

# OPINION

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## Consider the Facts to How Nation Came to Be

### The historical significance of Independence Day

BY OSCAR H. BLAYTON

Each year, many Americans celebrate the 4th of July. On that day in 1776, it is said that "The Land of the Free" was born.

But the true historical significance of Independence Day has been smothered in hot dogs, barbecue ribs and potato salad. And fireworks distract us from contemplating the economic forces that served as midwife to the birth of this nation.

Four hundred years ago, Europeans invaded the Atlantic coast of North America and fought each other and the indigenous peoples for control of the land. By 1763, the British had made deals or driven everyone else out so that they controlled the entire coast. This included Canada and Florida, which the British obtained



by treaty from France and Spain, respectively, at the end of the Seven Years' War – a global conflict waged by the colonial powers of Europe for control of the rest of the world.

Nine years after Britain gained control of the entire Atlantic seaboard, its colonists in North America were rocked by the news of a decision in the British high court that sounded the death knell for chattel slavery in the British Empire. This decision was the result of a case known as *Somerset v. Stewart*.

James Somerset was a West African held in slavery by a Norfolk, Va., merchant and customs officer, Charles Stewart. Stewart had taken Somerset with him when he sailed to England on business in 1769. Somerset escaped in 1771 while in England, but Stewart recaptured him and had him imprisoned on a ship due to sail for Jamaica. Somerset had been baptized while in England and his godparents helped him sue for his release.

The Lord Chief Justice of the

high court ruled in 1772 that slavery was contrary to Common Law and therefore illegal in England. Somerset was freed, and the news spread quickly to America. By early 1773, enslaved African Americans began to petition for their release in courts in the colonies, hoping to repeat Somerset's success.

The slaveholding British colonists were alarmed at these developments and believed correctly that the British Empire was on the path to ending chattel slavery. By taking their "revolutionary" stance, the colonists hoped to free themselves and their slave-based economy from the inevitable arrival of abolition in the Empire.

Every red, white and blue American knows the narrative of how the freedom loving Sons of Liberty threw off Britain's yoke of oppression. Some narratives even recount faithful slaves cheering them on. PBS and others have reported that 5,000 African Americans served in the Continental Army. But many thousands more ran away to fight for their own

freedom with the British.

The Revolutionary War did not end until two years after the Battle of Yorktown in 1781. As British troops were evacuating New York City in 1783, they took with them, from that port alone, 3,000 former slaves who had supported the crown. The names of these African Americans were documented in the "Book of Negroes" as they boarded the ships bound for Nova Scotia and the British West Indies. An accurate record of these former slaves was kept because of a dispute between George Washington and Sir Guy Carleton, the British commander in charge of the evacuation of New York.

Southern colonials had insisted that the treaty ending the war include a provision for the return of escaped African Americans to their slaveholders. Carleton refused to comply with that provision and was backed up by Lord Frederick North, the British Secretary of State who wrote to him that transporting the runaways from the land of their oppression was "certainly an act of justice

due to them from us..."

On the other hand, Washington and other slaveholders believed they had been robbed of what was rightfully theirs. After his first meeting with Carleton, Washington complained in a letter to the governor of Virginia: "[T]he slaves who have absconded from their masters will never be restored to them."

Take a moment to consider the facts of how and why this nation came to be. Maintaining slavery, as an economic institution, was the major driving force for the desire for Independence from England – at least for the Southern states. And it is fair to say that the Stars and Stripes were stitched together in large part by the sting of the lash upon black backs.

It is important to accurately recall and understand these facts in our history if we hope to make meaningful progress towards a better future.

*Oscar H. Blayton is a former Marine Corps combat pilot and human rights activist who practices law in Virginia.*

## An Attack on American Consumers and Workers

### Now comes Trump's trade war

BY TOM H. HASTINGS

Now comes the Trump Trade War, his *Bellum omnium contra omnes*, war of all against all. It is the most spiritless, cynical, pessimistic perspective on human nature and international relations imaginable. It is also doomed to



simply amount to an alienated attack on American consumers and workers.

I'm an old man who developed a hearing problem over the decades. I'm well into my senior citizen years and on my fourth generation of hearing aids, each improvement changing my life, saving my ability to work, and res-

cuing me from what would be increased social isolation. Trump's tariffs affect the import of high tech gear, including the most advanced components of state-of-the-art hearing aids. Do I care where components of my hearing aids are made or where they are assembled into the final product? I do not. Do I care if Trump alters not only the price of my hearing aids but possibly the quality? Yes, I do.

If you have a device such as a phone, a laptop, any notebook or tablet, Trump is stepping on you. He is driving up the price and possible dragging down the quality of what you can purchase and use. Thanks, Dear Leader.

Making cars, motorcycles, and other consumer goods that sell big in China—or Canada, or any of the countries Trump is hitting with tariffs, is now going to see a

radical reduction in markets. From soybeans to distilled spirits, the exports from the US are going to plummet as erstwhile trading partners respond in kind to Trump's "eff you, everyone!" Did you vote for him? Trump speaks for you. Trump is your leader. Trump is taking you right over the cliff. Trump's momentary success living in the White House as unemployment drops is now about to snatch failure from the jaws of victory. Hear that snap, crackle, pop? That is the giant bubble-bursting sound with the Trump lurch into trade wars that he says are "easy to win."

This is a guy who makes glib promises and instant blame-others excuses for his many failures, including, by the way, six declarations of bankruptcy. He refuses to own his mistakes and calls himself clever for taking advantage of laws that unfairly stick everyone

else with the losses and debts.

So when his trade war bombs and you are jabbed with the costs and consequences, Trump will refuse to be accountable. I mean, this is a guy who orders children snatched from their parents at the border and then repeatedly blames "the Democrats." Huh? He did it, no Democrat, not one. He could fix it. His cruelty and obdurate rationalizations are epic and inexcusable.

Indeed, the only possible way to hold him responsible is to impose all possible penalties, from indictment to impeachment. He will assume no component of culpability that is not simply brought down on him, and he will go kicking and screaming, but he must go if we have an ounce of collective common sense and decency.

*Tom H. Hastings is founding director of PeaceVoice.*

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and Medical Offices



### Letter to the Editor: Appalling Blow to Unions

I am appalled by last week's Supreme Court's decision that delivered a blow to unions in Oregon and across this nation. Unions built the middle class in America. My mother was a lifelong member of the United Auto Workers and five of my aunts retired from the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555 -- so I understand the job stability

and economic security that come with union membership.

The Trump-backed Supreme Court will not stop me from continuing to fight for the men and women in labor.

Today I reaffirm my commitment to all labor, especially my friends in the public sector unions. Count me in to support any efforts to ensure fair share is the standard throughout Oregon.

*Loretta Smith, Multnomah County Commissioner and candidate for Portland City Council*