

Céline on Fire

Volume I – The Origins of Tyranny – 1955
by Dale Allan Pelton



Arc du Carrousel – Evgeny Sosnovsky

*La danse de l'amour est la première des danses, celle
de qui toutes les autres dérivent sans l'égaliser jamais.*

René Maran

Volume I – The Origins of Tyranny - 1955, set in Paris, France.

Volume II – Resisting Tyranny - 1959, set in Paris, Lyon, Lausanne, and Soviet dominated Eastern Europe.

Volume III – Preserving Democracy - 1960-1962, set in Lyon, Lausanne, Switzerland, and Paris.

This a work of fiction. Names and characters are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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Céline on Fire



Ventdusud

Prologue

Céline on Fire is about how the past haunts the present. Like Voltaire's *Candide* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The New Heloise*, *Céline on Fire* uses dialogue to examine philosophical questions in an extended essay. Set during the Cold War in Paris, Lyon, Lausanne, and behind the Iron Curtain, 1955 to 1963, beginning with the French Algerian War and ending with the Cuban Missile Crisis, the characters of Céline talk about how ultra-nationalism was used by demagogues Mussolini and Hitler to fool the people, overthrow a democracy and establish a dictatorship. With the escalating assaults on the free press and an independent judiciary, and the rise of authoritarianism, we must question whether we are marching back to the 20th century when ethno-nationalism devoured more lives than in all preceding centuries. In light of the relentless carnage of man against man, Céline asks: "Why do good men commit atrocities?"

Utilizing the lessons of history, *Céline on Fire* addresses the struggle of democracy in the modern world. Minister of Public Enlightenment Joseph Goebbels said, “One of the most ridiculous aspects of democracy will always remain . . . the fact that it has offered to its mortal enemies the means by which to destroy it.”



Inauguration of President Vladimir Putin beside former President Boris Yeltsin in the Kremlin, Moscow, 9 June 2010 – www.kremlin.ru, Wikimedia

In our time, an authoritarian strongman in Russia has succeeded in taking over a democracy. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s government has silenced Klubrádió, one of the last radio stations not under control of the government, a repression unparalleled in Europe. In Myanmar, a military coup has replaced elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi. President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus has signed a law banning journalists from reporting on mass protests, awarding the Information Ministry the power to close a media outlet without a court decision, resulting in every leading journalist in Belarus being imprisoned or forced into exile.

Voting rights are under attack in Georgia, Arizona, and Texas. Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote in 1964, “The right to vote freely for the candidate of one’s choice is of the essence of a democratic society, and any restrictions on that right strike at the heart of representative government.” Freedom House Report documents the democratic recession with more countries moving away from democracy than are moving towards democracy. Authoritarian leaders are imprisoning, torturing, and murdering activists. The artists and thinkers of Céline show us that without a free press and a transparent electoral process, a democracy cannot survive.

The study of history is essential because it helps us to understand the origin, success, and failure of the forces active in forming a civilization. History is more than the affairs of state and military adventures. As French historians, Lucien Febvre, Henri Hauser, and Marc Bloch declared when they founded the Annales School of history in 1929: in order to understand the shifting currents in a society, history must integrate the impact of economics, technology, environment, climate, psychology, sociology, anthropology, religion, philosophy, the arts and humanities in a holistic way.

Marc Bloch stressed the importance of cross-examining people — much like a detective searches for the reality concealed beneath events. Much information is poisoned by false rumor, frauds, and myths. Bloch discovered that the early Middle Ages with its proliferation of forged documents was an example of mankind’s predilection for mythomania. Many people are compulsive liars and fabricators. People believe things because it’s useful to believe or because their income depends upon it. History must delve into the popular culture, the workers and artisans, the forgotten people, those who have been left out of the history books. There is a Nigerian proverb, “Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.”

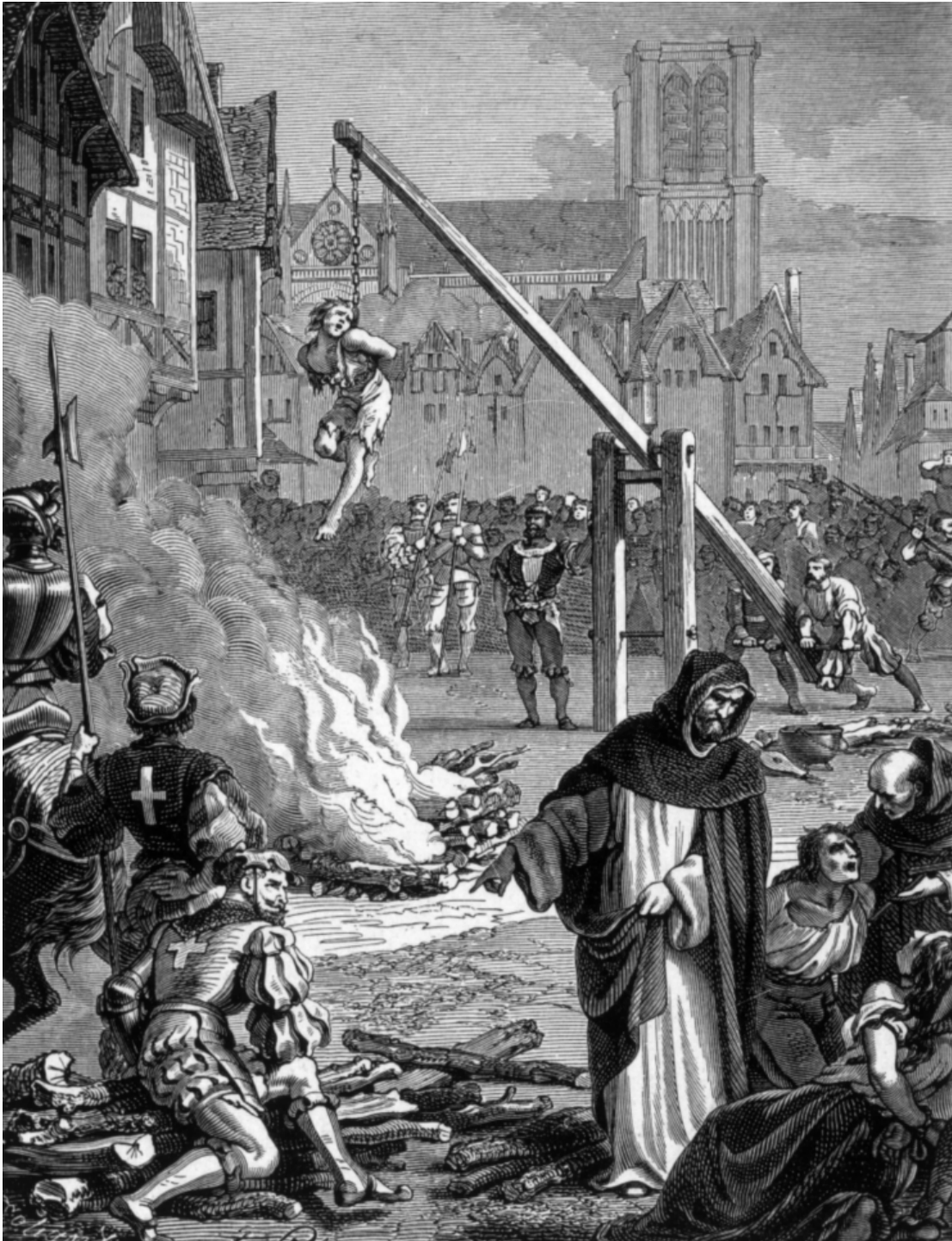
History does not travel in a straight line but moves like the breaking ocean waves striking the beach and receding to break once again eroding the shore in an endless succession of waves. In the 12th century, Christian Europe experienced a renaissance of knowledge and progress which hadn’t existed since the early days of the Roman Empire, an age of relative toleration

and the advancement for all classes — an early enlightenment where philosophical and artistic life flourished. But in the following 13th and 14th centuries, there was a reverse of the previous enlightenment — economies collapsed, the bubonic plague and war wiped out cities, destroying the advances of civility and returning to the intellectual and religious intolerance of previous centuries. Jews and Muslims were driven from Europe and thousands of witches burned even into Goethe's lifetime.



Bubonic Plague victims in a mass grave in Matigues, France, 1720-1721 – S. Tzortzis, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, public domain, Wikimedia

For every advance in the rights of humankind, the abolition of slavery and serfdom, the establishment of freedom of speech and religion, the separation between church and state, right of trial by jury, the prohibition of cruel punishment, the abolishment of child labor, the right of workers to organize, the right of women to be equal to men — there is a step backward to a more intolerant era. Populism and the fear of foreigners is rising in this moment with hyper-nationalism flourishing in Hungary, Poland, Brazil, Russia, China, Italy, France, the United Kingdom, and in our own country as well. We are moving backwards to a darker time when nationalism led to the bloody tragedy of World War One.



Huguenots tortured after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, 1686 – Everett Historical, Shutterstock 237235813

Whenever there is a loss of a war or an economic depression that arouses popular fury over the disparity of wealth, there will be a leader who demands, “Give me total power and I will restore our nation’s glory.” During the 17th century Enlightenment, emerging democracies were overthrown by authoritarian rulers.



Massacre of Jews in Barcelona, 1391 – Plate by Josep Segrelles, 1910, public domain, Wikimedia



Jean-Marie Le Pen President of National Front French Party – Novosti Yu, Wikimedia

Fifteen years after the French Revolution's overthrow of the Bourbon monarchy in 1789, Napoleon Bonaparte made himself emperor. Four years after the democratic revolution of 1848, in a coup d'état an elected leader, Napoleon III crowned himself emperor of France. Mussolini was a constitutional prime minister in 1923 before gradually dismantling the

institutions of democracy, removing the opposition through his secret police, outlawing labor strikes, extra judicial killings by his Black Shirts, passing laws establishing a one-party dictatorship and by 1925 anointing himself *Il Duce*, the supreme leader.



Benito Mussolini called himself *Il Duce*, the leader – Daily Galaxy, public domain, Wikimedia

After Germany's humiliating loss to France in World War One, the shameful misery of harsh reparation payments and the collapse of German money, the country was ready for a demagogue who told the people what they had been waiting to hear. After Hitler failed to take over the Bavarian government in his Beer Hall Putsch, while writing *Mein Kampf* in prison, he decided to establish an authoritarian government through legal means, appearing to abide by constitutional law while simultaneously demolishing democracy. By 1933, Hitler's Nazi Party still did not have a majority in the Reichstag. Although the corporate leaders had initially opposed him, considering him a ranting clown, their opinions changed due to his emerging political support and the threat of his shock troops in the streets. In secret meetings, Hitler persuaded the leaders of the large corporations that he would make Germany great again by creating a vast program of rearmament to generate a great economic expansion.

It was not only the German industrialists who decided to place their faith in Hitler. The head of General Motors, Alfred P. Sloan, strongly believed that the Nazi form of totalitarianism was a better system of government than the New Deal of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. IBM's Hollerith data processing machines were used by the *Schutzstaffel* to identify Jews by census data, to track slave laborers and death camp prisoners, and to implement the final solution. General Motors' Adam Opel AG subsidiary manufactured many of the trucks for Hitler's invasion of Poland and Russia. GM Opel produced the engines of the Luftwaffe's JU-88 bombers that devastated London during the Battle of Britain, manufactured the land mines of the Wehrmacht, and detonators for the torpedoes that sunk American ships. Hitler was good for business.



U.S. owned GM Opel manufactured the majority of the trucks for Hitler's Blitzkrieg invasion of Poland and Russia – Everett Historical, Shutterstock, 249573640

Corporate leaders of Germany, fearing the popularity of communism, believing that Hitler would make the economy surge, and confident that his worst instincts would be mollified by their financial power, created a clandestine multi-million-mark fund to finance Hitler's campaign in the 1933 election. But the businessmen were wrong. They could not control him.

How could so many people in a democracy go wrong? Once the free press is suffocated, and the judicial system is taken over by the executive branch, democracy is lost. By dramatizing Germany's shame over its loss in World War One, and the humiliation of the Versailles Treaty that left Germany bankrupt, Hitler's theatrical mass rallies and the threat of brown shirts in the streets, convinced the Germans to elect an absolute dictator.



Joseph Goebbels. Reich Minister of Public enlightenment and Propanganda, 1933 – 1945, Doctor of Philosophy, University of Heidelberg – German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

The tongue has the power of life and death. – Proverbs 18:21



**Nazis ransack the library of Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, Director of the Institute for Sexual Research in Berlin
– United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Wikimedia**



Nazi Book Burning, 1933 – German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Burning of the Reichstag - Berlin, 27 February 1933

Signed by President von Hindenburg, 27 February 1933, the Reichstag Fire Decree enabled Hitler to arrest the Communist parliamentary delegates, enabling Hitler to wield total power – Everett Historical, Shutterstock 249572539

After President Paul von Hindenburg appointed him chancellor, Hitler proclaimed in the Reichstag that he was the supreme judge of the German people. The burning of the Reichstag assembly hall gave Hitler an opportunity to proclaim the Reichstag Fire Decree, suspending the right to assembly, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and giving the police the right to arrest anyone without charge.

One million Germans were thrilled by the mystical drama of the 1934 Nuremberg Rally where Hitler's hysterical speeches inspired fanatical loyalty. "The great masses of the people," Hitler said, "will more easily fall victims to a big lie than to a small one." The wizard of the Big Lie blamed the demise of Germany on *untermenschen* — sub humans — Jews, Gypsies, and Slavs, aliens who were defiling the purity of the Aryan race. By sanitizing the blood of Germany, the nation would become great again



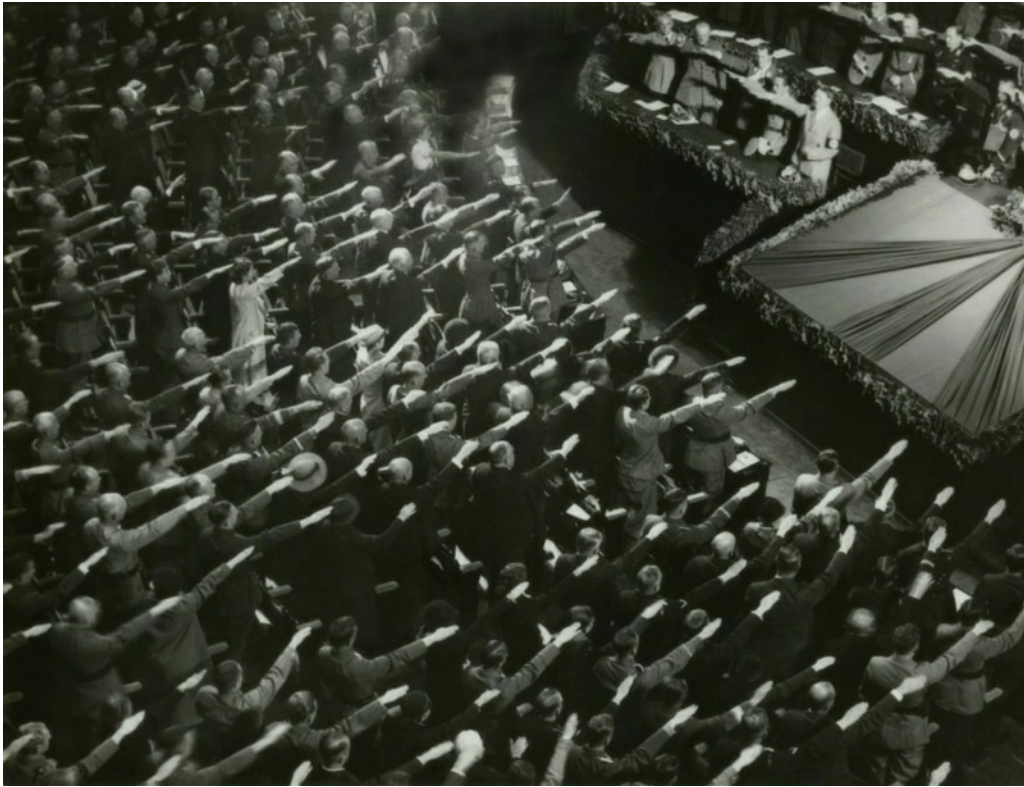
Nuremberg Rally, 1934 – Everett Historical, Shutterstock 251930365

After hearing Hitler speak, one historian said, “I was seized with a nationalistic pride. Nearly hysterical, I shouted until I was hoarse, *Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil!* From that moment on I belonged to Adolf Hitler, body and soul.” “Words,” Joseph Conrad said, “are the great foes of reality.” Ecstasy and politics are a poisonous mix.



Saluting the arrival of Hitler at the 1936 Olympic games – Everett Historical, Shutterstock

After President von Hindenburg’ death, Hitler called for a national election to decide whether he should be given the position of both chancellor and president. Ninety percent of the German electorate voted yes. Once elected, Adolf Hitler abolished the presidency and declared himself Führer of Germany — a man who was not even a German citizen four years before.



Reichstag delegates salute Adolf Hitler at the Kroll Opera House after the Reichstag Fire – Everett Historical, Shutterstock 785842567



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Flag bearers, Nuremberg Rally, 1933 – Everett Historical, Shutterstock 237230146



SS troops carry victory standards, Nuremberg Rally, 1933 – Everett Historical

After persuading the army to swear absolute loyalty to the Führer, backed by the SS who assassinated liberals and communists, he outlawed the opposition, established the Gestapo secret police, and made the Reich a one-party state. The Führer passed the Enabling Act seizing from the legislature the power to make laws, suspending the constitution, issuing the Nuremberg race decrees, and founding the Ministry of Public Enlightenment that gave the Nazis absolute control of public opinion.

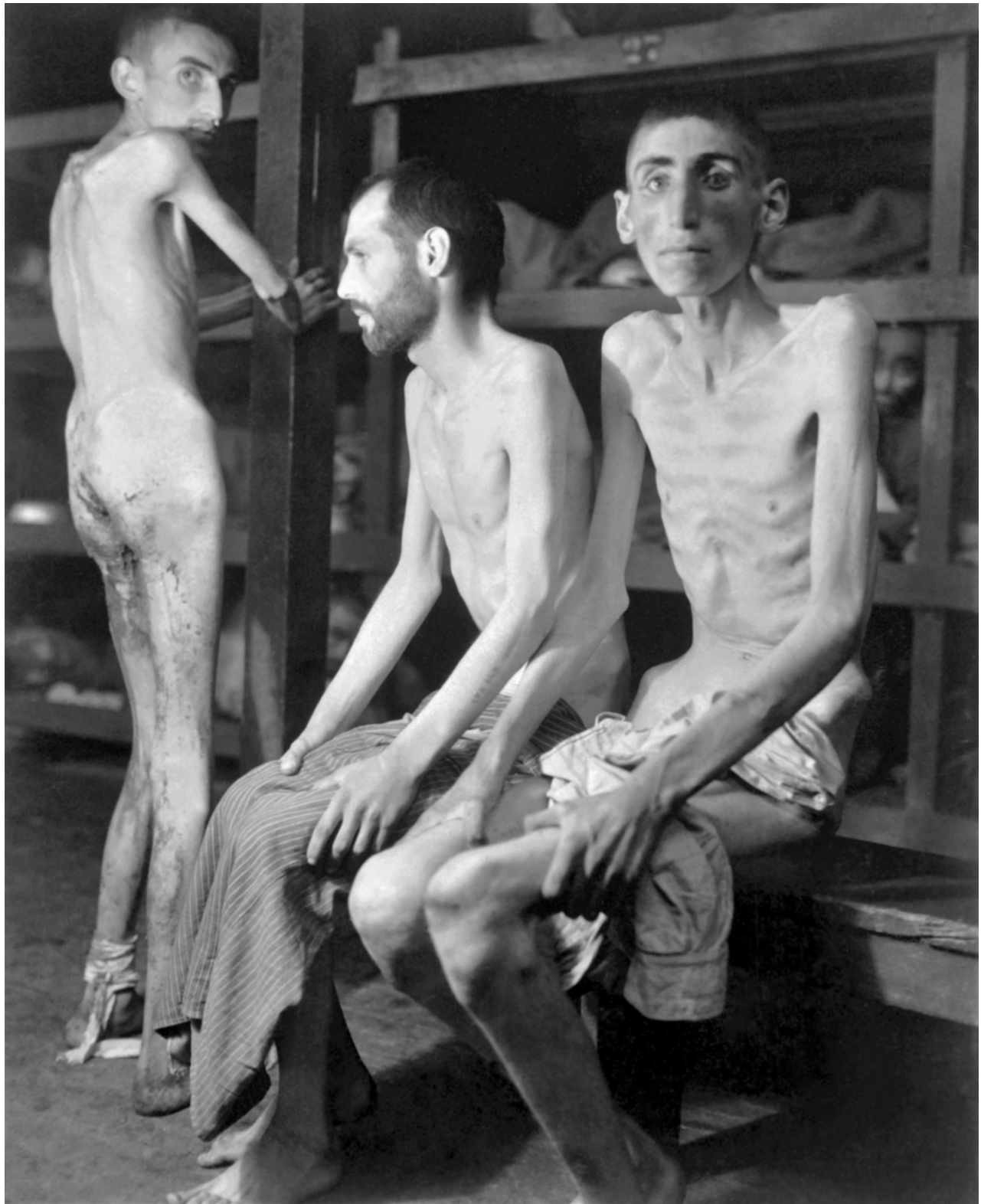


Luftwaffe fly-by in honor of Hitler's birthday, 1939 – Everett Historical



Operation Barbarossa, code name for the invasion of the Soviet Union, 22 June 1941, authorized by Hitler, 18 December 1940 – Everett Historical, Shutterstock 251930455

All the democracies in the West misjudged Hitler. The more they appeased him, the more powerless they were to stop him from taking even more totalitarian measures. The absence of a democratic tradition in German history was an enormous factor in the failure of the democratic Weimar Republic. Authoritarianism had strong roots in Germany for before the Weimar Republic, the people had never lived under a democracy. By 1933, Hitler's aggressive intent was apparent. Had the European nations systematically opposed his hostile intentions, they could have possibly contained him. From the moment of Hitler's ascent to power in 1933 through 1945 — the Lord of Death, cast his shroud over Europe and eighty million people died.



Buchenwald Concentration Camp, 1945 – Everett Historical, 249574138. Constructed by the SS in 1937, Buchenwald held Jews, French, Poles, Ukrainians, Russians, Roma and Sinti Gypsies, Freemasons, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals and prisoners of war to provide slave labor for the adjacent armament factories. It is estimated that 56,000 died at Buchenwald near Weimar, Germany where the writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe strolled in the surrounding Beechwood forests. Buchenwald Death camp was liberated by the US Army, 11 April 1945.

It takes many years to create the institutions of a democracy, but it only takes a few short years for a demagogue to destroy those institutions by unleashing a vengeful populism. Demagogues come to power by establishing a cult of personality — the apotheosis of the emperor in his own time. Lionel Trilling described a demagogue’s obsession, “The poet is in command of his fantasy, while it is the mark of the neurotic that he is possessed by his fantasy.” While there were many reasons that Hitler was able to take power in 1933, the overpowering cause was that the people and the corporations didn’t stand up to him. To preserve democracy, it takes more than blind faith.

It is not just Germany, Japan, and Italy that were taken over by a demagogue, for we have had our share of demagogues in America. President Andrew Jackson, a man with a volcanic temper, was one of the first successful demagogues in American.



Andrew Jackson, 7th President of the United States, 1829-1837 – Thomas Sully portrait, public domain, Wikimedia

A slave owner who worked 50 slaves on his 1,000-acre cotton plantation, Jackson denounced abolitionists and posted advertisements to recover runaway slaves.

Stop the Runaway.
FIFTY DOLLARS REWARD.
ELOPED from the subscriber, living near Nashville, on the 25th of June last, a Mulatto Man Slave, about thirty years old, six feet and an inch high, stout made and active, talks sensible, stoops in his walk, and has a remarkable large foot, broad across the root of the toes--will pass for a free man, as I am informed he has obtained by some means, certificates as such--took with him a drab great-coat, dark mixed body coat, a ruffled shirt, cotton home-spun shirts and overalls. He will make for Detroit, through the states of Kentucky and Ohio, or the upper part of Louisiana. The above reward will be given any person that will take him, and deliver him to me, or secure him in jail, so that I can get him. If taken out of the state, the above reward, and all reasonable expences paid--and ten dollars extra, for every hundred lashes any person will give him, to the amount of three hundred.
ANDREW JACKSON,
Near Nashville, State
of Tennessee.

Andrew Jackson's \$50 reward handbill for the return of a slave who escaped from Jackson's plantation - Tennessee Gazette, October 3, 1804, public domain, Wikimedia

Beloved by the white voters who craved Indian land, Jackson's principles were "An Eye for an Eye, Toothe for Toothe, and Scalp for Scalp." When it came to the Indian, Jackson believed in apartheid. Indian culture was inferior to American civilization. The Jacksonian

era was a time of territorial expansion, public corruption, and wild land speculation, a time of declining ethics and unvarnished greed. When gold was discovered on Cherokee land, whites forced Indians to sign leases and speculators fraudulently seized tribal lands of the Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, Choctaw, and Chickasaw Nations.



Of the 16,000 Cherokees in Georgia, 4,000 died on a forced march crossing nine states in bitter cold, huddled for weeks on the banks of the Arkansas River, dying from disease, cold, and hunger. The French philosopher, Alexis de Tocqueville said “He’d seen the expulsion of one of the most noble and ancient American peoples.” A U.S. soldier on the exodus of the Indians said long after the Trail of Tears, “I fought in the War Between the States, but the Cherokee removal back in 1838 was the cruelest I’ve ever seen.” Nikater, public domain, Wikimedia.



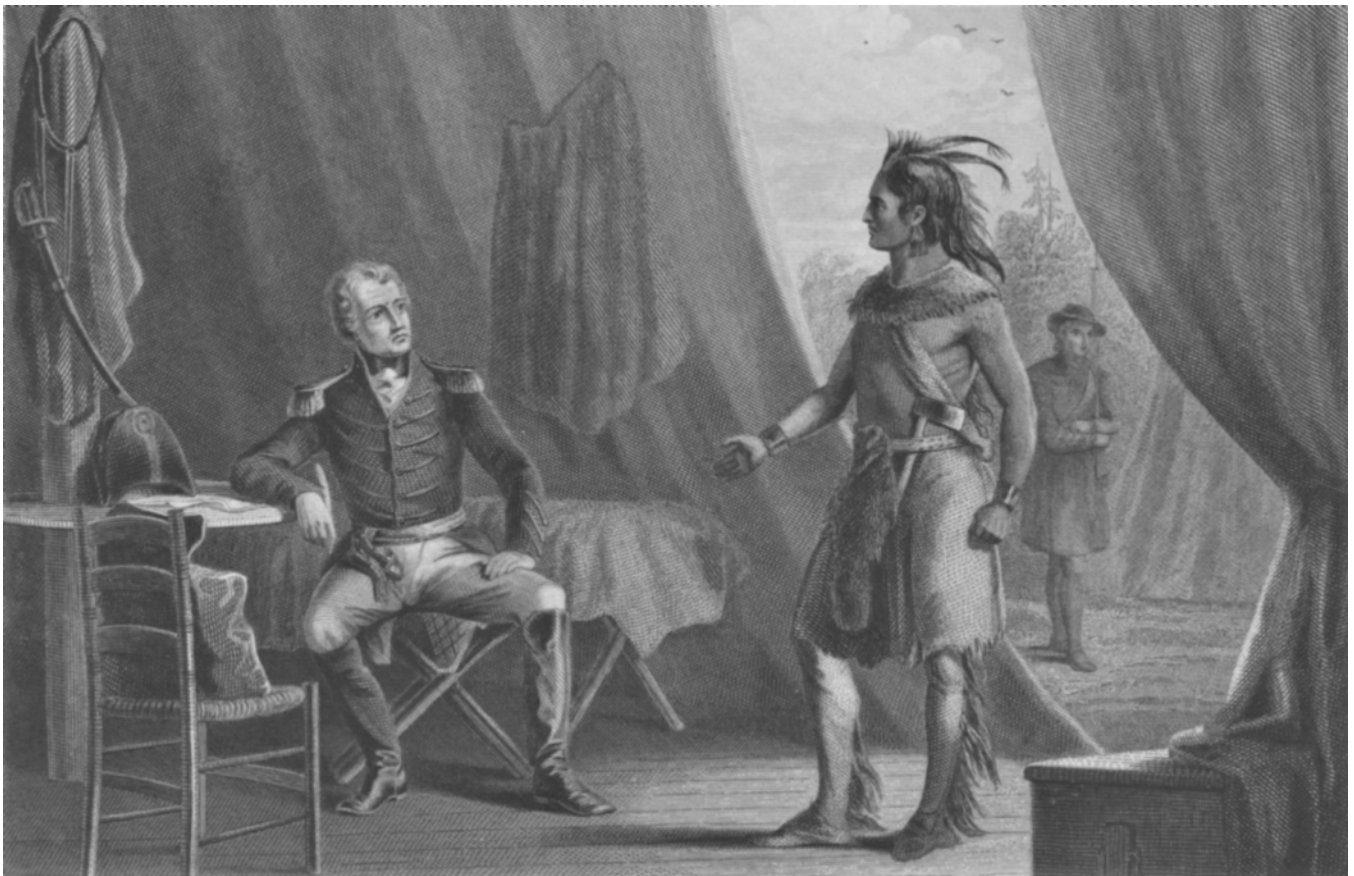
Land of the Cherokee in the Smokey Mountains of North Carolina – ReverieHikes, Wikimedia



Cherokee diplomats Outacite, Austenaco, and Ushesees ye in London, 1762 – Author, Henry Timberlake, public domain, Wikimedia

In his first year of office, George Washington feared that Indian wars would break out on the edge of white settlements once the tribes realized the treaties that they had signed were worthless pieces of paper. Henry Knox, the secretary of war and prior commander of Washington’s artillery, told the president, “Indians being the prior occupants possess the right of the soil, so to dispossess them would be a gross violation of the fundamental Laws of Nature and the distributive justice which is the glory of our nation.” In agreement with Knox, Washington made solving the plight of the original inhabitants of America his highest priority. Knox recommended that they make a treaty with the Creek Nation, the most powerful of the tribes. In the resulting 1790 Treaty of New York, the Creeks were promised sovereign control over a vast tract of the Southeast. But the American settlers, believing that

the Indians as a conquered people had no right to the land, crossed over the Creek tribal borders to establish homesteads while the Georgia legislature defied the federal government, declaring that all Creek lands were under Georgia's jurisdiction according to their colonial charter. Knox estimated that even if the entire American army was posted on the Creek borders, it would be impossible to enforce the Treaty of New York. Washington's and Knox's brave attempt to grant Indians sovereignty was a promise they could not keep. The settler's belief that the quest for land was their natural right assured what Joseph J. Ellis described as "a recipe for genocide in slow motion."



Creek Nation leader Red Eagle's surrender to Major General Andrew Jackson after the Battle of Horseshoe Bend – drawing by John Reuben Chapin, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia. Surrounded by Jackson's militia and outnumbered four to one, Chief Menawa lost 800 of his 1,000 warriors while holding off the militia for five hours. Severely wounded, Menawa crossed the Tallapoosa River and escaped to join the Seminole tribe in Spanish Florida. After the battle, Jackson's troops made bridle reins from skin taken from Indian corpses and sent their clothing as souvenirs to their ladies in Tennessee. On August 8, 1814, Andrew Jackson forced the Creek Nation to sign the Treaty of Fort Jackson, ceding 23 million acres, half of central Alabama and part of southern Georgia, to the United States government. Painting by John Reuben Chapin, U.S. Library of Congress, public domain, Wikimedia.

After Jackson's election, he reversed the policy of President John Quincy Adams who had refused to remove the Creek Indians. Jackson submitted the Indian removal bill to Congress which passed it into law, giving Jackson and the whites what they had always wanted.

During Andrew Jackson's and Van Buren's administration, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 was responsible for driving 50,000 Indians from their ancestral homes — land which Black Hawk, the great Sauk leader said, “had been given by the Great Spirit to his children to live upon and cultivate — a sacred homeland which must never be sold.” But Jackson and Van Buren sealed their fate. Under the guard of U.S. soldiers, the Five Civilized Tribes, the Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, and Cherokee Nations were forced to march to Oklahoma. Ten thousand Indians died.



Sequoyah, the inventor of the writing system for the Cherokee language – Author, lithographers George Lehman and Peter S. Divan after a copy of a painting by Charles Bird King lost in the 1865 Smithsonian fire – Public domain, Wikimedia

An economic crisis hit the United States in 1873. The transcontinental railroad had been completed and the economy collapsed on the East Coast. Thousands of men moved to the West to look for jobs that didn't materialize. With no unemployment insurance, men were left destitute in the streets, the churches struggling to feed starving men, a crisis which California had never experienced before. Dennis Kearney, an immigrant from Ireland, organized the Workingmen's Party of California in 1877 and laid the blame for unemployment on the coolies who were stealing jobs from whites. Speaking before a rally on top of Nob Hill in the light of enormous bonfires, Kearney yelled, 'The Chinese must go! Bathed in a thunderous ovation from the crowd and the flickering light of the bonfires, the hell fire orator preached to the unemployed, urging them to arm themselves with rifles, lynch the railroad barons, and drive the Chinese out of California even if they had to "wade knee deep in blood.'" At a rally next to San Francisco's City Hall, the crowd of unemployed whites, all descended from immigrants themselves, erupted with the cry of "On to Chinatown," and poured into the ghetto, looting, burning, and killing the Chinese for two days.



1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, political caricature, "Uncle Sam kicks out the Chinamen." – Public domain, Wikimedia. The Chinese Exclusion Act made Chinese immigrants permanent aliens by excluding them from U.S. citizenship, leaving Chinese men with little chance of ever reuniting with their wives. The Supreme Court declared in *Chae Chan Ping v. United States*, 1889, that "the power of exclusion of foreigners is an incident of sovereignty belonging to the government of the United States as a part of those sovereign powers delegated by the constitution." Author, The George Dee Magic Washing Machine Company, 1886, U.S. commercial political cartoon, public domain, Wikimedia.

The San Francisco riot was just the beginning of the rage against the Chinese. Forty thousand voted to end Chinese immigration, Kearney's party passing laws limiting the Chinese from living and working in the United States. The Supreme Order of Caucasians blamed Chinese coolies for depressed wages, fanning a ferocious hatred of aliens and eventually resulting in the U.S. Congress passing the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 banning the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years and in 1902, making the ban on Chinese immigration permanent. The Exclusion Act prohibited the Chinese from becoming U.S. citizens making them aliens forever, an especially cruel fate for they had little chance of reuniting with wives left behind in China. To preserve American racial homogeneity, an even greater ban was placed on immigration when President Coolidge signed the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 and Asian Exclusion Act that not only limited European immigration, but totally banned immigration of Arabs and Asians."

Beyond the crisis of democracy, the burning concern of *Céline on Fire* is the legacy of slavery in America. According to Supreme Justice Antonin Scalia, the Originalist school of Constitutional interpretation "treats a constitution like a statute and gives it the meaning that its words were understood to bear at the time they were promulgated." Although the founders of the Constitution are revered for their wisdom, many grew wealthy from the labor of slaves. To protect their right to hold slaves, the Fugitive Slave Clause was incorporated into the Constitution declaring that a person held in service in one state who escapes to another state, "shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service or labour may be due." Without using the word "slave," the constitutional clause meant that slaves who escaped to free states could never be free. Charles Pinckney, a slave holding planter from South Carolina and signer of the Constitution, said that fugitive slaves should be "delivered up like criminals."

George Washington's will provided that his slaves were to be freed upon the death of his widow, but the dowry slaves belonging to Martha Custis Washington remained enslaved at Mount Vernon. Washington had signed the Fugitive Slave Act that made it a crime to help an escaped slave or interfere with capture and permitted slave hunters to pursue escaped slaves in all of U.S. territory.

When Washington was serving as president in Philadelphia, one of his slaves, Oney Judge, a 20-year-old mulatto, ran away. Martha Washington had told Oney that she was to be given as a wedding present to her granddaughter. Certain she'd die a slave if she returned to Virginia, with the help of the free black community of Philadelphia, Oney escaped while the president was eating dinner. Washington put out a notice offering a reward for her capture, but she got away to New Hampshire, married a free black seaman, had children, and taught herself to read and write. Oney died a free woman, but her sister was given to Martha's granddaughter as a wedding present and died in slavery.

The system of slavery was embedded by the Founders in the Constitution and haunts our nation to this day. After the compromise of 1877 settled the 1876 presidential election by awarding the White House to Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, on the condition that Hayes would remove federal troops from the South — the only force during the Reconstruction Era that had guaranteed African-American rights. As soon as the troops were withdrawn, the “Redeemers,” white supremacist groups sprang up throughout the South, the White League, Knights of the White Camellia, the Red shirts, White Citizen's Council, Ku Klux Klan, terrorist groups which served as the military arm of the Democratic Party, suppressing the African-American vote by violent means.



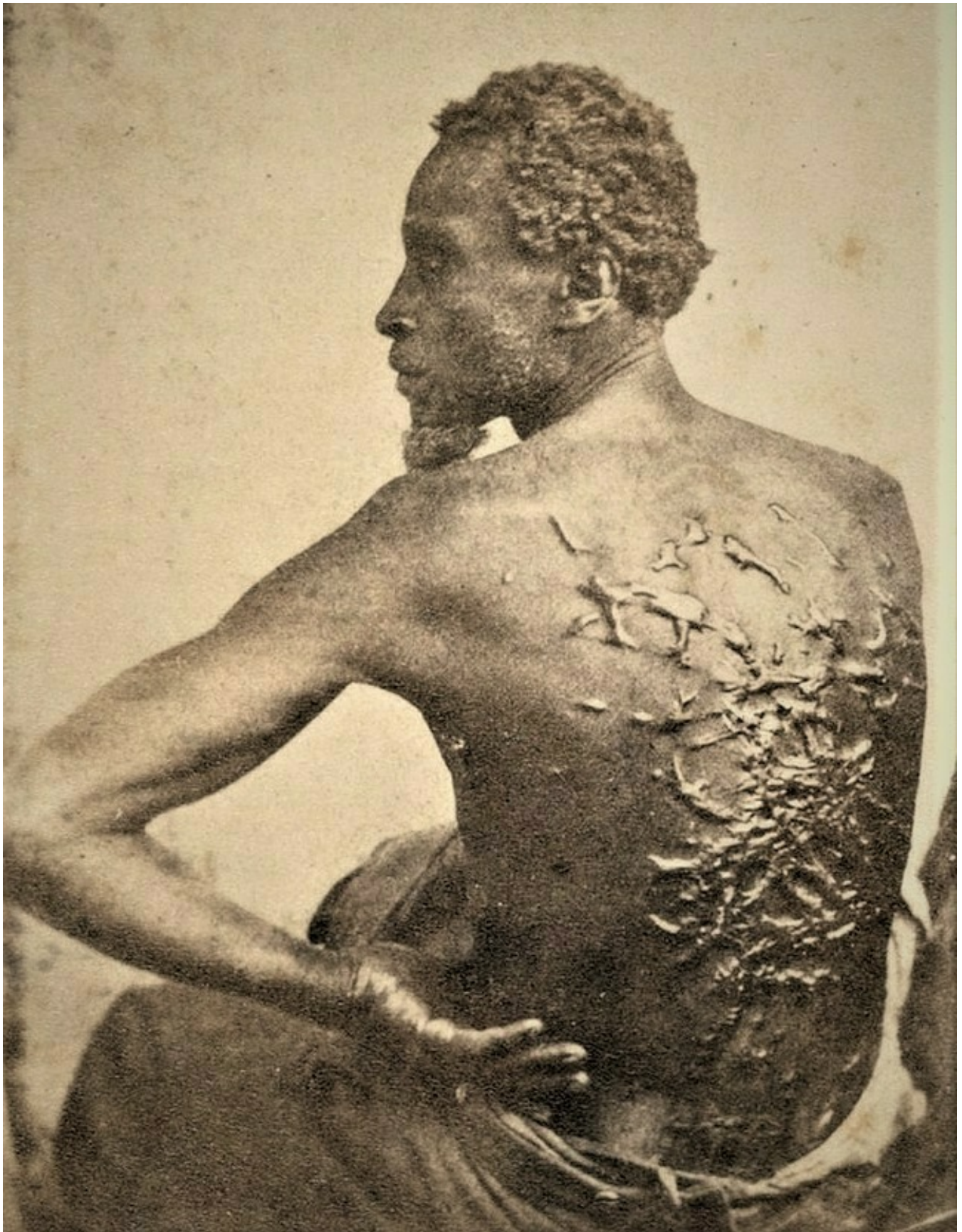
Ku Klux Klan parading down Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington D. C., 1926 – Everett Historical, Shutterstock 252134155

Terrorist groups consisted not only of former Confederate soldiers and poor whites, but also the middle and upper classes, the merchants, ministers, and professionals who put on their white hoods, burned crosses, and killed in the name of white supremacy. With the federal troops gone, the Redeemers passed Jim Crow laws that reestablished many of the conditions of slavery that had been abolished by constitutional amendments. One hundred and forty years later, even after the election of the first Black president, the bitterness between races flourishes.



James Arthur Baldwin, 1969, London, author of *Another Country*, published 1962 – Allan Warren photo, Wikimedia

James Baldwin, in his 1955 *Notes of a Native Son*, wrote, “In the context of the Negro problem, neither whites nor blacks, for excellent reasons of their own, have the faintest desire to look back; but I think the past is all that makes the present coherent, and further, that the past will remain horrible for exactly so long as we refuse to assess it honestly.”



Fugitive slave Gordon at the Baton Rouge Union camp during his medical examination, March 1863. Author, Mathew Brady, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Wikimedia

During the 1930s, Monsignor Charles Coughlin, one of the first to use the radio to reach a mass audience, incited hysteria in his millions of listeners by fulminating against the “Judeo-Bolshevik attack on America.” Coughlin broadcast anti-Semitic propaganda and published in his magazine *Social Justice* the fraudulent *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and supported the fascist policies of Hitler, Mussolini, and Emperor Hirohito of Japan in radio broadcasts to his devoted audience of 30 million.



Rev. Charles E. Coughlin, 1933 – Photo portrait by Detroit Crane, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia. In his newspaper *Social Justice*, Coughlin accused Jewish financiers of controlling world politics. In the late 1930s, Father Coughlin promoted fascist authoritarian government as the solution for the failures of capitalism and democracy.

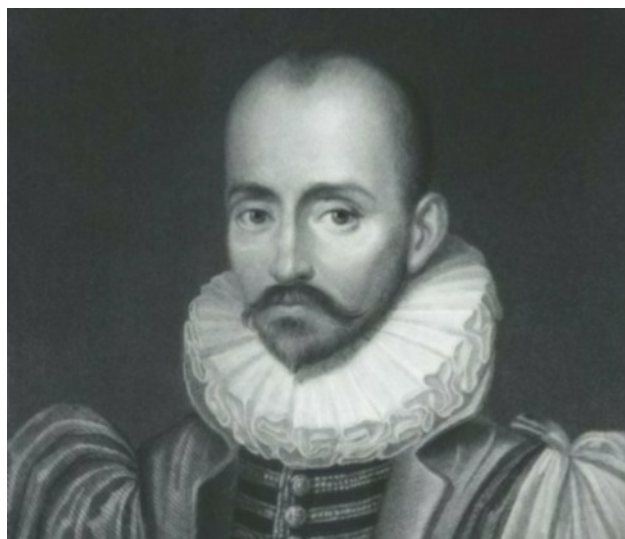
During the 1950’s, Senator McCarthy of Wisconsin, gave a speech in West Virginia claiming that “the State Department is infested with communists.” It was a time of great fear of communism. Stalin had taken control of Eastern Europe, instigated the Korean war, and achieved the atom bomb. Without documenting claims, McCarthy spread the fear of traitors in our government, the fear of hidden spies among us.



Senator Joseph McCarthy and his chief counsel Roy Cohn during the Senate Subcommittee Army-McCarthy hearings, 1954 - US Library of Congress, cph.3c14995, Wikimedia. An informal advisor to Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, Roy Cohn defended Donald Trump against the Justice Department's charge that he violated the Fair Housing Act in the operation of 39 buildings. While representing Rupert Murdoch in the 1970s, Cohn introduced the media baron to Donald Trump, establishing a mutual patronage that flourishes today.

Freely inventing whatever sprang into his head, McCarthy attacked the character and patriotism of his political opponents, claiming that the government was infiltrated with communists, stirring fear to create a fabulous paranoia in America. Senator McCarthy alone didn't create the climate of fear. The fear was in the American psyche. McCarthy just exploited that fear.

French essayist Michel de Montaigne said, 'There is no passion as contagious as that of fear.' Fear is the mother of war, fascism, and genocide.



Michel de Montaigne – Author, Georgios Kollidas, Shutterstock 81841960

Céline tells us that a remedy for the contagion of fear is the establishment of alliances and trade agreements with Europe, South Korea, Japan, the Philippines and indeed with our antagonists as well. International agreements are critical to the maintenance of peace. During the American Revolution, Benjamin Franklin said, “We must, indeed, all hang together, or we shall most assuredly hang separately.”

Walter Lippman said that “No amount of charters, direct primaries, or short ballots will make a democracy out of an illiterate people.” Many students graduate from high school uninformed of their civic responsibilities, unaware of the foundations of democracy, leaving them unprepared to resist the emotional exhortations of a demagogue. Americans frequently form their opinions from television and Internet sources that report the number of people killed by a suicide bomber, but provide little information to tell us that the reason they are being blown up is due to something that happened in 1921 and again in 1948.

Psychologists have discovered that reading for pleasure among young people has declined in recent times, a grave concern because reading develops imagination, introspection, vocabulary, and logical thinking in ways that television and video games do not. With the increasing emphasis on STEM courses in our universities, it leaves less time for study of civic policy, the role of government, the arts and humanities. In past times when it took a long time to get from one place to another, reading, conversation, and the writing of letters flourished. Today, our diminishing attention spans are driven by the hyper-stimulation of our electronic media. The richness of conversation and the art of letter writing have become lost in today’s dependence on email, texting, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat.

Céline on Fire was written to encourage Americans to dig deeper into the history of our origins, our failures, and our successes, and to unearth information that we need to understand today’s world. Because the American public is not inclined to watch foreign cinema or read the literature of other nations, it diminishes their ability to understand the thinking of other cultures. Bertrand Russell said, “To understand an age or a nation we must understand its philosophy, and to understand its philosophy we must ourselves be in some degree philosophers.” It is our responsibility for each of us to be that philosopher.

Bertrand Russell offers a suggestion for this moment in time, “The thing above all, that a teacher should endeavor to produce in his pupils, if democracy is to survive, is the kind of tolerance that springs from an endeavor to understand those who are different from ourselves. . . Ants and savages put strangers to death. And those who have never traveled either physically or mentally find it difficult to tolerate the queer ways and outlandish beliefs of other nations and other times, other sects and other political parties. This kind of ignorant intolerance is the antithesis of a civilized outlook and is one of the gravest dangers to which our overcrowded world is exposed.”



Everett Historical



Everett Historical

Twenty years after the First World War ended, the pursuit of national hegemony plunged civilization into the even greater bloodbath of World War Two. After the failure of the League of Nations between the wars, the United Nations was established in October 1945 to prevent the horrors of another world war. Three-quarters of a century later, the recrudescence of ethnic-nationalism and the demagoguery of populism threatens to destroy the mutually beneficial world for which the United Nations was created.



Vizier Tallaat Pasha ordered the ethnic cleansing of Armenians and Greeks, 1915 – Everett Historical, Shutterstock 785841286

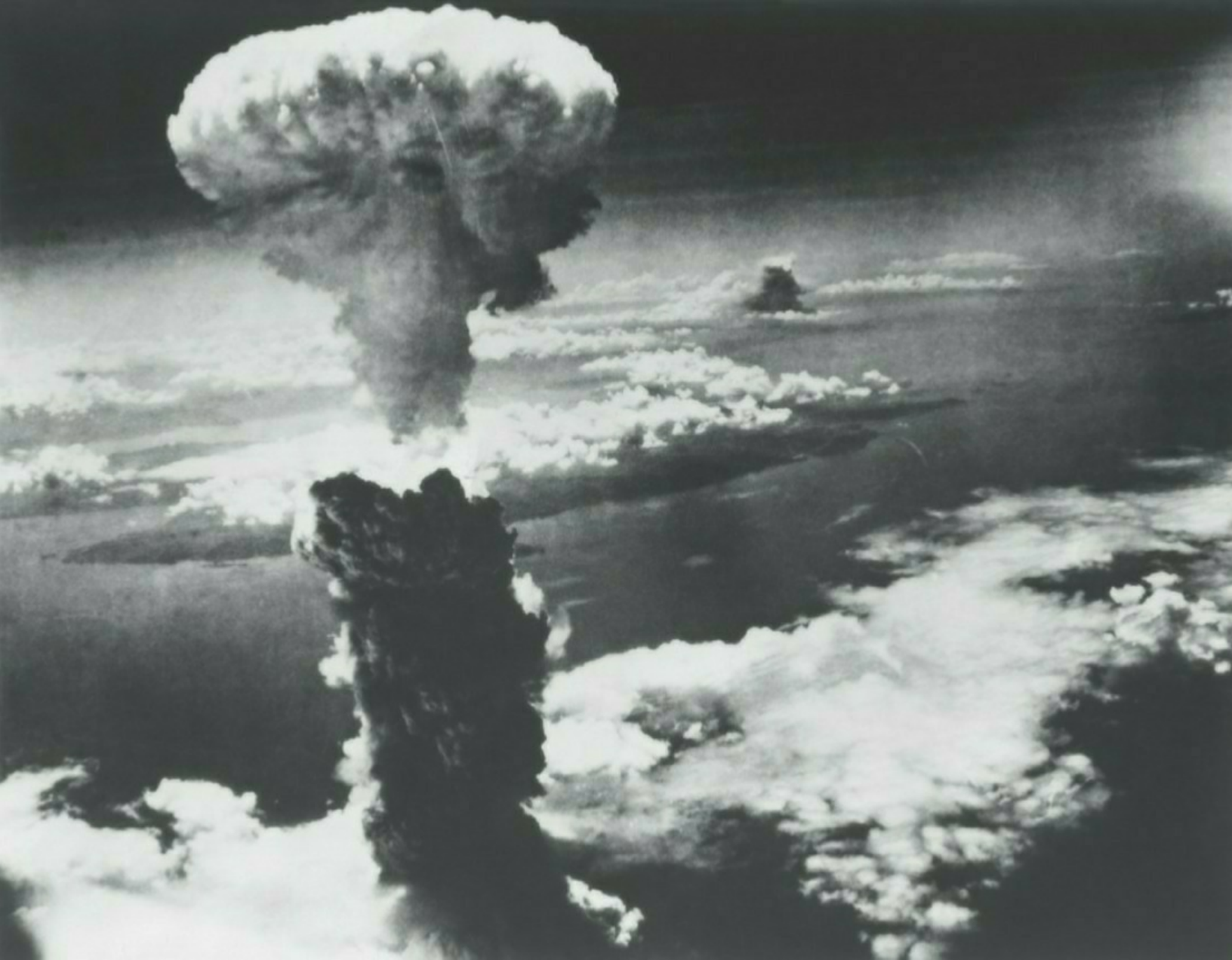


Survivors of the Armenian Genocide - Everett Historical, Shutterstock 249571153

While torture, war, and genocide has been common throughout history, it has never been as prevalent as in the 20th century. Economist John Kenneth Galbraith observed, “War remains the decisive human failure.”



Surviving women and children emerge from the cellars after the Allies liberate Chateau-Thierry, France, 1918 – Everett Historical



Atomic mushroom cloud, Nagasaki, August 9, 1945 – Charles Levy, U.S. Archives at College Park, public domain, Wikimedia

By looking into the past, we can begin to understand how fragile our democracy is when confronted by demagoguery, threats against the press, and increasing authoritarianism. By revisiting the failures of our past, we can better understand our failures in the present. If we examine the causes of war and genocide as diligently as we study the human mind and body, we can find a way to preserve humanity.

Dale Allan Pelton

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