

What is July 4th to US Imperialism? What is it to the Oppressed?

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Global Research, July 03, 2021

[Black Agenda Report](#) 1 July 2014

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [History](#),
[Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

What does America's national celebration mean to those under the heel of "Manifest Destiny," at home and abroad? "

For the victims of US imperialism, the 4th of July is indeed a 'hollow mockery' and 'mere bombast, fraud, and deception' as Frederick Douglass so eloquently put it in his famous speech."

first published on July 4, 2014

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July 4th is once again approaching and principled left forces need to use the day as a teaching moment. In a speech given on July 4th, 1852, Frederick Douglas spoke before a packed Rochester Hall and did just that, highlighting the hypocrisy that stains the July 4th celebration of the American Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence, as Douglass emphasized, held no worth to the millions of Black people in the United States whose existence was subjected to the racism and exploitation of chattel bondage. Over a century and a half later, the celebration of July 4th remains not only a practice of hypocrisy, but also a blatant co-sign US imperialist plunder all over the planet.

Liberty, independence, and equality are abstract ideas. Their presence in the Declaration of Independence must be placed in proper political-historical context. White capitalists, many of them slave-owners, wrote the Declaration of Independence. Independence from the British Crown for the American, slave-owning colonial bourgeoisie meant the ability to develop a settler colonial-capitalist order free from the British Empire's restrictive policies. Most notably, the likes of Thomas Jefferson and George Washington were concerned about a British mandate to abolish chattel slavery in its colonies, a policy that had the potential to severely weaken the colonial bourgeoisie and prevent further expansion of the capitalist system in North America. The Declaration of Independence implicitly legalized the enslavement of Black people and the genocide of Native people within the context of the developing American capitalist nation-state.

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This is the type of “liberty” that is celebrated annually every 4th of July. Douglass addressed the antagonisms brought forth by the July 4th “holiday” when he asked:

“What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. 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 denunciation of tyrants brass-fronted impudence; your shout of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanks-givings, 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 the United States, at this very hour.”

Douglass’s indictment of the American way of life remains true. Despite the relentless misinformation war waged by the US imperialist corporate media and education system, the conditions of oppressed people are far worse now than they were at the date of Douglass’s speech. Black America and Native peoples reside in the US in a state of neo-slavery. As indigenous nations battle against President Obama’s pipe-line incursions for survival under genocidal exclusion in forced residence on reservations, Black America’s masses live with the daily colonial realities of police-state terror, mass imprisonment, and economic and social death. Undocumented immigrants, many of whom are indigenous Chicanos, are super exploited for their labor and have been deported in record numbers by Obama Administration. The internal landscape of US imperialism is by definition the highest stage of Anglo-American settler colonialism, the founding social system that inspired Douglass’s July 4th analysis.

The US settler state is now an imperialist one that ensures the exploitation and misery of billions of people around the globe. The US has nearly 1000 military bases all over the world and spends trillions per year in overt and covert military operations. Recent corporate media focus has been on the re-invasion of Iraq to “protect” the Iraqi state from terrorist insurgents. This ignores the 1.6 million Iraqi people that died during the decade-long US occupation alone. Imperialist rhetoric of bringing “stability” to Iraq flies in the face of the fact that the US military-intelligence apparatus sponsors ISIS and other terror groups all over the Middle East and North Africa inside the allied nations of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the rest of the GCC and NATO alliances. US imperialism is scorching the earth, either by militarizing neo-colonial allies or conducting “humanitarian intervention” to justify overt invasion, as was the case in Libya and now again in Iraq. For the victims of US imperialism forced to live under imperialist political instability and economic dependence, the 4th of July is indeed a “hallow mockery” and “mere bombast, fraud, and deception” as Douglass eloquently put it in his speech.

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In the era of Obama, US imperialism has been very vocal in its disregard for humanity. In 2010, President Obama joked that he would “predator drone” the Jonas Brothers band, making a mockery out the thousands of people his Administration has murdered by drone

strike. The Obama Administration's left-flank imperial politics has branded imperialism and corporate exploitation with anti-Black racism (see Obama's 2013 Morehouse graduation speech) and fascist nationalism (see Obama's 2014 West Point Commencement speech).

Additionally, Hilary Clinton is making quite a name for herself in mainstream political discourse after stating on CNN that "Just because your child gets across the border, that doesn't mean the child gets to stay." This answer came after the question of immigration was raised in relation to the thousands of children that have been crossing the border of Mexico from Central America. The architects of imperialism are exposing their own illegitimate system, and by extension, the sham that July 4th represents. The ruling class's vocal and visible ruthlessness is both a signal of decay in the US imperialist system and of the political crisis among left forces in the US that allow such brutality to be carried out with impunity.

In the spirit of Frederick Douglass, this July 4th should be a moment not of celebration, but of deep reflection for left political forces. What does "American Independence" really mean? Does it mean the freedom for US imperialism to destabilize nations, murder millions, and force the world into its political and economic sphere of influence? Does it mean the independence for US imperialism to imprison the largest number of (mostly Black) people in the world? Is "liberty" defined by the US imperialist system's centuries-long colonization of Native and Black America, now taking form in the privatization of entire cities like Black Detroit? The answer is yes to all of the above. The masters of deceit can't and won't end the imperialist system the July 4th holiday represents. Only we can do that. Instead of going out to celebrate this farcical holiday, let's organize our communities and people in the direction of liberation from the US imperialist system.

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