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U.S. position on Russia, Crimea full of hypocrisy

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The hypocrisy behind the U.S. position on the Russian involvement in the Crimea is incredible. I don't condone the Russian power play in Crimea, but what I object to is a holier-than-thou attitude by the Obama administration, Congress and most of the mass media. What is that saying? People in glass houses shouldn't throw bricks, or something like that.

The U.S. has a long history of military, economic and political interventions in other countries. Let's start with Iraq under the Bush administration, supported by both Republicans and Democrats. What right did we have to invade Iraq? Was Iraq part of the United States as Crimea was part of Russia? Did Iraq have a majority of Americans living there who ostensibly needed U.S. protection? At least a majority of Crimeans are ethnic Russians. Did the United States have a vital national security interest in Iraq? The Russians do in Crimea because it borders Russia, which has military bases there, including a large naval facility that gives Russia access to the Black Sea. How can the United States keep a straight face and condemn Russia after what we did in Iraq (and some might include Afghanistan as well)?

It's not just recent history that brings out this hypocrisy and contradictions. I spent part of this past quarter teaching my students about the U.S.-Mexico war that most Americans know nothing about. Most believe that somehow Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona and California came with the Mayflower or just by nature became part of the United States.

This region, Mexico's northern provinces, were taken by the U.S. in a war of choice or conquest in the mid-1840s. Mexico posed no threat to the United States, but many Americans, believing in Manifest Destiny -- the idea that God had anointed Americans to spread throughout the Western Hemisphere, taking the virtues of liberty and freedom to less fortunate people -- propelled this expansion. But so, too, did material interests, such as Southern planters seeking new land for cotton cultivation; New England

merchants desiring trade with California to use it to expand trade to China; and Western farmers who coveted new farming lands.

Moreover, as I reminded my students, what freedom and liberty was the United States going to share with less fortunate others when millions of African-Americans lived in slavery, many white working people could not vote because they owned no property, and white women could neither vote nor own property?

The U.S.-Mexico war marked the origins of the American empire that would see other military interventions in the Caribbean (the Spanish-American War of 1898 -- where do you think the U.S. base in Guantanamo Bay came from?) and in Mexico and Central America. Into the 20th century, the U.S. imposed dictators throughout Latin America to ensure protection for American corporate interests. The history of U.S. interventions in Latin America make Crimea into a sideshow. And what about Vietnam?

The hypocrisy of the United States on Crimea is incredible, but the worst problem is that most Americans don't see the hypocrisy. They don't because they don't know their own history, and this blinds them to these contradictions. Historical amnesia supports these contradictions and allows U.S. leaders to advance policies and new foreign interventions that are not in the interests of the American people. History and the knowledge of our history, as I tell my students, is our ally and should make us better and more responsible citizens if we allow it.

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