

# The Fourth of July and American Exceptionalism

By Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada  
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George Washington and his family, with slave at Mount Vernon.

The Fourth of July is back. It will be another long weekend in the U.S. There will be special offers in the stores that will boost sales and attract many people. Some, however, will just have to make do with the illusion of the decorated windows. For most it will be an opportunity for rest and family gatherings.

There will also be pompous ceremonies, with the beating of drums, fireworks displays and abundant official rhetoric. There will be fake speeches, repeated for over two centuries, whose effectiveness nobody can question because they have been useful for luring many people, inside and outside the United States, for a long time.

President Barack Obama will display his undeniable oratorical skills; and will again tell us that the nation he

leads is exceptional, unrepeatable. He has not spoken yet, but there is no doubt he will repeat --give or take a word-- what he said last year:

*“On July 4th, 1776, a small band of patriots declared that we were a people created equal, free to think and worship and live as we please, that our destiny would not be determined for us, it would be determined by us. And it was bold, and it was brave. And it was unprecedented. It was unthinkable. At that time in human history, it was kings and princes and emperors who made decisions. But those patriots knew there was a better way of doing things, that freedom was possible, and that to achieve their freedom, they’d be willing to lay down their lives, their fortune and their honor. And so they fought a revolution. And few would have bet on their side. But for the first time of many times to come, America proved the doubters wrong. And now, 237 years later, this improbable experiment in democracy, the United States of America, stands as the greatest nation on Earth.”*

Such ranting has been reproduced incessantly, from day one, by all U.S. leaders, liberal or conservative, Democratic or Republican. Some, perhaps, could have pleaded ignorance; but this is not the case with the former constitutional law professor. All, without exception, have insisted on a big lie.

It is a discourse that has nothing to do with the historical truth of a country that emerged oppressing others and, for over two hundred years, has spread war, pain and death around the globe. Nor is it true that those men had thought about conducting some

"*democratic experiment*". Madison, Hamilton and Jay spelled it out in the days of the foundation. The new republic would not be governed by the people; the power should always be in the hands of those who owned land, factories and servants.

The amazing thing is that, despite everything, there are many who –there and elsewhere— still believe in a falsehood that is more than two centuries old. This capacity for deception is the authentic American exceptionality.

The rights mentioned by Obama existed only for the white owners of the wealth in the Thirteen Colonies which revolted against England in 1776. But for the native peoples and African slaves, especially, the consequences of July 4th were the exact opposite.

Freed from the constraints imposed on them by London –which led to the revolt– the landowners launched a sweeping march to the West, practicing a brutal genocide of its populations. They intensified the slave trade and the slave commerce that had been previously controlled by the British Crown. The main motivation of that "*small group of patriots*" was the fear they had of the abolitionist movement in England, and the need to act before its inevitable consequences.

However, without the media attention the protocol celebrations will receive, an important intellectual event is taking place this year in the United States. Gerald Horne, Professor of History and African American studies at the University of Houston, has just added two new texts to his long and brilliant

bibliography on these subjects. Last April, New York University published "*The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America*." And now, in late June, Monthly Review Press began distributing "*Race to Revolution: The U.S. and Cuba During Slavery and Jim Crow*."

The fruit of thorough and painstaking research, both books belie the legend of the revolutionary character of the 4th of July. The landowners revolted to prevent the emancipation of the slaves and to unleash an aggressive expansionism for the exclusive benefit of the plutocracy in the Thirteen Colonies. But they also encountered unwavering resistance.

Their victims, who were the same in North America and in the Caribbean islands, persisted in their quest for freedom; a struggle that united them beyond language differences and is –despite the lying propaganda which tries in vain to separate them– the foundation of their deep solidarity. Hopefully, someone will discover over there, in the capital of the Empire, these works by Professor Horne. And may they find time to read them. Now that they have a long week-end coming.

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**Edited by Walter Lippmann.**

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