

A Seminole Christmas Gift of Freedom

Traditional U.S. history downplays Native people who settled the land and Africans enslaved to cultivate it while glorifying European whites and ignoring when the “other side” won, as on Christmas Day 1837, writes William Loren Katz.

By William Loren Katz

On Christmas Day in 1837, Africans and Native Americans who formed Florida’s Seminole Nation defeated a vastly superior U.S. invading army bent on cracking this early rainbow coalition and returning the Africans to slavery. The Seminole victory stands as a milestone in the march of American liberty.

Though it reads like a Hollywood thriller, this amazing story has yet to capture public attention

Despite its significance, it does not appear in school textbooks and social studies courses, Hollywood and TV movies.

This daring Seminole story begins around the time of the American Revolution of 1776 as 55 “Founding Fathers” were writing the Declaration of Independence with its noble words about all people being “created equal [and] endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

About the same time, Seminole families, suffering ethnic persecution under Creek rule in Alabama and Georgia, fled south to seek independence. African runaway slaves who earlier had escaped bondage welcomed them to Florida. The Africans did more than offer Seminole families a haven; they taught them methods of rice cultivation the Africans had learned in Senegambia and Sierra Leone in Africa.

Then the two peoples of color forged a prosperous bi-racial nation and a military alliance strong enough to withstand European invaders and slave-catchers. The Seminoles were led by such skilled military figures and diplomats as Osceola, Wild Cat and John Horse.

This alliance drove U.S. slaveholders to sputtering fury since these armed Black and Indian communities lived a stone’s throw from what was then the southern U.S. border. The slaveholders claimed that the Seminole unity – along with the community’s relative prosperity and guns – posed a lethal threat to the plantation system. After all, here was a beacon that enticed more Africans to escape from bondage and offered them a military base for protecting their freedom. Further, these peaceful and successful agricultural communities destroyed the slaveholders’ myths claiming Africans required white control.

The U.S. Constitution of 1789 embraced slavery and protected slaveholder interests, even letting them count their slaves as three-fifths of a person for the purpose of representation in Congress, thus enhancing the political power of slave states. From George Washington to the Civil War, slave owners sat in the White House two-thirds of the time, the same proportion of time that slaveholders were Speakers of the House of Representatives and Presidents of the U.S. Senate. Further, 20 of 35 U.S. Supreme Court Justices owned slaves.

The War on Freedom

With the support of their Northern trading partners – merchants and businessmen, and the politicians who served them – slaveholders directed U.S. foreign policy, keeping up a drum-beat of demands for U.S. military intervention in Florida. In 1811, President James Madison, himself a slave owner, authorized covert U.S. invasions by slave-catching posses called “Patriots.”

Then in 1816, General Andrew Jackson ordered General Gaines to attack the Seminole alliance and “restore the stolen negroes to their rightful owners.” A major U.S. assault began on hundreds of people of color living in “Fort Negro” on the Apalachicola River.

As U.S. Army Colonel Clinch sailed down the Apalachicola he wrote: “The American negroes had principally settled along the river and a number of them had left their fields and gone over to the Seminoles on hearing of our approach. Their cornfields extended nearly fifty miles up the river and their numbers were daily increasing.”

When a heated U.S. cannon ball hit “Fort Negro’s” ammunition dump, the explosion killed most of its more than 300 defenders. The survivors were marched back to slavery. Then in 1818, General Jackson invaded and claimed Florida. The United States “purchased” it [\$5,000,000] from Spain in 1819, and sent a U.S. army of occupation for “pacification.”

But suddenly the U.S. faced the largest slave revolt in its history, its busiest “underground railroad” station, and the strongest African/Indian alliance in North America. The multicultural Seminoles carefully moved families out of harm’s way from 1816 to 1858 as they resisted the U.S. through three “Seminole wars.” Today many Seminoles still claim they never surrendered.

In June 1837, Major General Sidney Thomas Jesup, the best-informed U.S. officer in Florida, described the danger posed by the Seminole alliance: “The two races, the negro and the Indian, are rapidly approximating; they are identical in interests and feelings. ... Should the Indians remain in this territory the negroes among them will form a rallying point for runaway negroes from the

adjacent states; and if they remove, the fastness of the country will be immediately occupied by negroes.”

A Disputed ‘Victory’

Then on Christmas Day of 1837, 380 to 480 Seminole fighters gathered on the northeast corner of Florida’s Lake Okeechobee ready to halt the armies of Colonel Zachary Taylor, a Louisiana slaveholder and ambitious career officer. He was building a reputation as an “Indian killer.” Taylor’s troops included 70 Delaware Indians, 180 Tennessee volunteers, and 800 U.S. Infantry soldiers.

As Taylor’s army approached, Seminole marksmen waited perched in trees or hiding in tall grass. The first Seminole volley sent the Delaware fleeing. Tennessee riflemen plunged ahead until a withering fire brought down their commissioned officers and then their noncommissioned officers. The Tennesseans fled.

Then Taylor ordered the U.S. Sixth Infantry, Fourth Infantry and his own First Infantry Regiments forward. Pinpoint Seminole rifle fire brought down, he later reported, “every officer, with one exception, as well as most of the non-commissioned officers” and left “but four . . . untouched.”

On that Christmas Day, Colonel Taylor counted 26 U.S. dead and 112 wounded, seven dead for each slain Seminole, and he had taken no prisoners. After the 2½-hour battle, the Seminoles took to their canoes and sailed off to fight again.

The battle of Lake Okeechobee became the most decisive U.S. defeat in more than four decades of Florida warfare. But after his survivors limped back to Fort Gardner, Taylor declared victory – “the Indians were driven in every direction.” The U.S. Army promoted him and he later became the 12th president of the United States.

The battle of Lake Okeechobee was part of the Second Seminole War that took 1,500 U.S. military lives, cost Congress \$40,000,000 (pre-Civil War dollars!) and left thousands of American soldiers wounded or dead of disease. Seminole losses were not recorded.

The truth of what happened at Lake Okeechobee remained buried. When President Taylor died in office, former Congressman Abraham Lincoln memorialized him on July 25, 1850. “He was never beaten,” Lincoln said, adding, “in 1837 he fought and conquered in the memorable Battle of Lake Okeechobee, one of the most desperate struggles known to the annals of Indian warfare.”

A century and a half later, noted Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. wrote in *The Almanac of American History*: “Fighting in the Second Seminole War, General Zachary Taylor defeats a group of Seminoles at Okeechobee Swamp,

Florida.”

The United States needs to face its past. Americans of all ages have a right to know and to celebrate the freedom fighters who built this country, all of them. Our schools, children, teachers and parents deserve to learn about a daring Christmas Day battle that has been too long buried in lies and distortions.

This 2016 copyrighted essay is adapted from William Loren Katz, *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage* [Atheneum, 2014 revised edition]

John Brown's Anti-Slavery Legacy

For some American abolitionists, President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of Jan. 1, 1863, was a long time coming, but it was a moment for rejoicing among a racially mixed force in Kansas that included veterans of John Brown's anti-slavery uprisings, writes William Loren Katz.

By William Loren Katz

Only the skies were gloomy as Emancipation Day 1863 dawned and the First Kansas Colored Volunteers – a mix of African-Americans, Native Americans and Black Indians – assembled at Fort Scott to celebrate President Abraham Lincoln's long-delayed Emancipation Proclamation.

The men had been fighting the Confederacy since war broke out in 1861. The white officers even longer – as radical abolitionists whom John Brown commanded in his Kansas battles to free slaves in the 1850s (before his failed raid against the armory at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, which led to his trial for treason and his death by hanging in 1959).

Celebrating Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation issued on Jan. 1, 1863 about 500 people gathered at Fort Scott in eastern Kansas. As flags, sewn by women of color, floated above the fort, people sang the “The Star-Spangled Banner,” then they shared a barbecue and strong liquor. Next, soldiers and officers burst into *their* song. They honored their “immortal hero” with “the John Brown song.” The soldiers added this line: “John Brown sowed, and the harvesters are we.”

This self-liberated army was commanded by officers whom John Brown had trained and led in a Kansas guerrilla war to end slavery. By the Civil War, the First Kansas Colored Volunteers included the kind of fighters that Brown had dreamed of rallying to the cause. For this multi-racial force, this was the time to complete “the old man's work.”

The men of color were recruited from 10,000 people from the Seminole, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Cherokee Nations who followed Chief Opothla Yahola on what began as a peace march – to avoid serving the Confederate cause – from the Indian Territory. Attacked three times by Confederate cavalry on their desperate voyage, they finally decided to head for Union lines in Kansas.

By the time they reached Kansas, only 7,000 survived and many decided they were no longer pacifists. As early as October 1862, 225 men of the regiment drove off 500 Confederate troops.

The force continued Brown's work with forays into Missouri to free slaves, relatives, loved ones and strangers. Their white officers – once hunted by the Federal government as "John Brown traitors" – now were appreciated as experts in guerrilla warfare and were deployed in Kansas, then regarded as a less significant Civil War battle zone. There they and their men transformed the Civil War into a Revolution.

This heroic story is told in Mark A. Lause, *Race and Radicalism in the Union Army* (University of Illinois Press, 2009) largely ignored since publication.

William Loren Katz is the author of *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage* and 40 other books. His website is <http://www.williamlkatz.com>

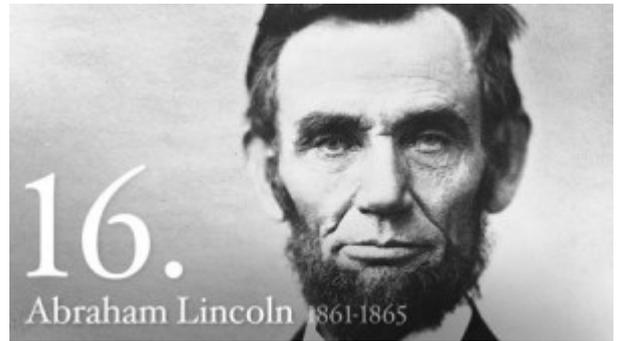
When New Year's Meant Freedom

Some white Americans still try to dismiss the evils of slavery, pretending that many slaves were happy serving their white masters. But the morning of Jan. 1, 1863, showed a different reality when President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and blacks celebrated, as William Loren Katz recalls.

By William Loren Katz

When the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect Jan. 1, 1863, African-Americans had been fighting the Confederacy near the South Carolina Islands for months. These soldiers assembled with their families to celebrate. Their commander, Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, had been a militant Abolitionist minister who together with black people in Boston had stormed jails to free captured people of color.

In South Carolina he was devoted to his courageous soldiers. His *Diary* describes their New Year's Day ceremony:



“About ten o’clock the people began to collect by land, and also by water, in steamers sent by General Saxton for the purpose; and from that time all the avenues of approach were thronged. The multitude were chiefly colored women, with gay handkerchiefs on their heads “There were many white visitors also, ladies on horseback and in carriages, superintendents and teachers, officers, and cavalry-men. Our companies were marched to the neighborhood of the platform, and allowed to sit or stand, as at the Sunday services; the platform was occupied by ladies and dignitaries, and . . . the colored people filled up all the vacant openings in the beautiful grove around, and there was a cordon of mounted visitors beyond. . .

“Then the President’s Proclamation was read by Dr. W. H. Brisbane, a thing infinitely appropriate, a South Carolinian addressing South Carolinians. . . . Then the colors were presented to us by the Rev. Mr. French, a chaplain who brought them from the donors in New York. “All this was according to the program. Then followed an incident so simple, so touching, so utterly unexpected and startling, that I can scarcely believe it on recalling, though it gave the keynote to the whole day. The very moment the speaker had ceased, and just as I took and waved the flag, which now for the first time meant anything to these poor people, there suddenly arose, close beside the platform, a strong male voice (but rather cracked and elderly), into which two women’s voices instantly blended, singing, as if by an impulse that could no more be repressed than the morning note of the song-sparrow.,

“‘My Country, ’tis of thee, Sweet land of liberty, Of thee I sing!’

‘People looked at each other, and then at us on the platform, to see whence came this interruption, not set down in the bills. Firmly and irrepressibly the quavering voices sang on, verse after verse; others of the colored people joined in; some whites on the platform began, but I motioned them to silence. I never saw anything so electric; it made all other words cheap; it seemed the choked voice of a race at last unloosed.

“Nothing could be more wonderfully unconscious; art could not have dreamed of a

tribute to the day of jubilee that should be so affecting; history will not believe it; and when I came to speak of it, after it was ended, tears were everywhere.”

As cited in several of my books: from Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Army Life in A Black Regiment* (Boston, 1882) 40-41.

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The Real Thanksgiving Day

From the Archive: On Thanksgiving Day, the United States celebrates the tradition of Pilgrims and Native Americans sitting down together in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1621 to celebrate each other as friendly neighbors. But the reality was not so pleasant, as historian William Loren Katz recalled.

By William Loren Katz (Originally published on Nov. 12, 2009)

Thanksgiving Day remains a most treasured holiday in the United States. Work comes to a halt, families gather, eat turkey, and count their blessings. A presidential proclamation blesses the day. But we must never forget that the holiday pre-eminently serves political ends.

Remember in 2003 when President George W. Bush flew into Bagdad on Thanksgiving Day to visit and celebrate with U.S. troops. He stayed a few hours and brought in a host of media photographers to snap his picture bearing a glazed turkey. No one ate the turkey, of course. It was cardboard, a stage prop.

However, this exploitation of joyous thanksgiving began almost four centuries ago, with a mythology that dates back to the first Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving Day memorializes the Pilgrims' survival of their first winter in New England. One hundred and forty-nine people had arrived in November 1620 aboard the *Mayflower* and were saved from starvation and disaster because the Wampanoug nation brought them corn and meat and taught them wilderness survival skills.

This truly was an effort worthy of gratitude. And in 1621, Governor William Bradford of Plymouth proclaimed a day of Thanksgiving not to the Wampanougs but to his fellow Pilgrims and their omnipotent God. In Bradford's view, the Christians had staved off hunger through their devotion, courage and

resourcefulness. And to this day American politicians, ministers and most educators would have the people see it this way.

Bradford's fable is an early example of "Eurothink" a grotesque lie encased in arrogance. To Europeans, native people and other humans who were neither Christian nor white no matter how much they helped were considered undeserving of recognition. The heroic scenario of determined and righteous European settlers overcoming hardships and travails had no room for the others.

Bradford's tale has his Pilgrims inviting the Native Americans as guests to celebrate the Europeans' victory over famine, an act of Pilgrim generosity as the settlers and their Wampanoug friends sat down to dine on bread, turkey and other treats. Since the colonists classified their dark-skinned, "infidel" neighbors as inferiors, they were asked to bring and serve not share the food.

As the English pursued their economic goals in the 1620s, they increasingly turned to outright aggression against their Native American neighbors and hosts. Matters came to a head one night in 1637 when Governor Bradford, without provocation, dispatched his militia against his Pequot neighbors. With the Pilgrims seeing themselves as devout Christians locked in mortal combat with infidels, the officers and soldiers made a systematic assault on a sleeping Pequot Indian village.

Bradford described the night of fire, pain and death: "It was a fearful sight to see them frying in the fire and the streams of blood quenching the same and horrible was the stink and stench thereof. But the victory seemed a sweet sacrifice and they [the militiamen] gave praise thereof to God."

The colony's famous minister, Reverend Increase Mather, rejoiced and called on his congregation to give thanks to God "that on this day we have sent six hundred heathen souls to hell." Mather and Bradford are still celebrated in school texts as colonial heroes.

The 1993 edition of the authoritative *Columbia Encyclopedia* states of Bradford, "He maintained friendly relations with the Native Americans." [p. 351] The authoritative *Dictionary of American History* states of his rule: "He was a firm, determined man and an excellent leader; kept relations with the Indians on friendly terms; tolerant toward newcomers and new religions." [p. 77]

The views of Native Americans were not recorded, but can be imagined.

The *Mayflower*, renamed the *Meijbloom* (Dutch for *Mayflower*), continued to make notable voyages. In May 1657, it carried a crucial message to Amsterdam that the new Dutch colony of South Africa needed supplies as Europeans sought to gain control of another piece of the world. Along costal Africa, the renamed

Mayflower also became one of the first ships to carry enslaved Africans to the West Indies.

For these and other reasons, those opposed to oppression and favoring democratic values in the Americas have little to celebrate on Thanksgiving Day. It stands as an affirmation of barbaric racial beliefs and actions that soon shaped the world's most unrelenting genocide. What is worth giving thanks to is the alliance between Native Americans and Africans that sprang forth to resist the English, Spanish and other foreign invaders.

In 1619, a year before the Pilgrims' arrival in Massachusetts, 20 Africans were unloaded in Jamestown, Virginia, and traded for food and water. They were sent out to work in the colony's tobacco fields as unpaid laborers.

Enslaved and persecuted together, people of color fought back together, and often united in armed maroon colonies beyond the white settlements that dotted the coastline. But above all, this alliance initiated an American tradition of resistance to tyranny, a demand for self-rule and equality. Those ideas would appear centuries later written on a parchment celebrated on July 4, 1776.

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Shaking Off the Symbols of Racism

A century and a half after the Civil War, many U.S. politicians still pander to Confederate sympathizers and hesitate to object to the South's racist symbols, an attitude shaken by the murders of nine African-Americans in a Charleston

church, as William Loren Katz describes.

By William Loren Katz

The Confederate flag represents a threat to citizens of color, a symbol of treason against the United States, and a war fought on behalf of slaveholders.

But there are other equally offensive symbols that have not attracted the attention they should. For example, a statue of former South Carolina governor and U.S. Sen. Ben Tillman stands in the state Capitol though Tillman was an advocate of lynching.

Tillman entered politics in 1875-1876, just before the end of Reconstruction, directing a mob called "The Red Shirts," in a massacre in Hamburg, South Carolina. As Tillman himself would later put it, "The leading white men of Edgefield" had decided "to seize the first opportunity that the Negroes might offer them to provoke a riot and teach the Negroes a lesson" by "having the whites demonstrate their superiority by killing as many of them as was justifiable."

Tillman was still around in 1907, regaling fellow senators with racial tirades: "I would lead a mob to lynch the brute who had ravished a woman." He identified the brute as "negroes . . . a black flood of semi-barbarians," "a lurking demon." Whites, Tillman claimed, faced "an irrepressible conflict between civilization and barbarism."

What about replacing Tillman with statues of heroic African-American men and women who fled to Union lines and volunteered to help, thousands served as spies or in the Union Army and Navy. Or Robert Smalls and his enslaved crew who hijacked the *Planter*, a Confederate gunboat from Charleston harbor, and sailed to the Union fleet?

What about a commemoration of the daring white and African-American radical Republicans of South Carolina? In 1868, 76 African Americans and 55 whites wrote a new state constitution that promised equal justice for all. The new multicultural legislature (with a black majority) opened public schools, reduced taxes for the poor, reformed prisons and the criminal code, and extended new rights to women.

What about a statue to celebrate Elias Hill, a formerly enslaved South Carolinian in York County? At age 5, he became too ill to stand or walk, or take care of his needs. Hill, who taught himself to read and write, became an ordained Baptist minister and a community leader who started schools and taught adults citizenship rights.

Rev. Hill changed history when raiders from the huge Ku Klux Klan chapter in York beat him savagely. Hill was carried by relatives into Federal Court in York to testify against the KKK. Others were inspired to testify. Enough convictions followed to close the York County KKK. The York trials inspired successful federal prosecutions in other Southern states.

Rev. Hill was among many South Carolinians of both races who suffered while building a multiracial democracy. Many lost their jobs, some their lives, and others were driven into exile. After his testimony, Hill had to flee to Liberia with his family and congregation.

Citizens in South Carolina and other states that have placed inciters of racial violence, like Sen. Ben Tillman, on pedestals should not only remove them but begin a discussion on their replacements. This meaningful discussion and its choices would properly celebrate those ordinary people who, in the face of unrelenting murder and fear, including state-sponsored terror and Federal indifference, rose to defend the rights of all people.

William Loren Katz is the author of 40 books on African-American history, and has been associated with New York University as an instructor and Scholar in Residence since 1973. His website is www.williamlkatz.com. Read an [interview with Katz](#) about his life teaching and writing history.

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How a Classic Movie Fueled US Racism

A century ago, there was a surge in lynching and other white racist violence against blacks across the American South, combined with a burst in Confederate pride, actions and attitudes fueled by the widely proclaimed movie, “The Birth of a Nation,” as William Loren Katz recalls.

By William Loren Katz

By an odd coincidence the first week of Black History Month this February, *Time* magazine ran an article on the 100th anniversary of the first public showing of the movie classic *The Birth of a Nation*. This 22-reel, 3-hour and 10 minute silent film was Hollywood’s first blockbuster, first great historical epic, first full-length film (when most ran for minutes not hours), and first to introduce modern cinematic techniques that still keep audiences enthralled.

Time noted the movie’s problem. From its casting and content to its dramatic conclusion it was unabashedly racist. (Spoiler alert: It ends with its armed KKK heroes riding to save “white civilization” from “black barbarians.”)

This first major box office hit charged a staggering \$2 admission, had a special musical score played by an orchestra of 30 at each showing, and reached 50 million people before sound films appeared in 1927. Its millions in profits built Hollywood and made movies a major U.S. industry. Beyond profits, it aimed to educate the public in the values of white supremacy. Thomas Dixon, author of the book and the movie, stated that his goal “was to revolutionize Northern sentiments by a presentation of history that would transform every [white] man in the audience into a good Democrat!” [Back then, Democrats in the South represented the interests of white supremacy and segregation, while Republicans were still viewed as the Party of Lincoln.]

In many cities the showing stirred racist violence against African-Americans, and no wonder. White actors put on blackface and played evil African-Americans who were grasping for political power over white people, except when they were intent on raping white women. It projected an air of authenticity by using pictures of Abraham Lincoln and others from the Civil War, and quotes by noted historians such as President Woodrow Wilson.

The Birth of a Nation focused on the period of Reconstruction after the Civil War when formerly enslaved men were allowed to vote and hold office in 11

Southern states. Dixon was a young former Baptist minister in love with gallant Ku Klux Klan stories he heard as a child and decided to write a book, a play, and a movie.

Dixon described Reconstruction as a clash between white good and black evil, when African-American men under the protection of three constitutional amendments and 25,000 federal troops were elected to office in Southern states.

Then his film omits a lot: With white allies, black elected officials helped rewrite the constitutions of Mississippi and South Carolina, elected 22 black congressmen, including two senators from Mississippi, a Supreme Court justice in South Carolina, and a host of state representatives, sheriffs, mayors, and other local officials in 10 states.

This coalition managed to introduce the South's first public school system, and bring economic, political, and prison reforms to their states, including laws to help the poor of both races and to end racial injustice. Nonetheless, black legislators did not challenge segregation in Southern education, business or personal life.

After about half a dozen years, as the federal government largely sat silent, these governments were overthrown by KKK violence and systematic election fraud. In 1877, the federal government caved in, made a deal with former slaveholders and withdrew all troops. A democratic experiment was overthrown and white supremacy reigned again.

The Birth of a Nation sought to erase any memories of the role of African-Americans and the unity they forged with whites to bring democracy to Southern states. The film's lesson: Race relations must remain in the hands of those who once owned, "understood," and controlled black people. And white violence is justified to ensure this noble end.

When the movie was shown at the White House, President Wilson called it "history written in lightning." When it was shown to members of the Supreme Court, Chief Justice Edward White proudly confided to author Thomas Dixon, "I rode with the Klan, sir."

The movie also stirred the first large nationwide NAACP-led protests and boycotts. So many black (and white) people marched on theaters that some mayors ordered the removal of lynching and other scenes, or cancelled showings.

African-American and other historians exposed the movie's lies, distortions, and omissions. But the most fulsome challenge came in 1935 when W. E. B. Du Bois, the great African-American scholar, wrote Black Reconstruction, a thorough history of that era and a documented refutation of the film's bigoted premise

and distortions.

But old racial lies have a high survival rate. In 1950, I was a senior at Syracuse University taking a course on the Civil War and Reconstruction when I read Du Bois's book as an assignment and wrote a highly favorable report. My professor returned it to me with one word on top: "Nuts." One of the final exam questions for the course asked students: "Justify the actions of the Ku Klux Klan." Thomas Dixon, Woodrow Wilson and Chief Justice White would have done well.

A hundred years after the premiere of *The Birth of a Nation*, the promise of Reconstruction remains unfulfilled. But this has been a century of antiracist struggle, and it has yielded important results. Sometimes we glimpse these symbolically.

In 1915, President Wilson was screening and praising a film that celebrated the Ku Klux Klan and was filled with images of grotesque racist stereotypes. In 2015, President Obama invited the black director Ava DuVernay to the White House to screen [Selma](#), a film that shows how [African-Americans fought for the right to vote](#) through courageous activism, facing down murderous white violence.

No doubt, voting rights are under attack once again. This time not by robed Klansmen, but by well-dressed, well-educated members of Congress, the Supreme Court, Northern and Southern state legislatures, and their fabulously wealthy backers.

So it's worth remembering that racism comes in different guises. But it's unthinkable that a film with the racial politics of *Selma* could have been shown in the White House 100 years ago. And that progress is something to celebrate.

William Loren Katz is the author of 40 books on African-American history, and has been associated with New York University as an instructor and Scholar in Residence since 1973. His website is www.williamlkatz.com. Read an [interview with Katz](#) about his life teaching and writing history. He wrote this column for the Zinn Education Project, www.zinnedproject.org.

In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in December 2014 focused on the Senate report about the CIA's torture of detainees, the failure of President Barack Obama to share important facts with the public, the continued racism in America, and the victory of "perception management" over an informed electorate.

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"NYT Shows How Propaganda Works" by Robert Parry, Dec. 2, 2014

"Learning the Lessons of Peace" by Rev. Howard Bess, Dec. 3, 2014

"Obama, the People and the Facts" by Robert Parry, Dec. 3, 2014

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"Ukraine's Made-in-USA Finance Minister" by Robert Parry, Dec. 5, 2014

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"What's the Next Step to Stop Torture?" by Ray McGovern, Dec. 11, 2014

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"Clashing Face-to-Face on Torture" by Ray McGovern, Dec. 14, 2014

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