

Red, Gray, and Blue

by [Jeff Plude](#) (July 2020)



Civil Unrest, Clayton Pinkerton, 1968

It seems as if the United States of America is being ripped apart once again from the inside out. The last time was during the mid- to late 1960s. The first time was a century before that, during a full-fledged civil war. What each time has in common is that the long-troubled history of African Americans was a major fault line that helped trigger the upheaval.

But even the United States of America's birth nearly 250 summers ago was shrouded in contradictions and violence.

America's founders, through the pen of Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence, declared that the citizens of a nation have the right to revolt and take up arms against a tyrant. The Declaration says that "all men are created equal"—not just some men—and have "unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." It is, of course, one of the seminal political documents in not only the history of the U.S., but of the world. It also led to what many believe is the finest system of government ever devised and implemented by man.

Mr. Jefferson, however, like many of his fellow founders, owned African-American slaves. They kept his palatial Monticello, or "little mountain," in the Virginia Piedmont running while he served as the first U.S. secretary of state and eventually president. When he was at home, they did all the dirty work while he read, wrote, gardened, sipped wine and tea, and created the University of Virginia (which I received a graduate degree from). He seems to have been a benevolent slave master for the most part, though nonetheless a slave master. After his wife died, it looks like he took one of his slaves, a young woman named Sally Hemings, as a longtime mistress and even fathered children with her.

This is ostensibly why during the recent turmoil some have suggested tearing down the Jefferson Memorial, among many others. It's one of the most imposing monuments in the nation's capital—a nation that might not have seen the light of day let alone thrived, if it hadn't been for Mr. Jefferson. Robert E. Lee is one thing (though I think the statue of him should stay put too). But Mr. Jefferson is quite another.

The National Guard is now helping law enforcement protect the sculptures and monuments in Washington, D.C., that commemorate America's past, and President Trump [appears](#) ready

to order U.S. marshals to do the same nationwide. Unsurprisingly, none of the men honored in stone lived pristine lives, since they were once far from being mere stone. But until fairly recently, at least in terms of history, the good they achieved for their countrymen was generally seen to far outweigh the bad.

Interestingly, the killing of George Floyd by a policeman in Minneapolis a month ago has quickly spread around the world and become as insidious as the coronavirus. Many politicians and corporations are predictably falling into lockstep with the protesters and rioters, though for the most part with nothing more than empty gestures and presumably dollar signs and votes in view. "Juneteenth," for instance, a portmanteau word for the day in 1865, two months after the Civil War ended, when Texas finally decided to officially obey the Emancipation Proclamation, has all of a sudden become a sort of national holiday (all employees of New York state had June 19 off for the first time). And many took a knee.

So it was encouraging to see Emmanuel Macron, France's young centrist president, proclaim in a nationally televised address that his government refuses to allow its colonial-era statues to be torn down.

One of the têtes on the historical chopping block is Jean-Baptiste Colbert, controller-general of finances under King Louis XIV. His likeness sits in front of the National Assembly in Paris. He wrote the *Code Noir*, which regulated France's African slave trade in the Americas. But he's also credited with improving his country's domestic economy, inspiring the monetary policies of the first American treasury secretary, Alexander Hamilton, and creating the French academies of science, architecture, painting and sculpture, and indirectly (through the eventual sale of his own impressive library) the Bibliothèque Royale. (Coincidentally, Mr. Jefferson's personal library eventually became the Library of Congress.)

M. Colbert and others like him need to be historically examined, not eliminated. "I say to you very clearly tonight: The republic will not erase any trace, or any name, from its history," M. Macron said in a televised address to the nation. ". . . We must look at all our history together."

In England, likewise, there have been demands that no less than the statue of Winston Churchill, the public conscience and rousing voice against Hitler and the Nazis, be removed from Parliament Square. If even he can't escape this witch hunt, who is safe? What human past or present can survive such a posthumous purge? You don't have to be *woke* to believe this will somehow make the world better; you have to be sleepwalking.

It seems that some of these current historical vigilantes, maybe even most of them, would try do the same to the whole country in their crusade against "white privilege." Isn't that what the looting and pillaging is all about, some of which was apparently carried out with the aid of luxury SUVs? Radical chic indeed!

That's the problem with many revolutionaries: they're good at tearing things down, but they're not so good at building things back up. Instead they wind up producing the guillotine and the gulag, to name two chilling weapons wielded in the name of social justice that ended up becoming the epitome of evil and oppression.

Indeed, the new American revolutionaries, unlike Mr. Jefferson and his cohorts, seem to have no concrete or constructive end in mind other than that nebulous scapegoat: "justice." All they offer is misleading abstractions and absurdities.

For instance, instead of reforming the police (a good idea that's long overdue) they want to "defund" it, a euphemism for eliminating it altogether. Which is nothing more

than a fool's paradise, or a child's fantasy is more like it. The reasoning, if you can call it that, seems to be that the problem will miraculously disappear when all authority is arbitrarily abolished. Instead of equality and dignity, anarchy and terror take its place. Such people seem to willfully ignore or not even know the historical record that other problems, often far worse, typically flood the vacuum left in the original problem's wake. It's just the kind of manic unrest and moral void that world-class opportunists like Napoleon or Stalin are waiting and hoping for.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, in a different context but with a similar meaning, summed it up best: "Without God . . . everything is permitted."

Mr. Jefferson appeals to God in the Declaration, calling him "Supreme Judge of the world," as the Americans' ultimate justification "for the rectitude of our intentions." He notably makes no reference, however, to Jesus Christ or his followers. A leading figure of the Enlightenment, Mr. Jefferson certainly did not believe Jesus was the son of God and the second person of the trinity or Godhead. He greatly admired Jesus as a supreme moralist, but nothing more. He even went so far as to make his own version of the four gospels (with the help of scissors). He was a deist through and through.

Which isn't saying much, as far as the God of the Bible is concerned. As James gibes in his epistle: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." In short, Mr. Jefferson was an unbeliever.

In fact revolution is not sanctioned by Christianity in any way or for any reason—even against a tyrant. Revolution is simply a sin. And thus it can never be condoned, at least by a true Christian. Satan was the original rebel. He was tossed out of heaven for trying to overthrow the king of the universe

and took a third of the heavenly host with him, all of whom will be cast into the lake of fire, when all is said and done, to suffer torment forever and ever.

The practical reason for this proscription is that government was instituted by God to protect human beings from themselves, that is, the law of the jungle. He made them in his image, but they preferred their own. God ruled over Israel directly at first, but then gave into demands from his chosen people to have an earthly king reign over them, as related in the first book of Samuel, just like the pagans all around them. Some kings of the Jews were good, others were bad, and a few were very bad (such as Ahab). It could not be otherwise in a fallen world.

But the king, no matter how evil, was the "anointed" one of God, the title passed on to his heirs but sometimes by divine revelation through a prophet, as with David. That's why David, before he became king, refused to kill King Saul, who had gone over to the devil and was trying to kill his Goliath slayer and successor. This is where the "divine right of kings" comes from, which monarchs reigned by for centuries.

Jesus not only did or said anything to contradict this, but he confirmed it. He is often portrayed as a social reformer and revolutionary, but he was anything but. He was focused on the individual and how a person governed himself or herself, that is, his or her own behavior. His concern is spiritual, not political.

He commanded his disciples to obey those in authority, or those who "sit in Moses' seat," that is, the scribes and Pharisees, even though he knew they would eventually have him crucified. ("But do not ye after their works," Jesus was quick to add, "for they say, and do not.") When he and Peter were commanded to pay the local tax during a visit to Capernaum, Jesus bristled but obeyed.

Peter later reaffirmed his master's clear directive in an epistle to the newly established church:

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

The only exception to a Christian's obedience to the government is when it prohibits what God's word commands. This happened when the Pharisees tried to prohibit the preaching of the gospel not long after Jesus's crucifixion; Peter and John were detained but told their Lord's condemners: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

Yet it has often been said in the past, and still is by a minority, that the United States is a Christian nation, or sometimes a Judeo-Christian one. But how can this be, given that Mr. Jefferson *et al.* were avowed revolutionaries?

The seed for America was sown long before July 4, 1776, and was of a much different strain. In stark contrast to the Declaration, the original colonists were not hesitant about declaring their ultimate allegiance and aim:

Haveing undertaken, for ye glorie of God, and advancemente of ye *christian* faith and honour of our king & countrie, a voyage to plant ye first colonie in ye Northerne parts of Virginia . . . (sic, emphasis added)

This is the opening of the Mayflower Compact, written a century and a half before the Declaration, when the Pilgrims

landed on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, on November 11, 1620. They had fled Europe for religious freedom, which Mr. Jefferson put at the head of the Bill of Rights he urged for his country's Constitution.

From the nineteenth century well into this past century, Christianity waxed in America but then began to wane. Now there is perhaps only a "remnant," to use the Biblical term, that remain.

Some anti-Americans invoke the Native Americans, who were essentially vanquished by the descendants of the original colonists, as further evidence of so-called white oppression. But the Indians, for anybody who has read any of the enthralling first volume of *France and England in North America* by Francis Parkman, were not exactly living in heavenly harmony with each other before or after the Europeans set foot on this continent. Which is not to say the newcomers were justified in what they did and why, but simply to point out the facts as related by contemporaries. The Native Americans were not all bad to be sure, but they were far from all good, even (and especially) to each other. Warfare was widespread and continual among the various tribes and leagues of Indians.

So what does all this mean for Americans today, especially if they are Christians?

Perhaps it's like the story of Joseph in Genesis. His older brothers tried to get rid of him because they were envious that he was their father's favorite and that one day, Joseph was told in a dream, they would bow down to him. But he ended up not only surviving but flourishing, and not only flourishing but saving the same brothers who caused him to be sold into slavery. "But as for you, ye thought evil against me," Joseph told them when they sought his help many years later when he had become the ruler of Egypt, "but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much

people alive.”

Mr. Jefferson may have been an unrepentant sinner as a revolutionary, but I believe that God used him like he used Joseph’s brothers. That is, to create a new nation that became a stronghold for Christianity. And in case someone is tempted by the apology for Judas—without Judas there is no crucifixion, and without the crucifixion there is no salvation, therefore Judas did a good thing—Jesus himself told him “woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.” God uses unbelievers to accomplish his purpose just as he does believers. But unbelievers like Mr. Jefferson, unless they repent, are still held accountable.

Of course I realize all too well that most if not all of the crusading avengers and their misguided mob of fellow travelers are anything but Christians, or even moralists, though some may consider themselves as such.

But there’s a pagan god who, ironically, also condemned all-out political rebellion: John Lennon, of all people, who claimed that the Beatles were bigger than Jesus and later became a peacenik (at least in public). He was tarred and feathered as a turncoat by his generation’s radicals for “Revolution,” which sounded like it came from a well-heeled Tory:

But when you talk about destruction
Don’t you know that you can count me out

(But in “Revolution 1,” an earlier version of the song but released after it, Mr. Lennon sang: “You can count me *out, in.*” [emphasis added] Just before his murder, however, he affirmed in the famous *Playboy* interview that “out” was the right word.)

My wife and I walk by a house in our suburban neighborhood that now has a sign on the front lawn:



A young woman who lives there is graduating from high school this year, another sign on the front lawn informs us. It also has her photo on it. One day we saw a young black man drive up to the house, walk up to the door, and hand the same young woman some flowers. They hugged and he left.

Well, I am white and I have now spoken, glib slogans notwithstanding. But that doesn't mean I consent to violence masquerading as justice, whether of the social or historical kind, no matter how much the aggrieved clamor for it. Nor should any Christian or even just plain American, in my view, whatever color they may be.

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