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Patriotic Quotes for the Fourth

Kevin Carson

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I've got my gut full of the predictably smarmy holiday coverage from assorted "local news teams." You know:

As Americans prepare to celebrate our nation's freedom and independence, we'll be talking to some people who understand the true meaning of those values...
[cut to Iraqi war footage]

As if an imperial war against a country the size of North Carolina, with an arsenal of aging Soviet-era weaponry, could have had anything to do with our "freedom and independence." It's especially ironic to hear the lapdog press praising an imperial war machine as the source of our liberties, give that we won our freedom and independence fighting a war against our own governments. And it's been less than three weeks since Flag Day, when we get to see that brilliant column trotted out once again: "It's not the demonstrator who gives us our freedom of speech, but the cop in riot gear who kicks his teeth in." Or something like that.

But you see, in the official ideology of the American regime, any war, by definition, is a war to "protect our freedoms." American

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soldiers, regardless of where in the world they are fighting, are by definition “protecting freedom” or “defending our country.” Never mind that the great “threat” to our “national security” involves what some country on the other side of the world might do within a few hundred km of its own border.

I’d like to hear the official government reaction to, say, a Chinese claim that military intervention in this hemisphere was necessary to counter the “national security threat” presented by American intervention in Central America. As it is, Pentagon spokesmen, representing a military machine larger than all the other armed forces of the entire planet put together, solemnly warn that China’s armed forces go far beyond “legitimate defensive needs.” As we’ve seen in official government reactions to Hugo Chavez’s arms buildup, “legitimate defensive needs” means something short of a credible capability of repelling a U.S. invasion.

Anyway, I thought I’d paste in a few real patriotic, freedom-loving quotes, in honor of the anti-authoritarian hell-raisers who really founded this country. That thumping sound you hear, every time the word “Freedom” comes out of Bush’s filthy pie-hole, is probably the heroes of Lexington Green spinning in their graves.

A patriot must always be ready to defend his country
against his government.

–**Edward Abbey**

A careful reading of history might give us another safe-guard against being deceived. It would make clear that there has always been, and is today, a profound conflict of interest between the government and the people of the United States. This thought startles most people, because it goes against everything we have been taught.

We have been led to believe that, from the beginning, as our Founding Fathers put it in the Preamble to the Constitution, it was “we the people” who established the new government after the Revolution. When the eminent historian Charles Beard suggested, a hundred years ago, that the Constitution represented not the working people, not the slaves, but the slaveholders, the merchants, the bondholders, he became the object of an indignant editorial in *The New York Times*.

Our culture demands, in its very language, that we accept a commonality of interest binding all of us to one another. We mustn't talk about classes. Only Marxists do that, although James Madison, “Father of the Constitution,” said, 30 years before Marx was born that there was an inevitable conflict in society between those who had property and those who did not.

Our present leaders are not so candid. They bombard us with phrases like “national interest,” “national security,” and “national defense” as if all of these concepts applied equally to all of us, colored or white, rich or poor, as if General Motors and Halliburton have the same interests as the rest of us, as if George Bush has the same interest as the young man or woman he sends to war.

Surely, in the history of lies told to the population, this is the biggest lie. In the history of secrets, withheld from the American people, this is the biggest secret: that there are classes with different interests in this country. To ignore that — not to know that the history of our country is a history of slaveowner against slave, landlord against tenant, corporation against worker,

rich against poor — is to render us helpless before all the lesser lies told to us by people in power.

If we as citizens start out with an understanding that these people up there — the President, the Congress, the Supreme Court, all those institutions pretending to be “checks and balances” — do not have our interests at heart, we are on a course towards the truth. Not to know that is to make us helpless before determined liars...

—Howard Zinn

I believe in adequate defense at the coastline and nothing else. If a nation comes over here to fight, then we'll fight. The trouble with America is that when the dollar only earns 6 percent over here, then it gets restless and goes overseas to get 100 percent. Then the flag follows the dollar and the soldiers follow the flag.

I wouldn't go to war again as I have done to protect some lousy investment of the bankers...

I helped make Mexico, especially Tampico, safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefits of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909–1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. In China I helped to see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested.

—Maj. Gen. Smedley Butler, USMC

Hines-got 'bout thirty thousan' acres, peaches and grapes-got a cannery an' a winery. Well, he's all a time talkin' about 'them goddamn reds.' 'God- damn reds is drivin' the country to ruin,' he says, an' 'We got to drive these here red bastards out.' Well, they were a young fella jus' come out west here, an' he's listenin' one day. He kinda scratched his head an' he says, 'Mr. Hines, I ain't been here long. What is these goddamn reds?' Well, sir, Hines says, 'A red is any son-of-a-bitch that wants thirty cents an hour when we're payin' twenty-five!'"

—John Steinbeck

There was another quote I tried to track down, with no luck. Some mayor of a fair-sized midwestern city, I think, around 1920 or shortly thereafter, said something like “When I hear a man talking about his ‘rights’ or about ‘civil liberties,’ I think ‘that man is a god damned red.’” Can't remember where I saw it.

...**And here it is**, thanks to Keith Preston and commenter sparrow:

We hear about constitutional rights, free speech and the free press. Every time I hear these words I say to myself, “That man is a Red, that man is a Communist.” You never hear a real American talk like that.

—Frank Hague, mayor of Jersey City

Jersey City and 1938—goes to show what relying on my memory gets you.

Empire focuses our attention on matters distant and remote, affairs to which we are mere spectators. You can care about your backyard or Baghdad; you can't tend to both. Under empire, Madonna replaces our mothers, imperial fantasies straight out of Henry Luce's LIFE erase our lower-case lives, and the wolf at the door is named Blitzer. Only he's not at our door—our doors are too insignificant for such a ravaging creature—but on the idiot boxes that broadcast without cease the propaganda of the regime. Facile contemners of President Bush deride him as a “Texas cowboy.” If only he were...

—Bill Kauffman

You ask me why the IWW is not patriotic for the United States. If you were a bum without a blanket ... if your job had never kept you long enough in a place to qualify you to vote; if every person who represented law and order and the nation beat you up, railroaded you to jail, and the good Christian people cheered and told them to go to it, how in hell do you expect a man to be patriotic? This is a businessman's war, and we don't see why we should go out and get shot in order to save the lovely state of affairs that we now enjoy.

—**Big Bill Haywood**

“Well, I was there. They wasn't no agitators. What they call reds. What the hell is these reds anyways?”

Timothy scraped a little hill level in the bottom of tile ditch. The sun made his white bristle beard shine. “They's a lot a fellas wanta know what reds is.” He laughed. “One of our boys foun' out.” He patted the piled earth gently with his shovel. “Fella named

To the average American of today, the Revolution means the series of battles fought by the patriot army with the armies of England. The millions of school children who attend our public schools are taught to draw maps of the siege of Boston and the siege of Yorktown, to know the general plan of the several campaigns, to quote the number of prisoners of war surrendered with Burgoyne; they are required to remember the date when Washington crossed the Delaware on the ice; they are told to “Remember Paoli,” to repeat “Molly Stark's a widow,” to call General Wayne “Mad Anthony Wayne,” and to execrate Benedict Arnold; they know that the Declaration of Independence was signed on the Fourth of July, 1776, and the Treaty of Paris in 1783; and then they think they have learned the Revolution—blessed be George Washington! They have no idea why it should have been called a “revolution” instead of the “English War,” or any similar title: it's the name of it, that's all. And name-worship, both in child and man, has acquired such mastery of them, that the name “American Revolution” is held sacred, though it means to them nothing more than successful force, while the name “Revolution” applied to a further possibility, is a spectre detested and abhorred...

To inculcate this proud spirit of the supremacy of the people over their governors was to be the purpose of public education! Pick up today any common school history, and see how much of this spirit you will find therein. On the contrary, from cover to cover you will find nothing but the cheapest sort of patriotism, the inculcation of the most unquestioning acquiescence in the deeds of government, a lullaby of rest, security,

confidence—the doctrine that the Law can do no wrong, a Te Deum in praise of the continuous encroachments of the powers of the general government upon the reserved rights of the States, shameless falsification of all acts of rebellion, to put the government in the right and the rebels in the wrong, pyrotechnic glorifications of union, power, and force, and a complete ignoring of the essential liberties to maintain which was the purpose of the revolutionists. The anti-Anarchist law of post-McKinley passage, a much worse law than the Alien and Sedition acts which roused the wrath of Kentucky and Virginia to the point of threatened rebellion, is exalted as a wise provision of our All-Seeing Father in Washington.

Such is the spirit of government-provided schools. Ask any child what he knows about Shays' rebellion, and he will answer, "Oh, some of the farmers couldn't pay their taxes, and Shays led a rebellion against the court-house at Worcester, so they could burn up the deeds; and when Washington heard of it he sent over an army quick and taught 'em a good lesson"—"And what was the result of it?" "The result? Why—why—the result was—Oh yes, I remember—the result was they saw the need of a strong federal government to collect the taxes and pay the debts." Ask if he knows what was said on the other side of the story, ask if he knows that the men who had given their goods and their health and their strength for the freeing of the country now found themselves cast into prison for debt, sick, disabled, and poor, facing a new tyranny for the old; that their demand was that the land should become the free communal possession of those who wished to work it, not subject to tribute, and the child

will answer "No." Ask him if he ever read Jefferson's letter... in which he says...:

"God forbid that we should ever be twenty years without such a rebellion!...What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that the people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take up arms... The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure."

—Voltarine de Cleyre

I am of the other America, the unseen America, the America undreamt of by the foreigners who hate my country without knowing a single thing about it. Ours is a land of volunteer fire departments, of baseball, of wizened spinsters who instead of sitting around whining about their goddamned osteoporosis write and self-publish books on the histories of their little towns, of the farmwives and grain merchants and parsons and drunkards who made their places live.

We are the America that suffers in wartime: we do the dying, the paying of taxes, we supply the million unfortunate sons (and now daughters) who are sent hither and yon in what amounts to a vast government uprooting of the populace. Militarism and empire are the enemies of small-town America, not only because some native sons come home in bodybags but also for the desolating fact that many never come home at all. They are scattered to the winds, sent out—by force or enticement of state—in the great American diaspora, never to return to the places that gave them nurture.

War kills the provinces. It drains them of cultural life as surely as it takes the lives of 18-year-old boys...