

A Dysfunctional Democracy

It is safe to say, regarding the United States, that there has never, in all of its history, existed a properly functioning democracy. That is to say, that there has never been a time when arbitrary class distinctions did not separate the governed from the governors, when social equality and the benefit of the people was of greater concern than political expediency and the profit and power accrual of the politicians. Likewise, there has never been a person who was involved in governmental affairs who sought after such, excepting only Thomas Paine, who was himself not a politician, but a writer; largely a political writer.

We are taught from childhood that the United States was founded as a "Representative Democracy," but this is an equivocation which even the highly respected Patrick Henry railed against. And Ross Perot, in his 1992 presidential campaign, offered: "The British aristocracy we drove out in our Revolution has been replaced by our own version, a political nobility that is immune to the people's will." A democracy intimates a pursuit of the people's will. Such is a pursuit which an aristocracy will not undertake. And History readily demonstrates that the people's will has never been a prioritized concern of the U.S. Government, nor of the governments of the several states.

The United States was founded on the propositions that (a) "all men are created equal," and (b) that they have "certain inalienable rights; that amongst these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." But what does "all men" mean? What does it mean to you? This phrase, like so many others in law—The Declaration of Independence is a legal document—is oftentimes corrupted by our want of understanding. And our understanding itself is oftentimes corrupted by educators who either misteach or allow our own misunderstandings to persist uncorrected. To an innocent fifth-grade school-boy, "all men" meant everybody, all people, all of mankind. He could not have been more wrong. Perhaps his teacher's understanding of the phrase was as flawed as his. This was not the understanding of the founding fathers—Note the patriarchal connotations here—who penned it. Consider:

Women were, because of their gender, excluded;
slaves were, because of their social status, excluded;

the indiginous and free black populations were, because of their skin color, excluded;
The poor were, because of their want of wealth, excluded;
those persons of the middle-class were, because of their want of property, excluded; and
non-Protestant Christians were, because of their religious beliefs, excluded.

Plainly, "all men" was an exclusive coterie. At the time of the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, it consisted of the wealthiest and most powerful and influential white men in the American Colonies. The same, excepting a smattering of tokens, is true of today's America. This fact testifies against America's social and political progress, and for its stagnation in these environments. It witnesses to the fact that our leaders today, two and a half centuries after the signing of the Declaration of Independence are no better people, and no better at leading than George, the British king that our founders abhorred.

Neither, however, are "We the People" blameless: For it is we that have sat idle while our leadership has exploited us and alienated us from those "certain inalienable rights" which include "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." It is we who have allowed our leaders to assemble the world's largest prison population. And it will be we who condemns ourselves and our posterity to abject slavery if we do not get off our . . . hands, and act. President Biden even said:

Freedom has never been guaranteed. Every generation has to earn it, fight for it, defend it in the battle between autocracy and democracy, between the greed of the few, and the rights of the many.

—Zeke Miller, AP White House correspondent, "Biden says each generation has to 'earn' freedom, in solemn Memorial Day remarks" (May 28, 2024)

This fact is true, even if the fight takes us in front of our own government, though, undoubtedly, this is not what Biden had in mind when he said it.