

A REPUBLIC, IF YOU CAN KEEP IT

I've thought so often this last two weeks about Frederick Douglass's 1852 speech, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"

These two paragraphs in particular, which I've shared in a past Fourth of July post, are more gripping than ever:

... 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 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. ...

What, to the American woman – especially women of color and impoverished women – is this Fourth of July?

This nation's gross injustice and cruelty has always been obvious to people of color; the amount and frequency has fluctuated over the nation's history but it has always been present. That we can name names now like murdered Minnesotan George Floyd has been both a horror and a blessing; the general public can now see what has been less visible. We have been in a position to begin to address it.

But the American public's attention has been shifted by the COVID pandemic, horribly managed under the Trump administration with the likely intent to hurt BIPOC the most because of their concentration in blue states. The anti-vax and anti-mask propaganda may have hurt majority white communities, too, but their access to health care has been far better than in majority-minority communities, nor has this propaganda's COVID fallout changed how red states vote.

The American public's attention has been shifted once again, this time by the Supreme Court's absurd opinions from states' ability to regulate guns to recolonization of Native American nation's lands, to women's bodily autonomy, to the nation's ability to regulate CO2 and other emissions.

What is this Fourth of July now that women of childbearing age no longer have the ability to move freely across the U.S. without concern for their personal welfare? They can no longer be assured their health care is private from either the federal or states' government. They can't be certain they can seek health care and not be treated with the same level of consideration as their male counterparts since some states may have deputized individuals (including health care workers from doctors to janitors) to report their reproductive health care status.

Women of this same age group can't be certain

they will be saved from death if they have an ectopic pregnancy which bursts – and in the age of COVID, some drugs used to treat the virus may increase the chances of ectopic pregnancy.

This nation's ongoing gross injustice and cruelty was flagrantly obvious in the case of the 10-year-old rape victim in Ohio, who by virtue of a matter of days could not receive an abortion in her home state and instead had to go to Indiana.

It is beyond cruel and inhumane to place a child at risk of mortality by insisting they carry their rapist's spawn to term. In this country the risk of maternal mortality approaches one in 3000 pregnancies – it's like the rapist, SCOTUS's conservative majority, and Ohio's GOP-dominated state legislature playing Russian roulette for the duration of every unwanted pregnancy with worse odds for a child forced to carry to term, a form of sustained terror.

Indiana's state legislature is already debating anti-abortion legislation which would make a flight from Ohio to Indiana for rape and incest victims seeking abortion impossible.

What is this Fourth of July to this victimized child and others like her who will suffer the same and worse injustice thanks to an unelected and irrational SCOTUS's conservative majority?

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What are these hollow celebrations to Native Americans whose autonomy has been recognized under federal law and treaties for more than two hundred but has now been violated as their lands were with SCOTUS's decision in Oklahoma v. Castro-Huerta?

There have been discussions about the availability of reproductive services on Native Americans' lands after the Dobbs' decision. But if this same SCOTUS has now penetrated tribal lands to allow states to exercise policing in the name of public safety, are any women white, BIPOC, or Native Americans on their own nations'

land secure in their persons from incursions by states?

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It will not stop with cruelty and injustice for women of childbearing age. Americans who need birth control are already at risk as well as American couples in same-sex relationships and marriages. We can thank Clarence Thomas for this much: he did spell out the next targets this current SCOTUS will attack now that the unenumerated right to privacy for Americans has been arbitrarily stripped from them.

As SCOTUS overturns Roe today, Justice Clarence Thomas's concurrence lays out other rights enshrined in settled case law that he says the high court should "reconsider."

- Griswold, aka contraception
- Lawrence, aka same-sex intimate relationships
- Obergefell, aka gay marriage

pic.twitter.com/xTyKf6l08X

- Marissa J. Lang (@Marissa_Jae) June 24, 2022

What is this Fourth of July and the next, to as much as 70 percent of this nation who are women, people in need of birth control, persons who are non-binary in relationships?

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But again, I think of of Douglass's speech, made in 1852 before abolition of slavery with the 13th Amendment in 1865.

Though blunt about the young nation's failings toward Black persons, Douglass used the word 'hope' and 'hopefully' seven times in his speech.

"...There is hope in the thought, and hope is much needed, under the dark clouds which lower above the horizon.

...

I, therefore, leave off where I began,
with hope. ...”

Hope is not an easy thing when one is under constant threat of enslavement and death simply because they had the luck to be born with a particular skin color to a particular group of people. Yet Douglass had it, as have the BIPOC people of this nation who have had to resist and persevere through many waves of progress and regression.

Douglass could see a trend which fed his hopes, writing,

...my spirit is also cheered by the obvious tendencies of the age. Nations do not now stand in the same relation to each other that they did ages ago. No nation can now shut itself up from the surrounding world and trot round in the same old path of its fathers without interference. ...

This trend remains, obvious in the response of democratic nations toward Russia's assault on Ukraine intent on overthrowing a sovereign autonomous people. This attack will not succeed; it has already failed in many ways by encouraging more cohesion between other democracies including Finland and Sweden's intent to join NATO. It has failed by exposing how hollowed out and threadbare Russia has become, eaten away by the kleptocratic forces which emerged after the fall of the Soviet Union.

The increased solidarity of democracies relied on regressive action and thought, stripping away the fuzziness of economics and culture, distilling the choice: violence against a sovereign autonomous democratic nation will not be accepted by other free, autonomous, democratic nations which will unify to support defense against such an illegitimate attack.

What must happen now within our own states is another regression – not that of the current SCOTUS conservatives' majority's thinking, but one which should be familiar.

I wrote four years ago during the Trump administration, after posting a copy of the Declaration of Independence:

The signatories to this document knew they also signed their death warrant. They debated this document thoroughly, understanding their lives, fortunes, and possibly the same of friends and family were staked on the success of the undertaking launched by this declaration ("corruption of blood" in family's case, which so concerned the founders it was cited later in the Constitution's Article III).

They staked blood and treasure for their thoughts and beliefs that the colonies must be free. The least we can do is remember this bravery and consider our own willingness to fight for this American democracy.

When asked in 1787 at the end of the Constitution Convention what form of government had been created, Ben Franklin answered, "A Republic, if you can keep it."

What will we do to keep it?

We must regress and think once again upon the intent of the founders if we are to regain our progress. We can't keep a government whose power is derived from the people and its elected representatives if we do not demand the *Republican Form of Government* guaranteed to us under Article IV, Section 4 of the Constitution unless we embrace the hope and faith in ourselves as a majority to do so.

It wasn't fear which drove the founders to write that guarantee, but a sincere belief that a

republic could be assured by its own citizens.

It is not a republic when a government erases the rights of its citizens – especially a majority of its citizens which women, BIPOC, LGBTQ+ represent.

It is this failure which must be addressed; organized, focused, collective effort is needed to this end. Fear will only undermine the work to be done. Naysayers and doom-mongers must be ignored, their demoralization pushed aside.

By you he meant *we*, the people, when Franklin described the new nation's government.

This remains a Republic, if we together can keep it.

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Further reading:

The Necessity of Hope

Things are bad. They will get worse. But despair has never been an option.

By Rebecca Traister, The Cut – New York Magazine, June 24, 2022

These cursed United States

'It's time to be brave. Fear is not a plan.'

By Jared Holt, Sh!tpost, July 4, 2022

"Chile got out from under an actual dictator using peaceful means. ..."

A Twitter thread

By Terry Kanefield, July 3, 2022