

# How 'Awesome' Is America?

**Exclusive:** America has an extraordinary capacity to submerge unpleasant truths about its past and present, from African-American slavery and Native-American genocide to bloodbaths in Vietnam and Iraq. Now faced with clear evidence of torture, one cheerleader simply says the U.S. is “awesome,” as Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

Fox News host Andrea Tantaros is facing some well-deserved ridicule for refuting the stomach-turning Senate Intelligence Committee report on torture by declaring that “The United States is awesome. We are awesome” and claiming that the Democrats and President Barack Obama released the report because they want “to show us how we’re not awesome.”

Tantaros’s rant did have the feel of a Saturday Night Live satire, but her upbeat jingoism was only a slight exaggeration of what Americans have been hearing from much of their media and politicians for decades. At least since the presidency of Ronald Reagan, any substantive criticism of the United States has been treated as unpatriotic.

Indeed, a journalist or a politician who dares point out any fundamental flaws in the country or even its actual history can expect to have his or her patriotism challenged. That is how debate over “how we’re not awesome” is silenced.

Fox News may be the poster child of this infantile anti-intellectualism but the same sentiments can be found on the Washington Post’s neocon editorial pages or in [the higher-brow New Republic](#). If you dare point out that America or one of its favored “allies” has done some wrong around the world, you’re an enemy “apologist.” If you regularly adopt a critical stance, you will be marginalized.

That’s why so many serious national problems have lingered or gotten worse. If we don’t kill the messenger, we denounce him or her as un-American.

For instance, the data on racial disparities in police killings and prison incarcerations have long been available, but the vast majority of whites seem oblivious to these continued injustices. To point out that the United States has still not done the necessary hard work to correct these history-based imbalances makes you seem out of step amid the happy-face belief that whatever racism there was is now gone. We have a black president, you know.

So, when white police shoot or otherwise apply excessive violence against blacks

at a wildly disproportionate rate to whites, many white Americans just shrug. They even get annoyed if black athletes join in some symbolic protests like raising their hands as Michael Brown did before he was shot to death in Ferguson, Missouri. Many people hate to have the real world intrude on their sports entertainment.

In reaction to such events, Fox News and much of talk radio find reasons to ridicule the victims and the protesters rather than address the real problems. The unwelcome evidence of racism is just another excuse to roll the eyes and infuse the voice with dripping sarcasm.

### **Mundane Neglect**

On a more mundane level in Arlington County, Virginia, where I live, many whites simply don't see the racial disparities though they are all around. While overwhelmingly white North Arlington benefits from all manner of public investments, including a state-of-the-art subway system which cost billions upon billions of dollars and amenities like a \$2 million "dog park renovation," racially diverse South Arlington, the historic home of the County's black population, is systematically shortchanged, except when it comes to expanding the sewage treatment plant.

When the County Board finally approved a much cheaper light-rail mass-transit plan for South Arlington's Columbia Pike and voted for a public pool complex in another South Arlington neighborhood, North Arlington residents rose up in fury. The local newspaper, the Sun-Gazette, which doesn't even distribute in much of South Arlington due to the demographics rallied the political opposition.

Before long, the County Board was in retreat, killing both the public pools and the light-rail plan, all the better to free up taxpayer money for more North Arlington projects. Yet, when I have noted the racial component to how the two halves of the county are treated, many Arlington whites get furious. They simply don't see the residual racism or don't want to see it. They view themselves as enlightened even as they favor neglecting their black and brown neighbors.

After I wrote a column about the history of Columbia Pike, which became an African-American freedom trail after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation and ex-slaves escaped up the roadway toward Washington, one reader complained that I had slighted Robert E. Lee by saying he had "deserted" the U.S. Army when his fans prefer saying that he "resigned his commission," which sounds so much more proper.

The point is interesting not only because the commenter didn't seem nearly as concerned about the fate of the African-Americans, some of whom joined the U.S.

Colored Troops to fight for the final defeat of slavery. And not only because General Lee violated his oath as a U.S. officer in which he swore to “bear true allegiance to the United States of America” and to “serve them honestly and faithfully against all their enemies or opposers whatsoever, and observe and obey the orders of the President of the United States.”

But the commenter’s point is also interesting because it underscores how white Americans have excused and even glorified the Confederate “heroes” who were fighting to protect a system based on the ownership of other human beings. If you have any doubt about the glorification, just visit Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia, where towering statues of Confederate generals dominate the skyline.

Or, if you’re in Arlington and driving on Route One, you might notice that it is still named in honor of Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy who was a fervent white supremacist and a major slaveholder. And, if President Davis and General Lee had been successful in their war of secession, it could have meant that slavery might never have ended. Yet, these protectors of slavery are treated with the utmost respect and any slight toward them requires a protest.

### **Crude Racism**

My writings about Thomas Jefferson also have elicited anger from some people who wish to idolize him as a noble philosopher/statesman when the reality was that he was a crude racist (see his *Notes on the State of Virginia*) who mistreated his Monticello slaves, including having boys as young as ten whipped and raping one and likely other of his slave girls. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Thomas Jefferson: America’s Founding Sociopath.”](#)]

Much like the defender of Robert E. Lee who preferred more polite phrasing about the general’s betrayal of his oath, defenders of the Jefferson myth expressed much more outrage over my pointing out these inconvenient truths about their hero than they did about the victims of Jefferson’s despicable behavior and stunning hypocrisies.

Which gets us back to Andrea Tantaros and how “awesome” America is. The context for her remarks was the release of the Senate Intelligence Committee’s torture report which detailed what can no longer be euphemized away as “enhanced interrogation techniques” or EITs as CIA officials prefer.

The only word that can now apply is torture, at least for anyone who has read the page-after-page of near drownings via waterboard, the hallucinatory effects of sleep deprivation, the pain inflicted by hanging people from ceilings, and the sexual sadism of keeping detainees naked and subjecting them to anal rape

under the pretext of “rectal rehydration” and “rectal feeding.”

The various apologists for this torture people like Tantaros, Vice President Dick Cheney and Washington Post columnist Charles Krauthammer prefer to counterattack by questioning the patriotism or the intellectual consistency of those Americans who are outraged at these actions. The torture defenders excuse the behavior because we were scared after 9/11 and wanted the Bush administration to do whatever it took to keep us safe.

All of these excuses are designed to prevent the sort of soul-searching that one should expect from a mature democratic Republic, a country that seeks to learn from its mistakes, not cover them up or forget them.

Instead of Americans confronting these dark realities of both their history and their present and making whatever amends and adjustments are necessary the torture apologists or those who don't see racism would simply have us wave the flag and declare how “awesome” we are.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).**

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