**The Race Card**

[Aliya Anjum](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/aliya-anjum/%22%20%5Co%20%22More%20Articles%20by%20Aliya%20Anjum)

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The United States of America and Pakistan seem to be nations very unlike each other, yet if we look closely then they have a lot in common. One such commonality is the Capitol Insurrection in the US on January 6, 2021, and the mob attacks on the General Headquarters of the Pakistan Army on May 9, 2023.

Both events were triggered by a former and current head of state, the US President and the Pakistani Prime Minister, respectively. Both men are very similar in their attitudes and behaviour, even though they come from different religions and cultures. Both men are political cult leaders who play on people’s most basic fears and insecurities for their benefit.

The American continent was inhabited by indigenous tribes who were exterminated through genocide after European colonization. The white European race founded the United States of America based on Manifest Destiny – a cultural belief that white settlers were Divinely ordained to settle across North America. The US hence began as a white supremacist nation at its core. The famous statue of Liberty that stands at the shore of New York welcomed the poor and the hungry albeit only from the whites. If you were European, you could move to the land of opportunity and make it your home. This remained true till the 1960s when President Kennedy first opened the US to non-whites. This move in the 1960s came at a time of racial uprisings from the blacks through leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. The 1960s was a time when non-whites could not dine in the same restaurant as whites. Z.A. Bhutto in his student days at the University of California, Berkeley was evicted from a restaurant when he went there to dine with his white college friends, on grounds of being a non-white. Rosa Parks is credited with creating the spark that officially ended black racial segregation. This meant the end of white racial supremacy in the 1960’s – atleast on paper, if not in the minds.

The racial sentiment is very similar in US and Pakistan, as the notion of identity is linked to one’s race. This is in spite of the fact that racism is condemned in Islam in the strongest terms.

During the 1980s manufacturing began to shift from the US and hard-working Americans started to lose their jobs. Poverty overtook rural and blue-collar Americans. Immigrants from Asia began taking over skilled jobs in the 1980s and 1990s. Doctors and Engineers from Pakistan, India and other English-speaking nations began to take over high-paying jobs. Then 9/11 happened and American political leadership identified the Islamic world as their enemy. Many white Americans joined the military in the War on Terror. Meanwhile, the US elected its first black president. Then the housing market crash happened in 2009 and many lost their homes. Businesses like Walmart and Amazon kept hiring temporary workers, which increased poverty and deprived Americans of health insurance. Then came the COVID lockdown, when working from home became normal. This accelerated the growth of freelance international workers, which meant American pay slips were now going to the pockets of non-whites at home and abroad. The Woke movement changing traditional beliefs about gender roles etc. also challenged white conservative values. The US faced defeat in Afghanistan and in general, the optics of the War on Terror did not look good. The disenfranchised white Americans – including war veterans – voted for Donald Trump who promised a white economic revival. Donald Trump shifted to a cult leader from a political leader, when he subtly invoked the notion of Manifest Destiny, which was already at risk, in the minds of white Americans. Disenfranchised white Americans saw the political and economic trajectory of the US, as an assault on white resources, beliefs, values and dreams. When Trump was not re-elected and he kept lying about the election results being manipulated, his white supporters decided to fulfil their patriotic duty to reclaim their country.

All this culminated in the shocking Capitol Insurrection of January 6, 2021, which was an all-white phenomenon. Even after Donald Trump has been indicted three times now, since the underlying motivation of his support persists, data points are still proving him to be popular in the forthcoming US elections. Imran Khan similarly touched a raw nerve when he kept telling a poor and politically unstable nation that their resources were being stolen by the ruling political parties. People rallied enmasse in his favor and Imran Khan shifted from being a political leader to a cult leader, with die-hard supporters. During his term as the Prime Minister, corruption increased and the poor got poorer with spiraling inflation. When Imran Khan was ousted through a valid legal procedure, he called it a conspiracy and implicated the army. The result was the May 9, 2023 insurrection on the GHQ in Pakistan. Since the underlying motivation of his followers persists, so does support for Khan in the upcoming elections – despite all valid court cases and the supporting evidence against him.

The racial sentiment is very similar in the US and Pakistan, as the notion of identity is linked to one’s race. This is in spite of the fact that racism is condemned in Islam in the strongest terms. From Z.A. Bhutto to the Sharifs, political leaders in Pakistan have played up racial sentiments to divide and rule. Every racial group votes for the leader who promises to promote his own racial group and province. This is why the spirit of nationalism is sorely lacking in Pakistan. The BLA in Balochistan is rallying people to see Gwadar as a Balochi asset. Just yesterday, I watched a clip of a TV program interviewing a mining engineer from Karachi working in the mines in Waziristan. The comments from aggrieved Pashtoons were all about the army stealing what he viewed as Pashtoon assets in the mines.

The white American supporters of Trump see American assets as belonging to the whites. This is the cause of their grievance, which has been encashed by Donald Trump. The various races in Pakistan see natural resources as the assets of the people of that region. They don’t view natural resources as the property of the state of Pakistan. This sentiment has been nurtured and then encashed by our political leaders. We need to foster nationalism with the Pakistan-first policy that the late General Musharraf often stated.

*The writer is an independent researcher, author and columnist. She can be reached at aliya1924@gmail.com*