

MLK Day: Hypocrisy Takes a Holiday

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PEJ News - Stephen Lendman - Martin Luther King Day is the only national holiday commemorating an African American, but it took over 15 long years of campaigning to get it authorized and over two more before it was first observed. It took even longer for Dr. King's day to be finally recognized in all 50 states for the first time on January 17, 2000. It likely only happened at all because the Congress finally was moved to act after receiving a petition with six million signatures that was the largest number ever collected supporting a national issue.

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Holiday Hypocrisy

Stephen Lendman

PEJ News

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Borrowing the line from Gilbert & Sullivan's HMS Pinafore: "Things are seldom as they seem, Skim milk masquerades as cream." It's as true here in the US today as it was in 19th century England, and its message explains how to understand and view our affairs of state and why the title of this essay was chosen - to reflect on our national federal holidays that, in fact, represent something much different than the stated reasons we commemorate them for. Eleven such holidays are reviewed below moving chronologically through the year post-New Year's Day discussed briefly at the end because it's part of the Christmas holiday season celebration.

Martin Luther King Day

Martin Luther King was a Baptist minister, political activist, renowned orator, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and the most noted leader of the American civil rights movement until his assassination in Memphis on April 4, 1968, two months before Robert Kennedy met the same fate in a Los Angeles hotel a day after he won the Democrat primary in his campaign for the office of president that year. In mid-January, King's January 15 birthday is commemorated as a federal holiday as it has been since it was for the first time on January 20, 1986 after Ronald Reagan reluctantly signed the legislation authorizing it in November, 1983. He did it in spite of his personal opposition, only capitulating after the bill authorizing it was passed in both Houses of Congress with veto-proof margins.

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After King's death in 1968, Representative John Conyers introduced a bill in the House to make his birthday a national holiday. It was a long struggle from then till it was finally achieved because of racist opposition in the Congress against honoring a black man led by former Senator Jesse Helms who accused Dr. King of having communist ties as well as making other outlandish slurs against his good name and accusing him of opposing the Vietnam war which he certainly did with passion and eloquence that may have led to his death.

Helms was a hard-liner throughout his public life (like too many others in the Congress then and now), and his career was characterized by mean-spiritedness and a lifelong opposition to democracy, diversity and affirmative action as well as his racist support for segregation and efforts to deny black people their constitutionally mandated rights. Some may also remember his 1990 reelection campaign waged against Harvey Gantt, the first black Mayor of Charlotte, NC, in which Helms disgracefully used a racist ad to counter his opponent's lead in the polls. It was called "Hands" and showed a pair of white hands crumpling a job-rejection letter with a narration explaining he was best qualified and needed the job a racial quota gave to a less deserving black man. It worked, overcoming Gantt's lead and helped reelect Helms undeservedly.

Martin Luther King Day is the only national holiday commemorating an African American, but it took over 15 long years of campaigning to get it authorized and over two more before it was first observed. It took even longer for Dr. King's day to be finally recognized in all 50 states for the first time on January 17, 2000. It likely only happened at all because the Congress finally was moved to act after receiving a petition with six million signatures that was the largest number ever collected supporting a national issue. Sadly, it happened because an assassin's bullet took his life much too soon.

To this day, the question remains: who killed Martin Luther King, but it's not hard to imagine why. James Earl Ray was accused of being the lone assassin, at first pleaded guilty in 1969 after being arrested earlier and held in jail for eight months. He was sentenced to 99 years in prison, never got a trial, and retracted his guilty plea three days after making it, claiming his lawyer deceived him - to no avail. The case was closed and his fate was sealed even though later evidence uncovered casts great doubt on his guilt. He nonetheless spent the rest of his life in prison dying on April 23, 1998 at age 70. *Today his name is hardly ever mentioned in the dominant media nor is any attempt made to clear it, which is no surprise*

But if Ray didn't do it, who then had a motive and might have. Every year commemorating his birth, we note and honor Dr. King's memorable "I have a Dream" speech while ignoring the

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most important of his dreams including the speeches he made supporting them. King was the foremost of our nation's civil rights advocates, but he also wanted to end the country's long history of exploitative materialism and culture of militarism supporting it. He wanted everyone's civil rights respected and honored but also was dedicated to pursuing social justice, promoting non-violence, and was unreservedly against war, becoming increasingly vocal in his opposition to the one raging in Vietnam using powerful language like calling the US government "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world."

King had already won great victories in his civil rights battles with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 that for the first time gave African Americans the rights guaranteed them under the Constitution that Jim Crow laws in the South denied them for decades. It was his public stand on the other great issues driving him that caused those in power concern. No King commemorative today ever mentions his memorable "Beyond Vietnam" speech delivered to clergy and the public on April 4, 1967, one year to the day before he was assassinated in Memphis. It was an heroic and spellbinding moment with Dr. King at his eloquent best calling for an end to the war and violence. *It also may have been a defining moment in his life that had a single year left in it*

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King knew he lived on the edge because of his beliefs and his ability to reach and profoundly influence a vast audience in the country and throughout the world. He rightfully believed his life was in danger and it might just be a matter of time before it was taken. We don't know for sure who, in fact, killed him if it wasn't James Earl Ray which seems very unlikely based on the best evidence now known. We do know who had motive, cause and easy opportunity to do it most any time or place. We also know if the US government was behind it, what part of it likely got the assignment.

It may have been the FBI with its long record of abuse against targeted enemies of the state that includes extensive documentation of its Cointelpro operations from the 1950s till the early 1970s but likely never stopped and has to be more active than ever now in the age of George Bush and its culture of illegal surveillance, witch-hunting, and imperial justice. In earlier years, the FBI targeted organizations and individuals on the left as well as those considered radical including non-violent ones like The Black Panthers, the American Indian Movement, and Dr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and Dr. King himself because of Director J. Edgar Hoover's obsession with the civil rights leader and his near-fanatical efforts to defame and defile him.

The CIA has an even more disturbing record of lawlessness as part of its overall mandate to

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collect and analyze intelligence about foreign governments, corporations, organizations and individuals as well as conduct whatever covert, "black bag," or extrajudicial state-sponsored assassinations assigned it that in half a century ran into the hundreds.

Since it was created in 1947, the CIA's record has been documented in detail including in the works of author, researcher and former State Department employee William Blum in his books *Rogue State* and *Killing Hope* detailing the shameful record of US foreign policy and the CIA's role in it since WW II. It includes carrying out state-sponsored assassinations including those against foreign leaders unwilling to surrender their nation's sovereignty to ours based on imperial management with no outliers allowed - reason enough to remove them with CIA operatives often assigned the task but taking care to do it with enough discretion to make it look like the long arm of Washington was uninvolved.

Through the years the methods used have included a "rogue element's bullet, a hard to detect poison or an "unfortunate" plane crash that was the method of choice to murder Panamanian president Omar Torrijos in 1981 and Ecuadorian president Jaime Roldos in a helicopter crash the same year. Sometimes other "plane accidents" are like the one CIA-trained Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) personnel, led by Ugandan-born and US-trained Paul Kagame (at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas' Command and General Staff College), arranged with surface-to-air missiles to shoot down the aircraft carrying Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundi President Cyprien Ntaryamira on April 6, 1994 that led to the ethnic slaughter that year. It elevated "our guy" Major-General Kagame to power and later to be president of Rwanda where he let US forces operate freely in the country using it as a base to pursue the greater prize Washington sought in the resource-rich Congo (DRC) even though it took hundreds of thousands of innocent lives to do it and millions in Congo where war for its spoils still continues but gets little attention.

Probably the best known and most infamous state-sponsored assassination was the CIA-orchestrated coup and murder of Chilean president Salvador Allende on another September 11 in 1973. It ended the most vibrant democracy in the Americas replacing it with the brutal 17 year dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet, who unfortunately died on December 10 without ever having to answer for his crimes against humanity. So far neither have those in authority at CIA or higher-ups in the Nixon administration like Henry Kissinger. He played a key role in the coup plot, ironically the same year he won a Nobel Peace Prize, as National Security Advisor and Secretary of State and now must check with the State Department for legal advice before traveling abroad for assurance he won't be served with a warrant for his arrest and detention.

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That kind of record through the years shows CIA and its operatives may have been behind the murder of Martin Luther King to remove a powerful voice whose influential opposition to war and support for non-violence and social justice conflicted with this government's agenda of imperial conquest for power and profit.

If one or more FBI, CIA or other US government assassins murdered Martin Luther King, the federal holiday commemorating his birth mocks him and stands as a shameless deceptive act dishonoring all he stood and worked for in his short 39 year life. It also makes his day of observance an act of collective guilt by the nation responsible for ending a noble life that might have accomplished far more if he'd had a chance to continue pursuing the goals he hoped to achieve but never got the chance. Maybe that was the whole idea and the reason he wasn't allowed to go on with his work.

Presidents' Day

Presidents' Day is observed on the third Monday of February, was formerly celebrated as Washington's Birthday, and now states have the option to use either designation or some other one if they choose as Alabama does commemorating Washington and Jefferson Day. They can also pick another day as Georgia does observing Washington's birthday the day after Christmas.

The period around this time is often used as an occasion for schools to teach students the history of US presidents, especially Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and some of our other noted ones. If only that occasion were used to teach real history (like found in Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*) instead of the fiction leading young minds to believe these historic leaders were larger than life heroes, noble in purpose and service to the nation in its highest office, and now deserving to be revered and remembered with a few further immortalized in granite sculpture carving, at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial on stolen Lakota Sioux land in South Dakota's Black Hills.

No past president gets more reverential treatment than our first, the general who led the Continental Army against the British in the nation's war of liberation from the Crown. He became our first president by coronation because he ran unopposed twice, and he's now known as the "Father of the Country" because he was its leader in war and then "selected" as its first head of state. Students are never taught that Washington expressed great aspirations referring to the new nation as a "rising empire" even at its birth and backed his sentiments with deeds to

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help make it one. He did it during the Revolutionary War by his savage acts against native Indians, all of whom he considered subhumans (or American Untermenschen). He compared them to wolves and "beasts of prey" and called for their total destruction much like the way George Bush today calls for defeating "terrorists" less well-defined than the ones Washington's had in mind and went about destroying ruthlessly.

He dispatched General John Sullivan and 5,000 troops to attack the noncombatant Onondaga people in 1779 with orders to destroy all their villages, homes, fields, food supplies, cattle herds and orchards in a scorched earth campaign to annihilate them. He wanted to kill as many as possible and did. He also wanted their land (like Bush today wants Iraq's oil) and took it by force, including from the Onieda people who aided Washington when he most needed help at Valley Forge. The truth about the nation's "Father," kept out of young minds in school, was our first president and all others after him pursued a policy of genocide against the nation's original inhabitants who lived mainly in peace for thousands of years on the lands we came uninvited to and took from them.

It began in 1492 when Columbus and those with him first arrived in what's now Haiti exterminating virtually the entire estimated eight million native Arawak, or Taino, people. The genocidal slaughter of all North, South and Central American Indian peoples followed reducing their population by about 100 million or as much as 98% of their original numbers. This is our shameful legacy of a new nation conceived as a great democratic experiment never tried before in the West, outside of ancient Athens, for a few decades but only for a privileged minority in it then and now.

It was never intended to be one for the nation's indigenous peoples. Their presence impeded what came to be known by the 1840s as the our "Manifest Destiny," or virtual divine right, to expand west and south seizing all the land from coast to coast south of Canada, from the people living on it who were exterminated as well as Texas and the northern half of Mexico we wanted, including the prized possession of California.

Also excluded from our grand vision were the many millions of black African captives sold into slavery and sent to their harsh fate in the new world "democracy" where those surviving the oppressive Middle Passage voyage, at the cost of 50 million lives lost some believe, were held in brutal bondage as human property to serve against their will or be sold like commodities to another master.

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This is the true legacy of Presidents' Day. It commemorates the nation's leaders who led the nation making it grow by a state policy of genocide and imperial expansion, for wealth and power at the expense of those in the way of the privileged class, whose only concern for ordinary people was and still is the use they could get from them. Try finding that history in a secondary or college text (unless Howard Zinn or a few others wrote it) or mentioned in the corporate-controlled media the next time this day of dishonor is observed.

Easter

Easter is a day of great religious significance, but only for Christians who worship Jesus of Nazareth or Jesus Christ. It's not observed by many around the country or world of other religious faiths or none at all. Still, in the US, Christian observances take on special meaning in a nation first settled and founded by those of Christian faith even though most came for secular reasons, not to escape religious persecution. The Founders believed church and state should be separated, and Jefferson first spoke of "a wall of separation" between the two in 1802 after freedom of religion was mandated in the First Amendment to the Constitution that came into force in 1791.

Still, throughout our history, many believed the nation was a Christian one and tried to tear down the separation wall the Founders erected. That view became especially prominent since the ascendancy of neoconservative influence, beginning with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, as these hard-liners want the country governed by Christian principles, including Judaic ones as well, but give short shrift to others and demonizing them the way Islam is now condemned as something synonymous with "terrorism" and "Islamofascism."

In the US today, all Christian holidays of importance get prominent mention and due reverence paid them, especially Christmas and Easter, the two holiest days in the Christian calendar. Prominent Jews, too, aren't ignored, many have near-equal status with Christians, and most non-Jews in the country know about special Jewish holy days like the Yom Kippur Day of Atonement and Rosh Hashanah New Year even if they're not sure why they're commemorated.

But try finding any mention of a Muslim holy day other than a general recognition of Ramadan (established in the year 638) without explanation of what the month-long observance in the 9th month of the Islamic calendar signifies. This period is considered the most important and blessed month of the Islamic year, and it's believed there are about as many Muslims in the US as Jews as well as about 1.8 billion of them worldwide (compared to an estimated 13.3 million

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Jews overall in 2002), a number surely large enough to warrant its adherents respect but instead only finds them wrongly condemned as a collective Antichrist and threat to national security.

Easter is commemorated between late March and late April (and early April to early May in Eastern Christianity little known about in the US) and is also known as Resurrection Day. It's the most important religious feast of the Christian liturgical year and thus gets due prominence in prayer and public displays of religious observance. But Americanized flair goes much further taking full advantage of a chance to commercialize almost anything. So around this period there are Easter Sunday parades and other non-religious promotional activities and expressions that always manage to be emphasized - even on the day celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which observers believe occurred on the third day following his death by crucifixion between 27 and 33 AD. The Roman Catholic Church gives this period special recognition with an eight day feast called the Octave of Easter. It's also the time of year when the Jewish seven day period of Passover is commemorated, marking the Exodus of the Israelites from enslavement in Egypt, that also now gets more prominent mention in the country as part of the effort to market anything, even important religious days and periods of observance, but only ones celebrated by Christians and Jews.

In a nation obsessed with and addicted to a culture of consumerism, even marketing the Almighty is fair game. Easter then, like other holidays and special days in the calendar, is just another day to be exploited for profit along with it being observed for the event and significance it commemorates. It's a subject left for the end of this essay when its most frenzied expression arrives between Thanksgiving and the New Year celebration. It's the time of year when corporate America's only interest in the spirit of the season is how to make a buck out of it - as many as possible because that's the make-or-break time of year they rely on and must do well in, to have the year overall be successful for owners and/or shareholders. So with Thanksgiving dinner still being digested, they practically scream "let the holiday shopping begin," and let it continue right into the new year almost unabated.

It happens on Easter as well, whether it's new outfits for the season, a day or two on the town, vacation travel or any other way the business community can exploit an occasion to get the public to part with its resources spent on everything imaginable people never knew they needed or wanted until the power of round the clock advertising convinced them their lives would be unfulfilled without them. Discussion of this subject will be picked up later in this essay to show it's quite acceptable to exploit a religious holy day for profit even if it corrupts the reason it's commemorated that should be an occasion for solemnity and not for the consumerism that defiles it. But corporate bottom lines aren't enhanced by religious reverence or observance - at least not until the big business finds ways to sell its wares in places and at times of worship and can get away with it. It's hard to imagine they're not trying to figure out how to do it.

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Memorial and Veterans Days

Because both days are related, they're discussed under a single heading. The first, Memorial Day, is commemorated on the last Monday in May and was first observed in 1866 and called Decoration Day beginning in 1868. Usage of Memorial Day wasn't common until after WW II and wasn't the holiday's official name until federal law called it that in 1967. The day is an occasion to honor the nation's men and women who died in military service to the country. More on that in a moment.

Veterans Day was formerly known as Armistice Day, or Remembrance Day in Europe, that originally commemorated the end of WW I on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of the year in 1918 when the guns went silent, or were supposed to. It was first observed in the US in 1919 and made a legal holiday here in 1938. In June, 1954, Congress enacted legislation changing the holiday's name to Veterans Day.

Both holidays would never be needed in a nation dedicated to peace, but one committed to perpetual war for an unattainable peace dishonors its youth in life and disingenuously honors those who died in imperial wars for conquest and plunder. Nations waging wars only guarantee more of them in an endless cycle of violence, militarism, brutality and shameless inhumanity to those made to suffer and die in combat theaters - so the privileged who get to stay home can profit from them.

People don't want wars but can always be made to support and fight in them using the proven method of choice that always works - fear based on shameless lies and deception by governments with hidden motives unrevealed because who would go along with them if they did. Only by deceitfully scaring people enough to believe the nation's security is threatened will they support foreign wars and fight in them thinking they have no other choice. When traumatized enough, those wanting peace can be convinced to go along with the most outlandish schemes planned that if ever explained would be condemned and never supported.

If people only knew the wisdom of iconic investigative journalist IF Stone, they'd know in times of war, or events leading to it, truth is the first casualty. He told young journalists that "All governments are run by liars and nothing they say (about anything) should be believed, and on another occasion shortened it saying, "All governments lie."

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Serial lying is the defining characteristic of the Bush administration, but all others earlier were duplicitous as well including the one led by the Republican former president just passed whose short two and a half year tenure only gave him less time to commit fewer crimes of war and against humanity. He managed to do his best with the time he had, yet we honor him instead of exposing his shameless acts deserving condemnation.

It's almost like it's preordained and in the country's DNA that this nation is warrior state sending its expendable youth to fight and die in foreign wars but not for national security, honor or the rights of free people anywhere. It's always for wealth and power that conquest and plunder afford the privileged who get to stay home safe and in comfort letting others do their dying and then shamelessly hold a day of remembrance honoring them for their sacrifice. This is the long tradition of this nation that since inception in 1776 has been at war with one or more adversaries every year without exception from that time to the present.

These two federal holidays warrant special condemnation. They represent a galling legacy of endless wars and false patriotic glorification of them including the so-called "good" one about which there was nothing good at all. Choosing days to honor the dead who sacrificed everything is a sacrilege and failure to note they died in vain on the alter of power and privilege for the few. Their deaths assure an unending cycle of violence and killing with legions of nameless, faceless grave sites ahead known only to those experiencing unconscionable loss.

These commemorative days stand above the others as symbols of this nation's depravity and ultimate crime against humanity and wasted lives it's taken. They ignore what Lincoln hoped for at Gettysburg in November, 1863 when he said "we here resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth." He knew the horror of war and understood for that to be they must end. He also feared they would not and had to reflect that future wars would take their leaders to new battlefields in an endless cycle of death and destruction wars always guarantee.

Future commemorations of past wars should chart a new course - a vow pledging they'll end, and this nation resolves never again. Remembrance should then be an act of contrition and path to redemption, honoring the living, and taking a sacred oath of non-violence promising to stand by it for all time. It should be a solemn dedication to equity and social justice for all in a state of peace renouncing wars and the shameless holidays in their honor. One day they'll be no more wars because no one will go fight in them. When it comes, days of memorial and honoring veterans will end replaced by a Peace Day honoring the living and sacredness of life so those past dead finally won't have died in vain. Pray it comes soon.

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Independence Day

Along with Christmas, no federal holiday is more celebrated than the day of the nation's independence from the British Crown declared on July 4, 1776. Coming in the summer with good weather across the country, it's a day of parades, outings, and baseball at all levels that many years ago nearly always meant so-called major league double-headers that was a big occasion for young boys growing up in "big league" cities whose dads took them out for an endless day at the ballpark. It's also a day of commemorative and exulting fireworks and other expressions celebrating the nation's history, liberation and traditions - not the truths about them but the acceptable illusions taught in school and extolled by the dominant media and their disingenuous allies in academia and the clergy who go along propagating the nation's myths.

Young minds are never taught the nation's real history, just what's falsely glorified with all ugly parts about important events and leaders responsible for them suppressed to assure a new generation of "good citizens" is properly trained, just like the ones preceding it, assuring those in it will be loyal to the state because they believe the mythology about the country schools at all levels teach is the greatest on earth.

We should commemorate the glorious achievement of our Founders and their Revolution that liberated the nation from a repressive British monarchy and aristocracy replacing it with an experimental system of government never tried before in the West outside its imperfect form in Athens in ancient Greece for a few decades. After the war of liberation, the Founders met in 1787, in the same Philadelphia State House where the Declaration of Independence was signed 11 years earlier, to frame our historic Constitution and later our Bill of Rights ratified in 1791.

It was historic and glorious, but much was left undone and to be desired. Only white male property owners got the most fundamental of all rights in a democracy until 1850 - the right to vote that should have been federally mandated for all male and female adults in the country but wasn't. In addition, slavery was a national shame until the 13th Amendment freed black people, who were just property until 1865. But they still never got real liberties until the civil rights legislation of the 1960s completed what the Constitution and its Amendments left undone. Even so, from then to the present, African Americans and others of color have always had far fewer rights and privileges than the nation's whites, and shamefully our society is as segregated today as it was in the 1960s before the landmark civil rights laws were passed guaranteeing this would never happen again. It did, and it's hardly a reason for people affected and all others of conscience to celebrate on July 4 or any day.

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The nation's native Indians have even less to celebrate, the small number of them remaining of the 100 million or so throughout the Americas slaughtered without mercy from the very earliest days before the nation was liberated from the British Crown. Native Americans lived on these lands for thousands of years in relative peace. It wasn't until white settlers and "Western civilization" arrived that everything changed for the worst.

When the first European settlers came in the late 15th century, they were accepted and at times aided by the nation's first peoples who preferred peace to conflict. But native graciousness wasn't returned in kind, and it led to the great push West and South and near total extermination of the many great Indian nations given no rights or quarter in our grand new democratic experiment for the privileged few. It was only in 1924 that indigenous peoples got any rights with the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act when there were hardly any left to enjoy what little they got grudgingly. Getting no rights at all were the many millions never born because their ancestors were slaughtered in cold blood leaving no new generations to follow.

Even today, in the 21st century, over 80 years since Indian people got citizenship including the right to vote, no peoples overall in the "land of the free" have fewer rights as citizens or live in more desperate poverty and despair unaddressed and virtually ignored than the original inhabitants of this vast continent for whom justice long delayed is justice never gotten. No day is ever held honoring these courageous people acknowledging their sacrifice for what the privileged few now enjoy.

Why would any of them, even as citizens, have reason to commemorate the date of the nation's "liberation" that for them only meant the continuance of their destruction and denial of their proud cultures. Today the traditions of our original inhabitants are unknown by the greater public, they're untaught in schools, and they're ignored by the dominant media that only disgracefully mock and demonize Indian people in films and society as drunks, beasts, primitives and savages, noble or otherwise. What native American could respect a government speaking only with forked tongue and acting like real savages making and breaking treaties, taking their lands, destroying their welfare and finally their lives. The kind of "liberation" this nation brought to the people of Iraq for the past 16 years, we gave our original inhabitants for 500 years "liberating" them, like Iraqis today, from their liberty and lives.

Others in the nation also have little to celebrate on this or any other day. Today it's truer than ever in an age of extreme greed, unprecedented wealth disparity, galling corruption and virtual abandonment of the rule of law by an administration and Congress uncaring about the rights of ordinary people anywhere. Through lies, deceit and contempt for humanity, they created a state of permanent war and disregard for the needs and human and civil rights of the majority.

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They also ignored and exacerbated conditions for the growing millions of poor, persecuted and deprived, who have no reason for joy on our day of "liberation" that gave them no rights or "free" society fruits few of them ever enjoy. Today, tens of millions of poor people, especially those of color, are practically condemned as criminals for their disadvantaged state, through no fault of their own, in a corrupted racist society worshiping wealth, privilege and all the interests of capital at the expense of those having none.

Newly arrived immigrants also have little to celebrate, especially the unwanted and exploited ones of color from the South forced to come here because their nation's leaders and ours destroyed their lives at home by the oppressive NAFTA trade pact enacted to enrich corporate giants at the expense of ordinary working people, mostly living south of the border in Mexico.

Muslims from everywhere, including citizens already here, have little to celebrate as well, in a nation defiling Islam in the age of George Bush equating them all with "terrorists" threatening the nation's security. Thousands threatening no one have been illegally hounded in witch-hunt roundups since 9/11, held in secret detention, unjustly deported, and given no rights including due process to clear their names. Their "crime" is their faith and color in a nation constitutionally mandating all its people can worship freely now no longer valid and abandoned along with all demonized, unwanted, poor and deprived peoples condemned for who they are because they're not white and privileged - the only race and class in the country exempt from the harshness directed against all others. Shame on the nation on its day of "liberation" and all others that strayed from its founding principles never granted to all and still only offered a chosen few.

Labor Day

Labor Day is commemorated on the first Monday in September each year since the first one was celebrated in New York in 1882. Around the world outside the US, socialist and labor movements are observed on May 1 to recognize the social and economic achievements of labor movements and working class people in them. This day gets limited attention in the US, but where it's observed here it's commonly to commemorate the Haymarket Riot of May 4, 1886 in Chicago that followed the May 1 general strike in the city for an eight hour day leading to the violence that broke out on the 4th.

Labor Day became a national federal holiday when Congress passed legislation for it in June, 1894, a time when working people had few rights. It took many painful years of struggle and

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strife before they got any of the ones finally achieved grudgingly from management only wanting to exploit them for profit. Only by organizing, taking to the streets, going on strike, holding boycotts, battling police and National Guard forces supporting management against working people, paying with their blood and lives did they finally gain an eight hour day, a living wage, on-the-job benefits and the pinnacle of labor triumph in the 1930s with the passage of the Wagner Act establishing the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) guaranteeing labor had the right to bargain collectively on equal terms with management for the first time ever.

All of it was won from the bottom up. Management gave nothing until forced to and neither did the federal government always siding with business interests unless and until enough people power forces Washington to yield legislatively or face possible serious work stoppages or even a national insurrection - all this in a democracy claiming to represent all people, the great majority of whom happen to be ordinary working ones.

Since a worried Congress passed the landmark 1935 Wagner Act and Franklin Roosevelt signed it into law in dire economic times when those in power feared the worst, the state of organized labor rights has declined, especially post-WW II. They then went steeply in reverse during the Reagan years when the administration openly showed disdain for working people in its one-side support for management. It continued unabated, under Republican and DLC Democrat administrations, and today stands at a multi-generational low ebb. Since coming into office in 2001, the Neanderthal George Bush neocon administration intensified its assault on the social contract government once had with its people and has been openly contemptuous of ordinary workers with little interest in their rights and welfare.

Since the years of labor's ascendancy, corporate America in league with government shamelessly denigrated unions and the rights of working people to organize in them. In 1958, one-third of the work force was unionized, but now the figure is barely above 12%, and it's below 8% among non-governmental employees or the lowest it's been in seven decades. Worse, most jobs are low-pay service sector ones because the nation's manufacturing base and many higher-paying jobs in finance and technology have been offshored to developing nations where workers can be hired for a fraction of the salaries paid here or as virtual serfs at below poverty wages to fill legions of factory jobs in countries where fair practice worker standards don't exist.

Nonetheless, on the first Monday each September this nation remembers its working people with a federally-mandated holiday in their "honor." Some honor when it's disingenuously given at the same time worker rights are ignored, forgotten, and uncared about by a government beholden to capital and defiling ordinary wage earners deceived on this day with meaningless

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bread and circus droppings leaving out what working people need most: good jobs at good pay, essential benefits with them, and a government that really cares by doing what counts most - fighting for their rights every day. On Labor Day and all others, that kind of reverence is off the table making a mockery of the day named for the people it claims to honor, respect and serve but never does.

Columbus Day

No federally mandated holiday raises public ire more than the one commemorating Columbus, mentioned above briefly. It honors a genocidist whose arrival on what's now Haiti began the systematic mass slaughter of 100 million native human beings so this man and those coming later could go home bringing "as much gold as (those sponsoring them) need....and as many slaves as they ask." The lure and lust for it got him 17 ships on his second voyage and 1200 men aboard them. They were expected to bring back the riches they found including the human ones headed for bondage. They went from island to island in the Caribbean, took their native Indians as captives, found no gold, but took hundreds of human beings instead back to Spain with the half or so of them surviving the journey put on the block for sale like sheep or goats but treated much worse.

The Arawak people deserved better. They were friendly and receptive to the new arrivals, greeting them with gifts, food and water making them feel welcome. They were much like Indians on the mainland - friendly and hospitable enough to make it easy for those arriving to subjugate and kill them because they came to conquer, enslave and steal the riches of the new land. Peaceful Arawak people subjected to this predation got their first taste of "Western civilization" with swords and daggers that later were guns, cannons, and assorted other super weapons of war matched against their simple and crude weapons by comparison for hunting, not warfare. It wasn't hard guessing who'd prevail.

It all got worse after the beginning and lasted 500 years with the deadly cost to native Americans already explained. Still we celebrate the serial killer who began it all, call him heroic, and honor his name and legacy on the second Monday each October as we've done since the first celebration was held in San Francisco in 1869. Today parades and other celebratory events are held in his honor that include speeches by politicians who desecrate the grave sites of the millions sent to them beginning with this man who slaughtered the first ones as a predatory participant in what was the start of the greatest genocide ever.

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Instead of commemorating October 12 as the day this man arrived in the new world (now the second Monday in October), Americans should condemn it as a day that will live in infamy as it is by the few native survivors whose ancestors perished by his hand and the many who followed for conquest and plunder.

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is celebrated in the US on the fourth Thursday of November giving thanks to the Almighty for the year's blessings and bounty. But most people wouldn't imagine its intent by the way they spend the day replete with self-indulgent overeating of traditional foods for the full four day weekend period when there are family gatherings, parades and, most important for ravenous merchants, the official start of the Christmas holiday shopping season beginning the day after the Thanksgiving and continuing till Christmas eve as long as stores remain open that are about as long as people want them to.

This holiday, like all the others, is also replete with mythology taught young minds in school about the Pilgrims inviting native Indians to share their bounty in a show of brotherhood and friendship with an array of foods the early settlers never heard of that were indigenous to the Americas and introduced to them by local native people. The Pilgrims had nothing to do with this tradition that began with Eastern Indians observing fall harvest celebrations for centuries before the first settlers arrived - never called Thanksgiving even after they did.

While George Washington had days for national thanksgiving, modern celebrations of the holiday only date from the Civil War in 1863 when Abraham Lincoln wanted a way to boost morale and patriotic fervor of the Union Army at a time it needed it. He tried doing it by proclaiming Thanksgiving a national holiday for the first time. It had nothing to do with the Pilgrims nor were they ever mentioned until 1890, and the term Pilgrim was never even used until the 1870s. So much for tradition.

The Thanksgiving holiday is also a way to promote American ethnocentrism and cultural superiority over all others by claiming the Almighty views our society as special the way ideological Zionists feel Jews are "the chosen people." It's a short step from these views to judging all others everywhere as inferior, especially ones ranked low in the racial, religious, ethnic or cultural pecking order - like blacks, Latinos (especially from countries like Mexico), and today's number one demon target - all Muslim "radicals and extremists" meaning all of them are by implication and are "Islamofascist" terrorists as well.

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Worse, they and others are what "we" say they are in a time of "universal deceit" when "telling the truth is a revolutionary act," as Orwell told us. He also said in our kind of society "war is peace, freedom is slavery, and ignorance is strength." The public believing it is a testimony to the power of the dominant media Orwell understood in his day over half a century ago before the age of television. If he were living today he'd be aghast at what now goes on where the dominant corporate-controlled media and PR allies act as national thought-control police programming the public mind into compliance with whatever the country's power structure wants us to believe - to its advantage and against ours.

Giving thanks on a special day of Thanksgiving also serves another purpose. It has special religious overtones that in the US are Christian ones as this country always was a Christian nation with over three-fourths of the people in it identifying themselves of that faith. It's been that way even with the traditional separation of church and state, but today the thinking and influence of fundamentalist Christianity in American Protestantism poses a special threat to those outside it. This extremist movement became dominant in the 1980s under Republican rule and reemerged even more virulently with the election of George Bush. What's disturbing and dangerous is that hard-right ideologues like Pat Robertson, who thinks it's all right to assassinate foreign heads of state he dislikes like Hugo Chavez, are close to the seat of power where their views hold great sway.

The US was founded as a secular state, and the Constitution's First Amendment guaranteeing freedom of religion has been interpreted by the Supreme Court as requiring a "wall of separation" between church and state prohibiting the government from adopting any religion or denomination as official and requiring the government to avoid undue involvement in religion, its trappings or expressions.

That status is now in jeopardy following the introduction of the "Constitution Restoration Act of 2004" in the Congress and reintroduced in near-identical form in 2005. If reintroduced again and adopted in the 110th Congress, it would turn the US into a de facto theocracy even though its supporters deny that's its intent. Don't believe them.

Support for the bill is led by Dominionists like Pat Robertson and at least those remaining of the 28 House and Senate sponsors like him in the last Congress, who support tearing down the sacred wall between church and state so the US can be governed by Christian dogma as they interpret it. It would make lawbreakers of those of other faiths, or none at all, disobeying whatever parts of Christian canon the bill designated the law of the land - a very scary prospect for about 75 million non-Christians in the country and many others of Christian faith who won't go along.

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If adopted, this bill will remove the Supreme Court's authority to challenge the right of anyone in or affiliated with federal, state or local government to acknowledge "God as the sovereign source of law, liberty, or government" - the Christian God, that is. Any judge at any level interpreting the Constitution otherwise would henceforth be subject to impeachment and prosecution in the new United States of America ruled by the Pat Robertson types of influence in it. Anyone jittery? It would also likely elevate the Thanksgiving holiday to one of obligatory Christian observance, even for non-Christians, advancing its current optional religious overtones to mandatory status.

Already the way Thanksgiving is celebrated today in the US is a sham. While barely thanking the Almighty for the year's blessings and bounty, if it's done at all, no heed is paid to the many millions of poor, deprived and oppressed peoples around the country and world whose desperate state is the result of our government's actions. It also ignores the systematic dismantling of constitutional rights at home along with the denial of essential social services to growing millions who otherwise aren't able to get them. And it fails to acknowledge our own dereliction in failing to take personal action opposing these abuses against humanity and the rule of law because we're too distracted or involved in other things - like over-indulging on a day to remember our blessings.

Those giving thanks on this day should reflect on their obligation to oppose these crimes of state and the harm they inflict on others and our own well-being. They need to demand real change by holding elected officials accountable and removing those failing to act responsibly. They also need to learn their history discovering how it began - that the nation they call America once was the land of its original inhabitants for many thousands of years who lived on it mostly in peace until we, as uninvited settlers, arrived, took it from them and slaughtered nearly all of them in the process for the past 500 years. It's not just thanks we should give on this day. It's forgiveness for this enormous crime our forebears committed most people don't even know about shamefully.

Journalism Professor Robert Jensen has it right in his article called No Thanks to Thanksgiving. *In it he suggests we would go a long way toward progressing morally if we replaced our "white supremacist" annual Thanksgiving Day tradition of overindulgence with a "National Day of Atonement" accompanied by a self-reflective collective fasting for the "original sin" of our forefathers even if our own came much later or from a different part of the world. Establishing that as a sacred tradition would be an important step toward a day when we might really have something to "give thanks" for every day in a land with leaders resolved never to repeat the crimes of the past and just as committed to public service instead of only to an elite part of it.*

Christmas

Christmas is observed worldwide by Christians and many others on December 25 by tradition (other than the Eastern Orthodox Church doing it on January 7) to honor the birth of Jesus Christ even though it's widely acknowledged not to be his birthday. Along with its religious significance, it's also a time for other celebratory events like winter festivals, Kwanzaa from December 26 - January 1 for Africans Americans reconnecting to their African cultural and historical heritage, and for Jews the Hanukkah Festival of Lights commemorating their struggle for survival and for Jewish children to serve as their Christmas with gifts from parents just like their Christian friends get.

The Christmas season is also a time for what can only be characterized as the national obsession of shopping and consuming that traditionally begins the day after Thanksgiving, runs through Christmas eve and then picks up again and continues into January largely resulting from a compulsion to buy and holiday gift cards, year-end bonuses and other resources gotten or borrowed to do it with - for all the things not received as gifts and anything else Madison Avenue creative minds can convince people to want then or any other time of year.

If one dominant trait characterizes American culture above all others, it's a variant of the consumerism of the kind economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen called "conspicuous" in his 1899 book *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Back then Veblen wrote about the habits of the "nouveau riche" of that era that had accumulated great wealth and spent lavishly to display it "conspicuously" rather than to satisfy needs. If he were living today writing on consumerism, he'd have to write an entirely different book in a society hugely different from the one he knew. His title might be something like *The Theory of the Spending Class* or *A Society Obsessed with Spending* or *Consumerism* encompassing everyone able to spend any amount above the bare subsistence level or what's done for basic needs everyone has.

The term "consumption" originated hundreds of years ago referring to the infectious disease now called tuberculosis or TB. But its original meaning bears significance in today's consumerist society even though the kind of consumption meaning to spend that everyone does for essentials is worlds apart from gluttonous consumerism covered in this section that refers to discretionary shopping and spending for things people don't need but buy anyway with all the negative effects on those doing it beyond their means or even within them as well as the overall harm to a society addicted to excess consumption.

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"Consumption," the disease, or untreated TB, was called that because it "consumed" people from within causing them to slowly and painfully waste away and perish. The analogy today is the great mass of consumers spending beyond their means and relying heavily on high interest-bearing credit cards charging up to 20% or more. It's placed millions precariously in debt over their heads and growing numbers becoming unable to service it because of unexpected financial exigencies like from uninsured medical expenses. It's resulted in a near-plague of personal bankruptcies that in 2005 affected over 2 million people, 30% above 2004, and may rise still higher in 2006 and succeeding years unless people curb their spending habits. Even those surviving that fate face an endless burden of high debt service handled by monthly credit card and/or bank or other lending agency payments that enrich them at the expense of borrowers never able to get out from under an obligation grown oppressive.

This would never happen in a society free from an addiction to spend excessively that in the US is extreme enough to be called a national pathological dysfunction and diagnosed as an obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). It's a psychological or psychiatric anxiety one characterized by obsessive or repetitive thoughts and related compulsions or tasks and the rituals employed to relieve the obsession. In the US, it's an obsession to shop and buy, and the compulsion is to go out, spend and do it. When done excessively the way it is here, it fits the clinical definition of a pathological social disorder that turns out to be deadly for many who get themselves in debt bondage increasingly resulting in bankruptcy.

In the West, but especially in the US, many tens of millions of otherwise normal people are "obsessed" with the need/desire to shop and accumulate all the things they never knew they wanted or needed until the Madison Avenue mind manipulating masters convinced them their lives couldn't be fulfilled without them. Economist Paul Baran once described their influence as being able to make us "want what we don't need (all unessential consumer goods and services) and not....what we do (like good health care, education, clean air and water, safe food, and good government providing essential services)."

For those afflicted with the national neurosis of consumerism, relief is only possible through ritual shopping and spending, even if it means doing it with borrowed funds at high interest rate carrying charges and the risk of future insolvency. Clinicians would characterize this behavior any time of year as abnormal and harmful, but during the Christmas shopping season it becomes a socially pathological orgy rising to the level of an out-of-control spending frenzy.

It's also an effective societal control technique as consumers out shopping or distracted by the vast array of other bread and circus attractions around them (the commercialized sights and sounds of the season to create a buying mood), are focused away from affairs of state and all

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the harm those in power do through them. While people are glued to their TV sets or out at malls shopping for the latest fashions, toys or trinkets, most don't pay enough attention to their government waging wars of aggression, destroying civil liberties and the rule of law, cutting social services, harming the environment, and failing in its social obligation responsibilities to society because they conflict with the elitist agenda of power and privilege it wants the public knowing nothing about.

They also fail to understand their over-indulgent consumerism feeds the corporate beast allowing it to grow, prosper and become even more predatory in a society based on savage capitalism, out-of-control greed, corruption at the highest levels in business and government using our misappropriated and stolen tax dollars, and iron-fisted militarism and homeland security enforcers supporting an imperial juggernaut on the march to make the world safe for big capital that needs armies of over-indulgent consumers to help it get bigger. The more we shop, the further it marches in search of new markets, resources and cheap labor replacing the more expensive kind at home that may have its future consumption impaired if it doesn't cut back on the excess amount of it now.

Adam Smith, the ideological Godfather of capitalism, understood the dangers of concentrated wealth and power and wrote about it in his seminal work *The Wealth of Nations*. He explained an "invisible hand" of unseen forces worked best in a free (meaning fair) market with many small businesses competing locally against each other. He railed against the concentrated mercantilism of his time like the British East India Company of his native UK, where he was Scottish born, even though it prospered quite well on ordinary consumption when there was no such thing as the kind of consumerism endemic in the US today.

If Smith were still living, he'd be appalled by today's kind of monopolistic capitalism that was unimaginable in his day, but he understood its danger in writing about what he called the "vile maxim of the masters of mankind....All for ourselves and nothing for other people." Smith's work was important in its day, but in modern Western society he'd likely have discovered there is no "invisible hand" making markets efficient.

Today markets need countervailing government intervention (called regulation) to make them work best for everyone, not just the ones controlling them for their own self-interest that's the way they work today with corporate giants allowed freewheeling unrestrained freedom letting them quash defenseless weak competitors that can only survive and prosper if regulations call for a level playing field where no one gets unfair competitive advantage over anyone else. That doesn't exist today as giant transnationals make their own rules, and they're all stacked in their own favor.

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Further, under today's neoliberal market rules, the compulsion to consume exacerbates the problem. It lets monopoly capitalism function like a giant vacuum cleaner growing ever larger by sucking into corporate coffers and growing bottom lines all the resources from addicted consumers including all they can borrow in an endless cycle of binge shopping and spending in a culture gone mad with the need to accumulate and overindulge especially during the Christmas holiday season.

Whatever Christmas once was, it no longer is, and it corrupts society and the spirit of the man whose day of birth it honors and the message of love and faith he gave his followers. It came in his teachings, deeds and sermons like his famous Sermon on the Mount when he said to "turn the other cheek" and preached the central tenets of the Ten Commandments that include loving thy neighbor, not killing and doing unto others as you'd want them doing to you. The consumerist US society is one of receiving, not giving; of accepting predatory capitalism or at least not opposing its harm; of ignoring essential people needs and rights; of swearing fealty to shopping and spending while turning away from or not caring about our fellow men, women and children throughout the year, especially at this holy time for Christians whose thoughts should be on those most in need and what can be done to help them.

It's a sad testimony to our society and how most in it are easily manipulated to support what benefits those with wealth and power at the expense of the greater good of all others. Christmas in America is now the defiled spirit of out-of-control excess unmindful of the unmet needs of most others close by and around the world our culture of savage capitalism exploits for profit. For them, Christmas is only "Bah Humbug," and Santa only Scrooge - all take and no give.

New Year's Day

The first day of the new year comes one week after Christmas and is just a continuation of the long holiday season beginning after Thanksgiving, reaching a climax around Christmas, ebbing slightly for a day or so and building again to a final celebratory welcoming of the new year with another overindulgent bout of eating, drinking, partying, and using whatever funds remain for more discretionary spending in January and thereafter in succeeding months gorging on nonessentials.

The new year is also a traditional time for resolutions including some with merit like losing weight, resolving to stop smoking and getting fit. Most are quickly forgotten, and the most

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important ones are never made: to work for peace on earth, good will toward others, loving they neighbor, and respecting the rights of all people everywhere, treating them as we'd want them to treat us in a society of caring and sharing with equity and equal justice for all. Wouldn't that be a wonderful solemn resolution for the new year along with a sacred commitment to keep it throughout the year and every one thereafter once the holiday season ended. Long ago in simpler times before the old world was called the new one and was named America, it was that way. It can be again if enough of us want it to be.

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