America’s Racial Self-Flagellation at the UN Only Helps Rogue States

April 15, 2021

By Noah Rothman

Commentary

[https://www.commentarymagazine.com/noah-rothman/americas-self-flagellation-at-the-u-n-only-helps-rogue-states/](https://www.commentarymagazine.com/noah-rothman/americas-self-flagellation-at-the-u-n-only-helps-rogue-states/?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Constituency+Maintenance+in+the+Party+of+Elites&utm_campaign=Daily+newsletter+04%2F19%2F21)

“Racial discrimination against minorities is a chronic sickness in American society.”

“…the challenges facing the United States in human rights are deep-seated. They did not just emerge over the past four years, such as Black Lives Matter.”

“[S]lavery is the original sin of America. It’s weaved white supremacy and black inferiority into our founding documents and principles.”

What distinguishes these relatively similar remarks about America’s flawed past and imperfect present? The first two were delivered by [Communist Chinese officials](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-chinese-director-of-the-office-of-the-central-commission-for-foreign-affairs-yang-jiechi-and-chinese-state-councilor-wang-yi-at-th/) in an effort to [embarrass the United States](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/www.vice.com/en/article/dyz7kk/china-racism-propaganda-black-lives-matter) on the world stage. The third is an indictment of the United States by the United States itself.

That particular remark comes from the head of the American mission to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, in [a March speech before the UN General Assembly](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/usun.usmission.gov/remarks-by-ambassador-linda-thomas-greenfield-at-a-un-general-assembly-commemorative-meeting-for-intl-day-for-the-elimination-of-racial-discrimination/). She recently reiterated the themes of that speech in an address to the non-profit group founded by Rev. Al Sharpton, the National Action Network. “Of course, when we raise issues of equity and justice at the global scale, we have to approach them with humility,” [Thomas-Greenfield conceded](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/twitter.com/tomselliott/status/1382388222819459074). “We have to acknowledge that we are an imperfect Union and have been since the beginning.”

Thomas-Greenfield is presently focused on getting the U.S. back into the United Nations Human Rights Council, an organization from which the U.S. withdrew in 2018—[and for good reason](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/america-s-decision-leave-cowardly-u-n-human-rights-council-ncna885326).

The UNHRC is an organization [plagued by corruption](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/www.fairobserver.com/more/global_change/united-nations-human-rights-council-failures-corruption-news-61211/). It elevates miscreants like China, Algeria, Congo, Cuba, Pakistan, Venezuela, Russia, and Qatar to membership. It maintains a permanent agenda item—[Item Seven](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/unwatch.org/agenda-item-7-country-claims-and-un-watch-responses/)—dedicated to the criticism of Israel. It elects people like Richard Falk, a [9/11 conspiracy theorist](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/www.sfgate.com/opinion/article/9-11-conspiracy-theorist-should-leave-U-N-job-3257919.php) and [obsequious apologist](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/www.youtube.com/watch?v=7aPN97izL-c&ab_channel=UNWatch) for the terror group Hamas, to oversee the situation in the Palestinian territories. It selects individuals like [Jean Ziegler](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/unwatch.org/end-human-rights-u-n-panel-mother-rogues-galleries/), a co-founder and recipient of the preposterous “Gaddafi International Prize for Human Rights,” to defend Venezuela’s murderous Maduro regime as a victim of America’s “economic war.” And so on.

And, of course, the UNHRC appears to share Amb. Thomas-Greenfield’s assessment of America’s terribly unimpressive record when it comes to the promotion of racial comity and minority rights.

In 2020, the Council adopted a resolution unanimously and by voice vote authorizing “a report on systemic racism, violations of international human rights law against Africans and people of African descent by law enforcement agencies,” in the U.S. The death of George Floyd proved an occasion for Russia’s envoy to denounce the “calamitous state of human rights” in the U.S., and it allowed China’s representative the [chance to denounce](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/apnews.com/article/0c317ab2dd7c8212859e515b0f1c0925) America’s “chronic and deep-rooted racial discrimination.” Sound familiar?

When riots and violence followed the anti-police violence demonstrations that year, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights condemned the U.S. response. “International human-rights law protects the right to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly,” said Rapporteur [Fionnuala Ní Aoláin.](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1066722" \t "_blank) “It is regrettable that the United States has chosen to respond to the protests in a manner that undermines these fundamental rights.”

Advocates in favor of the Biden administration’s efforts to make anti-racism “the business of the whole of government,” including the conduct of foreign affairs, insist this is clear-eyed honesty that advances U.S. interests. As [Joe Biden himself said](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/), “we’ll be a much more credible partner because of these efforts to shore up our own foundations.” But lending credence to the worst calumnies against the United States has already frustrated the new UN ambassador’s goals.

Amb. Thomas-Greenfield cannot help but qualify any condemnation of a foreign state’s human-rights record with a perfunctory nod to the legacy of racism in the U.S., diluting the effect of her efforts to shine the spotlight on the world’s most abused and repressed peoples. For example, in March, Thomas-Greenfield accused Beijing of grotesque abuses against minority groups such as the Uighurs, to which China replied with its own condemnation. “If the U.S. truly cared about human rights,” China’s representative said, “they should address the deep-seated problems of racial discrimination, social injustice, and police brutality, on their own soil.”

And how did the ambassador respond to this charge? By legitimizing it and reinforcing it by relating her own experience confronting racism when she worked as a teenage babysitter. “We have flaws. Deep, serious flaws,” Thomas-Greenfield [admitted](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-un/u-s-and-china-spar-over-racism-at-united-nations-idUSKBN2BB29E). “But we talk about them. We work to address them. And we press on, in hopes that we can leave the country better than we found it.” Consider the subject changed.

Proponents of making anti-racism into a theory of international relations have succumbed to the most blinding solipsism. The tortured effort to equate racial tensions, lingering personal bigotries, and even the illegal ([and prosecutable](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/www.nytimes.com/live/2021/04/15/us/derek-chauvin-trial)) mishandling of minorities by police with, for example, the resettlement of an entire ethnic minority into [reeducation and labor camps](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55794071) requires you to sacrifice even the most elementary powers of discernment. It isn’t enlightened—just the opposite. It is bafflingly stubborn and deliberately dense. Worst of all, it is a belief system that leads its advocates to all but defend the actions of genocidal states. After all, [who are we to judge](https://archive.vn/o/g0nfX/https:/twitter.com/BBCNewsnight/status/1382457168000081920)?

If our objective is the advancement and preservation of human rights abroad, this sort of behavior only makes that goal harder to achieve. The alternative to this conduct isn’t denying the fact that racism exists in ours and every other society on earth. It is having the capacity for circumspection—just enough to recognize that episodes of overzealous policing are not the same thing as ethnic cleansing, forced labor, and genocide.

The world’s rogue states have long sought to blur the clear and discrete lines between their systemic abuses and America’s imperfections. For some reason, the Biden administration seems to want to give that sort of craven propagandizing a boost.