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American Miseducation: Myths, Distortions, and Illusions

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Historically, white conservative groups across America have orchestrated campaigns against a critical study of race and socioeconomic class in America. Their propaganda war will continue to be a powerful impediment to social progress.

Shortly before he was voted out of office, Donald Trump issued Executive Order 13950 (the "Equity Gag Order") banning federal agencies, contractors, and grant recipients from conducting essential trainings, plus other activities that address systemic racism and sexism.

Although the Biden Administration has since revoked the Equity Gag Order, the war on racial and gender justice continues unabated. Since its rescission at the federal level, a version of Equity Gag Order has been introduced by many state-legislative bodies and publicly endorsed by top Republicans.

Attempts to ban the study of racial oppression are efforts to mute or silence voices of [educators](#). [Education Week](#) reports that “As of June 14, 2021, legislators in 21 states have introduced bills that would restrict teaching critical race theory or limit how teachers can discuss racism and sexism, according to an Education Week analysis. An increasing number of [states](#) have signed these bills into law. Moreover, a [NBC News analysis](#) finds at least 165 local and national groups are trying to disrupt or block lessons on critical race theory.

Unfortunately, most Americans have been woefully miseducated about their country and the world. Much of what they believe about America is based on myths, lies, and slick propaganda. The process of miseducation begins very early in their lives and continues throughout their lifetime. They are conditioned early in their preschool years to accept a fictional image of America through fairy tales, which portray imaginary heroes (White righteous knights) and villains (dark evil characters).

When children begin their formal education, they are routinely introduced to school rituals, which are designed to instill a sense of pride in America. Rarely are they introduced to ideas that would stir intellectual curiosity about America. Most schoolchildren in the United States still do not learn that “plantations” were terrible crime scenes where terror, rape, assault, and brutal separation of families took place over generations. They do not know that the immense wealth created from the forced labor of enslaved humans made the United States one of the wealthiest countries in the world. The fictional image of America that is presented to the young students is lovable, but it is also one that is largely based on myths and deliberate lies. For instance, in many schools, students are required to stand with their hands across their hearts,

while facing the American flag, and recite the pledge of allegiance to America. Included in this pledge are these words. " ... one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all." Every thinking person knows that this is patriotic rhetoric. However, through repetition, this big lie assumes the status of a quasi-truth along with the fables about George Washington, the Father of America who "never told a lie." This all serves a major goal of American education, which is to teach students to love their country, but not to understand it. It is no wonder that so many say "love it or leave it" to people who criticize America.

America: Community or Corporation

For most Americans, the origins of the country began when a group of "daring and righteous" English Pilgrims landed in 1620 at what is now called Plymouth, Massachusetts. Yet, the historical record shows that the first permanent English settlement was Jamestown, founded in the colony of Virginia in 1607. Why is this significant? This is significant because it serves to illustrate how the history of America is told in such a way as to make the story heroic. The story of a country founded by devoutly religious Christians dedicated to building a good society has greater patriotic appeal than the true story of a country whose origins are traced back to a settlement comprised of employees of the London Company and indentured servants whose task was to produce a profit for a group of English merchants. These merchants held an exclusive charter from King James I, which permitted them to exploit the resources of the land they seized from the Indians. In short, America began as a business venture motivated by greed and profit, not as an attempt to build a virtuous society based on community values (McLemore. 1983. pp. 22-25).

The First Charter of Virginia; April 10, 1606 (1) (excerpt)

JAMES, by the Grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c. WHEREAS our loving and well-disposed Subjects, Sir Thorn as Gales, and Sir George Somers, Knights, Richard Hackluit, Clerk, Prebendary of Westminster, and Edward-Maria Wingfield, Thomas Hanharm and Raleigh Gilbert, Esqrs. William Parker, and George Popham, Gentlemen, and divers others of our loving Subjects, have been humble Suitors unto us, that We would vouchsafe unto them our Licence, to make Habitation, Plantation, and to deduce a colony of sundry of our People into that part of America commonly called VIRGINIA, and other parts and Territories in America, either appertaining unto us, or which are not now actually possessed by any Christian Prince or People.

We, greatly commending, and graciously accepting of, their Desires for the Furtherance of so noble a Work, which may, by the Providence of Almighty God, hereafter tend to the Glory of his Divine Majesty, in propagating of Christian Religion to such People, as yet live in Darkness and miserable Ignorance of the true Knowledge and Worship of God, and may in time bring the Infidels and Savages, living in those parts, to human Civility, and to a settled and quiet Government: DO, by these our Letters Patents, graciously accept of, and agree to, their humble and well-intended Desires;

And do therefore, for Us, our Heirs, and Successors, GRANT and agree, that the said Sir Thomas Gates, Sir George Somers, Richard Hackluit, and Edward-Maria Wingfield,

Adventurers of and for our City of London, and all such others, as are, or shall be, joined unto them of that Colony, shall be called the first Colony; And they shall and may begin their said first Plantation and Habitation, at any Place upon the said-Coast of Virginia or America, where they shall think fit and convenient, between the said four and thirty and one and forty Degrees of the said Latitude; And that they shall have all the Lands, Woods, Soil, Grounds, Havens, Ports, Rivers, Mines, Minerals, Marshes, Waters, Fishings, Commodities, and Hereditaments, whatsoever, from the said first Seat of their Plantation and Habitation by the Space of fifty Miles of English Statute Measure, all along the said Coast of Virginia and America, towards the West and Southwest, as the Coast lyeth, with all the Islands within one hundred Miles directly over against the same Sea Coast; And also all the Lands, Soil, Grounds, Havens, Ports, Rivers, Mines, Minerals, Woods, Waters, Marshes, Fishings, Commodities, and Hereditaments, whatsoever, from the said Place of their first Plantation and Habitation for the space of fifty like English Miles, all alongst the said Coasts of Virginia and America, towards the East and Northeast, or towards the North, as the Coast lyeth, together with all the Islands within one hundred Miles, directly over against the said Sea Coast, And also all the Lands, Woods, Soil, Grounds, Havens, Ports, Rivers, Mines, Minerals, Marshes, Waters, Fishings, Commodities, and Hereditaments, whatsoever, from the same fifty Miles every way on the Sea Coast, directly into the main Land by the Space of one hundred like English Miles; And shall and may inhabit and remain there; and shall and may also build and fortify within any the same, for their better Safeguard and Defense, according to their best Discretion, and the Discretion of the Council of that Colony; And that no other of our Subjects shall be permitted, or suffered, to plant or inhabit behind, or on the

Backside of them, towards the main Land, without the Express License or Consent of the Council of that Colony, thereunto in Writing; first had and obtained.

Blacks and America's Origins

By omitting the story of Jamestown, the system of education ignores the beginning of the relationship between Black people and White people in North America. Bennett (1984), a Black historian, has written a book entitled, *Before the Mayflower*, to make a historical point that Black people were brought in shackles to Jamestown in 1619 before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth in 1620. But, unlike the Pilgrims who, in their quest for freedom, were in the process of shaping their future. Black people were taken forcibly in chains to Jamestown to work for those who owned them. Theirs was a future with little, if any, freedom.

George Washington and King George III

The sanitized image of America is built with a chronological sequence of myths and distortions. As the story continues, the American Revolution is falsely presented as a righteous struggle of American colonists against British tyranny. George Washington is portrayed as a hero who fought to end oppression under the rule of King George III. But the revolution was a power struggle between dominant elites who shared more social class similarities than differences. Let us think of King George III and George Washington as representing two belligerent forces and compare them in terms of their social positions, values, and interests. King George III was a monarch who ruled over a growing empire. He was seeking greater

power, control, and wealth. He was not concerned about sharing power or wealth with the masses of his subjects.

When we examine the life of George Washington, we see he had much in common with his adversary, King George III. George Washington was born into a wealthy family and pursued greater wealth and more power throughout his life. His subjects, who were under his absolute control, were hundreds of Black slaves who lived wretched lives in a state of total degradation on his tobacco plantation in Virginia. He was one of the biggest, if not the biggest slave owner in America during his time (Fresia.1988).

From this, we see that both Georges shared similar values and interests. However, their primary interests had little to do with lofty values and beliefs in freedom, justice, liberty, and the dignity of humankind. Moreover, a critical examination of the American Revolution reveals a struggle for more political power, economic control, and material wealth between two elite groups rather than a heroic struggle between the forces of freedom and tyranny. The only people who fought for basic humanitarian values in that war were enslaved Black people.

Origins of "Free" Black People

Throughout the period of slavery, there was a small class of Blacks who were not enslaved. This class resulted from the bold moves of some enslaved people who liberated themselves by running away and the actions of some slave masters who either freed their enslaved people or allowed their enslaved people to earn money to purchase their freedom. Furthermore, through natural reproduction, this class of Blacks perpetuated itself.

Blacks and the American Revolution

The role of Blacks in the American Revolution is interesting. During the early stages of the Revolutionary War, George Washington and the colonists had a policy of excluding "free" Black men from their army. But their foe, the British, adopted the opposite policy of recruiting "free" Blacks to fight in the King's army and promising runaway enslaved people freedom if they served. Realizing that their policy of Black exclusion put them at a serious disadvantage, Washington and the colonists reversed their policy and adopted a policy like that of the British. Many Black historians proudly state that over 5,000 Blacks fought in Washington's army, but few mentioned that over 20,000 served in the British army. The main point, however, is rarely made; the only people fighting for basic human rights on either side were Black. It should also be remembered that contrary to the simplistic picture found in textbooks and Hollywood movies, the White colonists were also divided over the war, and many loyalists fought with the British.

Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776

Note: The Declaration of Independence is not legally binding.

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident:

That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, 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. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems of government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

- He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.
- He has forbidden his governors to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and, when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

- He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of representation in the legislature, a right inestimable to them, and formidable to tyrants only.
- He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.
- He has dissolved representative houses repeatedly, for opposing, with manly firmness, his invasions on the rights of the people.
- He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise; the state remaining, in the mean time, exposed to all the dangers of invasions from without and convulsions within.
- He has endeavored to prevent the population of these states; for that purpose obstructing the laws for naturalization of foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands.
- He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers.

The Formation of the United States: Genocide and Slavery

A white wealthy male ruling elite created the United States and imposed their rule on the indigenous people of North America, committed genocide, and looted most of American Indian land. They also imported enslaved Africans to exploit their labor to build the economy of the United States. These two basic facts shaped the social, material, and moral foundation of the United States.

However, people are propagandized to believe that the United States of America was founded on the religion of Christianity. The fact is that the founders in general were critical of religious dogma. They believed that there should be a separation of church and state. This is made clear in the First Amendment to the Constitution:

First Amendment: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievance.

Furthermore, part of Article VI of the Constitution reads: The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.

Racial Political Strategies and Religion

The white wealthy class use both politics and religion to serve their interests. They use religion to justify black enslavement and racial segregation. Blatant race baiting was a common practice of white southern politician. Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina and Governor George Wallace are good examples. Like White Christian Southerners in general, Wallace believed "that black people comprised a separate and inferior race." In a 1963 letter to a social studies teacher, Wallace stated they were inclined to criminality -- especially "atrocious acts ...

such as rape, assault and murder" -- because of a high incidence of venereal disease.

Desegregation, he wrote, would lead to "intermarriage ... and eventually our race will be deteriorated (sic) to that of the mongrel complexity." (Carter, 1995).

The white elite fabricated a version of Christianity to make enslaved Blacks to submit to slavery and comply with segregation, but Blacks rearticulated it to inspire themselves to fight for liberation.

Blacks and the American Constitution

There is probably no greater myth in American history than the one about the American Constitution. Americans glorify this historical document as a model of democratic principles that should be emulated by all countries seeking to become democratic. Moreover, it is praised as a guarantor of human rights and a protector against tyranny and oppression. The Framers of the American Constitution are likewise revered as compassionate, democratically minded, fatherly figures who were primarily interested in the well-being of others. These very powerful images work very well among the miseducated. The American education establishment as well as the mass media systematically fosters these images to perpetuate the illusion that America is a democratic country founded by honorable men.

Even a cursory look at Black history provides insights that quickly debunk the myths about the American Constitution and the "Founding Fathers. " There are three sections in the American Constitution that legitimize the dehumanization of Black people. First, Article I, Section 2 stipulates that Black enslaved people (the Framers carefully avoided using the term slave in the constitution) would be counted as three-fifths of a person to distribute power among

the White ruling elite; second, Article 1. Section 9 provided for the protection of the slave trade; and third, Article IV. Section 2 declared runaway enslaved people (freedom seekers. refugees) to be criminals who had to be returned to their slave masters. Thus, the legal foundation for racism was firmly set in the American Constitution. But this would come as no surprise if one studied historical fact rather than fiction.

Constitution of the United States: Preamble

We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

U.S. Constitution : Article I

section. 2

Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.² T

section. 9. 1The Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a Tax or duty may be imposed on such Importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each Person.

U.S. Constitution: Article IV

section. 2. 1The Citizens of each State shall be entitled to all Privileges and Immunities of Citizens in the several States. 2 A Person charged in any State with Treason, Felony, or other Crime, who shall flee from Justice, and be found in another State, shall on Demand of the executive Authority of the State from which he fled, be delivered up, to be removed to the State having Jurisdiction of the Crime. 3 No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due.¹¹

The Elite and the American Constitution

Who were the Framers of the Constitution? This is a concrete question. Were there any women among them? No. Were there any people of color among them? No. Were there any poor white men (those who did not own property) among them? No. The historical record will show that the "Founding Fathers" were a group of powerful, privileged wealthy white men, some of whom were slave masters, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. As a matter of fact, [twelve U. S. presidents](#) owned enslaved Black people. This helps explain why the [Constitution was a pro-slavery](#), anti-democratic document primarily designed to sanction and protect the interests of the wealthy White ruling elite. Thurgood Marshall, the first Black American Supreme Court Justice in the history of the United States, said:

I do not believe that the meaning of the Constitution was forever "fixed" at the Philadelphia Convention. Nor do I find the wisdom, foresight, and sense of justice

exhibited by the Framers particularly profound. To the contrary, the government they devised was defective from the start, requiring several amendments, a civil war, and momentous social transformation to attain the system of constitutional government, and its respect for the individual freedoms and human rights, we hold as fundamental today. When contemporary Americans cite “The Constitution,” they invoke a concept that is vastly different from what the Framers barely began to construct two centuries ago (Marshall, 1987).

Blacks and the American Justice System: Dred Scott 1857

Students are taught that the American system of “justice” is the fairest in the world, one worthy of emulation. This image enjoys credibility even though historically the courts sanctioned the most dehumanizing form of slavery until the end of the Civil War in 1865. And then after slavery, the courts legalized a demeaning form of racial segregation.

The American legal establishment has always been anti-Black. It has never respected Black people as first-class American citizens. For about 246 years, American laws legalized the enslavement and debasement of Black people. During this long period of slavery, the courts defined Black people as subhuman (Barker & McCorry, 1980. 14). The legal opinion that best articulates this view is documented in the written decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case (Dred Scott v. Sandford (60 U.S. 393. 19 How. 393, 1857). In this case, the Supreme Court declared that the American Constitution does not recognize Black people as human beings worthy of the rights and privileges of citizenship.

The United States Supreme Court stated that:

They had for more than a century before been regarded as being of an inferior order; and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. He was bought and sold and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise and traffic, whenever a profit could be made by it. This opinion was at that time fixed and universal in the civilized portion of the white race. It was regarded as an axiom in morals as well as in politics, which no one thought of disputing, or supposed to be open to dispute; and men in every grade and position in society daily and habitually acted upon it in their private pursuits, as well as in matters of public concern, without doubting for a moment the correctness of this opinion ...

Is there any wonder that Black people have always had and continue to have serious problems with the criminal justice system? From the point of contact with the police to the harsh sentence of the judge, Black people regularly experience both prosecution and persecution.

Illusions about the Civil War

The Civil War in the United States began in 1861. The election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 precipitated the secession of seven southern states from the United States of America and the formation of the Confederate States; four more states soon joined them. The War Between the States, the Civil War, ended in Confederate surrender in 1865. The conflict was the costliest and deadliest war ever fought on American soil, with some 620,000 of 2.4 million soldiers killed, millions more injured and much of the South devastated.

There are two widespread false beliefs about the Civil War; the War was fought to free the slaves, and President Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves. These utterly absurd beliefs suggest the following:

* The white community in the North was willing to sacrifice thousands of white lives to free Black people from slavery.

* The United States government was willing to risk its internal cohesion as a nation to free Black people from slavery.

* White Northerners were willing to suffer severe economic deprivation for the sake of the welfare of Black people.

* White Northerners had deep compassion for Blacks.

* Freeing the slaves was a political goal of Lincoln's, moreover, the major one.

* He was willing to risk his presidency and the future of the federal government to free the slaves.

* He operated on his best moral impulses.

These preposterous ideas conjure up an image of a government and people who had great moral fortitude. They are the stuff necessary for a good heroic story. Let us examine the historical facts.

It is ironic that perhaps the biggest American myths have to do with Black freedom. From grade school, students are taught to believe that the bloodiest war in American history, the Civil War, was fought for the honorable goal of freeing Black people from slavery. This fiction

is embellished with the fabrication that President Abraham Lincoln freed Black people. The truth is that the abolition of slavery was a consequence of the Civil War, not a primary cause, and Lincoln did not actually free one enslaved person. These myths persist and largely go unchallenged because they have been so cleverly woven into the American cultural matrix of political ideology and moral values. Furthermore, they have retained credibility because they were created with deceptive half-truths and distortions.

The historical record reveals that the central causes of the Civil War were related to conflicting political and economic interests between the white ruling elite in the Southern states and the white ruling elite in the Northern states. These two elites struggled over the distribution of political power in an ever-expanding country, and the role of federal authority at the state and territorial levels. This conflict became so intense that it ruptured the country and resulted in the Civil War.

Lincoln and Slavery

Although Abraham Lincoln had a long history of opposition to slavery, he was not at the cutting edge of the movement to abolish slavery. [Lincoln](#), who believed that slavery was a cruel institution that undermined the moral integrity of the white nation, can be classified as a moderate in the abolitionist movement against slavery. He thought that it might be possible to abolish slavery by using a slow gradual approach coupled with compensating slave owners for their slaves and relocating Black people outside the United States (Franklin. 1980. 212-214).

First Lincoln-Douglas Debate august 21, 1858

I will say here, while upon this subject, that I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no

lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so. I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and the black races. There is a physical difference between the two, which, in my judgment, will probably forever forbid their living together upon the footing of perfect equality, and inasmuch as it becomes a necessity that there must be a difference, I, as well as Judge Douglas, am in favor of the race to which I belong having the superior position. I have never said anything to the contrary, but I hold that, notwithstanding all this, there is no reason in the world why the negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. [Loud cheers.] I hold that he is as much entitled to these as the white man. I agree with Judge Douglas he is not my equal in many respects-certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowment. But in the right to eat the bread, without the leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns, he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every living man. [Great applause.]

First Lincoln-Douglas Debate September 18, 1858

I will say then that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races, [applause]-that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality.

And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race. I say upon this occasion I do not perceive that because the white man is to have the superior position the negro should be denied every thing. I do not understand that because I do not want a negro woman for a slave I must necessarily want her for a wife. [Cheers and laughter.] My understanding is that I can just let her alone. I am now in my fiftieth year, and I certainly never have had a black woman for either a slave or a wife. So it seems to me quite possible for us to get along without making either slaves or wives of negroes. I will add to this that I have never seen, to my knowledge, a man, woman or child who was in favor of producing a perfect equality, social and political, between negroes and white men. I recollect of but one distinguished instance that I ever heard of so frequently as to be entirely satisfied of its correctness-and that is the case of Judge Douglas's old friend Col. Richard M. Johnson. [Laughter.] I will also add to the remarks I have made (for I am not going to enter at large upon this subject,) that I have never had the least apprehension that I or my friends would marry negroes if there was no law to keep them from it, [laughter] but as Judge Douglas and his friends seem to be in great apprehension that they might, if there were no law to keep them from it, [roars of laughter] I give him the most solemn pledge that I will to the very last stand by the law of this State, which forbids the marrying of white people with negroes.

Letter to Horace Greeley August 22, 1862, Executive Mansion, Washington

I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution. The sooner the national authority can be restored; the nearer the Union will be "the Union as it was." If there be those who would not save the Union, unless they could at the same time *save* slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time *destroy* slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object in this struggle *is* to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do *not* believe it would help to save the Union.

John Brown and Armed Insurrection

Lincoln's moderate approach was criticized by the militant Black and White abolitionists who wanted the immediate nullification of slave laws and the use of force, if necessary, to bring slavery to a quick end. Further, they pressed for compensation to the enslaved Black people for their unpaid labor rather than to the undeserving slave owners, and they pushed for the legal recognition of Black people as American citizens.

One of the dedicated leaders of the militant abolition movement was John Brown. He felt that violence was necessary to end American slavery, since peaceful efforts had failed. In October 1859, Brown led a raid on the federal armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia intending to start a slave liberation movement that would spread south; he had prepared a Provisional

Constitution for the revised, slavery-free United States he hoped to bring about. His bold courage and anti-slavery actions led to his death, but they served as a catalyst of the civil war.

The United State government hung John Brown for fighting for Black freedom

President James Buchanan ordered Marines from their nearby D.C. barracks to Harpers Ferry to put down the raid. The Marines, placed under the command of Colonel Robert E. Lee, captured John Brown after the raid on Harper's Ferry, a federal arsenal.

Brown was well read and knew that the last words of prominent people are valued. On the morning of December 2, 1859, Brown wrote and gave to his jailor Avis the words he wanted to be remembered by: *I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood. I had, as I now think, vainly flattered myself that without very much bloodshed it might be done.*

John Brown was charged with treason, murder, and insurrection and then hung on December 2, 1859. He was a hero and icon in the North. Union soldiers marched to the new song "John Brown's Body", that portrayed him as a heroic martyr. Newly freed African Americans sang the same song, and they often lowered their voices speaking of Brown, as if he were a saint.

The Civil War

When Lincoln took office as President on March 4, 1861, the nation was breaking up. Seven states in the lower South had seceded and other slave states were moving in that direction. He perceived his principal task as bringing the seceded states back into the Union. To accomplish this, he prodded Congress to adopt an amendment to the Constitution that would

have permanently barred Congress from ending slavery in the states (Geschwender. 1978. 154).

Even after the Civil war began, Lincoln continued his conciliatory policy toward the Confederacy. When Blacks volunteered their services to the Union army, they were rejected. Lincoln believed that allowing Blacks to serve in the Union army would further alienate the Confederacy (Franklin & Moss, 1988. 182). As the war became protracted, however, military, and economic considerations compelled Lincoln to reverse his Black exclusion policy.

Blacks and the North

The Union army faced a manpower shortage. But many whites in the North refused to volunteer to serve in the army and some even defied the draft. Northern newspapers that were anti-Lincoln had misled the general white public to believe that the purpose of the war was to free the slaves (Franklin & Moss, 1988. 186).

Blacks were universally despised in the North. Many counties and towns excluded Blacks, and racial segregation existed in all areas of social life including jobs, education, and even in religious institutions. Only a few Northern white communities allowed Blacks to vote. The very small number of Blacks who did had to meet stringent criteria. Before and during the Civil War, the Black community in the North was struggling for basic citizenship rights (Litwack. 1961; Curry. 1981).

Lincoln's famous Emancipation Proclamation

President Lincoln's famous Emancipation Proclamation, which many mistakenly believe is the act that freed the slaves, went into effect on January 1, 1863. It declared free all enslaved people in states or parts of states still in rebellion against the United States. However, these were areas where the Union army had no control. For instance, enslaved people in the border states of Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware that remained in the Union were not affected by the proclamation. Thus, in effect, Lincoln did not free one enslaved person (Franklin, 1988. 214-216).

Black Soldiers and Freedom

Lincoln's military advisers and generals persuaded him to change the policy of returning runaway enslaved people to their masters and to use Black men in the war. By doing this, they argued, the Southern economy, which was largely dependent on slave labor, would be severely undermined, and the Union army, with the addition of Black soldiers, would become a more powerful and effective military force. Black men changed from laborers to soldiers to liberators. This transformation underscores their agency in abolishing slavery.

Thus, Black people themselves were the principal force that ended slavery. Over 186,000 Black soldiers fought valiantly in the Civil War and more than 38,000 lost their lives. It is estimated that their rate of mortality was about 40 percent greater than that among the white troops (Franklin & Moss, 1988. 198-199). The civil war disrupted and reshaped the United States: It radically changed Black peoples' legal status from *legal property* to *second class citizen* by constitutionally incorporating Blacks into the polity of the United States.

Black Citizenship did not mean full United States Citizenship

Although the U.S. Civil War radically transformed the polity of the United States by advancing the citizenship rights of former enslaved Black people, the aim of the war was not to provide to Blacks' reparations in the form of land, material compensation, and broader legal and socioeconomic redress for their centuries of bondage. The major issue of social justice was left unresolved by the war, which persists to this day.

Blacks' democratic aspirations for land, schools, and civil rights motivated their struggle for liberation. Black radicals wanted more than civil rights; they wanted political power to demand resources for self-determination. They understood that after the legal abolition slavery and the establishment of citizenship that White hostility and active opposition to their gains would persist.

White supremacy remained intact. Left without the land, many Blacks were forced back to the plantations into a position of tenant farmer, slightly removed from that of their former chattel bondage. The political and economic gains that Blacks secured through war would be short-lived, and white racism provided justification for the political repression of Blacks in the postbellum era and the seizure of the few economic rights and limited resources they had secured.

White Reaction and Right-Wing Populism

The Ku Klux Klan, one of the leading organizations in the white terrorist movement that emerged in the South as Union troops were demobilized, harnessed the discontent, anger, resentment, and insecurity of masses of southern white people. Its strategic goal was to reverse

the political gains and destroy the most active leaders of the Black community. Strategies for controlling blacks included state repression and widespread brutal lynching and intimidation with the aim of preserving White supremacy.

American Racial Apartheid

By 1896, White reactionary populism firmly established American racial apartheid.

Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896), was a [landmark decision](#) made by the [U.S. Supreme Court](#) that codified the constitutional doctrine for [racial segregation](#) laws. In the eyes of the court as long as the segregated facilities were equal in quality, [African-Americans](#) could be served separately from the white population.^[2] The decision of the court is more commonly known as "[separate but equal](#)".^{[3][4]} The decision legitimized the many state laws seeking to re-establish white supremacy in the former Confederate States after [Reconstruction](#) (1865-1877).

Racial segregation is a means of preserving white privilege, hoarding resources, maintaining white spaces in employment, housing, schools, hospitals, and other areas. White populism's militant hostility towards federal government today is linked to taxes, which many Whites mistakenly think are for programs design people of color, who are viewed as a threat to their social status as well as their economic, political, and psychological interests in White supremacy.

Conclusion

To the detriment of Black people, the reality that the myths about the United States are more widely known and believed than the historical facts, point to the serious problem of miseducation. These myths perpetuate and reinforce the racist idea that Black people are

incapable of doing things for themselves and that they need a white savior to rescue or lead them. These mistaken ideas serve to make Black people invisible while others portray them as pitiful inferior beings who need white help and guidance.

The great myths in American history are also an obstacle to racial harmony. They instill and foster patriotic feelings of righteousness and superiority in whites. These myths make whites less able to understand themselves and their society. Progress toward interracial harmony necessitates an assault on American chauvinism, which is largely a product of miseducation.

The main historical point, however, is that relations between Blacks and Whites in America began as a relationship based on Whites' debasement of and control over Black people and that this basic relationship has persisted to the present. This profound and obvious fact cannot be ignored if we are to fully understand the political, psychological, social, and economic dynamics of U.S. society.

Once this is acknowledged, it becomes easier to understand the nature of the cultural dynamics of America and the rhetoric of the American ruling elite. The ruling elite continues to promote an image of America as a country firmly committed to the humanitarian values of freedom, justice, liberty, and democracy. But the reality is that America is a ruthlessly competitive society driven by the pursuit of material wealth, social status, power, and control. Further, it is a hierarchical society destructively divided along racial and class lines. This was

the reality in Jamestown in the early 1600s when America was in its embryonic stage, and it is more of a reality today.

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