

# July 4: “Patriotic Rituals R Us”. American Independence and Frederick Douglass’ Echoes Through The Ages

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*This incisive article was written by the late Danny Schechter, renowned author, television producer, filmmaker and contributor to Global Research, first published on July 4th, 2014. Danny’s thoughts and analysis will be remembered.*

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*The wheel of the calendar has turned again, and July 4<sup>th</sup> is upon us once again, a day for the consumption of 155 million pounds of hot dogs, and fireworks—75% of the pyro technics industry’s revenues ignite in an average 1400 displays on the federal holiday marking the anniversary of American Independence.*

Patriotic rituals r’ often us, although, never mind, that American celebrations only began after the war of 1812, and that it took quite a while for London to even respond to our declaration.

Quiet as its kept, actual independence only arrived on September, 3, 1783 when Great Britain formally abandoned its claims to its colonies and signed the Treaty of Paris.

Recall also that one of the pledges in the document of documents was a “Decent Respect for The Opinions of Mankind,” a vow undercut somewhat by a ruling by an appointed intelligence advisory body this past week—based on who knows what legal foundation—that US Spying on mankind is now and forevermore “legal” under our constitution.

Record this fact, too,that July 4<sup>th</sup> only became a holiday on June 28, 1870, a decision promulgated in the aftermath of our bloody civil war to encourage some semblance of unity in a still divided nation.

Back in ‘76, the independence war has been on for a year before the often feuding anddisunited politicians of the day decided a declaration was needed. It followed from a resolution by Richard Henry Lee of Virginia that began: “Resolved: That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.”

Even as Tom Jefferson drafted the words for the document, there was discordant music in the background. In the end, of the 13 colonies, nine voted yes, two — Pennsylvania and South Carolina — voted No. Delaware was undecided and New York abstained.

And so, it was on this basis, that the “United” States decided proclaim itself.

Of all the oratory and debate that on “our” independence, nothing in the literature surpasses the speech by abolitionist, editor and former slave, Frederick Douglass, whose oration about July 4<sup>th</sup> deserves to be much better known.

His famous speech has the title, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” It was delivered on July 5, 1852, eight years before the eruption of the war against the Confederacy’s secession from the union.

Douglass began slowly:

“Who could address this audience without a quailing sensation, has stronger nerves than I have. I do not remember ever to have appeared as a speaker before any assembly more shrinkingly, nor with greater distrust of my ability, than I do this day. A feeling has crept over me, quite unfavorable to the exercise of my limited powers of speech. The task before me is one which requires much previous thought and study for its proper performance. I know that apologies of this sort are generally considered flat and unmeaning....

The papers and placards say, that I am to deliver a 4th [of] July oration. This certainly sounds large, and out of the common way...The fact is, ladies and gentlemen, the distance between this platform and the slave plantation, from which I escaped, is considerable — and the difficulties to be overcome in getting from the latter to the former, are by no means slight. That I am here today is, to me, a matter of astonishment as well as of gratitude. You will not, therefore, be surprised, if in what I have to say I evince no elaborate preparation, nor grace my speech with any high sounding exordium. With little experience and with less learning, I have been able to throw my thoughts hastily and imperfectly together; and trusting to your patient and generous indulgence, I will proceed to lay them before you.

This, for the purpose of this celebration, is the 4th of July. It is the birthday of your National Independence, and of your political freedom. This, to you, is what the Passover was to the emancipated people of God. It carries your minds back to the day, and to the act of your great deliverance; and to the signs, and to the wonders, associated with that act, and that day. This celebration also marks the beginning of another year of your national life; and reminds you that the Republic of America is now 76 years old. I am glad, fellow-citizens, that your nation is so young.”

He went on and on, praising the founders and sympathizing with their cause before dropping the bomb he had, no doubt, been invited to drop—a condemnation of slavery a “peculiar institution”—what a euphemism that was— that some say now was one prime reason for the revolt in the colonies, based on the opposition to Britain’s decision to end its inhumanity, a choice many of the signatories to the Declaration opposed, no doubt, in part, because they, with whatever doubts or trepidations, held slaves themselves.

Douglass did not rush that day to get to his point, and the point, saying to all assembled, “Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common. — The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth [of] July is *yours*, not *mine*. You may rejoice, I must mourn.”

Ba Boom! He did not mince words:

“Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the old world, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.”

So much, back then, for American “exceptionalism,” and, so much for the deep debate that is still with us, when, in rare moments, our polity and media even recognizes the great gaps and inequalities that are dividing and impoverishing the nation.

Douglass ended his soaring declamation with hope, not despair, calling for a renewal of the values of the Declaration and a renewed commitment to justice. He quoted, the “fervent aspirations” of William Lloyd Garrison:

*God speed the year of jubilee  
The wide world o'er*

*When from their galling chains set free,  
Th' oppress'd shall vilely bend the knee,*

*And wear the yoke of tyranny  
Like brutes no more.*

*That year will come, and freedom's reign,*

*To man his plundered rights again  
Restore.*

Amen to that call to restore “plundered rights” on that July 4<sup>th</sup> and all that would follow.

Sadly, one promised set of holiday fireworks I was waiting for this year, seems to have been postponed or squashed, according to Op-ed News:

I am referring to the promised explosions by Glenn Greenwald who some see as a Douglass for our age. He had promised a July 4 extravaganza, writing last month:

*I think we will end the big stories in about three months or so [June or July 2014]. I like to think of it as a fireworks show: You want to save your best for last. There's a story that from the beginning I thought would be our biggest, and I'm saving that. The last one is the one where the sky is all covered in spectacular multicolored hues. This will be the finale, a big missing piece. Snowden knows about it and is excited about it.*

Writes Donn Marten: “For now at least the fireworks show has been postponed, with the incessant fear-mongering that has now overtaken the USA!, USA!, USA! over the new Islamic caliphate and Obama sending [more American troops back into Iraq](#) it is probably better than even money that it will be cancelled altogether in the interests of national security.”

True? In the spirit of Frederick Douglass, this is not a time to surrender. There will be fireworks. Declare your independence.

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