

Independence Day Hypocrisy

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Along with Christmas, no federal holiday is more celebrated than the day a new nation declared its independence from the British Crown on July 4, 1776. Coming in the summer with good weather across the country, it's a day or long weekend of parades, outings, various other celebratory events, and baseball at all levels that many years ago often meant major league "double-headers" that was a big occasion for young boys, like this writer, growing up in "big league" cities whose dads took them out for an endless day at the ballpark. It's also a day commemorating the nation's history, liberation and traditions most people don't know or forgot. That's just as well because they were never taught the truths about them, just the acceptable illusions learned in school to the highest levels. They're extolled by the dominant media, most in academia, and by the clergy and others in high places as well who are willing to spread acceptable myths for the status and benefits doing it affords them.

Young people are never taught our real history, only what's falsely portrayed about it with all ugly parts suppressed. It's to program their minds and train a new generation of "good citizens" to believe what serves the privileged best benefits everyone and assure they won't resist to keep it that way. So we're taught to accept the myth of America's exceptionalism, our special nature, goodness, and democratic way of life, in the best of all possible countries with the best of all possible leaders running a government of, for and by the people serving everyone. If only it were true.

We're also taught to commemorate our Founders' glorious achievements and their liberating Revolution from the repressive British Crown and aristocracy. They replaced it with an experimental system of government never tried before in the West outside its imperfect earlier form in ancient Athens for a few decades only. After the war of independence, the Founders met in 1787, in the same Philadelphia State House where the Declaration of Independence was signed 11 years earlier. They came to frame a Constitution they hoped would last into "remote futurity" - for their interests alone.

Yet, they managed to include unimaginable freedoms in it as well, including real democratic ones in the Bill of Rights, ratified in 1791. It gave people the rights of free expression, religion, peaceable assembly, protection from illegal searches and seizures, due process and more. We still have them, but, in the age of George Bush, they hang by a thread and can be revoked by a "unitary" executive authority in the name of national security if he says so.

Noted political scientist and social critic Michael Parenti wrote of our Founder's achievement in the 8th and earlier editions of his important book, "Democracy for the Few." In it, he states "the Constitution was consciously designed as a conservative document" with provisions in it, or omitted by intent, to "resist the pressure of popular tides" and protect "a rising bourgeoisie('s)" freedom to "invest, speculate, trade, and accumulate wealth" the

way things work for capital interests today. It was to codify in law what politician, founding father, jurist and nation's first Chief Supreme Court justice, John Jay, said the way things should be - that "The people who own the country ought to run it (for their benefit alone)."

Benjamin Franklin was reportedly asked at the end of the Constitutional Convention whether the 55 attending delegates created a monarchy or republic. He responded "A republic, if you can keep it" without acknowledging notions of an egalitarian nation were stillborn at its birth. It was true then and now in spite of all the pretense contrived to portray an idealized society, in fact, always out of reach for most in it. Republican America was created as a nominal democracy Adam Smith said should be "instituted for the defense of the rich against the poor."

The nation's founders achieved mightily handing down their legacy to succeeding generations of leaders always mindful of who gave them power and who they were there to serve. At the nation's birth, only adult white male property owners could vote; blacks were commodities, not people; and women were childbearing and homemaking appendages of their husbands.

Religious prerequisites existed until 1810, and all adult white males couldn't vote until property and tax requirements were dropped in 1850. States elected senators until the 17th amendment in 1913 gave citizen voters that right, and Native Americans had no franchise in their own land until the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act gave them back what no one had the right to take away in the first place. Women's suffrage wasn't achieved until the 19th Amendment passed in 1920 after nearly 100 years of struggling for it.

The 1865 13th Amendment freed black slaves, the 1870 15th Amendment gave them the right to vote, but it wasn't until passage of the landmark Civil and Voting Rights Acts in the mid-1960s, abolishing Southern Jim Crow laws, that blacks could vote, in fact, like the Constitution said they could decades earlier. Today those rights are gravely weakened for all through unfair laws still in force and a nation growing more repressive and less responsive to the needs of ordinary working people and the nation's least advantaged. The limited high-water mark of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society has steadily eroded since in loss of civil liberties and essential social benefits. It's hardly a reason for those harmed and people of conscience to celebrate July 4 or any other day commemorating a nation unresponsive to them and most others.

The nation's Native Indians have the least to celebrate. Few once remained of the 100 million or so throughout the Americas and around 18 million in our America. Long before the nation was liberated from the British Crown, white settlers began slaughtering them mercilessly. Our Native peoples lived peacefully on these lands for thousands of years. They developed proud cultures "Western civilization" began eroding when it arrived.

When the first European settlers came in the late 15th century, Native peoples helped them adjust to a hostile unfamiliar new land. They weren't repaid kindly in our great push West and South that exterminated millions of them given no rights or quarter in our grand "democratic" experiment excluding them. Survivors today enjoy few freedoms only gotten grudgingly, and most suffer severe repression and deprivation in a land they once thrived on.

Today, our original inhabitants live in more desperate poverty and despair than any others

in the nation. Their needs are shamelessly unaddressed and virtually ignored. No day honors them for what they sacrificed for the privileged few to enjoy alone. For them, justice long delayed is justice never gotten.

They have no reason to commemorate the nation's founding that cost them their rights and destroyed their proud heritage, culture and lives. Today, their traditions aren't taught in schools and are unknown by the public. They're ignored by the dominant media that mocks and demonizes them in films and society as drunks, beasts, primitives and savages, noble or otherwise. Their legacy is one of made and broken treaties, stolen lands, rights denied, welfare ignored and lives taken for 500 years. They're still repressed and denied in a shameful attempt to "Americanize" them against their will and destroy their proud cultures doing it.

Many others in the nation have no reason to celebrate either on this or any other day. It's truer than ever in an age of extreme greed, unprecedented wealth disparity, loss of civil liberties and essential social services, a state of permanent imperial wars of aggression, galling corruption, and virtual abandonment of the rule of law by a government complicit in all its branches serving the privileged alone. Through lies, deceit and imperial arrogance, they created conditions hostile to the rights of ordinary people everywhere.

They ignore the needs of millions in the country enjoying few of the fruits available to a shrinking number of people in the "land of opportunity" offering less of it to growing numbers in it. Today tens of millions of poor and deprived, especially those of color, are practically condemned as criminals for their disadvantaged state. Through no fault of their own, they're ignored by a heartless state worshiping wealth and privilege at the expense of those having little or none.

Newly arrived immigrants have little to celebrate either, especially the undocumented and exploited forced here by repressive trade agreements like NAFTA and DR-CAFTA. They destroyed their livelihoods at home enriching corporate giants at the expense of working people where they're in force. Their choice was stay at home and perish or risk coming north to survive in a hostile unwelcoming climate uncaring of their plight and exploiting and persecuting the ones getting here and able to stay.

Muslims as well have little to celebrate, including citizens whose rights are nominally protected by the laws of the land. Instead, their government defiles Islam in the age of George Bush calling its believers "militants," "terrorists" and "Islamofascists" threatening the nation's security because the president says so. Thousands have been illegally hounded in witch-hunt roundups since 9/11, held in secret detention, unjustly deported, and given no rights including due process to clear their names. Their "crime" is their faith and color in a nation nominally guaranteeing all its people can worship freely. That right's now voided for those of the wrong faith. They're demonized, unwanted, condemned and persecuted in "the land of the free" but not for them. Shame on the nation that strayed from its founding principles, never granted to all, still only afforded a chosen few, and now denied anyone designated an enemy of the state even if they aren't one.

Finally, African Americans have little to celebrate this independence day that gave them none at all at first, precious little thereafter, and still treats them as second class citizens at best. They were first commodified and sold into bondage as human property. Their worth and status were then degraded in Article 1, Section 2, Clause 3 of the Constitution. That was the infamous "three-fifths clause" euphemistically referring to slaves as less than people

(and Indians as non-people) that remained the law of the land until voided by the 13th Amendment in 1865.

Black Americans are now nominally free, but along with Native Americans suffer the highest rates of poverty, deprivation, and incarceration and get the least amount of government aid for essential social services. That includes decent affordable health care, education and housing and enough food to eat for the poorest and most deprived with single mothers with children most harmed.

This July 4, at holiday outings, picnics, barbecues, ballgames, outdoor concerts, parades, fireworks displays, visits to the shore on vacation, and other celebratory events, remember the growing millions of victimized and deprived Americans in need. The state ignores them, denies them, even condemns them for their plight. Those most desperate are helped the least so the most privileged and well-off can be advantaged the most. As we give thanks and count our blessings this and every day, think of the poor and desperate who have few or none of what we take for granted. Remember, but for the grace of the Almighty, their plight could be ours.

Finally, remember as well on our “day of independence” the many tens of millions worldwide we deprived of theirs. Included are the people of Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and every nation living under US-imposed neoliberal unfair free-market rules exploiting the many for the interests of a privileged few. Those harmed range from the southern tip of Chile to the vastness of Africa to the Asian continent and throughout Europe, most notably in the East once under Soviet control. People everywhere pay for our nation putting wealth and power interests above basic humanity.

On this “independence day” and all others, think of them and our own deprived millions at home. Then imagine a future time free of that condition because enough people mobilized to change things bettering everyone. That would be something worth giving thanks for and celebrating.

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