

Reflecting on the History of America's Wars, Trying to Feel Patriotic on the Fourth of July

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Global Research, July 02, 2014

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [History](#), [Law and Justice](#), [Militarization and WMD](#)

Since the assassinations of Jack Kennedy and Martin Luther King (and the Vietnam War that had much to do with both), it has been hard for historically-literate and open-minded Americans to generate much patriotic fervor on the Fourth of July. But they should have been skeptical long before those idealism-shattering events. My own seriously deficient high school education in world and American history has necessitated decades of catch-up reading and research in order to find the truth about the dark underbelly of America.

My high school textbooks totally ignored the real histories of the conquistadores, the genocide of Native Americans and their cultures, and the truth about the actual brutality of the enslavement of Black Africans. My history books glorified America's wars, and never mentioned America's use of propaganda or how it was involved in fascist movements worldwide. The cold realities of sexism, militarism, poverty, corporate abuse, the banking system, etc. were glossed over. Sadly, my relative ignorance about the (obviously censored out of our consciousness) painful and unwelcome truths about what really happened in history is probably the norm.

I have tried to do some of the catching-up by reading the relatively hidden alternative literature, starting with books like Howard Zinn's *The People's History of the United States* and also the writings of historically-literate truth-tellers like Martin Luther King, Noam Chomsky and Chris Hedges.

Anyone who honestly reads those author's books can't help but become disillusioned with America's history and the massive propaganda by which the vast majority of us Americans have been duped into sometimes very sincerely believing that the US is the new shining light of the world, working courageously and endlessly for justice and peace.

The Pseudo-patriotic Propaganda is Getting Thicker

And the flag-waving propaganda is getting thicker and smellier with every move that our nation's sociopathic mega-corporations, their unelected, over-privileged ruling elites, their well-paid lobbyists, their hordes of cunning, shyster lawyers, their five right-wing bought-and-paid-for Supreme Court justices, their thousands of bribed state and federal legislators, the entrenched bureaucracy, and their corporate-controlled media - all of whom are complicit in the demise of American democracy. Anyone who is paying attention is watching their democracy wither and die while the conscienceless uber-wealthy and their corporations bloat up, heading for the next bust.

The connections between wealth, power, violence and injustice should be obvious. Judge

Louis D. Brandeis nailed that concept when he said:

“We can either have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we cannot have both.”

With regards to American history as Zinn expressed it in his writings and speeches, all one has to do is list a few events that have contributed to the disillusionment and the reason so many find it hard to fake patriotism on Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, Veterans Day or Columbus Day (or to pretend that the Christian religious holidays of Christmas or Easter have much to do with the original, pacifist, unconditionally-loving, enemy-loving, compassionate teachings and actions of the original form of Christianity).

Many of the progressive thinkers of my generation were irretrievably disillusioned by the government-backed conspiracies (and the resultant cover-ups) that orchestrated the political murders of the leftist heroes (and perhaps the only hope for the American Dream) JFK, MLK, RFK and Paul Wellstone. And the pain is re-experienced every time one realizes that the real unindicted conspirators behind those assassinations are still at large, and therefore remain unpunished and free to kill again.

(One could say the same thing about the hidden power elites who were behind the planting of the controlled demolitions that so dramatically brought down the three WTC towers on 9/11/01 an event that allowed them to start the homicidal and suicidal wars for oil in the Mideast. And, similarly unpunished and free to exploit again, are the known financial and political elites that caused the Crash and start of the Great Recession of 2008. They not only got bailed out, but were rewarded for their crimes rather than going to jail where they belonged.)

Those folks who have done the necessary catch-up research and reading that revealed what the right-wing censors had taken out of our history books have understandably become disillusioned about America's status in the history of the world.

A Few Historical Facts to Temper One's Patriotism

Consider these events that were hailed with mesmerizing flag-waving fervor, just from the last two generations:

- 1) the crimes against humanity and atrocities that were done in our name in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos;
- 2) the quasi-fascism of the traitorous, criminal, autocratic Richard Nixon (and his unapologetic resurrection that allowed him to actually receive positive funeral eulogies from prominent US politicians, all of whom ignored his treachery);
- 3) Ronald Reagan's bogus trickle-down economics scheme that cunningly camouflaged the disastrous effects of the next six items;
- 4) the predatory lending schemes from Reagan acolytes that destroyed so many small family farms and businesses in the 1980s, thus enriching the already rich;
- 5) the predatory corporate privatization schemes that did the same;

6) the granting of huge tax breaks to the ultra-wealthy and their corporations, again starting in the Reagan era;

7) the massive Reagan-era nuclear weapons buildup during the orchestrated Cold War;

8) Reagan's union-busting agenda, which fostered the impoverishment of America's middle classes;

9) the unpayable 4 trillion dollars of new debt during the Reagan years (largely thanks to the bloating of the US military (which is still on-going) that some future generation won't be able to reverse either;

10) the use of torture and killer drones that extra-judicially assassinate people who are only suspected of being enemies of the state;

11) Etc, etc. Add your own nightmarish examples of America's many anti-democratic and military misadventures.

Many progressive Americans are still working, often with broken hearts, for peace and justice in our nation and in the world, but they are often understandably cynical about - indeed, often disgusted with - America's wasteful, boastful, morally bankrupt, war-mongering, predatory nature.

Is America Only Partially Fascist - or is it Worse Than That?

It is true that many historically aware, intelligent people around the globe look at our national security apparatus (NSA, CIA, FBI, militarized police/Swat teams that suppress honest, nonviolent dissent) - and they see Gestapo.

Many of these citizens of the world look at the Stars and Stripes - and they see Swastika.

Many of these same people see fascism when they look at the US's long history of supporting fascist dictators in nations like Iran, South Korea, South Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, Chile, Argentina, Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama, Colombia, etc. Friendly American fascism was institutionalized during the Cheney/Bush-era at Abu Ghraib in the prisoner abuse scandal, in the legalized torture policies at secret CIA sites and in the prolonged torturous imprisonment of "suspects" at Guantanamo who haven't been charged with a crime and who haven't been given a chance to prove their innocence in a trial before their peers.

Fascism in America can be understood when one acknowledges that America is ruled by corporations. Recall that Mussolini, the inventor of fascism, said: "Fascism should more properly be called corporatism because it is the merger of state and corporate power").

Private corporate interests are fostered and protected, not only by the most lethal and costly weapons systems ever, but by the most brutal and efficient killing force in the history of the world - both paid for by the US taxpayer. Hitler's monster weapons and his Wehrmacht soldiers were pikers in comparison.

True Patriotism is the Willingness to Have a Lover's Quarrel With Your Country

Not that the disillusioned ones don't love their country. Many of those dissenting peace-lovers, justice-seekers and, by logical extension, whistle-blowers, think of themselves as loving America so much that they are willing to have a lover's quarrel with it. That sounds pretty American to me.

I was once a member-supporter of the Democratic Party, even to the point of becoming a delegate to the Minnesota State DFL Convention back during the frightening Reagan era. I was - and still am - a believer in the ideals of the progressive, anti-fascist, anti-corrupt capitalism, pro-environment, anti-racist, anti-militarist wing of the party best exemplified by the politics of Paul Wellstone, the nearly disappeared remnant of the party that appears to have become largely pro-militarist and corporate-controlled (and therefore rightist). The Green Party (read about the 10 Key Values of the Green Party at: <http://www.gp.org/tenkey.php>) seems to me to be the true representative of the old values of Democratic Party pro-peace patriots like Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern and Paul Wellstone.

Many true patriots have sadly come to realize that American politics is increasingly meeting the definition of classical European fascism (although the Democratic Party is not as strongly fascist as the more intensely corporate-controlled, NeoConservative, Theocracy-aspiring, Tea Party-tolerating, racist-infiltrated, Young Earth believing, climate change denying, anti-intellectual Republican Party. Being an anti-fascist, I find it hard to support, ethically or monetarily, the agendas of either of these entities.

Most seasoned American peacemakers have seen through the propagandistic pro-war rhetoric that is dutifully repeated as valid by the corporate-controlled media (and, sadly, increasingly so even on NPR and PBS).

War profiteers in the investor classes know that there is no money to be made in a peaceful world without wars or rumors of wars. Therefore publically-traded corporations that are connected to the weapons and other war-related industries do their mercenary duty for the Pentagon's pro-war and Cold War agendas, both of which are good for business.

The "Greed is Good" Captains of Industry and their Ponzi Scheme dealings on Wall Street have been selling their addictive products to the "hoping-to-get-rich-quick" crowd for as long as the stock market has existed - and the gambling addicts in the investor classes can't get off the stuff long enough to sober up and see that they are being had.

The Ideals of Lady Liberty

The United States of America stopped being a beacon of light, truth, peace and liberty long ago. It didn't just happen after JFK's assassination or 9/11 (which was a cleverly orchestrated event designed to start the Middle East Wars for Oil [see www.ae911truth.org for proof] when the Cheney/Bush administration, squandering the sympathy of the world with a series of blatant lies, led the US public into an illegal and unjust war, showing their willingness to risk igniting World War III, with the full consent of most of the servile congress-persons from each of the two major political parties.

Cynicism about Independence Day (independence from Great Britain) and the ideals behind the Statue of Lady Liberty, was prevalent in America long before France gave America the Statue. That generous gift from an appreciative nation was intended to celebrate the first 100 years of American independence but also represented the fondness that France had for

the US and its role in inspiring the French Revolution.

America's promise to be the beacon to the world has been shattered many times since the Statue was dedicated in 1886. America once deserved its reputation as a refuge to the oppressed people of the world – which is the America that disillusioned activists still naively hope can be revived. There was indeed a time in world history when the inscription on the Statue represented the real aspirations of true patriots – something that is worth fighting and even dying for.

“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free,
the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless,
tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Many generations of the increasingly despised “tempest tossed” – if they ever made it across the border – found out too late that they were going to be discriminated against, chewed-up, spit out, rendered homeless or exploited by corporate America for their cheap labor. It has taken many of us a long time to understand that our multinational corporations, with the essential help of the brutal tactics of the CIA and hired local mercenary soldiers, were the ones who forced these Central Americans from their land and livelihoods in the first place, in the interest of making room for corporate plantations to raise and export sugar cane, coffee, and bananas. And then, if the unjustly dispossessed ones actually made it to “El Norte” alive, these victims were harassed, abused in America's for-profit prison system, offered no access to health care, safe living situations, living wages, or real security for the future.

The First Exploitees of American Fascism Were Non-White

The very first victims of American Fascism were the aboriginal people who could have annihilated the usurper Columbus and his sex-starved crew (who abducted and raped young native women ASAP back on board the Santa Maria). Native Americans suffered the indignity and cruelty of the European invaders and ultimately were nearly annihilated themselves via legalized, racist, genocidal policies (“the only good Indian is a dead Indian”) at the hands of the US Army that then “opened up the frontier” to the undocumented and illegal immigrants from war-weary, impoverished, and exploited Europe, all white folks who had overpopulated their own homelands.

Next in line for exploitation were the black African victims of the very profitable slave trade that produced a lot of the “wretched refuse”. The eventually freed slaves of the late-1800s were destined to become the easily-lynchable victims of Jim Crow segregation that persists to this very day in most of the quasi-fascist southern states – despite federal legislation that supposedly granted them civil liberties and voting rights. Note that those hard-won voting rights are now being taken away by the afore-mentioned Supreme Court Five – at the request of those southern racists who haven't yet gotten over the loss of the Civil War.

These oppressed ones “yearning to be free” had often been fooled about the deceptively-labeled “American Dream”. For many it rapidly became the “American Nightmare”. Many of them were destined to be treated as virtual slaves, indentured servants, share-croppers, or otherwise victims of predatory entities that found any number of ways to exploit these “untermenschen”. They became the frequently-unemployed masses who were so desperate for work that they were willing to accept the poverty wages offered by greedy corporations

and the wealthy elites, all of whom did everything possible to prevent the unionization of their industries. (It is important to understand the business principle that high unemployment, frightened, desperate-for-work workers, low wages, and union exclusion all help the profit margins and share prices of publicly-traded companies.)

The spirit of Liberty seems to have been strangled, what with the late-lamented Cheney/Bush/Rumsfeld/Rove doctrine of pre-emptive, aggressive and endless wars (which meets the definition of international war crimes and crimes against humanity). (Click on the link below and watch one of these crimes that occurred in Baghdad that was courageously and patriotically leaked by Chelsea Manning at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rXPrfnU3G0>).

Now, as an extension of the Cheney/Bush doctrine, America is not only victimizing Middle Eastern women and children, but it is also brutalizing Central Americans whose land was stolen from them by American industry and who only want to find dignified work somewhere in order to better themselves and to support their families.

After thinking about America's immigration issue, some concerned citizens might actually work for the acceptance of these hard working freedom-loving immigrants and instead deport (or convert) the worst of our American fascists and racists. America might turn out to be more purely American with some variation of that plan.

One person who criticized the annual 4th of July celebrations was the emancipated black intellectual Frederick Douglass. Douglass was the pre-eminent - and obviously very courageous - mid-19th century spokesperson for the abolition of slavery. His speeches and writings remain important today because of the powerful way he articulated the case against racial discrimination.

A couple of years ago I wrote an essay that ended with excerpts from Douglass's 4th of July speech, which he delivered to a mostly white audience back in 1852, a decade before President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Declaration. His words could have been spoken by First Nations people, Black Africans, Chinese immigrants, Japanese immigrants, Hispanics and many other racial, ethnic and sexual minorities from the dark pages of American history. Due to its length I will only print the link to the speech below.

His speech contains many unwelcome truths that are still pertinent today. Douglass's words will be simplistically dismissed by some as being unpatriotic, but his statements are irrefutable and his truth-telling makes him a hero to justice-seekers. He warns in his speech that

"I will use the severest language I can command; and yet not one word shall escape me that any man, whose judgment is not blinded by prejudice, or who is not at heart a slaveholder, shall not confess to be right and just."

The speech can be read at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2927t.html>

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