

Foreclosing a Real 'House of Lies'

Showtime's "House of Lies" with Don Cheadle dissects the corrupt world of corporate consulting at a time when the Republicans seem poised to nominate Mitt Romney, who made millions at Bain Capital by applying similar strategies for pumping up companies and inflating profits, as Danny Schechter observes.

By Danny Schechter

If you go to the corner of 8th Avenue and 42nd Street near Times Square in Manhattan, just down from the Wax Museum and around the corner from the bus station, and look up, you'll see an oversized billboard for Showtime's, fast-paced "House of Lies," a new cable TV series that is more like a realistic docudrama about the world of hard-charging management consultants.

Don Cheadle stars in this tightly written challenge to the popular "Mad Men" glorification of Madison Avenue in the 1950s, spiced with the insertion of pretty graphic hot sex that makes Janet Jackson's Superbowl moment seem like it belonged on the Disney Channel. An actor on the series laughingly downplays the explicit physical grappling as "naughty."

At a time when Mitt Romney, a former management consultant himself in his years at Bain Capital, is running for president, this show offers insight into just how vulgar vulgar capitalism can be.

In one scene, the team headed by Cheadle who plays the superslick Marty Kaan (a.k.a. "King Kaan") is pitching a bank president on how to win over the public by offering no interest loans and guarantees to keep customers in their homes.

When his prospective client rejects the idea, it is explained that very few of his customers will end up "qualifying" for the "benefit" which is designed as a phony image-enhancer to allow him and his cronies to take big bonuses without any criticism. When he understands that he can get richer by appearing socially responsible, he hires the team. It's all a clever flim-flam, but sounds suspiciously like what most of the big banks did when peddling fraudulent loans.

The Internet Motion Picture Data Base calls the series, "a subversive, scathing look at a self-loathing management consultant from a top-tier firm. Marty, a highly successful, cutthroat consultant is never above using any means (or anyone) necessary to get his clients the information they want."

Cheadle's work in this series is very political even as it is promoted as only entertainment and comedy. Perhaps that is why cheeky reviewers in such high-level publications as Entertainment Weekly attack it by acknowledging that the

issues it raises are appropriate but not the way they raise them.

Ken Tucker writes, "And at this time in history, who doesn't want to see undeservingly wealthy people get fleeced, or at least brought low by their avarice? In practice, however, *House of Lies* becomes a zero-sum game: Creeps conning creeps, and the creeps we're supposed to root for, Cheadle's gang at Galweather & Stearn, led by their boss, *The West Wing's* Richard Schiff, don't seem all that much more interesting than the clients they're gouging."

Au contraire. New York Magazine gets closer to the truth by writing:

"Marty and his clients portray the one percent at their very worst: 'You look at the pilot and go, "Man, these guys helped these assholes be happier and keep doing their business,"' says Cheadle. 'But they give themselves the out that "we're not the ones doing it. They're doing it. We're just helping them do it better.'"

"The timing, between Occupy Wall Street and the presidential election, couldn't be better for a sendup of corporate amorality and the kind of M.B.A. capitalism Mitt Romney, at Bain & Co., helped perfect."

Remember, Cheadle starred in "Hotel Rwanda" (2004), a film about the Rwandan genocide. He later was active in promoting awareness of genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan. The IMDCB reminds us that, "In January 2005, he traveled to Sudan with five members of Congress to see refugee camps and to meet survivors of the genocide. Upon his return, he reported on his trip for 'ABC News Nightline.'"

Today the only films about Romney, the real-world "con(man)sultan(t)" are full-length attack ads like the one that New Gingrich's super-PAC bought and broadcast before Gingrich apologized.

Increasingly, to get to the truth of any of this you have to watch TV entertainment or films, not news. Stephen Colbert can raise the critique about money in politics that he does because he is considered a comic, someone who "riffs" (to use a New York Times word). He's not considered a serious commentator.

Unfortunately, in our culture, information has to be presented as entertainment to be taken seriously because information programming and news reporting is so predictable and formularized. The best new film on the financial crisis is "Margin Call." Documentaries like the ones I have done on banksters can't compete in this environment.

That's one of the reasons the big Internet sites went after the new bill on

online piracy, arguing it would make it harder to reference copywritten material in social criticism and free speech.

Of course, they also did it because they were being threatened with fines and jail time for carrying, or allowing others to download, music and movies that Hollywood producers and the Music Biz want to control to keep their profits high. They are the real pirates in this piracy debate.

The lesson in the one-day so-called "internet strike" led by Wikipedia, Google et.al is that when usually competitive companies collaborate they have a lot of power.

The Left blogosphere could learn this lesson. While the right-wing punditocracy tend to share and reinforce the same message, radicals love to fight with each other in pursuit of the "correct line" and often dissipate their impact by magnifying small differences to prove some often-insignificant point.

I had that experience with some organizations I approached to work with Globalvision in creating the collaborative not-for-profit Mediachannel.org network to try to help build a media and democracy movement.

They insisted on not working together or cross-promoting each other's work because it would, they feared, diminish their vanguard role. In their own way they were as single-mindedly competitive as any avaricious capitalist firm. Some said, "we will hurt ourselves if we help you," retreating into what became a self-serving parochial cottage industry that was not growing.

In one sense, they projected the values that were the bane of the Bain "solution." Today, Mediachannel is back as **Mediachannel1.org**, in an alliance with Rob Kall's Op-ed News, hoping to reclaim its cutting-edge role in dissecting media as a window into what's wrong with our system and what we can do about it.

Join us as members or affiliates. Working together helps make the difference in the house of lies we live in.

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Israel Tamps Down Iran War Threats

Exclusive: For months, Israeli hardliners and their neocon allies in the United States have been beating the war drums over Iran. But apparent resistance to war from President Obama has brought a softening of rhetoric in Israel, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern reports.

By Ray McGovern

In a stunning departure from recent Israeli threats to attack Iranian nuclear facilities, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak on Wednesday used an interview with Israel's Army radio to assert that any attack on Iran "is very far off," adding, "We haven't made any decision to do this."

When pressed as to whether "very far off" meant weeks or months, Barak replied: "I wouldn't want to provide any estimates. It's certainly not urgent. I don't want to relate to it as though tomorrow it will happen." The world should be thankful for small favors.

Even more intriguing was the phrasing that the Israeli newspaper Haaretz put under its headline, "Barak: Israel 'very far off' from decision on Iran attack." In a sub-head, Haaretz highlighted an equally important change in Israel's stance regarding Iran:

"Israel believes Iran itself has not yet decided whether to make a nuclear bomb, according to intelligence assessment to be presented later this week to U.S. Joint Chief of Staff [Martin] Dempsey."

Haaretz did not specify its sourcing for that information. However, if it's correct, it puts Israel in line with senior U.S. policy and intelligence officials, like Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, who have tenaciously held to the "Iran-has-not-yet-decided" judgment since it was promulgated unanimously by the 16 U.S. intelligence agencies in November 2007.

That National Intelligence Estimate stated up front: **"This NIE does *not* (italics in original) assume that Iran intends to acquire nuclear weapons."** Among its declassified Key Judgments were:

"We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program; Tehran's decision to halt its nuclear weapons program suggests it is less determined to develop nuclear weapons than we have been judging since 2005."

If you thought that those conclusions in 2007 might be greeted in Official Washington or Tel Aviv with the sighs of relief, you would have been mistaken. Not only were the Israelis in high dudgeon, but so were President George W. Bush and, even more so, Vice President Dick Cheney, who had been persuaded to attack Iran's nuclear facilities in 2008.

Here's what Bush wrote in his memoir, *Decision Points*: "But after the NIE, how could I possibly explain using the military to destroy the nuclear facilities of a country the intelligence community said had no active nuclear weapons program?"

For his part, Cheney publicly expressed his chagrin at the wobbliness of his president/protÃ©gÃ©. The former Vice President told "Fox News Sunday" on Aug. 30, 2009, that he was isolated among Bush advisers in his enthusiasm for war with Iran.

This Time It's Different

Before Wednesday, when Defense Minister Barak promised no imminent Israeli attack on Iran, the unholy alliance between Israeli hawks and American neoconservatives was exuding confidence that they would prevail in Washington and also in Tel Aviv in pressing for war with Iran.

Yet, this alliance faced two key obstacles that weren't there when a similar coalition successfully pushed the invasion of Iraq in 2003. This time, the White House and other key elements of the U.S. national security apparatus are dead set against attacking Iran or provoking an Iranian attack. They have apparently now made that clear, in unmistakable terms, to Israeli leaders.

And this time, U.S. intelligence has not been "fixed around the policy." CIA analysts have not been badgered into falsifying their assessments to please higher-ups.

To disrupt what had appeared to be an unstoppable march toward war with Iran, gaining momentum in December and early January, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta intervened with his own rendition of "Let me be clear."

Appearing on CBS's "Face the Nation" on Jan. 8, and apparently unsure whether host Bob Schieffer would have the courage to ask the \$64 question, Panetta decided to ask it himself rhetorically: **"Are they [the Iranians] trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No."**

Yet, in a highly illustrative example of media hypersensitivity on this issue, PBS was not even willing to let the Defense Secretary's comment reach the ears of the network's listeners. Its "NewsHour" program deleted Panetta's emphatic

“no” and played only his subsequent comment:

“But we know that they are trying to develop a nuclear capability. And that’s what concerns us. And our red line to Iran is do not develop a nuclear weapon. That’s a red line for us.”

Got that? Panetta said Iran is not trying to develop a nuclear weapon, but Iran better not develop a nuclear weapon because that’s a red line for us. Clearly, Panetta was trying to be all things to all people, but he had spoken emphatically to the key question of whether Iran was “trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No.”

But Panetta’s declaration was so discordant from the anti-Iranian propaganda that has been pouring out of Washington’s elite opinion circles that PBS appears to have reflexively censored the Defense Secretary’s crucial assessment. After all, if Panetta was allowed to say that Iran was not working on a bomb, all the smart pundits who have been telling the American people the opposite would look rather stupid.

Israeli Reaction

The word “no” also didn’t sit well in Israel. There, it appears Israeli hardliners felt that some drastic measure might be needed to stop what was shaping up as a new initiative by the Obama administration to steer the looming crisis with Iran away from the cliff, or at least from the Strait of Hormuz. Israeli hardliners fretted that the U.S. and Iran might be interested in direct talks to defuse the rising tensions. So, what could be done?

On Jan. 11, just three days after Panetta’s assertion that the Iranians were *not* trying to develop a nuclear weapon, assassins in Tehran attached a bomb to a car carrying Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, an Iranian scientist connected with Iran’s nuclear development program. The attack killed Roshan, making him the fifth such victim in the last couple of years.

Suspicion immediately focused on Israel, which has historically engaged in cross-border assassinations of people it considers a threat. Usually in these cases, Israel offers some ambiguous semi-denial. This time, however, Israeli officials mostly swaggered. Israel’s chief military spokesman, Brig. Gen. Yoav Mordechai, posted a statement on Facebook, saying: “I don’t know who settled the score with the Iranian scientist, but I certainly am not shedding a tear.”

And a leak from the Israeli Parliament revealed that on Jan. 10, the day before the killing, Israeli Forces Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz told the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that during 2012 Iran would see things happen to it “unnaturally,” a reference that Israeli defense and intelligence officials

understood to mean covert actions against Iran's nuclear program.

For months now, Israeli officials have spoken almost giddily of the "unnatural" setbacks that have plagued Iran's nuclear program, including cyber-war attacks.

Israeli press reports termed Gantz's testimony "particularly prescient."

Even usual apologists for Israeli violence, such as the New York Times, agreed that Israel was likely behind the "unnatural" death of Roshan. *Time* magazine was even more direct, citing "Western intelligence officials" in a report that said: "Like three previous Iranian scientists ambushed on their morning commute, the latest nuclear expert to die on his way to work was a victim of Israel's Mossad."

The Obama administration clearly was not amused by the assassination. The White House and State Department issued unusually prompt and strong denials of U.S. complicity. Panetta went so far as to say, "We have some ideas as to who might be involved. But we don't know exactly "

On Jan. 12, President Obama called Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the White House took the unusual step of releasing a photo of Obama on the phone with Netanyahu. Though the White House did not disclose the details of the conversation, the Obama administration soon signaled not only its displeasure with the murder of Roshan but annoyance over what appeared to be an Israeli strategy to ratchet up tensions with Iran.

Obama's call was followed by the strongest and most tangible move since Panetta's statement on *Face the Nation*. Three days after the killing of Roshan, large-scale joint U.S.-Israeli military exercises planned for this spring were abruptly postponed, without any cogent explanation.

Amid all this, what has become clearer and clearer is that Israel's chief objective vis-à-vis Iran is not so much thwarting a possible Iranian effort to obtain a nuclear weapon, but rather what we old-timers at the CIA used to call "government overthrow", the current sobriquet being "regime change."

Arguably, if the Israelis were genuinely interested in ending or limiting Iran's nuclear program, they would probably not continue doing all they can to sabotage diplomatic efforts toward that end. A stroll down memory lane may be instructive.

Blowing Up Peace

On Oct. 1, 2009, Tehran shocked virtually everyone by agreeing to a proposal to send most (as much as 75 percent) of its low-enriched uranium abroad to be turned into fuel for a small reactor that produces medical isotopes. (To state

what may be obvious, one needs low-enriched uranium before one can refine it to levels needed for medical research and then even higher to weapons-grade.)

In Geneva, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, gave Tehran's agreement "in principle" to the swap plan to representatives of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany. The meeting was chaired by Javier Solana of the European Union. Reversing the Bush administration's allergy to talking with "bad guys," Obama had sent Under Secretary of State William Burns to the Geneva meeting.

A 45-minute tête-à-tête between Burns and Jalili marked the highest-level U.S.-Iranian talks in three decades. It was agreed that swap talks would resume on Oct. 19 in Vienna. Jalili also expressed Iran's agreement to open the newly revealed uranium enrichment plant near Qum to international inspection within two weeks, which Tehran did.

Even the *New York Times*, which has been one of the most strident media voices against Iran, was forced to acknowledge that "if it happens, [the swap] would represent a major accomplishment for the West, reducing Iran's ability to make a nuclear weapons quickly, and buying more time for negotiations to bear fruit."

It was at this hopeful moment when on Oct. 18, 2009 Jundallah, a terrorist organization supported by the Israeli Mossad and other intelligence agencies, detonated a car bomb in southeastern Iran ripping apart a meeting of top Iranian Revolutionary Guards commanders and tribal leaders. Jundallah also mounted a roadside attack on a car full of Guards in the same area.

Killed in the attacks were a brigadier general who was deputy commander of the Revolutionary Guards ground forces; the Revolutionary Guards brigadier commanding Sistan-Baluchistan; and three other brigade commanders. Dozens of other military officers and civilians were left dead or wounded.

Jundallah took credit for the bombings, which followed years of lethal attacks on Revolutionary Guards, policemen and other Iranian officials, including an attempted ambush of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's motorcade as he drove through the area in 2005.

The Oct. 18 attack was the bloodiest in Iran since the 1980-88 war with Iraq. It was a safe bet the Revolutionary Guards leaders went to their patron, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, with telling evidence that the West cannot be trusted.

The attack also came one day before talks were to resume at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna to follow up on the Oct. 1 breakthrough. The timing of Jundallah's bombings strongly suggested that the attacks were designed to scuttle those talks.

So, instead of progress on getting Iran to surrender much of its low-enriched uranium, Khamenei issued an angry statement on Oct. 19 condemning the terrorists, who he said “are supported by certain arrogant powers’ spy agencies.”

Iran dispatched a lower-level Iranian technical delegation to Vienna for the Oct. 19 meeting, not Iran’s leading nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, who stayed away as the Iranians began to raise objections that foreshadowed backsliding on their earlier willingness to part with as much as three-quarters of their low-enriched uranium.

Half a Loaf

In 2010, Brazil and Turkey tried to resurrect this deal with a new overture that was privately encouraged by President Obama. The Brazil-Turkey initiative soon won acceptance in Tehran.

On May 17, 2010, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva announced success in persuading Iran to send some of its low-enriched uranium to Turkey in exchange for higher-enriched uranium that would be put to peaceful medical uses.

Lula da Silva, in particular, had become very concerned that, without some quick and smart diplomacy, Israel was likely to follow up a series of escalating sanctions by attacking Iran. Mincing no words, da Silva said: “We can’t allow to happen in Iran what happened in Iraq. Before any sanctions, we must undertake all possible efforts to try and build peace in the Middle East.”

The two leaders secured an agreement on the same quantity of low-enriched uranium that had been envisioned in the Oct. 1 talks. Tehran agreed to exchange that amount for nuclear rods that would have no applicability for a weapon, but the quantity now represented about half of Iran’s supply because more had been produced in the intervening months.

Rather than embrace this Iranian concession as at least a step in the right direction, American neocons launched a political/media offensive to torpedo the deal. Though Obama had sent a private letter encouraging the leaders of Brazil and Turkey to undertake the swap negotiations, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her neocon friends moved quickly to sink it. Instead, they pressed for harsher and harsher sanctions.

The Fawning Corporate Media, particularly the editorial sections of the Washington Post and the New York Times, did their part by insisting that the deal was just another Iranian trick that would leave Iran with enough uranium to theoretically create one nuclear bomb.

Focus Instead on Sanctions

With the swap deal scuttled, a perturbed Lula da Silva released the text of Obama's encouraging letter, but Obama still acquiesced to Clinton's demands for tougher economic sanctions against Iran. On May 18, 2010, Official Washington and especially the neocons had something to cheer about.

"We have reached agreement on a strong draft [sanctions resolution] with the cooperation of both Russia and China," Secretary Clinton told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, making clear that she viewed the timing of the sanctions as a riposte to the Iran-Brazil-Turkey agreement. "This announcement is as convincing an answer to the efforts undertaken in Tehran over the last few days as any we could provide," she declared.

In the ensuing months, the propaganda drumbeat against Iran grew steadily louder, with dubious allegations about Iran plotting an assassination of the Saudi ambassador in Washington and the IAEA, under new pro-U.S.-Israeli leadership, issuing an alarmist report about Iran's purported nuclear progress.

Congress also enacted even more draconian sanctions aimed at crippling Iran's banking system and preventing it from selling oil, Iran's principal source of income. Obama arranged to have waivers inserted in the sanctions legislation, meaning he can hold off imposing penalties if he feels that's needed to protect the U.S. economy or national security.

Obama also appears to have reengaged in efforts to seek a peaceful solution to the Iranian nuclear issue.

Gen. Dempsey's Arrival

So, that's the backdrop for Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey's talks in Israel with his counterpart, Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz, and other senior officials, beginning Thursday evening.

Given the preparatory work and Haaretz's report that Israeli intelligence agrees that Iran has yet to decide about building a nuclear bomb, Israel may not challenge Dempsey's expected efforts to tamp down tensions.

The Haaretz article states: "The intelligence assessment Israeli officials will present later this week to Dempsey indicates that Iran has not yet decided whether to make a nuclear bomb. The Israeli view is that while Iran continues to improve its nuclear capabilities, it has not yet decided whether to translate these capabilities into a nuclear weapon – or, more specifically, a nuclear warhead mounted atop a missile. Nor is it clear when Iran might make such a decision."

But Dempsey's visit bears close watching to see if the alteration in Israeli rhetoric is durable and reflected on the ground. In the past, Israel's Likud leaders have played hardball with American leaders, often by enlisting the help of their influential allies in the United States. If "regime change" remains the real priority, then Israeli leaders won't be likely to warm to the idea of negotiating over Iran's nuclear program.

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How Not to Celebrate Liberty

American history can be described as an endless tension between the nation's ideals and its practices, with hypocrisy often winning out over principle – and those contradictions are most obvious when the nation celebrates its liberties while betraying them, both today and in the past, William Loren Katz notes.

By William Loren Katz

When the National Defense Authorization Act cleared Congress on Dec. 15, 2011, some critics noted the irony of the date, the 220th anniversary of the ratified Bill of Rights.

Instead of celebrating those old promises of "speedy" trials and no "cruel and unusual punishments," Congress sent a bill to President Barack Obama with language authorizing him and his successors to order indefinite detentions under draconian conditions. (Obama signed the NDAA into law on Dec. 31, though expressing "serious reservations" about those provisions.)

But it was not the first time that the United States has desecrated the anniversary of a founding document. A similar defiling of American principles occurred in 1876, during the centennial year celebrating the signing of the Declaration of Independence with its lofty commitment to "self-evident" truths, that "all men are created equal endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

In that celebratory year of 1876, powerful figures of the U.S. government sided

with an unholy alliance of northern railroad builders and land speculators, unrepentant former southern slaveholders and assorted white supremacists, and their obedient lobbyists and media.

What followed was a severe and simultaneous assault on the basic rights of Native Americans and African-Americans, sending the country careening in a new direction.

This fateful change began in late June 1876 as Americans prepared a massive coast-to-coast July Fourth celebration. But as the bunting went up, as bands rehearsed and as corks began to pop, shocking news arrived from the Little Big Horn, a remote area in what is today southeastern Montana.

A force of about 2,000 Lakota and Cheyenne commanded by Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse and Rain In the Face had surrounded Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer and a contingent of 226 men in his Seventh Cavalry. In a battle that became known as Custer's Last Stand, not one Bluecoat survived.

Though the U.S. reaction to Custer's annihilation was one of righteous fury, the truth was that the dashing, brilliant and somewhat arrogant officer was not ambushed while on some peaceful mission. Instead, he was seeking to open the Black Hills of South Dakota to gold prospecting by whites. Custer also was set on teaching the Indians a lesson and making a media splash during the summer's Presidential nominating conventions.

If facts and reason had ruled, the reaction of U.S. government officials would have been anger toward Custer. On his own, he chose to ignore the U.S. Treaty of 1868 stating that "no white person or persons shall be permitted" to "enter" the Black Hills.

Custer knew the Lakota loudly proclaimed this was their sacred ground. He was aware that President Ulysses S. Grant publicly pledged, "it is secured to the Indians." Yet, Custer chose to ignore Sitting Bull's flat warning, "If the whites try ... I will fight."

The dashing officer whom Native Americans called "Long Hair" relied on what he called "Custer luck." And his "luck" may have survived the battle even though he didn't. Instead of censure for his flouting of treaties and other government promises not to mention his exceptionally poor military judgment U.S. political leaders embraced Long Hair as a martyr to Indian savagery.

U.S. government officials rose not to castigate Custer but to demand revenge for this defeat of national power. Politicians cagily added, for the benefit of land-hungry easterners, it was time for Indians to surrender their lands. In the centennial Fourth of July celebrations, public grief mixed with greed, anger and

glorification, and behind closed doors, leading politicians and generals planned to complete the grim work Custer had begun.

By mid-July, War Department orders nullifying the Treaty of 1868 sent General William Sherman riding off with a mandate to treat Lakota reservation families as belligerents or prisoners of war. By mid-August, U.S. officials demanded the Lakota surrender their Black Hills and Powder River lands. U.S. troops began a march that would not stop until the Wounded Knee massacre in December 1890.

Sitting Bull seemed to sense the inevitable outcome in 1877 when he spoke to fellow commanders at the Powder River Council. He began by recalling the earliest white invaders as "small and feeble when our forefathers first met them, but now great and overbearing."

Then he began to speak of the whites' character, explaining: "Strangely enough, they have a mind to till the soil, and the love of possession is a disease in them. These people have made many rules that the rich may break, but the poor may not. They have a religion in which the poor worship, but the rich will not!

"They even take tithes from the poor and weak to support the rich and those who rule. They claim this mother of ours, the Earth, for their own use, and fence their neighbors away from her, and deface her with their buildings and their refuse."

Sitting Bull reached a despairing conclusion: "We cannot dwell side by side. Only seven years ago we made a treaty by which we were assured that the buffalo country should be left to us forever. Now they threaten to take that from us also. My brothers, shall we submit? Or shall we say to them: 'First kill me, before you can take possession of my fatherland!'"

End of Reconstruction

With some minor alterations Sitting Bull's words could have been addressed to African-Americans of that era. In the southern states, African-Americans faced a powerful planter class committed to white supremacy and to regaining control of those they had recently enslaved.

Determined to cast off northern Reconstruction which had deployed federal troops to protect the rights of African-Americans, the plantation owners saw their chance in November 1876 when a disputed presidential election left the country in turmoil. A special federal commission equally divided between Democrats and Republicans reached a "bargain" that forever changed racial relations.

The commission awarded the White House to Republican candidate Rutherford Hayes who, in turn, promised to recall the last federal troops from the South. In that

simple decision, the party of Lincoln which had emancipated the slaves and enacted three new constitutional amendments guaranteeing the rights of African-Americans handed the welfare of the former slaves back to their former masters.

Southern legislatures swiftly moved to install new rules of white supremacy that effectively nullified emancipation, made a mockery of the new amendments, and locked free women and men into a new form of slavery. For generation after generation and through two world wars a regional one-party white dictatorship governed the states of the old Confederacy. Black families were reduced to landless peasants.

Southern bigots who controlled the Democratic Party also used their political clout to advance white supremacy nationally. Southern politicians made sure no national anti-lynching bill passed Congress. A policy of official terror reigned. Night riders killed black leaders, attacked schools, churches and communities.

U.S. presidents after 1876 made no significant effort to ensure that the constitutional rights of people of color were enforced in the southern states (until the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s).

Native Americans suffered a similar fate. The U.S. Supreme Court declared Indians "wards of the state" who must bow to rule by the U.S. cavalry and accept a culture imposed from outside. President Chester Arthur's Secretary of the Interior indicated what was on the way when he announced that his plan for Native Americans would outlaw customs deemed "contrary to civilization" and ban traditional ceremonies, dances and songs.

In 1887, Congress mounted a multi-pronged attack on Indigenous life through Sen. Henry Dawes's General Allotment Act. First, the law mandated the largest American property transfer in history. In less than half a century, Indigenous Americans lost two-thirds of what they still owned 90 million acres of land. Many became landless peasants in the home of their ancestors. Though some plots passed to eager white homesteaders, the largest gainers were railroad builders and unscrupulous speculators.

Sen. Dawes claimed to be speaking for a superior, wiser and triumphant Christian nation when he explained that his aim was to civilize and reform the "savages." Indians had to "learn selfishness" and this meant "cultivate the ground, live in houses, ride in Studebaker wagons, send children to school, drink whiskey, and own property."

In the name of a grand march toward white, Christian ideals and the sanctity of private property, the Dawes Act declared its goal of assimilation and education

by requiring the end of Native American identity, religion and society.

The Act authorized placement of Native children in schools run by Protestant missionaries. In those schools, brother was separated from brother, sister from sister, and children were kept from those who spoke their language. Contacts that reinforced their parents' heritage were banned. Severe punishment awaited anyone speaking a Native American language. Far from home and family, children were taught to embrace the values of Christianity and private ownership.

Lest pupils slip back to "Indian ways" with their parents during summers, they were apprenticed to Christian families in order to practice hard work, discipline and "American values." In Indian schools or white homes, children often suffered abuse that was largely unreported and rarely corrected.

By 1889, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas Jefferson Morgan exultantly announced a great victory over Native Americans their "socialism destroyed." Then he offered new goals and new threats:

"The Indians must conform to 'the white man's ways' peaceably if they will, forcibly if they must. They must adjust themselves to their environment and confirm their mode of living substantially to our civilization. ... They cannot escape it, and must either conform to it or be crushed by it."

As the Bureau of Indian Affairs moved to control Native American life in the West, southern planters pursued a similar path regarding African-Americans. The tools were legally imposed segregation and discrimination laws passed by state legislatures.

These laws were buttressed by a new form of slavery known as the "convict lease system" in which courts sentenced thousands of innocent men to labor for southern planters, mine companies, railroads and local governments. In addition, there was the extra-legal terror of lynching.

Southern legislatures quickly moved to deny African-Americans the right to vote, hold office, bring suit or testify against whites in court, serve on juries, or exercise other human rights. Independent farmers lost their land, communities lost schools, and the skilled and professional people of color were restricted to their own communities. Families and the young began to lose hope.

Then in 1896 in the Plessey case, the Supreme Court voted 8-1 to make segregation the "law of the land."

In 1903, Justice Edward White, forever proud he rode with the Ku Klux Klan, wrote the majority opinion in the Lone Wolf (Kiowa) case. Indian treaties could be broken by Congress, he proclaimed, "if consistent with perfectly good policy

toward the Indians.” Seven years later, White was elevated to Chief Justice where he lived out his life deciding what was legal and constitutional. He died in 1921.

Beginning in that fateful year of 1876, African-Americans and Native Americans learned again that the words of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution did not apply to them.

One of the gifts I received as an historian was an attractively encased red, white and blue Centennial banner. In it, 1776 appears on the top left with 1876 on the top right, and a large “United We Stand” is the center. What irony!

This essay is adapted from William Loren Katz’s landmark book, *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage* [New York, Atheneum Publishers, the revised and expanded 2012 edition] His website is WILLIAMLKATZ.COM
