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Happy July Farce: An American Revolution Would be a Good Idea



Image by [Vlad Tchompalov](#).

“Read a book, you might learn something.”

– *New Left historian Carl Parrini to a generation of students at Northern Illinois University*

“Fuck your fireworks, fuck your Court, fuck its decisions, and fuck your Fourth.”

– *The author, somewhere in downtown Chicago, today*

Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence (DOI) and the American “revolution” it signified should be taken with a ton of salt. The (DOI) articulated the revolutionary notion that “the people” have the right to dissolve a government that no longer serves their

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interests and the common good. But who were “the people” in the early U.S. republic? White male owners of substantive property holdings. This left out: Blacks, most of whom were branded and ruthlessly exploited as chattel slaves in the new republic; Native Americans, reviled as “savages” (more on who the real savages were below); women of all races; much of the white population, which was considered too poor to be trusted with citizenship (though they were welcome to give their lives to fight the British).

Silent Profits: Jefferson’s Nail Factory

Thomas Jefferson, whose face is carved into a South Dakota mountain stolen from the great Sioux Nation, is a chilling national icon. Henry Wiencek’s justly heralded volume, *Master of the Mountain: Thomas Jefferson and His Slaves* (2012), dug into previously overlooked evidence in Jefferson’s papers and new archaeological work at Jefferson’s Monticello site to discover Jefferson’s morally stunted, penny-pinching world. As one reviewer rightly notes:

“Wiencek’s Jefferson is a man of business and public affairs who makes a success of his debt-ridden plantation thanks to what he calls the ‘silent profits’ gained from his slaves and thanks to a skewed moral universe that he and thousands of others readily inhabited. We see Jefferson taking out a slave-equity line of credit with a Dutch bank to finance the building of Monticello and deftly creating smoke screens when visitors are dismayed by his apparent endorsement of a system they thought he’d vowed to overturn. It is not a pretty story. Slave boys are whipped to make them work in the nail factory at Monticello that pays Jefferson’s grocery bills. Parents are divided from children in his ledgers... Slaves are bought, sold, given as gifts, and used as collateral for the loan that pays for Monticello’s construction—while Jefferson composes theories that obscure the dynamics of what he himself called ‘the execrable commerce.’ Many people saw a catastrophe coming and tried to stop it, but not Jefferson. The pursuit of happiness had become deeply corrupted, and an oligarchy was getting very rich.”

A “Revolution” Driven by Fear of “Domestic Insurrections”

Jefferson’s American “revolution” was a national independence movement led by wealthy landowners, slaveowners, merchants, and elite politicians who feared uprisings from below. These North American exploiters and rulers wanted more breathing space – what Hitler would later call Lebensraum – to preserve and develop further systems of racial oppression, territorial conquest, and class rule.

Look at this curious, rarely noted line in the Declaration of Independence’s (DOI’s) list of grievances against King George: “He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us and

has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions.” Here the “royal brute” was accused of advancing social upheaval from the bottom up (“domestic insurrection”) in the New World – an instructive complaint, symptomatic of the “American Revolution’s” counter-revolutionary nature.

Interesting, no? – a “revolutionary” document that complains about its enemy “exciting domestic insurrection”! A “revolution” driven by fear of “domestic insurrection”!!



Photo by Paul Street.

“Merciless Savages”

“The inhabitants of our frontiers” – would that be the original Indigenous First Nations people who the white un-“settlers” from the British Isles and Europe ethnically cleansed

from British North America and the early US republic's eastern seaboard before the national break-off? It was not a pretty story. Jefferson's description of North America's original inhabitants as "merciless Indian savages" anticipated Orwell by projecting onto Native Americans the genocidal practices that white "settlers" exhibited from day one. Consider the celebrated progressive historian Eric Foner's textbook description of the grisly and religiously infused Mystic River Massacre of 1637:

"A force of Connecticut and Massachusetts soldiers, augmented by Narraganset allies, surrounded the main Pequot fortified village at Mystic and set it ablaze, killing those who tried to escape. Over 500 men, women, and children lost their lives in the massacre. By the end of the war [of New England settlers on the once powerful Pequot tribe], most of the Pequots had been exterminated or sold into Caribbean slavery. The treat that restored peace decreed that their name should be wiped from the historical record...The colonists' ferocity shocked their Indian allies, who considered European military practices barbaric. A few Puritans agreed. 'It was a fearful sight to see them frying in the fire,' the Pilgrim leaders William Bradford wrote of the raid on Mystic. But to most Puritans, including Bradford, the defeat of a 'barbarous nation' by 'the sword of the Lord' offered further proof that they were on a sacred mission and that Indians were unworthy of sharing New England with the visible saints of the church."

The Puritans wept with joy and thanked "God" for helping them flame-broil Indian women and children who stood on ground the "settlers" would turn into a heavenly "City on the Hill." A glorious moment in the unfolding of the great democratic "Saxon" ideal that American historians before Frederick Jackson Turner considered to be the distinctive genius of the United States and its British-colonist forbearers! After a cruel campaign of genocidal removal (at the conclusion of "King Phillips' War") in which the white (un-)settlers pushed most of the last Indians they had not killed out of New England in the mid-1670s, "the image of Indians as bloodthirsty savages," Foner writes, "became firmly entrenched in the New England mind."

The United States' first and heralded president, the "father of the country," George Washington was a determined and vicious killer of Native Americans known to the Iroquois as Conoctocaurious, meaning "Town Taker," "Burner of Towns," "Village Destroyer," and "Town Destroyer." In 1779, during the American War for Independence, Washington ordered and organized the Sullivan Campaign, which carried out the genocidal destruction of 40 Iroquois villages in New York. He's up on Mount Rushmore,

along with “the Master of the Mountain.” So is the warmongering Bull Moose Teddy Roosevelt, who wrote this about the ethnic cleansing of North America’s Native people: “The settler and pioneer have at bottom had justice on their side; this great continent could not have been kept as nothing but a game preserve for squalid savages....The most ultimately righteous of all wars is a war with savages, though it is apt to be also the most terrible and inhuman...Let the sentimentalist say what they will, the man who puts the soil to use must of right dispossess the man who does not [“put the soil to use” understood to mean enclosing the earthly commons, fencing it off as private property and exploiting natural resources and human labor power – P.S.]. American and Indian, Boer and Zulu, Cossack and Tartar, New Zealander and Maori, – in each case the victor, horrible though many of his deeds are, has laid deep the foundations for the future greatness of a mighty people...It is of incalculable importance that America, Australia, and Siberia should pass out of the hands of their red, black, and yellow aboriginal owners, and become the heritage of the dominant world races...”

Hitler would certainly have approved of those Social Darwinian passages from Roosevelt’s multi-volume “study” *The Winning of the West*. Indeed, Hitler may well have been familiar with them: he was a great fan of US-American “frontier fascism” (Greg Grandin’s phrase), drawing significant inspiration from US Indian Removal and Jim Crow.

Slaveowner Lebensraum

But let’s dig in further. The reactionary reality of the DOI emerges more clearly when you realize what many of the leading North American colonists hoped to do with the land they wanted to seize from Jefferson’s “merciless Indian savages.” As the prolific historian Gerald Horne suggests in his 2014 book *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America* (New York, 2014), the (seemingly minor) line in the DOI quoted above reflects a central, fundamentally counter-revolutionary motivation behind the fateful decision to break off from England: a sense that the slave system on which North American fortunes depended could not survive except through secession from the British Empire.

As Horne shows, the expansion of a largely slave-based colonial economy across the New World during the 17th and 18th centuries had caused a serious problem for England, Spain, and France. Slaves came to outnumber Europeans in the colonial world. Africans in the Americas took notice of their demographic preponderance and recurrently revolted against their masters, forcing Old World authorities to invest ever-rising resources in

repression. The colonizers tried to lure and (mainly through impressment) force enough Europeans to the colonies to sustain a balance of racial power and terror that would suppress slave rebellion. They failed.

To make matters worse from the Europeans' perspective, Africans in the New World were empowered by increasing rivalry between the colonial empires. Great conflicts in Europe developed between the colonizers: the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) and the Seven Years War (1756-1763). These wars became global affairs in which colonial holdings switched hands between the great powers. They could not be waged in the Caribbean and South America without giving weapons to Blacks, and Black soldiers had to be freed if they were going to bear arms in European wars.

By the mid-18th century, as intra-European warfare further eroded the profitability of colonial enterprises, the colonial powers were looking for ways to accommodate their Black populations. In the Caribbean, Blacks were incorporated into colonial regimes. European rivalry had given rise to a new class of free Black Africans eager and equipped to fight in well-ordered military units against slavery and its remnants wherever they could be found. Hard-line resident British planters in Barbados shut down their operations and moved to North America, where the white/black ratio was less threatening.

White North American slave-owners and northern merchants who profited from the lucrative slave economy were not pleased with these developments. They experienced numerous slave revolts even in their less concentrated and volatile part of the British Empire. Examples included major Black rebellions in Manhattan (1712, 1741) and South Carolina (the Stono Uprising, a mass 1739 uprising in which dozens of white settlers were killed) – only the best-known incidents. Eighteenth Century North American colonists reported numerous instances of slaves quite understandably poisoning their masters, plotting insurrections, taking over ships, and setting fires. “Black insurrectionists” were commonly said to be in league with the hated imperial rivals France and Spain. Horne notes that “one historian has observed as early as the 1760s that ‘every white person in the eastern counties [of Virginia] knew of a free person that had been killed by a slave’ [and that]... ‘individual whites had nightmares about waking up amid slaves or feeling the first spasms of a stomach contorted by poison’” (Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776*, p. 237). Between 1756 and 1763, the white settlers of North America “endured a remarkable spate of slave plots driven by the flux brought by the Seven Years War” (Horne, 237).

Lord Dunmore as U.S. Founding Father

The settlement of that war played a pivotal role putting the US colonist-Founders on the road to secession (“Independence”). After its victory over France – following a war in which “London made extensive use of armed Africans” in the New World (Horne, 187) – the British government decreed a limit to the colonists’ territorial expansion on the North American mainland. The royal Proclamation of 1763 conflicted with the colonists’ insatiable lust for fertile land to plant and harvest cash crops with Black slaves – land inhabited by Jefferson’s “merciless Indian Savages.” Had the settlers been forced to remain within England’s confines, they feared, Black population growth would generate a “Caribbean” situation in North America. Their dread of Black rebellion was enhanced by the constant influx into North America of Black slaves infected with the “Caribbean virus” (resistance) – this thanks to the liberalization and dramatic expansion of the global slave trade in the 18th century.

There followed two further great steps on the path to the North American slaveholders’ secession – to American Independence. In the June 1772 Somerset case (*Somerset v Lewis* of 1772, 98 ER 499), the British high court ruled that chattel slavery violated English common law. The application of *Somerset* to the thirteen British colonies would have meant an end to the slave machine that fed the coffers of the Yankee mercantile elite and fueled the wealth of New England while it created a wealthy landed aristocracy in Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. The British judge responsible for the decision (William Murray Mansfield) tellingly became a special political target of British colonial North America’s southern white colonists over the next four years.

The next landmark came in November 1775, when Lord Dunmore, the royal Governor of Virginia, offered to liberate and arm North American slaves to squash the anti-colonial rebellion under way since the Tea Act of 1773. With this action, Dunmore “entered a pre-existing maelstrom of [colonial] insecurity about slavery and London’s intentions” (Horne, 222). Across the future US South in the spring of 1775, elite colonists were consumed with fears of a slave insurrection allied with the British, Spanish, and/or Native Americans. “Lord Dunmore’s proclamation effectively barred any possibility of rebel reconciliation with London” (Horne, 234) as the colonists “now confronted Africans armed by London” (Horne, 237).

The *Somerset* decision and Dunmore’s edict joined London with Abolition in the minds of the white colonists. The latter provided the decisive white rallying point for what historian Thelma Wills Foote accurately called “*a white settler revolt*” and “*the white American War for Independence*” – fought in no small measure to preserve and expand Black

chattel slavery. Independence emerged from “the state of the mind of the rebels” who already by early 1775 “coming to believe that a London-African combine was mounting against them, leaving secession – a unilateral Declaration of Independence – as the only way out” (Horne, 227, emphasis added). Two months before Dunmore issued his proclamation, rebels in South Carolina hung and cremated a free black man, Thomas Jeremiah, for saying that if England sent troops to repress the colonists, he would join them. Over the objections of South Carolina’s royal colonial governor, Jeremiah was tried and found guilty of “exciting the Negroes to an insurrection” (Horne, 226). “Even before the Dunmore proclamation,” Horne shows, “colonists were up in arms in light of alleged attempts by the crown to incite the Africans against them.”

When Dunmore issued his edict, there was no turning back from white independence, leading Horne to ironically call Lord Dunmore a leading US “Founding Father.”

It is hardly surprising that North American slaves identified the cause of Freedom with London, not the rebels. Tens of thousands of those slaves and a large number of free blacks naturally “joined the redcoats” (Horne, 246).

Independence as a Disaster for Nonwhites

The American “revolution” was a disaster for North American nonwhites. The colonists’ triumph over London “brought about the reassertion of slaveowner control over the enslaved black population in the new republic” (Thelma Wills Foote, quoted in Horne, 244). The North American slave system tightened and expanded in subsequent years. The color line between white and black was drawn with harsher lines than ever before in the “land of liberty.” Horne reflects on immediate and long-term consequences that mock the dominant national sense (shared even by many left historians) of the American Revolution as a democratic, forward-leaning development:

“there is a disjuncture between the supposed progressive and *avant-garde* import of 1776 and the worsening of conditions of Africans and the indigenous that followed upon the triumph of the rebels. Moreover, despite the alleged revolutionary and progressive impulse of 1776, the victors went on from there to crush indigenous politics, then moved overseas to do something similar in Hawaii, Cuba, and the Philippines, then unleashed its counter-revolutionary force in 20th-century Guatemala, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, Angola, South Africa, Iran, Grenada, Nicaragua and other tortured sites too numerous to mention” (Horne, 248).

The white North American settlers’ counter-revolution was a great slavery success – at least until the Civil War, when another white secession and military necessity compelled

Abraham Lincoln to follow in Lord Dunmore's footsteps by liberating and arming black slaves.

The American Paradox

The "American paradox" (US historian Edmund Morgan's term), whereby "the Age of Liberty" was also "the Age of Slavery," was not limited to colonial North America and the United States. As the historian Greg Grandin reminds us, "the paradox can be applied to all of the Americas, North and South...What was true for Richmond [Virginia] was no less true for Buenos Aires and Lima – that what many meant by freedom was the freedom to buy and sell Black people as property" (Greg Grandin, *Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World*, New York, 2014, emphasis added).

Still, of the 10 to 16 million Africans who survived the Middle Passage to the New World, two-thirds ended up in Brazil or the West Indies. But by 1860, approximately two thirds of all New World slaves lived in the US South. In the US alone among the new Western Hemisphere Republics of the 19th century, Black chattel slavery flourished rather than faded – until its destruction in the Civil War.

Part of the explanation for that disjuncture is the natural reproduction of slaves under the "paternalist" regime of the US South. Another aspect is the remarkable expansion of cotton slavery across the US South in the first half of the 19th century, critical backdrop for the early industrial revolution in England and Europe. A final piece was the 1776 "counter-revolution:" the North American break-off slayed the specter of British Abolition and opened vast new swaths of land for genocidal theft from the continent's original inhabitants and the deployment of new slave cash-crop production armies.

In his remarkable 1976 volume *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, the historian Edmund S. Morgan argued that Black chattel slavery was part of why bourgeois "freedom" and democracy rhetoric of the kind that produced the famous Virginian Jefferson's famous and stirring Declaration of Independence was so pronounced in "revolutionary" North America. In making their case for "revolution" and "equality" against the "slavery" imposed on them by the British crown and British merchants, the tobacco planters of Virginia and their publicists took bourgeois-republican rhetoric to new egalitarian-sounding heights in part *because they could*. They did not have to worry about a vast artisan, yeoman, servant, and proletarian class that might take such rhetoric and turn it against their rulers in the ways that English and French lower and working classes did in the late 18th and 19th Century Age of Revolution, Chartism, and early socialism. The planters had slayed that menace in advance by turning their southern

workforce into chattel slaves branded by their skin color and stripped of all basic human and civil rights by people utterly without rights. This was their response to Bacon's Rebellion, a great 1676 interracial uprising of Virginia's indentured servants, ex-servants, workers, poor farmers, and even slaves. Ironically enough, the slave system and its Black Codes helped make Virginia a leading global bastion of "liberty" talk since there was no free working class there to wield republican and democratic rhetoric against ruling classes from the bottom up.

"Crimes Which Would Disgrace a Nation of Savages"

Seventy-six years after the DOI, the great Black abolitionist Frederick Douglass delivered perhaps the greatest oration in U.S. history, titled "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" By the reckoning of Douglass, himself an escaped slave, the great national holiday was "a day that reveals to [the slave], more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim." Further:

"To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy — a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour...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."

War Capitalism

To ground Douglass's eloquent fury in harsh historical-material circumstance, I can recommend no academic text more strongly than Edward Baptist's Bancroft Prize-winning 2014 study *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism*. Baptist eviscerates the mainstream tendency to see slavery as a quaint and archaic "pre-modern institution" that had nothing really to do with the United States' rise to wealth and power. In this tendency, slavery becomes something "outside of US history," even an antiquated "drag" on that history. That tendency replicates a fundamental misunderstanding curiously shared by anti-slavery abolitionists and slavery advocates

before the Civil War. While the two sides of the slavery debate differed on the system's morality, they both saw slavery as an inherently unprofitable and static system that was out of touch with the pace of industrialization and the profit requirements of modern capitalist business enterprise. Nothing, Baptist shows, could have been further from the truth. Unlike what many abolitionists thought, the savagery and torture perpetrated against slaves in the South was about much more than sadism and psychopathy on the part of slave traders, owners, and drivers. Slavery, Baptist demonstrates was an incredibly cost-efficient method for extracting surplus value from human beings, far superior in that regard to "free" (wage) labor in the onerous work of planting and harvesting cotton. It was an especially brutal form of capitalism, driven by ruthless yet economically "rational" torture along with a dehumanizing ideology of racism.

The Half Has Never Been Told shows that "the commodification and suffering and forced labor of African Americans is what made the United States powerful and rich" decades before the Civil War. Capitalist cotton slavery was how United States seized control of the lucrative the world market for cotton, the critical raw material for the Industrial Revolution, emerging thereby as a nation to be reckoned with in the world capitalist system by the second third of the 19th century.

But the biggest parasitic profiteers of chattel slavery employed wage labor on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. North American cotton slavery was the historical-material taproot for the British industrial revolution, whose capitalist owners benefitted from the American "revolution" since US independence meant they could import chattel-generated cotton that would not have been available if the colonies had stayed under the control of a British empire that had outlawed slavery. American independence was a big win for the textile lords of Manchester. Historian Sven Beckert's magisterial study *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (Vintage, 2014) shows how utterly dependent English and European textile manufacturers were on the expanding frontier of coerced gang slave labor in the Antebellum South. The rise of supposedly "free market" British and European industrial capitalism depended on two critical dimensions of what Beckert calls "war capitalism": "the warlike expropriation of native peoples" from North American lands and the brutal enforcement of "coerced labor" in North American cotton fields, where wage labor was not viable.

The returns were wrung through soul-numbing exploitation overlaid with savage racist torture. Chronicling the astonishingly horrifying violence and terror inflicted on millions of Black Americans who suffered in bondage over the eight decades between US national

independence (1783) and the US Civil War (1861-1865), Baptist documents how the southern slave engine of American capitalist accumulation murdered Blacks in huge numbers and “stole everything” from surviving slaves through “the massive and cruel engineering required to rip a million people from their homes, brutally drive them to new, disease-ridden places, and make them live in terror and hunger as they continually built and rebuilt a commodity-generating empire...” Over a generation, *The Half Has Never Been Told* shows, the infant US South grew from a thin coastal belt of burnt-out tobacco plantations into a giant continental Empire of Cotton. This remarkable expansion was rooted in regular and ferocious white violence. The brutality and bloodshed included mass-murderous Indian Removal (cotton slavery required constant westward territorial extension), forced slave migrations, the endemic fracturing of slave families, and the ubiquitous and systematic torture of Black slaves. As Baptist observes:

“In the sources that document the expansion of cotton production, you can find at one point or another almost every product sold in New Orleans stores converted into an instrument of torture [used on slaves]: carpenters’ tools, chains, cotton presses, hackles, handsaws, hoe handles, irons for branding livestock, nails, pokers, smoothing irons, singletrees, steelyards, tongs. Every modern method of torture was used at one time or another: sexual humiliation, mutilation, electric shocks, solitary confinement in ‘stress positions,’ burning, even waterboarding...descriptions of runaways posted by enslavers were festooned with descriptions of scars, burns, mutilations, brands, and wounds.”

The merciless system that survived and then took off across the future slave Confederacy (which would carry out a second great slaveholders’ secession in 1861) under the Cross of Cotton was a monument to racist sadism in profitable service to unbridled capitalist accumulation.

Beyond “Patience” with a “Messy Democracy” That’s Been “the Envy of the World”

“Read a book,” the New Left historian diplomatic (imperialism) historian Carl Parrini told a generation of students at Northern Illinois University, “you might learn something. Go to the library and get lost in the stacks and sources.” Maybe the current US president or his speechwriters need to follow Parrini’s advice. Here’s what soon-to-be President Elect Joe “Nothing Will Fundamentally Change” Biden said two nights after Election Day 2020 while Trump and his minions were moving ahead with their well-telegraphed campaign to “legally” and (if “necessary”) violently overthrow the outcome: “*Democracy’s sometimes messy. It sometimes requires a little patience as well. But that patience has been rewarded*

now for more than 240 years with a system of governance that's been the envy of the world." (New York Times, November 6, 2020, A1)

That was some serious *gaslighting*. What "democracy" was Sleepwalking (through a nightmare) Joe talking about? As Joe "Nothing Will Fundamentally Change" Biden sputtered out those clueless words of self-destructive calm, a vast empirical literature documents the abject cancellation and trumping of majority U.S. public opinion by concentrated wealth and power on key social and policy issue after another. US- American "democracy" is so "messy" it doesn't exist. Here's some reading on that: Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page, Democracy in America? What Has Gone Wrong (University of Chicago, 2017); Ron Formisano, American Oligarchy: The Permanent Political Class (University of Illinois, 2017); Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, Winner Take All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer (Simon and Schuster, 2011); Paul Street, They Rule: The 1% v. Democracy (Routledge, 2014); Paul Street, This Happened Here: Amerikaners, Neoliberals, and the Trumping of America (Routledge, 2021)

"Patience rewarded for 240 years"? Joe might want to read Baptist's *The Half Has Never Been Told* and Douglass's July 4th speech and reflect on how that oration was delivered exactly 76 years after the American "revolution." The speech is available as a book and so now is historian David Blight's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of the Douglass, Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom (Simon and Schuster, 2018). Blight's latest volume is a must read. So is Deborah Gray White's brilliant and highly readable volume Aren't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South.

The 1857 Supreme Court's *Dred Scott* decision, which explicitly denied the humanity of Black people, came down 81 years after the American "revolution." It helped precipitate a Civil War in which Black chattel slavery was only ended through an epic struggle that killed off nearly 3 percent of the nation's population. Blacks were still legally segregated and disenfranchised in the US South a century after the conclusion of that war. Women did not win the franchise (vote) until 1920! They still haven't passed an Equal Rights Amendment! Meanwhile, numerous civil, human, and voting rights (including the right of Black people to choose their own Congressional representatives) have been getting away chipped away at for many years and the nation's neo-Taney Court just re-imposed the female enslavement of forced motherhood across half the nation in one fell swoop with its horrific June 24th, 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision.

"Envy of the world" – really? Ever try to explain numerous key authoritarian aspects of the US political order, crafted by slave-owning Founders for whom democracy was the

ultimate nightmare – the undemocratically ludicrous Electoral College, the absurdly powerful and malapportioned Senate, the pathetically gerrymandered House of Representatives, reactionary federalist “states rights,” campaign finance rules that turn US elections into a “wealth primary,” the unelected Supreme Court – to someone from another country? The thoroughly proper response you’ll get: “Wait, your leaders call this democracy, indeed the greatest democracy in the world?! What a farce!”

Here’s a good book for Joe and his dismal Dem friends on our holy “system of governance”: Daniel Lazare, *Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Paralyzes Democracy* (1997).

Patience? It has just been shat upon with *Christian-fascist glee* by the highest judicial body in the world’s most powerful state. After a little mess he and his mealy-mouthed Attorney General don’t really want to properly clean up – the 2021 fascist assault on bourgeois democracy and rule of law carried out by Trump, Meadows, Flynn, Eastman, Bannon et al and documented at length by the US House January 6th Committee – Biden inherited a Supreme Court stocked with absurdly revanchist super-majority Christian- and fossil-fascists. That Trump Court *just wiped out women’s fifty year constitutional right to an abortion, rolled back the legal civil rights of arrested people, rolled back gun safety, slashed Indian Country’s right to run its own legal affairs, and prosecute non-Indigenous criminals, eviscerated Black voting rights in Louisiana, and crippled the Environmental Protection Agency’s power to regulate carbon emissions* – this last as the planet tips further into terminal environmental collapse with the United States stands in the eco-cidal vanguard of this and many other planetary crimes.

Hey, Joe, it’s like the Revolutionary Communist Party leader Bob Avakian says: “your Shining City on a Hill is full of fascists.” Fascists in high places. Basic bourgeois-democratic voting rights and safe elections now face massive reactionary white-nationalist/neofascist assault across the nation. The fascist Court has just agreed to hear a case arguing the formerly fringe, far-right “independent legislature theory.” The fact that the Court agreed to hear this insane argument – basically for letting Red states cancel popular presidential votes as the basis for their Electoral College slates in 2024 – is the tell. (The decision to take *Dobbs* in May of 2021 was the signaling of intent.) The Trump-Alito Court will likely permit Red State legislatures to guarantee election outcomes matched to their Amerikaner world view.

“What People Will Quietly Submit to”

Patience is recommended with the US “system of governance”? Really? Biden might want to read Howard Zinn’s justly famous *People’s History of the United States*, which details repeated instances in which human rights and social justice progress recurrently *depended precisely on masses rejecting patience and trust in the supposedly benevolent US “system of governance.”* Zinn’s best-selling volume was of course inspired by the wisdom of Douglass, who wrote this on the eve of the Civil War: “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to, and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.”

As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. used to reflect, the silence of many if not most of the good and decent people is just as problematic as, if not more disturbing than the viciousness and fascism of the bad. “The best lack all conviction, while the worst,” Yeats wrote, “are full of passionate intensity” (wise words even if he appears to have identified with the fascist enemy). It’s not fair, but the quiet, privatism, shelter, individualism that so many of us crave can easily become complicity. It ultimately proves disastrous. When we play the passive role of bystanders watching the game of social and political oppression and resistance from the sidelines, we should not be surprised when the game leaps up off the field to swallow up our lives.

There are limits to focusing just on the noisy and explicit evil of the most obvious and ugly culprits. “*The oppressor*,” Simone de Beauvoir once wrote, “*would not be so strong if he did not have accomplices among the oppressed.*”

“In the end,” King once wrote, “we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends.”

Note to Elie Mystal: Look to the People to Stop the Courts

But why on Earth am I making reading recommendations for Joe Biden and his ilk? Our 21st Century Bertrand Russell-plus, the legendary left intellectual Noam Chomsky rightly dismisses the longtime “left” maxim “speak truth to power.” As Chomsky says, “power knows the truth already, and is busy concealing it.” And distorting it, I might add. It is the oppressed who need to discover the truth, not the oppressors.

Complicity and silence can take deceptively vocal forms. Listen to the liberal *Nation*’s legal correspondent Elie Mystal talking to Chris Hayes on MSNBC about how depressed he feels over Biden’s failure to take on a Christian fascist (my description

not Mystal's though I wouldn't be surprised if he agrees with the characterization) that no longer cares about any of the "practical realities" and facts that used to concern Republican Supreme Court justices:

"The Court has no money. It has no power to tax. And it has no army. *The person who can stop the courts is the executive of the United States, the President of the United States.* But right now, I don't want to say I am angry at Biden right now...I am sad [about Biden]. I am sad that right now, cuz you know who remembers 30 years ago [when the pre-fascist Supreme Court still cared about the practical realities involved in issues like climate change and abortion – P.S.]? Joe Biden. Joe Biden remembers the hokey past of bipartisanship, where he could reach out to conservatives who were concerned about practical governance. *Those people don't exist now, but Joe Biden never got the memo. And so, I'm sad that in this crucial moment, we have a president who is unwilling, who is so ossified in his past thinking, that he won't stand with his people at this critical moment to take power back.* Not for himself, because he doesn't matter, but to take power back for the American people from the unelected, unaccountable judges."

That is good, very quotable on Biden. But this is Joe "Nothing Would Fundamentally Change" Biden, the deeply conservative right-wing neoliberal warmonger that we on the left have known about forever. Why be sad about President Corn Pop being the rusty old pool chain we know he is? Let's How about just be properly disgusted and then move on to make some Douglass-Zinn *People's History*. Would MSNBC like to join or at least give a shout out to Rise Up 4 Abortion Rights and RU4AR ally and civil disobedience hero Guido Reichstatder (who sat atop Washington DC's Frederick Douglass Bridge, shutting down traffic there for more than 27 hours on the day that the illegitimate fascist Court stripped away women's constitutional abortion rights) and to many other groups of people in DC and across the country who are not simply begging Sleepytime Joe and the dismal Weimar Dems to be something they aren't and who are taking to the streets and public squares and putting their bodies on the line to force change through mass and direct citizen action? *Dear Elie Mystal: only the people can stop the Court.*

Something, some collection of outrages must break through this silence, this lack of conviction, this passivity, this complicity with the oppressor. Many have broken with surrender, but far too few. Patience and over-reliance on misleaders like Joe "Drill Baby Drill" Biden, Barack Obama, and Bill Clinton is our potentially terminal downfall.

An American Revolution is a Great Idea

The phrase American Revolution reminds me of what Gandhi said when a reporter asked him what he thought of Western civilization: “I think it would be a good idea.”

There there’s a part of the 1776 document that still resonates if we expand our concept of “the people” to include persons of all genders, races, classes, cultures, and sexual orientations, etc.:

“Governments ...deriv[e] their just powers from the consent of the governed...Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive [of human rights, life, liberty, and happiness] it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

There’s a dangerous idea – the right to revolution on behalf of the masses – that merits respect along with update for new circumstances.

American “revolution”? We need one without quote marks – a real and actual revolution. “So foul a sky,” wrote Shakespeare five generations before “the Master of the Mountain” was born, “clears not without a storm.”

In the meantime, I recommend proper respect for and attention to good books, like the many ones quoted, cited, and hyperlinked in this essay. It’s not for nothing that Red State Amerikaners banning tons of books. Burning them is the next stage, followed perhaps by the flaming of authors. Those who ignore the crimes of the past have been known to repeat them.

Paul Street’s latest book is *This Happened Here: Amerikaners, Neoliberals, and the Trumping of America* (London: Routledge, 2022).

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