

Anything Learned from 'Christmas Truce'?

As the U.S. Congress votes for a military confrontation with Russia over Ukraine and even "liberal" commentators cheer the economic pain being inflicted by U.S. policies, it is worth recalling how big-power arrogance sparked the conflagration called World War I and how it could start World War III, writes Greg Maybury.

By Greg Maybury

At this point in our history – and especially at this time of the year – it is perhaps instructive for us all to reflect on the following: Amid the apocalyptic destruction of the First World War which began a few months earlier, exactly 100 years ago this Christmas the combatants – all God fearin' folks one and all – downed the tools of war for a few short, precious hours to break bread and exchange gifts with each other amid the blood, guts, smoke, fire, rubble and carnage of Hell on Earth.

It was time for them to remember when there wasn't a war and to celebrate Christmas.

Along with being one of human history's most jaw-dropping moments of irreducible, pitch-black, granite-thick irony, it was a singular pointer to the inarguable absurdity, futility, and ignobility of that war. Indeed, any war. The great satirist and literary misanthrope Jonathan Swift himself – he of Gulliver's Travels – could not have dreamed this shit up. But one imagines it would not have surprised him.

Given that the war's precipitators, promoters and the pundits infamously anticipated – and told anyone who would listen – the war would be done and dusted by Xmas, this itself adds an additional measure of tragically indelible poignancy to the proceedings. (Are there any better examples of the all too human propensity for hubris than when it comes to waging war?) With the possible exception of Armistice Day itself on Nov. 11, 1918, this was arguably the only time when it truly was All Quiet on the Western Front.

Now of course the top military brass on both sides took a dim view of these proceedings as this was not in the brochure. One suspects the same of those who were the principal yet wholly *unprincipled* drivers of this gargantuanly cynical, misguided – and utterly avoidable – conflict, the repercussions of which are still reverberating within and across the geopolitical sphere today in more ways than space herein allows one to recount.

Yet we don't need a Ph.D in international relations and military history to

appreciate this here and now. Indeed, the same mercenary motivations and malevolent machinations that sparked The War to End All Wars until the Next Got Here are exactly – repeat “exactly” – the same ones driving current events whichever direction we look. Same shit, different shovel.

And the folks who were the drivers of that war then were afflicted with *exactly* the same psychopathology as the ones driving current events. Same horse, different cowboy! Of course the stakes are much, much bigger today, something they will gloss over because they don't want to scare the horses too much!

What these lunatics will tell us though is that it's all about freedom, democracy, human rights, liberty, security, stability, the rule of law, self-determination, peaceful co-existence, sovereign independence, God, king and country, yada, yada, yada, you name it. They will tell us that *right* must and will prevail over *wrong*, *freedom* over *slavery*, *good* over *evil*, *truth* over *lies*. Bottom line though it is always – repeat, *always* – about them. Their wrongs, their slaveries, their evils, and their lies!

The Conclusions of Lunatics

The ideological forebears of the present power elites of the geopolitical world order told our forebears the same shit back then. As then, they will now tell us whatever they think we will swallow or make us feel good other than the real facts because their agenda is a long way removed from the average person who along with their brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, cousins, nephews, nieces, aunts, uncles, grandchildren, in-laws, outlaws, neighbors, friends, acquaintances and colleagues are the ones almost exclusively called upon to fight these wretched, misbegotten wars on their behalf.

They will do this because they know that even if we were paying some attention in history class in school, we've forgotten all this shit. Or that this time “it's different!” It's always different!

And if we demonstrate any reluctance to swallow their delusions, they have ways of enforcing us to do so or punish us if we don't, and are constantly working on new ways and means to achieve these objectives. This is already happening here in Australia, in Canada, in the UK and Europe, and in the country that is the imperial epicenter of it all, Uncle Sam's Home of the Brave and the Land of the Free, where as the saying goes, folks are free to do whatever their government tells them to do. According to the prevailing dictates of the Agenda Benders.

Of course the key items on that “hidden in plain sight” agenda are as follows: energy and resources (oil & gas esp.); empire (global power & military supremacy); and last but decidedly not least: the Filthy Lucre (aka Mammon).

These folks have sold their own souls and ours, and those of our descendants as well for the stuff, presumably believing Old Nick will honor his promise to allow them to bring it all with them on their final descent into Dante's Ninth Circle of Eternal Damnation.

And whatever we learnt in school about the causes of the First World War (or any other war for that matter) is not worth the paper it was written on. I should know; I used to teach this nonsense. That is until I wised up and stopped drinking the Kool-Aid (the shit was giving me reflux), and learnt that history is not just written by the victors so as to gloat over the vanquished, it is done so with a future purpose in mind, one which probably does not need to be spelt out here.

Yet such are the stakes this time round, there are unlikely to be any 'winners' (think "nukes" aka WMDs), so it's unsure as to who might actually get to write the next installment of history, much less study it for posterity. Or for that matter, teach it! As Einstein once opined, World War Three might be fought with nukes, but World War Four will be fought with sticks and stones. And oldie, but a goodie to be sure. With all this in mind, this has been a momentous, (ahem) tortuous year for the history of our species on the planet. For those reading this who don't appreciate this reality, it may be time to get out more.

Especially if we care about the future of humanity after we are no longer on the right side of the grass. And if we are parents, we should care. If we are grandparents, then this applies even more so.

This "reality" I refer to is one that I and many other hugely concerned folks have attempted to shed some light on, admittedly with varying degrees of insight and success. And it is one we will never – repeat, *never* – get a handle on whilst we continue to rely on the mainstream (or corporate) media.

It's anyone's guess as to whether the forces that prevailed to set the world on fire in 1914 will repeat history. I hope not. At all events what may be worth considering is the message below – from a man who was ahead of his time both artistically and politically.

It is methinks highly appropriate in these dangerous times in which we live ...
Fab Johnny Says: Give Peace a Fighting Chance MOFOs. Happy Christmas, War is Over. Well, Not Quite, But Some of us be Working on it John. Backatcha when we're done!

Johnny, we hardly knew ye old son! Thanks for everything. In your own way you chose the peace of the grave not the security of the slave. Oh, and you wrote a half way decent tune or two every now and then. Bonus. Rest in Peace m'man. If

you still be around, you blood be worth bottling.

John Lennon – Happy Xmas (War is Over):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yN4Uu00lmTg>

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Ayn Rand v. ‘It’s a Wonderful Life’

During the Red Scare of the late 1940s, novelist Ayn Rand and other right-wing zealots targeted Hollywood for supposedly subversive messages, like the criticism of bankers and the praise of community in Frank Capra’s “It’s a Wonderful Life,” as Michael Winship recalls.

By Michael Winship

A number of years ago, I was telling a longtime city dweller friend of mine yet another story about the small, upstate New York town in which I grew up. Simultaneously baffled and captivated, he said, “I think you were born and raised in Bedford Falls,” the fictional burg at the center of Frank Capra’s classic Christmas movie, “It’s a Wonderful Life.”

Well, I wasn’t. Actually, I grew up about 27 miles west of there. Its real name is Seneca Falls, New York yes, the same place that’s also the birthplace of the women’s suffrage movement. While not absolutely certain, there’s a compelling body of circumstantial evidence that Capra had the town in mind when he created his cinematic version of Bedford Falls.

The steel bridge over the canal, for example, like the one from which the hero George Bailey contemplates jumping in a suicide attempt, only to dive in to save his guardian angel, Clarence. The old Victorian homes, the design of town streets, a large Italian population, mentions of nearby cities Rochester, Buffalo and Elmira are just a few of the other similarities. There’s even the perhaps apocryphal tale of Frank Capra finding inspiration after stopping in Seneca Falls for a haircut on his way to visit an aunt.

Enough coincidences abound that Seneca Falls now holds a yearly “It’s a Wonderful Life” festival, and although it may not draw as many visitors as the nearby Women’s Rights National Historical Park, there’s also an “It’s a Wonderful Life” museum.

Whatever the ultimate truth, there’s no denying that the movie is a storybook

evocation of bygone small town America, places like Seneca Falls and my own hometown, right down to the underside of greed and malice that often lurks just around the corner from the film's compassion and wholesome neighborliness.

As for Frank Capra, as he prepared to make the movie, he told the *Los Angeles Times*, "There are just two things that are important. One is to strengthen the individual's belief in himself, and the other, even more important right now, is to combat a modern trend toward atheism."

Which makes it all the crazier that when the movie first came out, it fell under suspicion from the FBI and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) as Communist propaganda, part of the Red Scare that soon would lead to the blacklist and witch hunt that destroyed the careers of many talented screen and television writers, directors and actors.

Screenplay credits on "It's a Wonderful Life" went to Frances Goodrich and her husband Albert Hackett, Capra and Jo Swerling, although a number of others took turns at different times, including Clifford Odets, Dalton Trumbo and Marc Connelly not an unusual situation in Hollywood. But a 1947 FBI memorandum, part of a 13,533 page document, "Communist Infiltration of the Motion Picture Industry," first went after the writers Goodrich and Hackett:

"According to Informants [REDACTED] in this picture the screen credits again fail to reflect the Communist support given to the screen writer. According to [REDACTED] the writers Frances Goodrick [sic] and Albert Hackett were very close to known Communists and on one occasion in the recent past while these two writers were doing a picture for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Goodrick [sic] and Hackett practically lived with known Communists and were observed eating luncheon daily with such Communists as Lester Cole, screen writer, and Earl Robinson, screen writer. Both of these individuals are identified in Section I of this memorandum as Communists."

The memo goes on to cast doubt on the movie's storyline, in which Jimmy Stewart's George Bailey and his struggling savings and loan fight on behalf of the good people of Bedford Falls against the avarice and power of banker and slumlord Henry Potter, played by Lionel Barrymore:

"With regard to the picture 'It's A Wonderful Life', [REDACTED] stated in substance that the film represented a rather obvious attempt to discredit bankers by casting Lionel Barrymore as a 'scrooge-type' so that he would be the most hated man in the picture. This, according to these sources, is a common trick used by Communists.

"In addition, [REDACTED] stated that, in his opinion, this picture deliberately

maligned the upper class, attempting to show the people who had money were mean and despicable characters. [REDACTED] related that if he had made this picture portraying the banker, he would have shown this individual to have been following the rules as laid down by the State Bank Examiners in connection with making loans.

“Further, [REDACTED] stated that the scene wouldn’t have ‘suffered at all’ in portraying the banker as a man who was protecting funds put in his care by private individuals and adhering to the rules governing the loan of that money rather than portraying the part as it was shown. In summary, [REDACTED] stated that it was not necessary to make the banker such a mean character and ‘I would never have done it that way.’”

This was part of an FBI evaluation of several Hollywood movies others included “The Best Years of Our Lives” (which beat “It’s a Wonderful Life” at the Oscars for Best Picture and Best Director), “Pride of the Marines,” and Abbott and Costello in “Buck Privates Come Home.”

Wait it gets nuttier. According to the media archival website *Aphelis*, “Among the group who produced the analytical tools that were used by the FBI in its analysis of ‘It’s a Wonderful Life’ was Ayn Rand.”

“Abbott and Costello Meet Ayn Rand” what a comedy horror picture that would have made! Rand’s group told the FBI:

“The purpose of the Communists in Hollywood is not the production of political movies openly advocating Communism. Their purpose is to corrupt non-political movies, by introducing small, casual bits of propaganda into innocent stories and to make people absorb the basic principles of Collectivism by indirection and implication.

“Few people would take Communism straight, but a constant stream of hints, lines, touches and suggestions battering the public from the screen will act like drops of water that split a rock if continued long enough. The rock that they are trying to split is Americanism.”

But redemption of an odd sort came for “It’s a Wonderful Life” at the infamous October 1947 House Un-American Activities Committee hearings. Just days before the appearance there of the Hollywood 10 writers (and one director) who refused to testify and subsequently went to prison, a parade of “friendly witnesses” (including Ayn Rand, Gary Cooper, Ronald Reagan and Walt Disney) came before the committee to insinuate and weave dark tales of Communist infiltration and subversion in the movie business.

One of them was a former Communist and screenwriter named John Charles Moffitt.

Aphelis reports: "When asked by HUAC Chief Investigator Robert E. Stripling if Hollywood is in the habit of portraying bankers as villainous characters, Moffitt takes the opportunity to try to *clear* the reputation of Frank Capra's movie 'It's A Wonderful Life:' he tries to argue that the film isn't, in fact a Communist movie."

STRIPLING. The term "heavy" has been used here as a designation of the part in which the person is a villain. Would you say that the banker has been often cast as a heavy, or consistently cast as a heavy, in pictures in Hollywood.

MOFFITT. Yes, sir. I think that due to Communist pressure he is overfrequently cast as a heavy. By that I do not mean that I think no picture should ever show a villainous banker. In fact, I would right now like to defend one picture that I think has been unjustly accused of communism. That picture is Frank Capra's "It's a Wonderful Life." The banker in that picture, played by Lionel Barrymore, was most certainly what we call a "dog heavy" in the business. He was a snarling, unsympathetic character. But the hero and his father, played by James Stewart and Samuel S. Hines, were businessmen, in the building and loan business, and they were shown as using money as a benevolent influence.

At this point, there was a bit of commotion in the hearing room.

THE CHAIRMAN. Just a minute. Come away. Everybody sit down. Will all you people who are standing up please sit down? And the photographers.

MR.MOFFITT. All right.

THE CHAIRMAN. Go ahead.

MOFFITT. Well, to summarize, I think Mr. Capra's picture, though it had a banker as villain, could not be properly called a Communist picture. It showed that the power of money can be used oppressively and it can be used benevolently. I think that picture was unjustly accused of Communism.

Since then, the movie has been more than redeemed as it slowly became a sentimental and beloved holiday perennial. And if anything, its portrayal of a villainous banker has been vindicated a thousand fold as in the last seven years we've seen fraudulent mortgages and subsequent foreclosures, bankers unrepentant after an unprecedented taxpayer bailout and unpunished after a mindboggling spree of bad calls, profligacy and corkscrew investments that raked in billions while others suffered the consequences.

It's a wonderful life, alright, but not if you're homeless or unemployed tonight, not if your kids are hungry and you can't pay for heat. There are still a lot of Mr. Potters in the world. We know who you are and we'll keep calling

you out. God rest ye merry, gentlemen.

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Will 'New Obama' Bring Hope for Change?

President Obama has finally shown glimmers of the leader that many Americans thought they saw in 2008, as he displays some boldness in ending U.S. hostility toward Cuba and acting on global warming. But it remains unclear if this "new Obama" will offer more reasons to hope for change, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

"My presidency is entering the fourth quarter. Interesting stuff happens in the fourth quarter, and I'm looking forward to it." – Barack Obama, Dec. 19. 2014

One should be careful about drawing conclusions concerning the intentions and state of mind of a president based on when he takes certain major actions. The background to almost any presidential action involves a bureaucratic process within the U.S. government and, with foreign policies, negotiations or consultations with other governments.

Sometimes a step is taken at a particular time because that's when the processes and the negotiations happened to be completed. Sometimes timing is largely a matter of making room on a crowded plate with other issues demanding high-level attention. Nonetheless, President Obama's actions over the past several weeks are consistent with the analysis that he has become a more politically liberated and thus more energized national leader since the mid-term elections, which were the last elections which will put anyone into national-level office while Mr. Obama remains president.

If the President really has made such a transition, any American who would rather see broader pursuit of the national interest take precedence over a narrow focus on the next election ought to be pleased about that.

Mr. Obama is putting the lie to accusations that he is a timid and indecisive leader, and revealing such accusations to be merely a combination of general Obama-bashing and specific preferred policies of the accuser. Many of his

opponents who call for more assertive U.S. policies overseas equate assertiveness with bombing somebody rather than, say, asserting the right for the United States to practice diplomacy with anyone it wants or getting in front of efforts to keep Earth habitable.

Many who say that people and governments overseas yearn for more forceful U.S. action (whiny Gulf Arab monarchies with their sectarian objectives seem to be a favorite reference point in this regard) are merely pushing certain narrow agendas on salient topics such as the Syrian civil war, while refusing to recognize the far broader international approval that Mr. Obama's recent actions have received.

Even if the President does not have any more elections to worry about, domestic politics still will have a lot to do with what he can or cannot achieve. That there will be continued obstructionism in Congress is a safe bet, especially given that the results of those same mid-term elections did not give the obstructionists any new incentive to change their ways.

One of Mr. Obama's responses to this reality is to make the fullest possible use of his executive authority where constructive legislative action is unlikely. Another thing the President has going for him is that once he takes specific action, this clarifies the choices between those actions and the alternatives in a way that drains credibility from opponents who try to argue that the President's actions are against the national interest, and also clarifies likely electoral costs for opponents who *are* focusing on the next election, even on subjects where obstructionists might fare better in a debate waged in more abstract terms.

Timothy Egan has made a similar observation this way: "Are Republicans really going to spend the first year of their new majority trying to undo everything the president has done, to roll back the clock? Will they defend isolation of Cuba against the wishes of most young Cuban-Americans? Will they restore a family-destroying deportation policy, when Obama's de-emphasis on sending illegal immigrants home has already given him a 15-point boost among Latinos? Will they take away health insurance from millions who never had it before? Will they insist that nothing can be done on climate change, while an agreement is on the table for the world's two biggest polluters, the United States and China, to do something significant?"

If Mr. Obama really is going to make things interesting as well as productive for U.S. interests in the first few months of his fourth quarter and not just in the closing weeks of the third, two decision points in particular will bear watching, in addition to watching whether the President keeps the heat on, so to speak, on the problem of climate change. Taking the correct course of action at

each of these decision points would involve, like the opening to Cuba, a removal of outdated and damaging impediments to U.S. diplomacy and foreign policy.

One of the two decision points concerns whether the President will inject into the U.S. negotiating position the flexibility that will be needed to conclude an agreement to restrict Iran's nuclear program. Although these are multilateral negotiations, the most critical decisions will be made by the President of the United States and the Supreme Leader of Iran.

Of course there will be vigorous efforts from the same quarters that have been trying all along to undermine the negotiations to destroy whatever agreement may be reached, specifically through Congressional action. There will be cries about giving up the store and making too many concessions. But that will happen no matter what the terms of the agreement.

And once an agreement is in hand and the implications between upholding the agreement and discarding it become clearer than ever, the issue will become like the others on Egan's list, with no reasonable case to be made in favor of discarding the deal, and discarding along with it any special restraints on, and monitoring of, the Iranian program.

The other issue to watch is the unresolved conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, where Mr. Obama's actions so far have mostly been limited to giving John Kerry a pat on the back and wishing him luck. For American politicians this issue is the granddaddy of all contradictions between doing what is in U.S. interests and bending in another direction because of fear of what will happen at the next election.

If Barack Obama really does feel liberated by not having to think about the next election, this issue presents the toughest test of that proposition. And if anyone doubts what this festering conflict does not only to Palestinians but to Israel, and why it cannot be allowed to fester indefinitely, a good corrective read is Roger Cohen's most recent column.

There may actually be several decision points that this subject will present to Mr. Obama over the next two years, but an immediate issue concerns a draft resolution introduced at the United Nations Security Council on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, calling for an end to the Israeli occupation and conclusion of an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement by a date certain sometime in the next couple of years.

The language of the resolution will undergo more discussion and change before it is put to a vote. But if it basically says that the 47-year occupation has to end and that there should be established within the next couple of years a

Palestinian state with boundaries negotiated by Israel and the Palestinian Authority, such a resolution will be worth supporting. It certainly should not be vetoed.

No such resolution will, by itself, bring a Palestinian state an inch closer to realization on the ground. Nor will it provide shortcuts to the tough bargaining that still will be necessary between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators. But for the United States not to veto such a resolution, and even more if it actively supports it, will be a salient and significant development, a much-noticed departure from past unfortunate practice, that will at least bring resolution of the conflict closer.

This gets to the standards that President Obama ought to apply in assessing where his leadership can accomplish things and thus where he should make bold moves on any topic. Accomplishment in most cases will not mean wrapping up a problem in the next two years. In most cases it will mean imparting new momentum to a necessarily longer term process.

This clearly is the case with the climate problem; the agreement with China on reduction of emissions is an accomplishment because it imparts momentum to a process that will require many years and broad multilateral participation.

Even most of the benefit of the initiative on Cuba will not materialize during the rest of Mr. Obama's term. The old U.S. policy toward Cuba had over half a century to show that it does not work; the new one deserves more than two years to show that it does (especially if Congressional resistance undermines the new policy).

And as for the Palestinian problem, for the United States not to oppose a UN resolution that explicitly criticizes the Israeli occupation will spur processes that are necessary to resolve the problem, even if it is not resolved in the next two years. The change in the U.S. posture will send a strong message to the rest of the world, ranging from extremists who repeatedly cite the unresolved conflict and the U.S. role in it as a reason for their anti-U.S. violence, to Israeli voters who have to think long and hard about the path their country is on.

The message is that the United States realizes, and is willing to act on that realization, that indefinite continuation of this conflict on terms set by the right-wing rulers of Israel is contrary to U.S. interests, as well as being contrary to the interests of Palestinians and of Israel itself.

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University for security studies. (This article first appeared as a [blog post at The National Interest's Web site](#). Reprinted with author's permission.)

US Democracy's Failure at Racial Justice

The unprovoked murder of two New York policemen has prompted understandable outrage, but the larger context remains the U.S. failure to address legacies of slavery and segregation, compounded by recent police violence targeting young black men, as Dustin Axe explains.

By Dustin Axe

Many people might be shocked and even appalled to see such a fervent national reaction to the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. There have not only been weeks of demonstrations and marches around the nation but Ferguson itself experienced days of rioting.

Corporate media outlets have covered protests in places like New York, Boston, Chicago, and Oakland with enthusiasm, and Attor

ney General Eric Holder and President Obama have each spoken extensively about it. Media coverage and national outrage have also brought to light other killings of black people at the hands of police, events that might not otherwise get attention. The choke hold death of Eric Garner and the shooting death of Tamir Rice have each received considerable amount of coverage.

Why did the killing of one black man by a white police officer, Darren Wilson, trigger such a severe reaction? After all, events like this are regular occurrences.

Anarchist Alexander Berkman (1870-1936) offers insight to this question in his essay entitled "[The Idea Is the Thing](#)." He wrote: "The social revolution . . . is not an accident, not a sudden happening. There is nothing sudden about it, for ideas don't change suddenly. They grow slowly, gradually, like the plant or flower.

"Hence the social revolution is a result, a development, which means that it is evolutionary. It develops to the point when considerable numbers of people have embraced the new ideas and are determined to put them into practice. When they attempt to do so and meet with opposition, then the slow, quiet, and peaceful social evolution becomes quick, militant, and violent. Evolution becomes revolution."

This is true today as it was in the early 1900's when Berkman wrote it. Social movements and revolutions do not start with singular events. They are the result of gradual accumulation of injustices experienced by many people for a really long time.

Nobody knows when a social revolution is coming and nobody can control it, least of all those in power. The beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's is often attributed to Rosa Parks for refusing to give up her bus seat that was reserved for whites only. This was a transformative event, one that ignited a social movement unlike any other in the history of the United States, but what followed, boycotts, rallies, marches, riots, etc., was the result of decades and centuries of oppression, not one occurrence.

Likewise, the outrage over the shooting death of Michael Brown is the effect of years, decades, and even centuries of oppression of black people.

Legacy of Injustice

We are witnessing the legacy of both slavery and segregation, and we are experiencing a well established new racial caste system. Africans were bought and sold by the millions to work on colonial plantations, and our nation's founding documents preserved slavery as an institution.

When the Constitution was ratified black people were considered to be three-fifth of a person (for the purpose of representation), not real human beings. When the Civil War ended and slavery was outlawed, it was not entirely clear socially, politically or economically what would happen to the 4 million newly freed slaves. The answer was Jim Crow.

Black people were free from chains but they were not free from a racial caste system that segregated them from whites. A considerable amount of equality was gained because of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's, however, widespread discrimination and segregation continue today in a new form.

Michelle Alexander's book, entitled *The New Jim Crow*, details the reality millions of black people experience as a result of the War on Drugs, three strike laws, maximum minimum sentencing, stop and frisk, and mass incarceration. She states being a criminal is what it means to be black today.

There are more black people in jail, on probation, or on parole than were enslaved in 1850. In all, one in 30 black people are involved in the justice system one way or another. And once in the criminal justice system, a label renders a person obsolete by limiting their ability to get housing, employment, higher education, food stamps, and it even limits one's ability to vote. This is effectively legal discrimination against black people, which ultimately renders

them second-class citizens.

Alexander explains that while the tactics of social control have changed from slavery to segregation to mass incarceration, the overall goal has not. The only difference is the language used. She writes: "In the era of colorblindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt. So we don't. Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice system to label people of color 'criminals' and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind."

Indeed, draconian laws are enforced by a paramilitary police who use brutal tactics in the name of "law and order." The result is police brutality and violence. A ProPublica analysis of killings by police reveals that black people are 21 times more likely to be killed by police than white people. In addition, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement found in the 2012 Annual Report on extrajudicial killing that a black person is killed every 28 hours by police, security guards, or vigilantes.

Thus, we should try to understand the response in Ferguson and across the nation in this context. When we learn about the extent to which black people are targeted by laws and by the police we can appreciate their frustration. And we now see where Alexander Berkman was right. He argues that social revolution is an evolutionary process, one that involves many people who embrace the same frustrations.

This is how a seemingly small event, like the refusal to give up one's bus seat or the killing of an unarmed person in the middle of the street, erupts into a quick, sometime violent revolution.

Ferguson and Democracy

It is easy to look at rioting in Ferguson and dismiss it. Many people see astonishing images of police cars on fire and hear interviews of store owners who had their businesses destroyed and think violence is wrong and wag their finger at the citizens of Ferguson. I want to offer a different perspective.

I suggest we look beyond the fire and looted stores, and even beyond the particular details of the Michael Brown case, which no one truly knows. We should instead focus on the context of the events in Ferguson and try to understand it as a part of democracy.

I am not justifying rioting by any means. I am the first person to criticize violence, including America's use of violence in empire-building abroad. Violence is never the answer, it is always wrong. I am arguing that race riots should be understood as part of a larger, democratic process for change.

Anger in Ferguson is an accurate representation of what happens when peaceful channels for change are too slow or entirely absent. Violence erupts when people do not have avenues to enact peaceful change. If we had a transparent democratic system, one that gave citizens the opportunity to have their voices heard, there would not be rioting

Understood this way, riots can be a useful barometer that reveals just how ineffective our democracy is. Howard Zinn (1922-2010) makes this argument in his 1973 book, *Disobedience and Democracy*. If citizens turn to unorganized violence to enact change rather than working peacefully through the "system" then you know your government is ineffectual.

It proves the slowness it has in solving problems, such as poverty, racism and police brutality. Zinn says we must remember that social disorder, whether it is violent or nonviolent, is the result of problems, not the cause. In other words, the real problem is not a riot, but rather the unsolved grievances of the people.

In Ferguson, we are seeing what happens when large numbers of oppressed people are entirely marginalized and left with no political power whatsoever. In order to have a political voice in the United States you must have money. Our elections, debates, and political parties are entirely run by corporate elites and billionaires, not poor people.

This means large numbers of Ferguson citizens, as well as tens of thousands of poor people all across America, including you and me, are entirely disenfranchised from the democratic process. They simply cannot change draconian laws that directly affect them in negative ways. Therefore, it is only a matter of time before an event, some sort of trigger, such as the shooting of Michael Brown, gets people in the street, yelling and rioting.

Broken Economic System

What we are really seeing is the effects of vast amount of inequality and poverty. The issue at hand is a broken economic system, one that criminalizes the poor and people of color. Laws, police, and prisons do not function as instruments of crime control, but rather social control. The unprecedented power police departments have and the expansion of their arsenal started decades ago, and it directly correlates with the upsurge of inequality.

I am not alone in my analysis. In a 1968 speech, Martin Luther King said this about riots: "It is not enough for me to stand before you tonight and condemn riots. It would be morally irresponsible for me to do that without, at the same time, condemning the contingent, intolerable conditions that exist in our

society. These conditions are the things that cause individuals to feel that they have no other alternative than to engage in violent rebellions to get attention. And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard.”

Race riots in the 1960’s were effective in starting national conversations and debates about voting rights and equality. They themselves were not instruments of change, because violence leads to violence and it never guarantees positive change; however, they were part of the process for change.

Today, people are already discussing solutions to police brutality like better training and more cameras for police officers. President Obama announced a \$75 million proposal to make 50,000 body cameras available to police officers. Cameras will not solve the underline problems of inequality and racism, but they might at least reduce incidents of police brutality.

Why look down our noses at poor people who are fed up with being treated as second-class citizens? We should not wag our finger at rioters in Ferguson, just as we should not dismiss terrorists who want to attack the United States, or a person who storms a school with an assault rifle. Doing so ignores the broader context at hand, and thus limits any opportunity to learn from such events. Instead, we should identify the root cause and ask tough questions. Why are poor people angry? Why are black people angry?

As King suggested, if we do not denounce those who have all the wealth and power and who have gained it mostly through terror and war, then it is unfair to denounce poor black people who have nothing. Again, I am not condoning violence. I am suggesting we approach the events in Ferguson from a different perspective. No one ever said democracy was easy!

Ferguson and Empire

In an interview with Laura Flanders, Chris Hedges explains it perfectly. He says all empires show signs of decline when they start using ruthless tactics and weapons (that are normally used abroad) on its own citizens at home. In other words, things are bad when the barrel of the gun is aimed at home. This is clearly happening in America.

Missouri just deployed its National Guard in St. Louis to disperse protesters and quell a rioting, but soldiers and tanks are being used nationwide for lesser offensives. We are seeing police officers being deployed on the streets with full military gear, machine guns, tanks, and drones.

The same weapons used in places like Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen are being deployed on American streets to control local disturbances. The distribution of military supplies to police departments, such as sniper rifles, silencers,

tanks, and M-16's, is at a record high, and it is overwhelming to see how quickly these things can be deployed.

The signs are everywhere. In 2013, the Boston Police Department quarantined a significant part of the city and systematically went door to door in full military gear to search for a suspect. An early morning warrant being issued in Oakland by SWAT police in armored vehicles is no different than a night raid in Pakistan.

Is it too hard to imagine drones being used one day to take down suspects in Detroit like they are in Yemen? And there have been an increasing number of enemies being identified at home just like they are abroad. We are witnessing an intensification of security at the border and record-breaking deportation of immigrants.

The mechanisms of control used in Gaza are the same used at home. Chicago Police Department Superintendent Garry McCarthy traveled to Israel last month to lead a delegation of law enforcement officials from 60 nations. It was Israel's 3rd Annual International Homeland Security Conference, and its goal was to discuss best practices and strategies for fighting crime and preventing insurrection.

McCarthy shared Chicago's experience of controlling protesters during the 2012 NATO summit. Speaking from firsthand experience, I can tell you that the police presence during the NATO summit was completely extravagant and unnecessary. The city was swamped with cops, many of which were bused in from other states. Mayor Rahm Emanuel used the event as an excuse to further militarize the police and to increase surveillance.

Berkman said social revolutions do not happen by accident, but the same can be said of empires. They are forged out of the deliberate use of greed, theft, deceit, imperialism and ruthless terror. The American Empire is no different.

Yet the vast majority of Americans prefer to ignore it; foreign affairs are not something most people pay attention to. However, if you pay attention to the weapons and tactics being used by the American Empire for social control at home, you are seeing exactly what it does abroad, as well. This is a sign that our empire is imploding.

We do not know for sure if the death of Michael Brown is the event that will ignited a social revolution, but we do know it started a considerable amount of unrest and dissent. I believe many people wonder how one event could do such a thing because they are not fully aware or sensitive to the amount of oppression black people experience.

We should not be surprised when victims of the New Jim Crow spill into the

streets full of anger. And if proper channels for peaceful change do not exist, we should not be surprised if that anger becomes violent. When inequality, unjust laws, mass incarceration, racism and police brutality among other things, are not addressed then the result is insurrection.

Some may see rioting in Ferguson as just that, rioting. I see an empire in decline, seeds of revolution, and a struggle to preserve democracy.

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Dividing the CIA in Two

When created in 1947, the CIA was meant to coordinate objective intelligence and thus avert some future Pearl Harbor attack, but its secondary role engaging in covert operations came to corrupt its independence, a problem that must now be addressed, says ex-CIA analyst Melvin A. Goodman.

By Melvin A. Goodman

In the wake of 9/11, a time of great fear and anxiety, the C.I.A. needed sound judgment and professionalism. Its six directors over the past 13 years gave it nothing of the sort.

The Senate Intelligence Committee's report on the C.I.A.'s sadistic torture program demonstrates why the C.I.A. needs to be eliminated and replaced by two new agencies for conducting intelligence analysis and clandestine operations. A wall is needed between worlds of analysis and operations to ensure independent assessments.

The operational world is secretive and insular. Its mentality is oriented toward counterintelligence, emphasizing intrusive security clearances and the need-to-know. It has been excessively militarized, including the controversial drone program. Its direct involvement in policy implementation undermines any possibility of independence.

The analytic world must be open and accessible to outside experts who can offer substantive critiques. The C.I.A.'s "fusion centers," which combine intelligence analysts and clandestine operatives, produced politicized intelligence to justify war against Iraq, and orchestrated torture and abuse in secret prisons. The focus of these centers is to support policy, which undermines the ability of analysts to provide objective analysis.

The directors of the new analytical and operational agencies would have to come from outside the intelligence community. Distinguished Foreign Service officers, who understand the support role of strategic intelligence, could lead an elite intelligence organization. The director of the National Clandestine Service should come from outside the operational arena, and a distinguished board should be created to review all covert actions, which should be minimal. Both agencies should have smaller budgets and fewer personnel than the bloated directorates of today's C.I.A.

An intelligence reorganization will require rebuilding the oversight process, which is vital to the intelligence community. The Senate Intelligence Committee took too long to expose C.I.A. violations of law and morality, and its report represents only Democrats. Increased partisanship in the intelligence committees is worrisome. Oversight at the C.I.A. is essential, but will have to be rebuilt because President Barack Obama has weakened the role of the C.I.A.'s statutory inspector general.

With new agencies and distinguished leaders, as well as aggressive oversight, we can return to President Harry Truman's idea of a C.I.A. as a "quiet arm of intelligence."

Melvin A. Goodman is senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and professor of government at Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of *The Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA* and *National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism* and the forthcoming *The Path to Dissent: The Story of a CIA Whistleblower* (City Lights Publishers, 2015). [This article first appeared as a commentary at the New York Times.]
