

Gerald Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America* ©2014

“For it is the argument of this book that slavery permeated colonial North America, underpinning the pre-1776 economy in terms of not only agriculture but insurance, banking, shipbuilding, and the like. Yet the enslaved resisted fiercely, as we will see, and did so quite often, at times with the aid of competing colonial powers, notably Spain and, to an extent, France. Their resistance helped drive settlers from the Caribbean to the mainland, particularly in the years leading up to 1776. The sprawling land mass of the mainland — versus the limited land mass of the Caribbean — allowed European empire to more easily bump into one another, for example, on the Georgia-Florida border, causing sparks to fly.”

“The crucial turning point for North America — and arguably, the British empire as a whole — emerged in 1688 with the so-called Glorious Revolution, which, *inter alia*, caused the monarchy to retreat and led to the ascendancy of a rising class of merchants. . . . As the economy developed on the mainland [of North America], thoughts of “independency” grew accordingly — along with slave resistance London realized that massive slave uprisings in Jamaica and Antigua, most particularly, could portend the collapse of the Caribbean colonial project as a whole, as Africans strained to assert themselves forcefully, if not rule altogether: such rebelliousness made London more susceptible to sweet reason — and, ultimately, abolition — as it considered the further expediter of blood and treasure that could have gone to bolster British India or territories elsewhere. At the same time, slave rebelliousness causes settlers — particularly on the mainland — to dig in their heels, hastening the split between province and metropolis.”

“Though it may be hard to imagine at this late date, my conclusion in this book is that many Africans had different plans for the destiny of colonial North America that decidedly did not include a starring role by the now famed Founding Fathers and their predecessors but, instead, contemplated a polity led by themselves in league with the indigenous and, perhaps, a compliant European power. As such, the ongoing persecution of descendants of mainland enslaved Africans is — in part — a continuing oppression of what tends to befall those who are defeated in bloody warfare: often they are subjected to a heinous collective punishment”

“In essence, simply because Euro-American colonists prevailed in their establishing of the U.S., it should not be assumed that this result was inevitable. History points to other possibilities, and contemplating them may shed light on — at least — why Africans suffered so grievously in the aftermath of the founding of the republic: strikingly; as London was moving towards abolition, the republic was supplanting the British isle as the kingpin in the global slave trade.”

“Hence this book diverges sharply from the consensus view of the origins of the post-1776 republic — a view which has united a stunningly diverse array of scholars. In short, unlike previous analysts, I do not view the creation of the republic as a great leap forward for humanity — though I concede readily that it improved the lives of a countless number of Europeans. More than this, I believe that — perhaps understandably — there has been a desire to create an uplifting anti-colonial narrative to explain and undergird the fruits of 1776. The

problem is that — irrespective of the diverse ideological persuasions of the creators, the narrative serves to obscure the point that as 4 July 1776 approached, Africans has been involved steadily in the poisoning and murdering and immolating of settlers, creating (at least) a yawning deficit of trust between Africans and Europeans. Portraying the Africans as bit players supporting a revolt in 1776 dominated by Europeans — as the uplifting narrative tends to do — not only distorts and caricatures the historical record, but also obscures a trust deficit that may still be of relevance today.”

“Ironically, the founders of the republic have been hailed and lionized by left, right, and center for — in effect — creating the first apartheid state.”

Tomorrow in class you will need to present the answers to these questions in class. Be prepared to write them on the board and to take questions from your peers on this document. You are the expert!

Reading Questions

- 1) Summarize Gerald Horne’s argument from the first paragraph of this reading. What is he arguing in the book this is excerpted from?
- 2) Why was the Glorious Revolution of 1688 important? What chain of events did it cause? Be specific — explain the chain of events.
- 3) For Horne, what caused the colonists to want to split from England? What caused the American Revolution?
- 4) What should we not assume was inevitable? What does Horne argue could have happened in the 1770s in North America?
- 5) How is Horne’s study of the American Revolution sharply divergent from other studies of the same period? Why do you think that is?