalist/imperialist enterprise as opposed to funding the Bolivarian assault on global economic exploitation. Among the least acknowledged answers to this question is racism, specifically anti-Black racism and the progressive measures undertaken to eradicate it since the onset of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Since the early nineties Caracas has been consistently characterized as one of the top ten most dangerous cities in the world. This characterization is largely an outgrowth of the Caracazo, the February 1989 mass uprising which occurred after then president Carlos Andrés Pérez reneged on his campaign promises and attempted to implement what was commonly referred to as "el paquete" or the package. The "package," a set of neoliberal economic reforms recommended by the International Monetary Fund, resulted in the overnight doubling and in some cases tripling of costs of basic staples like milk and gasoline. In response to these anti-people reforms, the urban masses, "predominantly poor Afro-descended people from the cacao-cultivating regions of eastern Miranda State," took to the streets in protest. The state attempted to quell these rebellions

White Supremacist link goes to definitional blog, not to any evidence of showing that Guaidó is racist.

Claims of Guaidó being anti-people and used of quotes around leader is loaded language, again sans evidence.

Use of "under the pretense" leads one to presume that the article may examine a counter-narrative to the detailed OAS report illustrating why the elections were neither free nor fair - however it does not.

Pink Tide link goes to the website of VenezuelaAnalysis, a media outlet found and sponsored by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

It's also notable that Layla Brown-Vincent, uses the term coup here - which traditionally is used to describe a violent and illegal seizure of state power when Guaidó is peacefully using legal methods.

Again, it's worth noting that Layla Brown-Vincent does not engage with any of the primary texts produced either by the Venezuelan opposition or the Lima Group but merely parrots the talking points printed by the PSUV.

Layla Brown-Vincent admits that her viewpoint is in the minority, but does not mention the viewpoints of any other experts.

Layla Brown-Vincent attributes the designation of Caracas as one of the most violent cities not due to high instances of murder, kidnapping and crime that have all gone up since the election of Hugo Chavez - but to a few days protests. This is deflection.

The subsidies provided by the Venezuelan government caused, like many other oil rich countries, what's frequently referred to in economic literature as the "resource curse" - wherein economies fail to diversify and become stagnant and unstable. Countries that have managed this problem - like Norway - do so by ensuring market reforms adjust incentives. What Brown-Vincent here refers to as "anti-people reforms" is in fact a means of helping ensure that the country isn't enslaved to the international price of oil and that the citizens aren't enslaved to the government's social spending policies.

through deadly violence; death tolls are estimated between 300 and 3,000. This racialized urban rebellion has shaped Venezuelan politics to this day and is perhaps the single most important event that precipitated Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution.

It was the Caracazo, the people's rebellion, that set the stage for Hugo Chávez's 1992 failed coup against Pérez. Chavez's post-coup imprisonment made him a national hero and fueled mass support for his 1998 presidential victory. It was the demands of the masses, and perhaps even more so their willingness to revolt, that required Chávez to envision and commit to a new economic reality for the country, one he would come to refer to as 21st Century Socialism. One of Chávez's first orders of business as president was the rewrite of the Venezuelan Constitution so that it reflected the Bolivarian Revolution's commitment to an economically and racially just society.

It was not until Chávez's base helped thwart the 2002 coup attempt however, that the Bolivarian Revolution became decidedly Pan-African and feminist in its political orientation. Only then did the revolution begin to center issues specific to the predominantly poor Afro-Indigenous base. Among the major laws and campaigns supported during the post-2002 coup years were the nationalization of oil to support education, health, and land reform in the country; the Organic Law Against Racial Discrimination; and public education efforts to include lessons about the history of slavery and Afro-Venezuelan contributions to contemporary society. One of the campaigns most successful in increasing the visibility of Afro-Venezuelans was the "Soy Afro" 2011 Census Campaign led by the Network of Afro Venezuelans, which declared "Soy Afrodescendiente . . . y tú ¿cómo te reconoces?" that loosely translated means, "I am an African Descendant . . . and you, how do you identify?".

Until recently, the official estimates of Venezuelans with African ancestry were about 12 percent of the population (two million people). According to the 2011 national census, Venezuela is home to nearly 29 million inhabitants with just over 750,000 identifying as Negro/Negra and only about 182,000 identifying as Afrodescendiente, the vast majority of which are concentrated in Miranda (home to the capital city Caracas), Carabobo, and Aragua. While less than one

Photos and public accounts show that protestors were not peaceful but included mob violence which using weapons against the police, other representatives of the state and massive destruction of private property and looting. While criticism of the repression is appropriate, properly providing a history of those days must include these facts.

It's rather odd that in discussing the coup attempt that no mention is made of the MBR-200 and the oath that Chavez, Felipe Acosta Carles and Jesús Urdaneta Hernández made in 1983 to one day take over Venezuela. Is this not known, or is it purposefully obscured?

Experts for and against Chavez describe his 1998 election to the presidency as a result of institutional party collapse following years of mismanagement. Given his win was by only 1 million votes and the vows he made to the poor it seems this is a Georges Sorel-ian historical formulation rather than one based in empirical fact.

As this was Venezuela's 26th Constitution, a certain degree of cynicism is appropriate - rewriting a constitution could just as well signify the changing of legal rules to disempower and disrupt one's political opposition as much as it is to develop a "just society".

percent of the entire Venezuelan population identified as Afro, nearly 50 percent identified as *moreno/morena*, and about three percent identified as *Negro/Negra*, revealing that nearly 54 percent of Venezuela's citizens are of discernible African ancestry. Afro-descended people's realities have become more visible since 2002, and their realities increasingly inform the political rhetoric/agenda of the Bolivarian Revolution, making **Blackness** synonymous with the people, socialism, and Chavismo while **whiteness** is synonymous capitalist exploitation, anti-Blackness, and the anti-people counterrevolution led by the opposition.

There is perhaps no clearer example of the association of revolution with Blackness than the **lynching** of **Orlando Figuera**, a 21-year-old grocery store worker who in 2017 mistakenly found himself in the middle of opposition protests that cost him his life. Reports of the incident detail that Figuera was stabbed multiple times, doused with gasoline, and set on fire because of his presumed status as a Chavista. According to Figuera's father, when Orlando found himself among opposition protesters after leaving work, they yelled to him, "hey Black guy, are you a Chavista? You see what happens to Chavistas." It was Figuera's Blackness that made him stand out among the protestors, that made them inquire about his political leanings, and ultimately why they murdered him in cold blood.

Less than one month before he succumbed to cancer in 2013, Chávez penned a profound declaration for the third Africa-South America Summit that took place in Equatorial Guinea. Due to the advanced stages of his cancer, Chávez was unable to attend the Summit. As a show of his unwavering desire to see the political alliance of the two continents, in what is now referred to as his "**Letter to Africa**," Chávez declared, "I won't tire of repeating that we are one people. We are obliged to find one another, going beyond formality and discourse, in the same feeling of our unity. Together we must dedicate ourselves to creating conditions that allow us to rescue our peoples from the maze they were thrown into, first by **colonialism** and then by the neoliberal capitalism of the twentieth century." Chavez's declaration is a testament to his cultural and political commitment to Africa and her children, at home and in the **diaspora**.

If blackness is synonymous with Socialism, and less than 1% of the population identifies as negro/negra - it's appropriate to describe the Chavista social movement as racist in it's orientation.

And here we see what could be construed as an example of racism by Layla Brown-Vincent. To her the life of a single Chavista that is black is, by her omission of other relevant facts for an assessment of the PSUV regime, more important than the 7000+ people that the UN has reported the FAES has killed or the at least 4 million Venezuelans that have fled the country.

While this section seems intended to showcase Chavez's humanity, it ironically highlights the Opposition's case against him and Maduro.

By giving away so much oil, or selling it at reduced costs, financing the projects of allies to gain influence and engaging in irregular warfare - not only has the Venezuelan economy faltered but it's political culture has become paranoid and regressive.

Nicolás Maduro, Chávez's chosen successor, played a central role in helping to manifest Venezuela's growing commitment to Africa and its diasporic children. From 2006 to 2013 Maduro served as Venezuela's Minister of Foreign Affairs. It was during Maduro's tenure that Venezuela severed ties with Israel, established diplomatic ties with **Palestine**, bolstered support for Libya under **Muammar Gaddafi's** leadership, and helped (re)establish diplomatic relations with more than fifteen continental African nations. In light of this history, Chávez's decision to make Maduro the next leader of the Bolivarian Revolution demonstrates his desire for the Revolution to continue the work of supporting African, Indigenous, and **poor people's struggles** for liberation all over the world. It also provides more context for understanding US interest in funding regime change efforts in Venezuela. **Guaidó's claim to the presidency** rests on the assertion that Maduro has failed to fulfill his constitutional responsibilities and has therefore "abandoned his post." This assertion is an outgrowth of opposition claims that Venezuela's 2018 presidential elections were fraudulent and "the people" did not vote for him, a claim which **Mariela Machado**, an Afro-Venezuelan community activist from La Vega Parish in Caracas, vehemently contests. In a March 2019 interview, she proclaimed:

“

[W]e are clear that we voted for Nicolás Maduro. We elected him so that he could continue the policies of Hugo Chávez. He must deepen the policies around the communes and communal power because the people will save the people. The rights of women have been recognized, which is key, but it's not just that . . . I am black and poor, and I will never be a slave again because I have lived a process of profound liberation where I say whatever I feel,

DONATE

Here we can again see what could be construed as racism by Layla Brown-Vincent. She seems to be saying that it's acceptable for governmental attention and funds to flow out of the country to other regions that's don't benefit the Venezuelan people so long as they are black.

Here Layla Brown-Vincent seems to be oblivious to the fact that the extensive financial support Venezuela gives to projects oriented towards supporting some World Revolution - despite being unable to effectively self-manage it's own affairs - and the widespread corruption and political crimes committed by the PSUV's narcissistic leadership which she admits to are the very basis for the claims that Maduro has "abandoned his post" and is acting against the interests of his own people in pursuit of his own selfish goals for recognition as a world-historic actor.

Again worth mentioning giving it's absence is the lack OAS or other intergovernmental reports highlighting the majority of the world community's rejection of the election - instead we are just to take the word of a Chavista activists because, given the prior language of the article, she is black. This could be construed as yet another example of Layla Brown-Vincent's racism.

like I'm doing right now . . . there's no way we will return to the past."

The profound liberation Machado speaks of is the radical potential of the Bolivarian process, particularly for Black/African peoples. Just as Haiti was the strong hold of Black liberation in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and Cuba became a beacon of the global struggle for Black/African liberation in the 20th century, Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution—despite its inadequacies—is the most earnest attempt to facilitate Black liberation of our time. Guaidó's attempts to destabilize Bolivarian efforts to reimagine socialism are part and parcel of the US-led effort to maintain racial capitalism across the globe. Anyone concerned with the freedom and self-determination of Black/African people anywhere in the world should be paying attention to and fundamentally opposed to the US-funded, manufactured coup and economic destabilization currently unfolding in Venezuela.

Again, the sole reliance on sources outside those of the Venezuelan government prevents the recognition that preservation of rule of law and respect for democratic norms and institutions is the true issue at hand.

If Bolivarian Socialism indeed was a liberation that everyone across the world should strive towards, it seems unusual that so many people there would flee the country or find themselves jobless, without access to social services, jailed, dead from such a wonderful, utopian politics.

Final Grade: P for Propaganda

Extensive use of loaded language.

Extensive use of government sources (i.e. Venezuela Analysis).

Extensive use of unreliable sources (i.e. GreyZone Project).

Several claims could be construed as racist.

Multiple claims unsupported by evidence.

Multiple claims seem to have facts important to the context intentionally omitted.

Multiple claims fail to examine counterfactuals.



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Layla Brown-Vincent is an Assistant Professor of Africana Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston. She earned a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology in 2016 from Duke University. Layla is also a proud graduate of North Carolina Central University. Her areas of specialization include Afro-Latin American social movements, Pan-Africanism, and Black feminism. Follow her on Twitter @PanAfrikFem_PhD.

Comments on “(Anti)Blackness, Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution, and Guaidó’s Attempted Coup”