

Thomas Nast cartoon celebrating the Fifteenth Amendment grant of universal suffrage. American citizens of many ethnic origins having sharing Thanksgiving dinner, 20 November 1869 – Author, Thomas Nast, public domain, Wikimedia

The vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by human beings for breaking down injustice and destroying the terrible walls which imprison people because they are different from others.

— Martin Luther King

Giovanni

*To study history means submitting to chaos and nevertheless
retaining faith in order and meaning*

— Hermann Hesse

We rode our bicycles through the village of Yffiniac then followed a country lane north along the coast. There had been heavy rains recently, the streams nearly out of their banks. The fog was drifting in from the sea, floating across green fields and into the trees. Yvonne was a distance ahead of me, dressed in white, her cashmere sweater barely visible, a ghostly form vanishing into patches of fog then appearing once more gliding through a tunnel of dark cypress lining the road. Far away, bells rang from a village church then fell silent. The only sound I could hear was the sound of my tires whirring against the pavement.

We follow the same route each time we come to the sea. Ever since the day we discovered it four years ago, it has been a spot where we've renewed our passion. After an hour of riding, we came over a rise and could see the bay of Saint-Brieuc with the headland of Pointe du Roselier stretching out to sea. The gray clouds hanging over the horizon were splintered with shafts of silvery light, their swift flight casting mercurial shapes on the restless water like the day I'd taken Paola to the sea.

In the dunes beside the river, Yvonne found our secret place sheltered from the wind by a sand dune, not a single footprint in the sand, only the tracks of the birds.

"I'm going for a swim." She stripped down to her swim suit. "I'll be back in a minute."

I watched her lithe body leaping through the grass to the river. She swam rapidly in the swift current her arm strokes flashing as the sun for a brief moment broke through the clouds. I am amazed how she can swim in cold water. She has the psyche of an Eskimo and the instincts of a sea otter. For her, swimming is a way of life.

In a few minutes, she came running up with a burst of speed, grabbed a towel and dried off her hair, water running down her legs. I kissed her legs, cold water on my lips.

"Stop! You're insatiable. I've prepared a feast. I'm hungry as a wolf!"

There were olives from Provence, cheese from Normandie, foie gras from Perigueux, charcuterie from Strasbourg, a ratatouille of aubergine and courgettes, calamari salad with tomatoes, onions, and celery, and a bottle of white wine from Orvieto, the color of pale straw.

“The texture of the calamari is wonderful. You got it just right.”

After we'd eaten, she pulled from her basket a gift, *Narcissus and Goldmund* by Hermann Hesse.

“Céline gave me this book last year, now I'm giving it to you.”

I asked who Hesse was and she replied, “A German writer. When Nazism came to power he abandoned Germany for Switzerland. Hesse was influenced by Eastern thought, especially the thoughts of Siddhartha. After the war, he was awarded the Goethe Prize and the Nobel Prize. Hesse wrote about the conflict between reason and sensuality.”



Hermann Hesse, Nobel laureate in literature, 1946 – Nobel Foundation, public domain, Wikimedia

Inside the jacket she'd inscribed Hesse's words. *You know quite well, deep within you, that there is only one single magic, single power, a single salvation. . . and that is called loving. Well then, love your suffering. Do not resist it, do not flee from it.*

She took from her basket, a little red box tied with a yellow ribbon, decorated with a sprig of mint and a daffodil.

“Céline made a present for you. She's proud of her baking skills.”

I slipped the daffodil into her hair and opened the box to find four puff pastries glazed the color of golden caramel and crusted with brown sugar.

“They're too beautiful to eat.”

“The best is what's inside.”

I discovered *crema di mascarpone* and devoured the pastry. She kissed a drop of cream perched on my nose.

“*Per amor de Christo*.... what did she put in it?”

“Strawberries, mascarpone, honey, heavy cream, Marsala wine, used up all of my *crème de menthe* and anisette and I don't know what else.

She licked the mascarpone from my lips, and I kissed her, leaving a trace of cream on her lips”



Pâte feuilletée – LukaszKatlewa

“You finished your book while I was gone?”

“I’m revising the last chapter. I’ll send it to the publisher in a couple of weeks.”

“What did you finally decide for the title?”

“*The Wisdom of Primitive People.*”

“What is their wisdom?”

“The first part of the book focuses on animism.”

“What is animism?”

“Animism is the belief that objects in the natural world are infused with consciousness. Ancient people were at the mercy of the elements, the sun, the wind, and the rain. Their survival depended on the cycle of the seasons and the plants and animals in the forest. For these people, all things have a personality, not only humans, but animals and birds, rocks and trees, the sun and the moon, the wind and the rain. We call this view of the world, animism. There is no separation between man and the spirits of nature. Everything has a soul. All things are divine.”



Ojibwe chiefs in the 19th century – shannothunderbird.com/tribal_lifestyle, Wikimedia. Anthropological studies of Ojibwe religion contributed to the understanding of the animistic belief that everything is conscious, everything has a soul.

“When I was in Kyoto,” I said, “I visited the Shinto shrine of Fushimi-Inari-Taisha. I took the *torii* path up the sacred Inari Mountain and admired sensual statues of the fox. They told me the fox was the messenger of Inari, the god of rice. I tasted sushi at a little stand and ate the favorite food of the fox, fried tofu. The cherry trees were still in bloom, just beginning to fade, flurries of wind sending petals flying over me, the *hanafuki*, they said. Petals like white snow covered the soil, and on the hillside above, ribbons of cascading cherry trees brilliant white amid the green trees. Shinto is beautiful because it says that spirits exist in all of nature. There’s no separation between the material and the spiritual. As you’ve said about animism, in Shinto everything has a soul. All things are divine. That belief inspired me to compose a song using the haunting sound of the *Shakuhachi*, a bamboo flute of the Zen Buddhist monks.”

“Why haven’t you played it for me?” Yvonne said.

“I’m still working on it. You’ll hear it soon.”

<p>ホ ハ 急ヤラヤラ 急ホホホ</p>	<p>手打 ラ 五 穴 チ ハ ウ</p>	<p>四二三四五 ニ押ス 三打 四打 五打 ニ押ス</p>	<p>同音連続 二押ス</p>
<p>イ 口 ホ 口 ラ ハ 乙 ホ 乙 ホ 乙 ホ 乙 ホ 乙</p>	<p>フ 年 フ ヒ ウ イ ハ チ レ ツ 口</p>		
<p>拍子符記号 一 一拍子 二 二拍子 三 三拍子 四 四拍子 五 五拍子 六 六拍子 七 七拍子 八 八拍子 九 九拍子 十 十拍子 十一 十一拍子 十二 十二拍子 十三 十三拍子 十四 十四拍子 十五 十五拍子 十六 十六拍子 十七 十七拍子 十八 十八拍子 十九 十九拍子 二十 二十拍子 二十一 二十一拍子 二十二 二十二拍子 二十三 二十三拍子 二十四 二十四拍子 二十五 二十五拍子 二十六 二十六拍子 二十七 二十七拍子 二十八 二十八拍子 二十九 二十九拍子 三十 三十拍子 三十一 三十一拍子 三十二 三十二拍子 三十三 三十三拍子 三十四 三十四拍子 三十五 三十五拍子 三十六 三十六拍子 三十七 三十七拍子 三十八 三十八拍子 三十九 三十九拍子 四十 四十拍子 四十一 四十一拍子 四十二 四十二拍子 四十三 四十三拍子 四十四 四十四拍子 四十五 四十五拍子 四十六 四十六拍子 四十七 四十七拍子 四十八 四十八拍子 四十九 四十九拍子 五十 五十拍子 五十一 五十一拍子 五十二 五十二拍子 五十三 五十三拍子 五十四 五十四拍子 五十五 五十五拍子 五十六 五十六拍子 五十七 五十七拍子 五十八 五十八拍子 五十九 五十九拍子 六十 六十拍子 六十一 六十一拍子 六十二 六十二拍子 六十三 六十三拍子 六十四 六十四拍子 六十五 六十五拍子 六十六 六十六拍子 六十七 六十七拍子 六十八 六十八拍子 六十九 六十九拍子 七十 七十拍子 七十一 七十一拍子 七十二 七十二拍子 七十三 七十三拍子 七十四 七十四拍子 七十五 七十五拍子 七十六 七十六拍子 七十七 七十七拍子 七十八 七十八拍子 七十九 七十九拍子 八十 八十拍子 八十一 八十一拍子 八十二 八十二拍子 八十三 八十三拍子 八十四 八十四拍子 八十五 八十五拍子 八十六 八十六拍子 八十七 八十七拍子 八十八 八十八拍子 八十九 八十九拍子 九十 九十拍子 九十一 九十一拍子 九十二 九十二拍子 九十三 九十三拍子 九十四 九十四拍子 九十五 九十五拍子 九十六 九十六拍子 九十七 九十七拍子 九十八 九十八拍子 九十九 九十九拍子 一百 一百拍子</p>			

Myoan-fingering Shakuhachi fingering chart and notation – The European Shakuhachi Society, Wikimedia

“Ancient Japanese myths,” Yvonne continued, "had similarities to Greek mythology. My story begins with Persephone, the Greek goddess who symbolized the birth and death of vegetation — the fertility of the earth. Long before the male dominated monotheism of the Judaic, Muslim, and Christian faiths, the female gods of antiquity were important. Persephone, the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, the goddess of harvest was kidnapped by Hades, god of the underworld. She was condemned to spend eight months on earth and four months in the underground with Hades. Her descent into the underground marked the death of plant life, the disappearance of fertility in winter. In the spring, her ascent from the underground marked the rebirth of life.”



Rape of Persephone by Hades, god of the underworld – Bibi Saint-Pol, Altes Museum, Wikimedia

“To the ancients, the river was a living phenomenon inhabited by dryads, river-gods, water nymphs, and Ondines. The entire world was teeming with divine creatures. Consider the river, in spring it's a torrent of water, but in the summer, it slows to a lazy crawl. In the 5th century before Christ, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, ‘You cannot step into the same river twice, for fresh waters are ever flowing upon you.’ Nothing is immutable, nothing remains unchanging. In our universe, the planets are hurling around the sun, stars are being born, others exploding, transforming into cosmic gas, others collapsing upon themselves.



ALMA observation of star creation in the Orion Nebula, a 500-year-old explosion, the violent birth of massive stars – www.eso.org/public-images, Wikimedia



Dense gas in the Orion Nebula from which new stars are born – Hubble Space Telescope Orion Project Team, NASA, ESA, Wikimedia

“Two thousand years ago, Chinese and Islamic astronomers observed a supernova, a star with many times the mass of our own sun exploding with the energy of a billion suns. During this brief explosion, a supernova can radiate as much energy as our sun can produce over its entire life span. Astronomers using infrared observation can penetrate the interstellar dust and collapsing molecular clouds of gas where new protostars are being formed. As one sun blows up, new stars are born. The universe is a process, a becoming. The same dynamic energy that resides in life on our planet is inherent in our universe — an engine of creation, destruction, and recreation. Everything is in flux, everything is alive.”

“In Van Gogh’s paintings, the fields, flowers, and trees are vibrant. He captured the innate volatility of life. The portraits of Soutine and Kokoschka express the vibrancy of the human spirit. Kokoschka pursued the inner psyche, the dynamic essence we call life. Our very cells are dying each day, and each day they are renewed again and again until they stop regenerating and that is death. But as one person dies, another is born.”



***The Tempest-Bride of the Wind*, Oskar Kokoschka’s self-portrait expressing his unrequited love for Alma Mahler, widow of composer Gustav Mahler – Oskar Kokoschka, 1913, Wikimedia**

“It sounds like music,” I said. “But aren't we too sophisticated for pagan gods and goddesses?”

“It depends on what you mean by sophistication. Modern science is uncovering the secrets of the universe and yet our technology is ravaging our planet. A century ago, Karl Marx lamented the destruction of the forests of Europe. Marx said, ‘The development of civilization and industry in general has always shown itself so active in the destruction of forests that everything that has been done for their conservation and production is completely insignificant in comparison.’

Civilization has wiped out the forests of Europe. North and South America is doing the same thing — the never ceasing expansion of human habitat. The increase in the use of pesticides and agrochemical toxins will have a dire effect on the population of bees. Charles Darwin said, ‘It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.’ Bees have a very weak immune system and aren’t very adaptive to environmental modification. If manmade toxins result in killing the bees and plants cannot be pollinated, then mankind would disappear in a few short years.”



Solitary bee (*Anthidium floren num*), feeding on a *Lantana camara* flower – Alvesgaspar, Wikimedia

“The technology of nuclear fission,” Yvonne said, “has been used to destroy Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Alain Resnais’s film, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* captures the pain of that nuclear memory. Emmanuelle Riva, the inconsolable lover speaks Marguerite Duras’ words, ‘200,000 dead and 80,000 wounded in nine seconds,

10,000 degrees on the earth. 10,000 suns. The asphalt will burn. Chaos will prevail. An entire city will be lifted off the ground and fall back to earth in ashes.”

“I’ve heard people claim,” I said, “that the U.S. could have demonstrated the power of the bomb to the Japanese by dropping it offshore of Tokyo or on a military target. Instead, they decided to drop it on two cities with hundreds of thousands of people. I’ve heard other Americans who disagree. They believe it was the right thing to do — to end the war sooner and save American lives by dropping the atom bomb and ending the war. I wonder if the shoe were on the other foot what would Japan have done? If Japan had the bomb and America didn’t, would have Japan dropped the bomb on San Francisco and Los Angeles? I think they would. Revenge fuels atrocities. But whatever justifications people give, I think Christ would say, ‘Just because your enemy commits atrocities, it does not justify you to commit atrocities.’”



Carbonized child, Nagasaki, 10 August 1945 - Yosuke Yamahata

“It was one hell of a revenge,” Yvonne replied, “in one split second, tens of thousands of civilians burned alive, the heat of the bomb 6,000 degrees centigrade at the center of the blast. John Hersey’s book, *Hiroshima* reports that the bomb left permanent shadows of humans cast upon the walls by the bomb’s blinding light.

“The medics labored to save the lesser injured saying, ‘There’s no hope for the badly wounded. They will die. We can’t bother with them.’ Everywhere, wooden houses were burning, people trapped beneath the collapsed roof beams, screaming for help. The ones who were able to run away had to leave their loved ones behind to burn alive. Many of the injured were lying on the sand spit in the river too weak to move. They drowned as the tide swept in.

“A bombardment of neutrons, beta particles, and gamma rays simply destroyed body cells, causing their nuclei to degenerate. When they tried to pick the survivors up, their skin slid off their bodies exposing raw flesh below. Wounds that appeared to heal would suddenly swell up and burst open again. The ones who didn’t die instantly suffered from nausea, headaches, diarrhea, and fever, infections blooming in the chest cavity as if they’d been given massive doses of X-rays, the random effects of radiation sickness — fatigue, feelings of hopelessness, a sense of doom which wouldn’t go away.

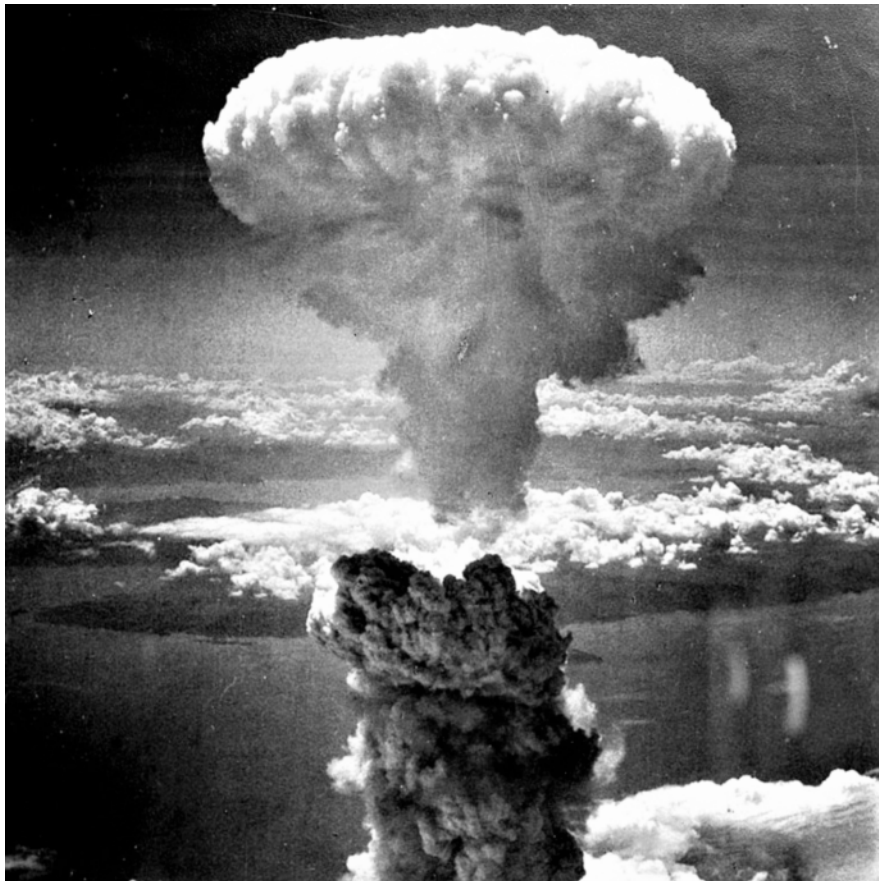


Hiroshima survivors thermal burns from atomic radiation – National Museum of Health and Medicine

“I’ve seen photographs of people suffering from radioactivity — melted eyes, hair falling out, weariness and feverishness, a haunting depression, and then the keloid scars — deformed flesh, thick, rubbery, coppery colored growths forming over their burns, hideous flesh following them to the grave.

“It would be a good idea,” I said, “that at a certain age all children see those images. When they grow up, maybe they wouldn’t be so eager to drop the atomic bomb.”

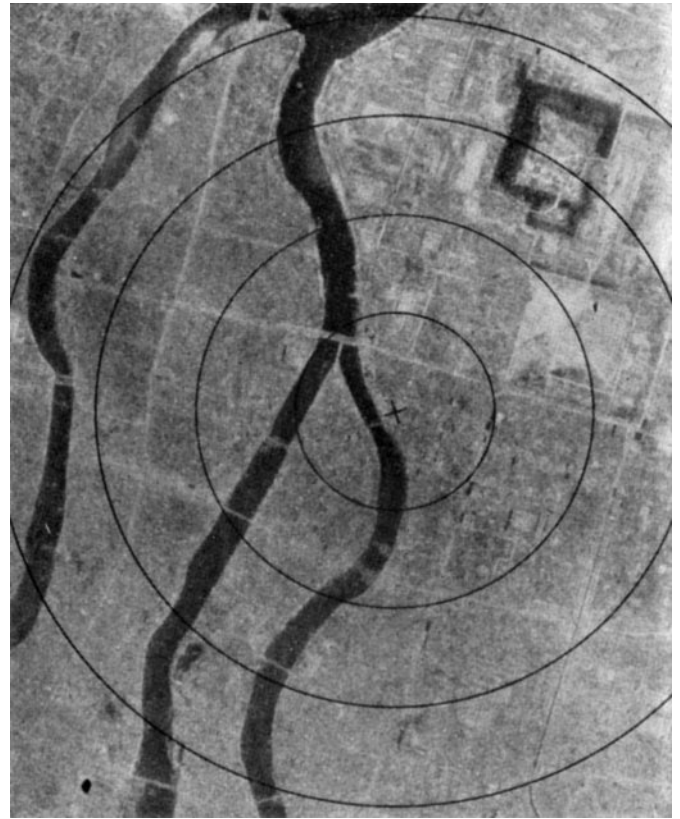
“Hersey tells of an explosion of surreal green that sprung up like black magic in the ruins of the city after the bomb. The bomb had irradiated the plants so that weeds and wildflowers sprung up in the cracks in the asphalt along the riverbanks and amid ruins of houses. In the summer of 1945 at the first nuclear test at Alamogordo, one of the creators of the atomic bomb, Robert Oppenheimer beheld the blinding light and radiant white-hot blossoming cloud rising thousands of feet into the sky and spoke from the Hindu Scripture *Bhagavad Gita* which he’d read in the original Sanskrit. ‘*Now I have become Death, the destroyer of worlds.*’”



Atomic mushroom cloud, Nagasaki, August 9, 1945 – Charles Levy, U.S. Archives at College Park, Wikimedia. Leo Szillard, the Hungarian-American physicist and inventor who had conceived the nuclear chain reaction in 1933 and patented the idea of a nuclear fission reactor in 1934, convinced his old friend Albert Einstein to sign a private letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt about the possibility of nuclear weapons, warning of the German nuclear weapon project, and advocating a program to develop the bomb, leading to the creation of the Manhattan Project that successfully developed the atomic bomb. Szillard and Einstein advocated that the atomic bomb be first demonstrated to the enemy and only used if the enemy did not then surrender. After the scientist’s warning against the use of the bomb was ignored and Hiroshima and Nagasaki were destroyed, Leo Szillard said, “Let me say only this much to the moral issue involved: Suppose Germany had developed two bombs before we had any bombs. And suppose Germany had dropped one bomb, say, on Rochester and the other on Buffalo, and then having run out of bombs she would have lost the war. Can anyone doubt that we would then have defined the dropping of atomic bombs on cities as a war crime, and that we would have sentenced the Germans who were guilty of this crime to death at Nuremberg and hanged them?”



Hiroshima before bombing – [ibiblio.org](https://www.ibiblio.org), Wikimedia



Hiroshima after bombing – [ibiblio.org](https://www.ibiblio.org), Wikimedia



Destroyed temple, Nagasaki, Japan, 1945 – Cpl. Lynn P. Walker, Jr., Marine Corps, [The Wayback Machine digital archive](https://www.waybackmachine.org/), Wikimedia

“What did the Japanese do for the people suffering from irradiation?”

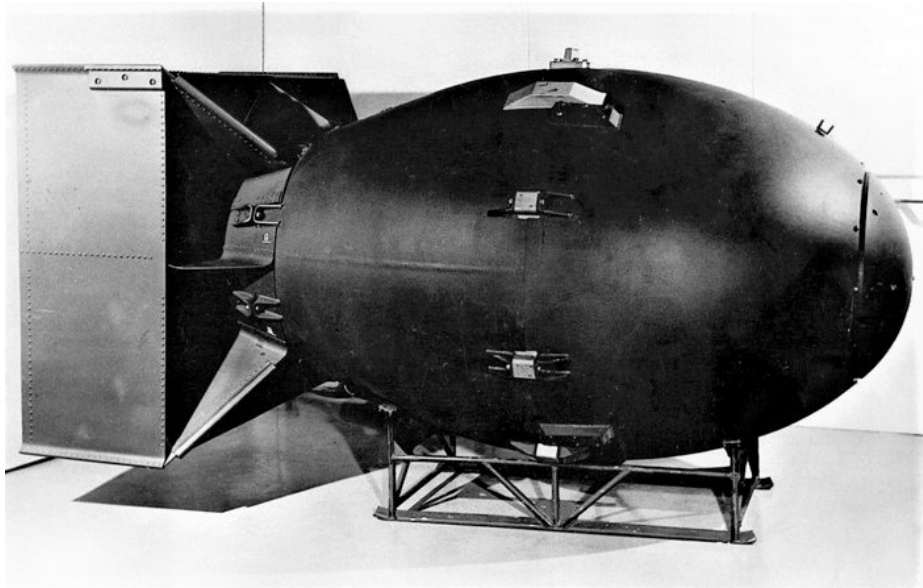
“For many years,” Yvonne said, “not much of anything. The Japanese government didn’t take moral responsibility for the victims of the bomb possibly because it was the work of the evil Americans. Nearly ten years later in 1954, the Americans tested a hydrogen bomb on Bikini atoll in the Pacific irradiating twenty-three crewmen on the fishing boat *Lucky Dragon*.”



Nuclear weapon test Bravo on Bikini Atoll – Operation Castle, United States Department of Energy, public domain, Wikimedia. “The use of [the atomic bombs] at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender because of the effective sea blockade and the successful bombing with conventional weapons . . . The lethal possibilities of atomic warfare in the future are frightening. My own feeling was that in being the first to use it, we had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages. I was not taught to make war in that fashion, and wars cannot be won by destroying women and children.” — Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy, Chief of Staff to President Truman, 1950

“That unexpected tragedy ignited a storm of protest which pushed the Diet to pass the A Bomb victims medical care law finally giving some relief to the survivors. Paradoxically, many people of Hiroshima believed their suffering was for the sake of their Emperor, the spiritual father of Japan. They didn’t hold accountable Japan’s sense of divine right which had led to the brutal conquest of China and the Philippines, the Korean comfort women, the rape of Nanking, and the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

“Just as Prussian militarism had set the stage for Hitler’s declaration of the German master race, many Japanese began to realize that the belief in racial superiority and the cult of militarism was responsible for the devastating defeat of Japan. They understood that total war which makes no distinction between soldiers and civilians had brought upon the Japanese the grotesque irradiation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. More than in



Mockup of the Fat Man nuclear bomb dropped on Nagasaki, August 9, 1945 – U.S. Department of Defense, public domain, Wikimedia. Hiroshima was destroyed on August 6 and Nagasaki decimated on August 9. At midnight, August 9, the Soviet Union invaded the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo. Facing an Allied invasion and utter destruction of Japan, Emperor Hirohito announced the surrender of Imperial Japan six days later, August 15, 1945.

any other country, the Japanese recognize the atom bomb as a weapon beyond the pale — a weapon which for the sake of humanity must be banned just as the Geneva Convention has forbidden gas warfare.”

“Before dropping the bomb,” I said, “why wasn’t there a demonstration of its demonic force? After the Japanese rulers saw what it could do, a surrender might have been negotiated. In God’s name, couldn’t there have been a way to save those hundreds of thousands of lives?”

“Truman said that the first atomic bomb was dropped on a military base to avoid killing civilians, which is absurd, since nearly all of the dead were civilians including American prisoners of war. I’ve never tracked it down but there’s a rumor that General George Marshall urged that the U.S. give the Japanese a warning before the bombing so that civilians could be evacuated. I don’t know whether this is true, but it would have been the moral thing to do before you use a weapon with that kind of radioactive devastation. The Pentagon evidently wanted to hasten the end of the war, because the military planners knew what kind of casualties they were suffering by capturing island by island from the Japanese. They would be taking an incredible number of casualties if they had to invade Japan itself, their projections coming to as many as 4 million casualties and three-quarters of a million deaths. But even if Truman was right that the thermonuclear bomb was the best way to quickly end the war, then why drop a second atom bomb on Nagasaki, 40% greater than the one dropped on Hiroshima, and destroy 74,000 additional lives, including 8,000 Christians and the Urakami Cathedral?”

“Jesus Christ!” I exclaimed, “Why would the Americans target civilians? If they’d given a



Emperor Jimmu, first Emperor of Japan, in Japanese mythology, a descendant of the sun goddess – Painting by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, public domain, Wikimedia

demonstration on a purely military target, it would've given the Japanese government time to reflect on the horror of the devastation and realize the madness of continuing a war they could not win.”

“I agree, there’s a good possibility that a surrender could have been negotiated before dropping the first bomb. Many military experts believe that a conventional bombing and a total naval blockade by submarines would have forced Japan to surrender unconditionally. American intelligence had broken the Japanese code and had learned that Japanese leaders were considering a negotiated peace with the Allies even a year before the end of the war. The Japanese civilian leaders knew they were losing the war. Despite their intransigence, the military leaders probably knew it too, but their ideological obsession made it hard for them to accept that the end was coming. Deciphered cables revealed that the Japanese Foreign Minister had said that the only obstacle to peace was *unconditional* surrender. If before dropping the radioactive bomb, the U.S. had taken a brief time out and included in their demands for surrender, conditions that would respect *kokutai*, Japan’s spiritual essence by preserving the Emperor of Japan and other symbols of Japanese sovereignty, I believe a negotiated surrender could have ended the war. Allowing the Japanese to surrender while preserving their national pride would have saved hundreds of thousands of lives. The ethical decisions made during the war will be argued until the end of time.

“Wars enflame hatred on both sides,” Yvonne continued. “Reprisal and revenge are part of the equation. It was the same in Europe. The Allies didn't spare the civilians of Dresden. The saturation bombing of Dresden, Cologne, Essen, Hamburg, and Frankfurt killed hundreds of thousands of civilians. It was a method of terror used not only against the Nazis regime but against the entire German nation.”



Renowned for its stunning baroque and rococo architecture, called “Florence on the Elbe”, Dresden was firebombed on the night of 13-14 February 1945. 773 RAF Lancaster bombers dropped thousands of tons of incendiary high explosive bombs, destroying 90 percent of the city, killing 25,000 inhabitants – Richard Peter, Deutsche Fotothek

“History — the chronicle of man, has an arbitrary nature, like a typhoon that changes course in the last hour and destroys one town rather than another. We cannot recalculate the past. If Hitler had not been born, would there have been a World War Two? What quirk of fate could set off World War Three? In today’s world, a Soviet-U.S. crisis could at any moment propel scores of American B 52 bombers and Russia’s R-7 ballistic missiles armed with nuclear warheads soaring through the stratosphere over the polar ice cap in opposing directions to annihilate millions of people in a molten mass.”



Soviet R-36M, silo based ICBM, designated by NATO as the SS-18 Satan. The U.S. withdrew from the ABM, Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty, June 2002, and Russia abandoned the START II agreement. Russia retains 54 MIRV-capable (multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle) SS-19 Satan with 10 warheads each and 40 MIRV SS-19 Stiletto with 6 warheads each and 24 MIRV RS-24 Yars with 3 warheads each to remain in service until replaced by more advanced models in 2020. As of 2011, the Minuteman III is the only U.S. land-based ICBM with 3 MIRV. – ISC Kosmotras, Wikimedia



Russian RT-2PM2 Topol-M Intercontinental Ballistic Missile deployed from transporter erector launchers – Участник:Goodvint, Wikimedia

“We live in a civilization where three quarters of the world live in grinding poverty — a civilization where the industrialized nations exploit the earth's resources without regard to future generations. As an undergraduate, I spent a year in Niger. The subsistence farmers and nomadic herdsman have a deeper understanding of what it means to live with the forces of nature than the people living in advanced societies. In the 20th century, we’re living in a cocoon created by our technology and energy production. Our cocoon assures that in the coming century, we’ll become increasingly disconnected from the process of our planet, the process we call life.”



Wodaabe, nomadic cattle-herders and traders migrating between Niger, Cameroon, and Chad, among the first ethnic groups to embrace Islam – Dan Lundberg, Wikimedia

“What can we learn from primitive people?”

“Primitive people,” Yvonne said, “saw themselves as a part of the natural world, while modern man sees himself as the *ruler* of nature. In the early days of man, the small number of people on the planet demanded little from the earth. But with the advent of advanced technology, mass farming, the growth of mega-cities, an ever-surging population has resulted in the five continents being ravaged by the voracious search for minerals and petroleum. By the end of the 21st century, we will begin to exhaust the limits of our planet. Can the earth survive the demands of a two or three billion more people? If we don’t learn to live on less, we could end up destroying the viability of the earth. Once destroyed it cannot be renewed. My thesis is if the earth is to survive, we have to revisit the wisdom of the ancients.”

“You’re saying that technology will destroy civilization?”

Yvonne laughed, “No, no, not at all. I’m saying that it’s the *irresponsible use of technology* that will destroy civilization — the industrial practices of corporations who abandon open pit copper, zinc, lead, coal, and uranium mines, the government not holding corporations responsible for pollution, no one forcing them to restore damaged sites. Mathematician Norbert Weiner said, ‘We have modified our environment so radically that we must now modify ourselves in order to exist in this new environment.’ The great amount of our resources that are used to produce destructive weapons is why Einstein has said that our ‘technology has exceeded our humanity.’ The development of consumerism for the sake of consumerism, the rapacious demand for extracting resources without regard to nature and indigenous peoples, the slaughter of our native wildlife on a mass scale, the clear cutting of forests without planned re-growth, the lack of regulation of the chemical, oil and gas industries which pollute our streams and rivers, the constant rattling of sabers which drives countries to invest in more and more armaments that do nothing to strengthen our schools, public transportation, water sources, sewage, and housing — the reliance on a system based on profits of the stock holders rather than what is beneficial to humanity — that will be the killer of civilization.”



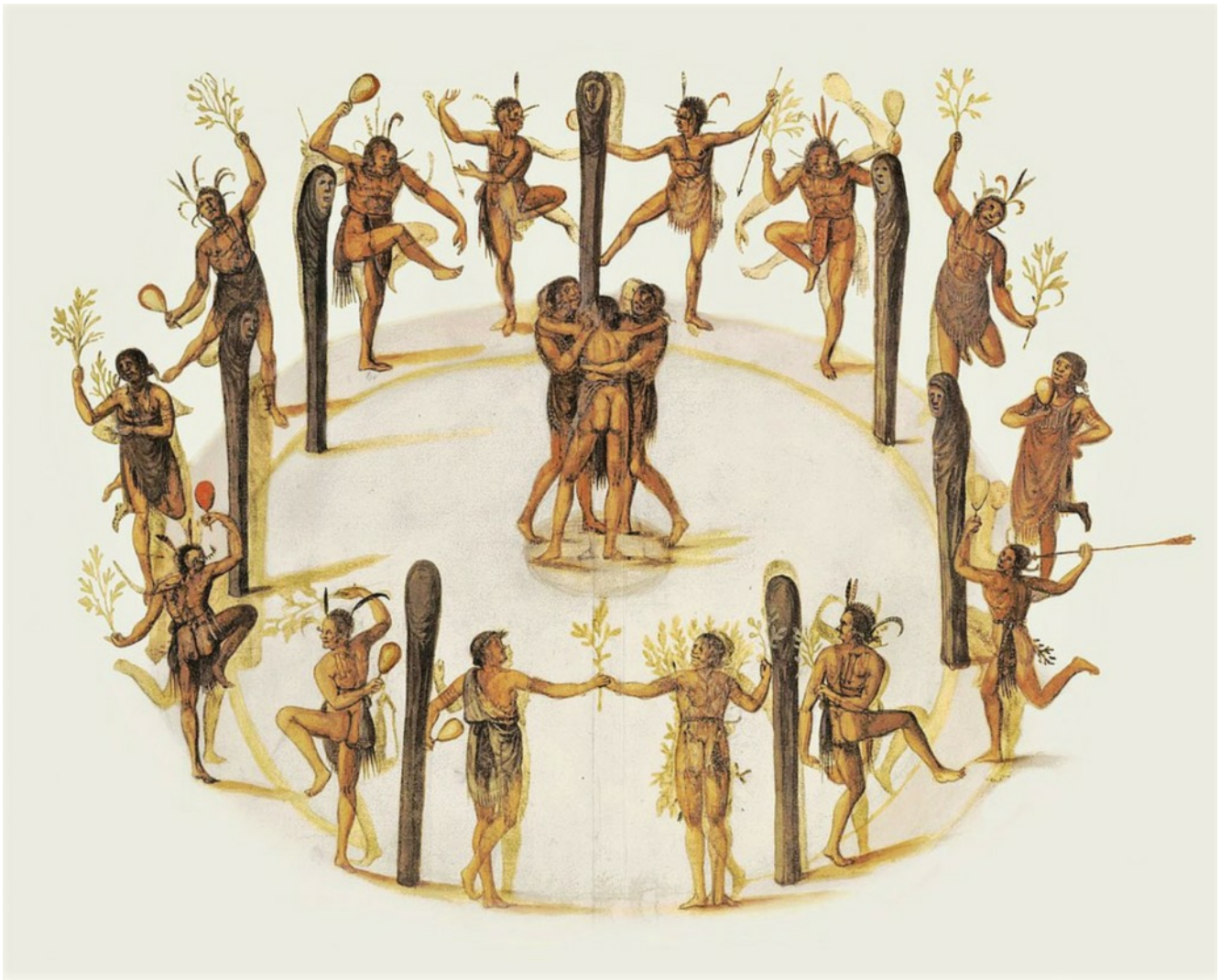
Strip mining. Open-pit copper mine near Silver City, New Mexico – Eric Guinther, Wikimedia

“Many equate science with technology,” Yvonne went on. “But science is curiosity about how the universe works, an effort to discover how things grow, how they die. Technology is the development of practical tools which are founded on the discoveries of science. Science discovers the principles of physics, while technology applies those principles to make the hydrogen bomb. Everything we use is a tool. The first stone hatchet, the first club and spear were technological inventions. The invention of the scythe allowed workers to cut wheat faster. The invention of irrigation systems and water wheels gave rise to the civilizations in the Tigris-Euphrates Delta, a great agricultural revolution which created the leisure time which allowed *Homo sapiens* to create architecture, painting, sculpture, pottery, gardening, fashion, music, dance, and the culinary arts. Without advances in agricultural technology, none of these arts would have evolved beyond a certain level. Humans would still be gathering seeds and berries, migrating over the savannas with their herds.”

“Even before the civilizations of Mesopotamia,” I said, “primitive people made music, sang and danced.”



Shiva, Lord of Dance, Tamil Nadu, India, Chola Dynasty
– Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Wikimedia



Dancing Secotan Indians in North Carolina – Watercolour painted by John White, 1585, British Museum, Wikimedia

“You’re right. Music, singing and dance are inherent in all races and civilizations. *Homo sapiens* are compulsively musicians, singers, and dancers. *Homo sapiens* are also inherently inventors — you can’t stop our species from inventing. If we want to preserve civilization as we know it, it is our responsibility to produce technology which sustains life, to create knowledge which enhances life for all, not for just a few. Beneficial technology can purify our streams and rivers and clean our air. It can produce new ways of producing power, bring irrigation and clean water to third world countries, to produce immunizations for disease, to decrease infant mortality and bring medical advances which will extend our lives. The issue is not technology in itself. Rather, it’s an ethical question we must answer. What are the limitations of our power over nature — the animals, reptiles, birds, and fish with whom we share the planet? What is our responsibility to nature?”

“In *A History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell points out that the attitude of man toward nature has varied over the course of history. The Greeks with their dread of hubris and their belief in a fate superior

even to the gods, avoided insolence toward the universe. The Renaissance glorified human pride. While it led to great works, it also led to anarchy and disaster. In modern times, man began to think of himself as almost a god. This, Russell says, leads to ‘cosmic impiety.’ The concept of truth as something ruled by forces beyond human control was a philosophic reinforcement of man’s humility something which Gautama Buddha taught. When the restraints on pride are abandoned, when modern man loses his humility before the universe, when we encourage the intoxication with man’s power, our loss of humility will end in disaster.”

“What about,” Giovanni asked, “the anti-technology movement?”

“The anti-technology movement, I replied, “has a great fear of technology’s symbiotic relationship with corporate power. With profit as their motive, can we trust the industrial complex to make the right decisions? After all, the industrialists of Germany supported Hitler’s Third Reich. It’s our responsibility as a citizen to question what technology is good and what is bad. The German-French sculptor and poet, Jean Arp said, ‘Soon silence will have passed into legend. Man has turned his back on silence. Day after day he invents machines and devices that increase noise and distract humanity from the essence of life, contemplation, and meditation.’”

“Despite the destructive results of out of control technology, science has learned much from nature that can improve life for mankind. By examining the bone structure of the wings of a vulture we discover a geometric pattern of thin bones forming a three-dimensional space frame that provides strength in the vulture’s six-foot wingspan allowing it to resist powerful currents of air. Evolution in the vulture has created an efficient structure which can be used by architects in creating the habitat of man. When I talk about revisiting the wisdom of the ancients, I don’t suggest that we return to a previous level of technology, rather I am saying that we must rediscover reverence for our planet. It’s the failure to revere nature that will destroy our civilization.”

“As a kid,” I said, “I fell in love with the romance of the American Indian. I went to the Viterbo library on weekends and read everything about American Indians I could get my hands on. You talk about the wisdom of the ancients, but the plains Indians were always warring against their neighboring tribes vying for the same hunting grounds. The Lakota Sioux, Blackfeet, Cheyenne, Crow, Arapaho, Blackfoot, Pawnee, Gro Ventre, and Kiowa were all warrior tribes, fighting for their turf and their pride of a warrior’s manhood. I remember reading about a battle in a boulder outcropping in Colorado where one tribe slaughtered the other tribe to the last man. I think there are some things primitive people did that we might not want to copy.”

“You’re right,” Yvonne said. “Tribalism is built into the human psyche. The will to conquer and protect

territory is deeply ingrained in man — us against the others. Like modern man, primitive man annihilated his neighbors. The wars of the 20th century are the wars of primitive tribes only a million times more lethal. Man has an instinctual aggressive nature which is directed against the members of his own species. Kill the neighboring tribesmen before they kill us. Animals kill because they are hungry. Men kill each other over wealth and land. When the earth was scarcely populated, aggression was a survival trait. It served to continue the species. But what happened when there was a great increase of population during the industrial revolution? The will to power, the will to control territory resulted in massive world wars of 60 to 100 million deaths. The aggressive nature of man is no longer a survival trait. Aggression has become a trait of extermination. That is our challenge, how can we restrain man's urge for aggression.”

“Ancient religions,” I said, “like the Ammonites and Phoenicians committed very cruel acts. Some sacrificed their children to the god Moloch.”

“When I speak of primitive man,” Yvonne said, “I’m talking about the culture of tens of thousands of years ago. Once man left the nomadic food gathering, hunting period and began to farm, great agrarian cultures arose like the Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Aztec, and Mayan. Elaborate beliefs and rituals evolved. The concept of God changed radically from the animism of primitive man.”



Egyptian farmer ploughing a field, 1200 BCE – Burial chamber of Sennedjem, Wikimedia

“I think instead of a historian,” I said, “you prefer being a philosopher.”

“Other than history, my baccalaureate exams were in philosophy and anthropology because the curriculum allowed me a greater scope of studies — political science, economics, humanities, literature, psychology, sociology, religion, aesthetics, physical and cultural anthropology. I’m a historian of ideas. From an interdisciplinary perspective, I follow the evolution of ideas throughout history. Bertrand Russell said, ‘To understand any age, we must understand their philosophy. And to understand their philosophy we must ourselves be philosophers’.”

Yvonne took out the thermos from her basket, poured two espressos and we finished off Céline’s *crema di mascarpone* pastries, eating in silence while the whirring wind thrashed the grass.

After a while, she began again, “Many of my best insights have come from my studies in anthropology. After reading Claude Lévi-Strauss’ *Tristes Tropiques*, I was smitten with a love of anthropology. It allowed me to step out of my own life into other cultures, other epochs of time. My book, *The Wisdom of Primitive People* owes a debt to Lévi-Strauss’ seminal work *La Pensée Sauvage*. It has been translated as *The Savage Mind*, but I would call it *The Thinking of Primitive Man*.”



Claude Lévi-Strauss, receiving the Erasmus Prize, 1973 – Bert Verhoeff, Netherlands Nationaal Archief, Wikimedia

“My fascination with anthropology led me to Margaret Mead’s *Growing up in New Guinea*, an anthropological study of the intimate lives of three New Guinea tribes from childhood to adulthood. Focusing on the gentle, mountain dwelling Arapesh, the fierce, cannibalistic Mundugumor, and the headhunters of Tchambuli, she advanced the theory that many so-called masculine and feminine characteristics are not based on fundamental biological sex differences but reflect the cultural conditioning of different societies. The Tchambuli tribe was completely different than the Arapesh. The men spent their time decorating themselves while the women worked and were practical sustainers of the family.



Margaret Meade, anthropologist, 1948 – Smithsonian Institution Archives, Wikimedia



Ruth Benedict, anthropologist, 1937 – World Telegram photographer, Library of Congress, Wikimedia

“There is a nomadic African tribe, the Wodaabe of Niger, on the fringes of the Sahara who stage a seven-day celebration at the end of the rainy season uniting the two lineages of the Wodaabe people. The dances go on for seven days and nights, a sort of endurance trial where the men elaborately adorn themselves for a beauty contest just as women do in our culture. The beautiful young men prepare for their climatic *yaake* dance by lightening their skins with a pale ocher color, shave their hairlines to heighten their foreheads and blacken their lips and eyes with kohl to emphasize the brightness of their eyes. After the three most beautiful women have chosen the most beautiful males, the young men perform frenzied dances until the sun rises, strings of beads crossing their bare chests, white ostrich plumes billowing from their heads.”

“That’s wild,” I said, “a male beauty contest.”



A Wodaabe maiden judging the beauty of men at a Guérewol Festival, Niger – Dan Lundberg, Wikimedia



Wodaabes perform *Yaake* songs and dance to impress marriageable maidens in the Guérewol Festival, Niger – Dan Lundberg, Wikimedia

“Part of the Fula people spread across West Africa, the Wodaabes of Niger were among the first ethnic groups to embrace Islam in the 17th century and one of the forces which spread Islam in Central West Africa. *Wodaabe* means ‘people of the taboo.’ The taboos found in one society are not the same taboos of another society. Mead convinced me that male and female roles in many cultures have quite opposite characteristics than our own.

“Through the lens of anthropology, I’ve have studied the role of religion in peoples’ lives. I’ve asked the question, why were there so many religions? What did they have in common? What is religion’s relationship to science? Bronislaw Malinowski said that there are no peoples however primitive without religion and magic. He discovered that primitive races in their own way have a form of scientific attitude. In studying the Trobriand Islanders and the Kula Ring in Melanesia, Malinowski saw similarities between magic and religion.



Bronislaw Malinowski with Trobriand Islander children, 1918– possibly by Stanislaw Witkiewicz, Wikimedia

“Malinowski said that both are based on mythological tradition. They both exist in the realm of the miraculous. Religion and magic are surrounded by taboos and rituals which separate their observances from the profane world. In *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* published in the early twenties, Malinowski had a big influence on the methodology of modern anthropology. He said that the anthropologist must go into the villages to observe the native’s planting, celebrating, worshipping, and mourning, recording their lives at work or play, sharing their lives day by day. The goal of the ethnographer is to grasp the native’s point of view, to realize a vision of the native’s world.

“Emile Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* taught me to search for the common factors in religions in different cultures, the universal aspects that are common to all religions. Primitive man could not live without religion. Religion marked the birth of children, the passage of puberty, marriage, and death.

The rites of passage were a form of reasoning. Rituals made life comprehensible. Religious ceremonies granted significance to the great events of life. Religion provided a balm to one's distress. Religion instilled in man a faith to face a hostile world and survive. Religion nourished the spirit with the promise that we can overcome despair. That essentially was the message of Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King."

"Emile Durkheim was influenced by Auguste Comte, the French philosopher who founded positivism and originated the discipline of sociology. Comte intended to ameliorate the malaise of the French Revolution by founding social philosophy on science, an approach which influenced not only Durkheim, but George Eliot, Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill, and Harriet Martineau, the first woman sociologist."

"A woman," I asked, "was a sociologist in the 19th century?"



Harriet Martineau, English philosopher and sociologist – Wikimedia

"Harriet Martineau was unique," she said, "for it was rare for a woman intellectual to be able to earn her living as a writer of criticism in the time of Queen Victoria. She wrote not only about public policy, but on the economic theories of Malthus, Ricardo, and Bentham. In her book, *Household Education*, published in the middle of the century, she wrote about the nurturing qualities which she believed were necessary for young girls, qualities which Martineau's mother had failed to give her as a child.

“Martineau whose ancestry was French Huguenot believed that in order to study society one must focus on all its institutions, political, religious, and social. Exhaustive social analysis is the only way we can understand men’s domination of women. In being ‘progressive’ she was accused of imitating the qualities of a man which was not what a woman was supposed to be.”

“Martineau was radical for her time. What were her thoughts about God?”

“Like many of the revolutionary thinkers of the mid-19th century, she was a philosophical atheist. She didn’t deny that there was a first cause for existence but believed that it was unknowable. She was at peace with it being unknowable. Her thoughts about God are similar to that of Bertrand Russell who’s written a great deal about Aristotle’s argument for God as being the unmoved mover.”

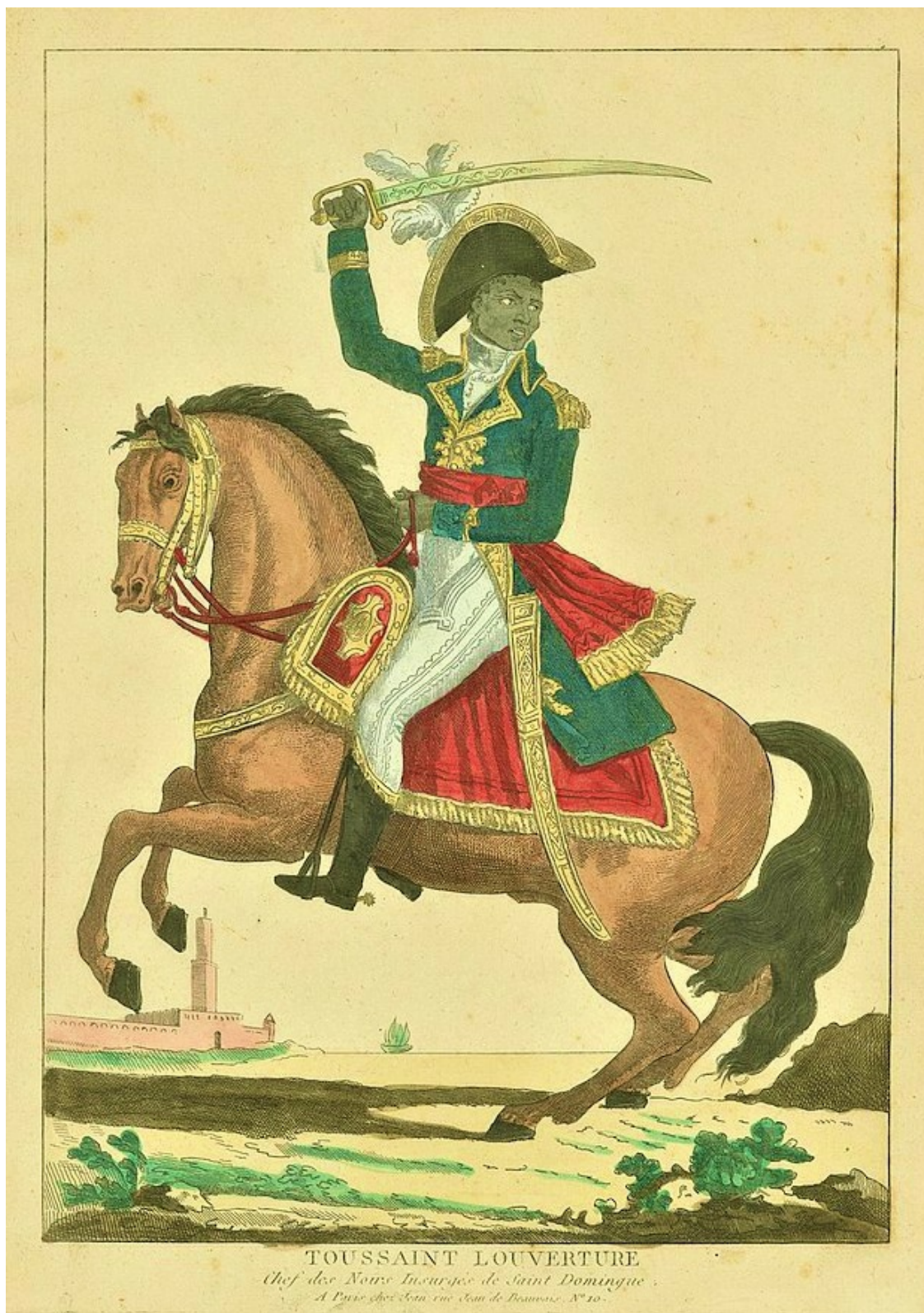
“An unmoved mover?”

“Aristotle said while God causes things to be; he motivates all things and all life, God is not caused by any previous action. When Saint Thomas of Aquinas was reconciling Aristotelian philosophy with the principles of Christianity in the late medieval period, he brought many of Aristotle’s ideas, like the unmoved mover into the theology of the Catholic Church.



Temptation of St Thomas Aquinas. Upon refusing the temptations of a prostitute, angels award the theologian with the sash of purity – Painting by Diego Velázquez, Public Domain

“Martineau is one of my mentors,” Yvonne continued. “She had a wide field of interests: she condemned slavery and wrote a novel based on the life of Toussaint L’Ouverture, the leader of the slaves who struggled for Haitian independence.



Toussaint L’Ouverture Chef des Noirs Insurgés de Saint Domingue – Engraving, John Carter Brown Library

“When Martineau traveled to the United States, she met James Madison at Montpelier, abolitionists in New England, and studied how girls were being educated. After returning from the United States, Martineau published *Society in America*, criticizing an educational system which encouraged women to be ill-educated, passive, and subservient. She believed that contrary to what she discovered in the United States, girls should be taught freedom and rationality rather than obedience.”

“In his book on religious life, Emile Durkheim said that the concept of supernatural is relatively new. The rising importance of science led to the division between natural and supernatural. The natural can be rationally explained and the supernatural cannot be rationally explained. One of the themes of my book is that for primitive man, *everything was supernatural*. During the machine age, the huge population growth led to an increase in the number of social interactions, making society more and more complex. It made it difficult for religious institutions to maintain control. Durkheim argued that although humans are inherently egoistic, the norms of their behavior, their religious beliefs and shared moral values form a collective consciousness.”



Emile Durkheim monograph, *Suicide*, a study of suicide rates in Protestant and Catholic populations, pioneered social research, distinguishing sociology from psychology and political philosophy – Public Domain, Wikimedia

“On tour, when I was alone at night, I imagined conversations with you. It’s so wonderful to come home and hear you talk. What is collective consciousness?”

“Collective consciousness,” Yvonne said, “is the glue that holds a society together. Ibn Khaldūn in the 14th century, one of the fathers of history, economics, and the social sciences, created the concept of *asabiyyah* —

social solidarity. An intellectual who advised Muslim rulers from Mesopotamia to Morocco and Spain, Ibn Khaldūn is considered one of the most important philosophers to come out of the Muslim world. Born in Tunis into an upper-class Andalusian family of Arab descent, Khaldūn observed that ideology and religions increase the cohesion of a group. Based on the rise and fall of Islamic dynasties in North Africa and Spain, Khaldūn noted that desert tribesmen had more social cohesion than the settled ruling powers. When the existing powers become corrupt and decadent, the hungrier desert tribes swept in to found a new ruling dynasty. But over time the ruling dynasties founded by the warrior invaders become corrupt and decadent themselves, and new barbarian hordes sweep in from the desert and the steppes of Asia to found new dynasties, a theory of history explaining the rise and fall of dynasties from the Mongols to the Persian and Roman Empires, with social cohesiveness being the critical cement for a dynasty's survival.”

“Expanding on Ibn Khaldūn observation, Durkheim thought that our ability to transcend our innate egoism and create a cohesive society depends upon this collective consciousness. But cohesiveness of the public will does not necessarily bring about good results. You'll remember how Hitler achieved the solidarity of the people by creating an enemy who threatened Germany from within.”

“I remember you telling me Hitler was able to convince the people that they were being oppressed by the socialists, communists, and Jews.”

“Hitler aroused in the people a cynicism and anger that conjured up a national Gestalt in tune with the Nazi takeover of the state. By fanning the flames of a conspiracy of traitors, by demonizing the Jews, Hitler created an apotheosis of the State by means of ruthless suppression, theatrically staged rallies, hundreds of thousands of people marching, torchlight processions in the night, Hitler's apocalyptic speeches whipping up a religious fervor sanctified by Leni Riefenstahl's propaganda film, *Triumph of the Will* — Leni's spiritual eulogy to the power of the state.”

“You talked about *Triumph of the Will* before,” I said. “You said that a film critic called it a diabolical Masterpiece — the repetition of images and rhythmic editing created the illusion of a triumphant German Reich.”

“Very good Giovanni. Illusion is the right word. That's the essence of propaganda — illusion. During the Nazi occupation France suffered a breakdown in social cohesion. The ultimate question for the citizens was whether to collaborate with the status quo of the German occupation or to resist it with violence. The schism between those who pragmatically collaborated with the Nazis suppression and those who resisted the Reich destroyed the cohesion of France.”



Poster for Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 propaganda film *Triumph des Willens*. Authorized by Adolf Hitler, the film proclaimed Germany's return as a global power. Led by Hitler, Germany would achieve greatness again – Wikimedia

“The reason to pay close attention to history is that events in the past color the present. Faulkner said it best, ‘The past is never dead. It’s not even past.’ Even as we die, our childhood is still with us. In an undergraduate course on American diplomacy that Emile Charreau was teaching several years ago, I wrote a paper on the history of the Panama Canal and the scandal covered up by the government, a national financial disaster which we talked about when we were discussing the Dreyfus Affair.

“I remember you telling me the Panama Canal Company went belly up and destroyed the savings of thousands of ordinary people.”

“To refresh your memory, before the Americans began work on the canal, the French were the first to attempt the gargantuan project under the leadership of Ferdinand de Lesseps who built the Suez Canal. But the enormous difficulties, the attempt to construct the canal over the mountains, the primitive state of steam shovels,

rain soaked tropics, mosquito infested jungle, twenty thousand deaths of workers from malaria and yellow fever, and financial corruption, brought the French effort to bankruptcy within twelve years of immense effort.



Share of the *Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interocéanique de Panama*, 1880. Ferdinand de Lesseps' effort to build the Panama Canal ended in bankruptcy resulting in a half-million French losing their savings.



Culebra Cut, 1896 – Doomed French attempt to build the Panama Canal through mountainous terrain – Wikimedia

“When President Theodore Roosevelt became interested in building the canal in 1903, Panama was still part of Columbia. When the negotiations over the rights and sovereignty issues of the canal, didn’t lead to the conclusion he’d desired, Theodore Roosevelt sent warships to support a Panamanian revolution.”



1903 U.S. political cartoon. Phillipe Bunau-Varilla French engineer, influenced President Theodore Roosevelt in the separation of Panama from Colombia to give the U.S. rights to build the canal – Wikimedia



1903 U.S. political cartoon. Theodore Roosevelt and his Big Stick gunboat policy in the Caribbean - William Allen Rogers Courtesy of Granger Collection

“I thought that the United States paid Panama for rights to the canal zone.”

“They made an offer,” Yvonne replied, “but not a price which the Columbians believed fair. When Columbia wouldn’t agree to their terms, the United States fomented a revolution by Panama against Columbia and backed up the Panamanian revolutionaries with American gunboats. The Columbian government couldn’t get troops through the jungle to put down the revolt and Philippe Bunau-Varilla, an engineer for the French canal company, became ambassador for Panama and negotiated the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty with the U.S. for the Canal Zone. Bunau-Varilla wasn’t even a citizen of Panama. He was French. The U.S. paid Panama only ten million dollars for rights to control the canal in perpetuity. Columbia was paid nothing. Latin America has been taken advantage numerous times by its neighbor to the north. Current dynamics are informed by bitter memories of past transgressions. Without understanding relations in the past, one cannot form a wise policy in the present. This is particularly true in Latin America which has experienced a century of gunboat diplomacy by the United States.”



President Theodore Roosevelt sitting on a steam shovel at the Panama Canal, 1906 – *New York Times* archive

“On the other hand,” Yvonne said, “while President Theodore Roosevelt was an ardent imperialist when it came to the Philippines and South America, he was a Republican who believed in regulation of industry and successively used the anti-trust laws to break up monopolies like the Standard Oil trust and induced Congress to pass the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act to halt the abuses of the meat packing industry. The great American imperialist also had a great respect for nature. After traveling by stagecoach into Yosemite Valley and camping out in the back country with the great naturalist John Muir, Roosevelt became a powerful advocate for the wildlife preserves of America’s National Parks.”



President Theodore Roosevelt riding a carriage through the Wawona Tunnel Tree during his 1903 visit to Yellowstone National Park – Doris A. and Lawrence H. Budner Theodore Roosevelt Collection, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Wikimedia

“Wasn’t John Muir the founder of the Sierra Club?”

“You’re becoming an informed American,” Yvonne said with a big smile. “During the late 19th century, there was a growing awareness of the importance of conserving nature. The United States’ first national park, Yellowstone, was established in 1872 by Congress during the administration of President Ulysses S. Grant. But it was not long after the Battle of Gettysburg that President Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Land Grant into law, protecting the majestic valley and giant sequoias of the Mariposa Grove. But the old tragedy fell on the Ahwahneechee Indians who lived in Yosemite Valley.”



Encampment of Ahwahneechee (People of the Yosemite Valley) of the Miwok tribe – 1872 Painting by Albert Bierstadt

“What happened to the Indians?”

“The Ahwahneechee tribe was removed from their homeland to a reservation near Fresno, one of the many treaties made with California Indians that was later never ratified. Roosevelt was a strong preservationist signing legislation that created five national parks, Crater Lake, Oregon, Wind Cave, South Dakota, Sully’s Hill, North Dakota, Mesa Verde, Colorado, and Platt, Oklahoma in the land of the Chickasaw. Just as important was his enactment of the Antiquities Act of 1906 that allowed future presidents to proclaim landmarks of

historic significance as national monuments, which is why Theodore Roosevelt is one of four presidents sculpted from rock on Mount Rushmore in South Dakota. By the end of his presidency, Roosevelt had proclaimed four national monuments, Devil’s Tower, Wyoming, El Morro, New Mexico, Montezuma Castle and Petrified Forest, Arizona, and a large part of the Grand Canyon. Although the National Park service came into being during Woodrow Wilson’s administration, John Muir and the Sierra Club were not able to stop the federal government from damming the Tuolumne River. It broke John Muir’s heart when Wilson approved the dam which flooded Hetch Hetchy Valley and destroyed a national treasure.”



Hetch Hetchy Valley, Yosemite, was destroyed in 1923 when the Tuolumne River was obstructed by the O’Shaughnessy Dam to create the reservoir providing water to the San Francisco Bay – Painting by Albert Bierstadt, Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts

“When I finish my gig in Paris, I’ll take you to the states to see the fabulous beauty of Yosemite.”

“I want to see Mesa Verde and the Grand Canyon too. I’d love to explore America with an Italian immigrant.”

“You’ve said ‘history is memory.’ Why is memory of history so important? What makes a great historian?”

“There’s been a shift in the focus of historians, Yvonne replied. “To be a good historian, one must understand all areas of human knowledge. Professor Marc Bloch, Professor of Economic History at the

Sorbonne said, ‘History is not the accumulation of the events of all kinds that have taken place in the past. It is the science of human societies.’ In previous centuries, history was primarily focused on warfare and political governance, kings and generals and to a far lesser degree on economics, culture, the arts, and the common man. In 1929, Historians Henri Hauser, Lucien Febvre, and Marc Bloch founded the Annales School of history. Their journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* brought radical change to historiography.”

“What’s historiography?”

“Historiography is the study of the methodology of historians — their research techniques for gathering and organizing data.”

“How did the Annales School bring a radical change to historiography?”

“The Annales school focuses on looking at the patterns of social and cultural history much like an anthropologist who collects economic statistics, medical histories, religious practices, family studies, even witchcraft and superstitions, and by deep interviews like the American anthropologist Oscar Lewis in his studies of the culture of poverty by interviewing members of a family in the vast slums of Mexico City. A common thread in the Annales School is their compassion for the suffering of marginal people, the working class, and those on the fringes of society. In the past, most historical sources emanated from the literate wealthy classes, not from the semi-literate world of slaves, serfs, peasants, laborers, craftsmen, and the urban poor. Historians from the Annales School, Febvre, Bloch, Hauser, and Braudel examine the daily life of the common folk, not the kings, statesmen, and nobles.”

“Actually,” Yvonne added, “there was a precedent for this shift in historical focus. When we talked about existentialism, I said that in Voltaire’s 18th century, *Essay on the Customs and the Spirit of the Nations*, he departed from the tradition of narrating political and military events. He was the first one to write history without a theological bias and included the customs, culture, social history, arts, and sciences. Voltaire was a pretty good historian.”

“I see what you’re saying,” I said. “The historian gathers information on the lives of all segments of society including common people and the poor and reconstructs a coherent image, a meticulous portrait of another time.”

“That’s well said, Giovanni. In my book, I establish that the historian must understand the living before



A satirical polemicist, Voltaire criticized intolerance, religious dogma, and the French institutions of his day – Engraving by P. Baquoy, painting by Monsiau, 1795 – Wikimedia

being able to understand the past. Marc Bloch quotes an old Arab proverb, ‘Men resemble their times more than they do their fathers.’ Continual technological revolutions have widened the psychological gap between generations. Ignorance of the past leads to misunderstanding of the present.’

“Understanding popular culture and human consciousness is the mark of a master historian. Written when he was a prisoner of the Nazis in 1944, Marc Bloch’s *Méthodologie Historique, The Historian’s Craft*, 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 livelihood depends upon it. Bloch advocates that the historian be skeptical. Like Bertrand Russell, he advises social scientists to not be too quick to believe. They must question. They must doubt.”

“A historian,” I said, “tries to discover what is real and what is unreal. What is truth and what is a lie.”

“A historian cannot merely accept what he’s told, but must dig deeper, like an investigative reporter in the process of discovering something that the witness has no intention of revealing. It reminds me of the directorial style of Robert Bresson who uses nonprofessionals in his films, having them repeat the scenes until

a totally naturalistic expression appears. Like the historian, Bresson is searching for not what the actor chooses to reveal, but something deeper, something that they are unaware that lies inside.

“Bloch criticized the compulsion of historians for making judgments. He called it the ‘satanic enemy of true history.’ I guess,” Yvonne laughed, “I’m one of those satanic enemies, for I’m not a historian in the orthodox sense. As I said in the beginning, I’m a historian and philosopher of ideas. I’m not Marc Bloch’s kind of academic historian. I draw conclusions from my research which suggest a better way of being. As a philosopher, I have ethical concerns.”



Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir – Photo by Alice Schwarzer. Sartre, author of *Being and Nothingness*, and de Beauvoir, author of *The Second Sex*, challenged the cultural and political status quo of the post-war era, and criticized the spiritual void of *mauvaise foi*, bad faith, a major theme of their work.

“I understand. Like Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, you believe in advocating change.”

“I once told you that while Bertrand Russell’s and Jean-Paul Sartre’s philosophies are quite different, they share one common thread — Voltaire’s and Marx’s view that a philosopher is valuable not only for interpreting the world but for his ability to bring about change in society. The philosopher must actively apply his conclusions to the world. One of my chief areas of concern is that the historians of the 19th century showed little interest in the power relationships between the sexes—obviously because history was dominated by male writers. History conditions the present. That’s what I bring to my students. History gives us a chance to reflect on the evolution of ideas, trace the course of change over time. We can learn from the ideologies and *gestalt* that are responsible for a culture to flourish or fail.”

“You talked about history’s relationship with science, but how does religion affect history?”

“As Heraclitus said, everything is in flux, everything changes. Religions of man are always evolving. The religion of primitive man was much different from Roman Catholicism, or Islam, or Buddhism. But as much as they have differed throughout time, their beliefs serve a common need. We long for spiritual leaders to inspire us to overcome the hardships of life. The Black church, W.E.B. Du Bois said, was the first institution in American in which blacks had unique control, the only institution in which they were the masters. The Black Church was a threat to the established order. Because of that threat, whites burned down black churches.

“The Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston,” Yvonne continued, “is a good example. Charleston, which was called Charles Town in the colonial period, was the fourth largest port city in the Colonies, one of the most beautiful cities in America with elegant architecture built by the wealth from rice plantations and the largest slave market in America. One of the towering mansions on East Bay Street was owned by Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, a graduate of Oxford, signer of the U.S. Constitution, John Adam’s vice-presidential candidate and the Federalist presidential candidate running against Thomas Jefferson’s during his run for a second presidential term. Due to Jefferson’s popularity due to the Louisiana Purchase and a booming economy, Pinckney was defeated in a landslide. Although he believed that slavery was essential to the South Carolina economy, Pinckney agreed to the 1807 Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves which Jefferson and Congress passed into U.S. law.”

“Did that act,” I asked, “end the importation of slaves?”

“Did that act end the importation of slaves?”

“Not altogether. Slave ships were active in America until the Civil War. While Pinckney agreed to the U.S. ban on new importation of slaves, he was against any form of emancipation and upon his death bequeathed hundreds of slaves to his family. A few years ago, Emile and I attended the music festival in Charleston where I was astounded by the vast number of architectural styles, Georgian, Greek revival, Italianate, and Queen Anne. My favorite was the Federal architecture of the Nathaniel Russell house on Meeting Street with an oval shaped dining room filled with the afternoon light.”

“But you were talking, Giovanni said, “about the burning of black churches.”

“Sorry, I got waylaid. When I talk about Charleston, I get carried away for I love the architecture. Because of the way whites treated the slaves, Morris Brown and Denmark Vesey left the white church in

Charleston and the black members of the church followed them out the door to organize the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, an offshoot of the AME Church in Philadelphia, the first independent black denomination in the United States. This aroused a lot of fear in the whites of Charleston who had prevented blacks from assembling in groups.

“One reason for whites to be alarmed, was that at this time in Charleston, blacks far outnumbered the whites. The South Carolina ordinances allowed blacks to worship only during daylight hours and they could only attend a church which had a white majority. In fact, churches without a white majority were not permitted to exist. To prevent ideas of freedom from circulating among the slaves, literacy was forbidden to the blacks. Believing that the classes in religion at the new black church were a school for slaves, the City Council had the members arrested, their leaders sentenced to fines and lashed at the stake.

“Then they burned down the new Church?”

“That came later, after the rebellion of the slaves.”

“Tell me about it.”

“Denmark Vesey was the eye of the hurricane. His vision, recruitment of lieutenants and charismatic hold over the slaves nearly made the rebellion succeed. Before I talk about the rebellion, I’ll tell you how how Vesey won his freedom.”

“Doesn’t sound possible in Charleston.”

“Vesey won his freedom by luck combined with a keen intelligence and forceful personality. Even as a teenager he had a special aura of authority and intelligence which caught the eye of a slaver. During the Revolutionary war, Captain Joseph Vesey, took on a cargo of 400 slaves in St. Thomas including a fourteen-year-old boy of great beauty and intelligence. Vesey made the boy his pet, giving him new clothes and naming him Télémaque. When he arrived in Haiti, he sold Télémaque, but when the captain returned to the island, the new owner demanded that Vesey take him back because he was having epileptic seizures. Under the slave law, Vesey was forced to take him back and oddly enough the boy never had another seizure. Télémaque had fooled his new owner so that he could return to Captain Vesey, eventually becoming his master’s interpreter because he had a gift for languages, picking up French and Spanish besides English. When Captain Vesey retired after the American Revolution, Télémaque came with his master to Charleston where his master hired him out as a carpenter.

At that moment, a stroke of fate changed Télémaque life. He won a large sum in the city lottery and bought his freedom from Vesey, taking the name of his former owner and the name of Denmark, the country which ruled St. Thomas where he was born. Denmark set up his own carpentry shop and married an enslaved woman. However, the children he had by her, by rule of the law, *partus sequitur ventrem*, dictated that children were ruled enslaved due to the mother's status rather than the father's. When Denmark tried to buy his wife's freedom, her master refused to sell her for any price, condemning the children of a freedman to a life of slavery."

"I see, the whites had everything figured out."

"The moment that Denmark realized that he couldn't free his wife and kids, I'm sure was the minute he decided to start a revolution. The only way he could free his children was to revolt and free all the slaves. Another factor which strengthened Vesey's ability to revolt was that twenty-years before, there'd been a successful revolution of slaves in the Caribbean."

"Where was that?"

"In the French colony of Saint-Domingue, known today as Haiti. At the beginning of the 19th century there were 800,000 African slaves working on French plantations, a third of the entire Atlantic slave trade,



Slaves being transported to the landowners' plantations in Brazil, 1830 – Drawing by Johann Moritz Rugendas, Wikimedia

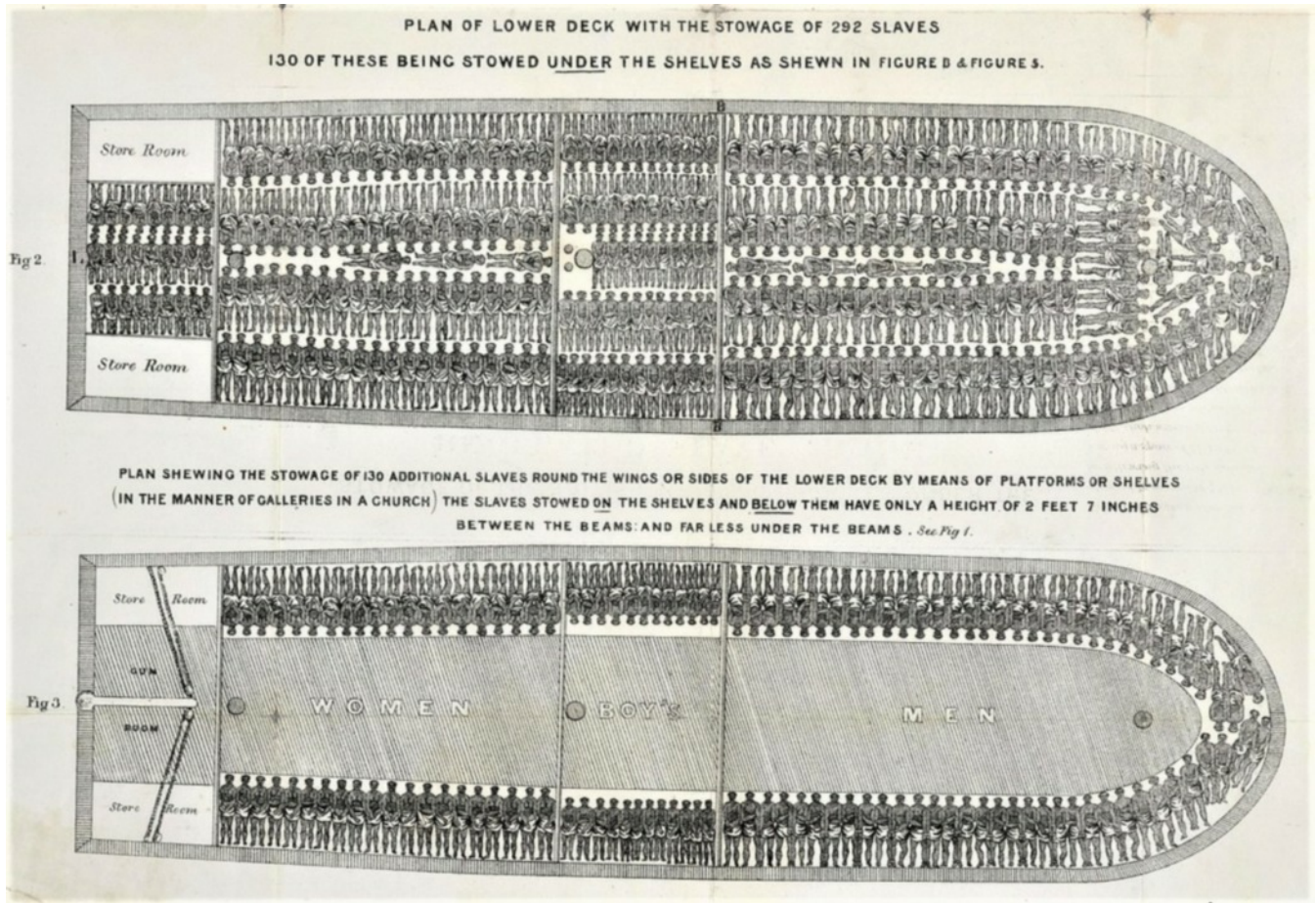
outnumbering the whites by four to one. The great majority of Africa slaves were transported to the Caribbean and Brazil. The Portuguese were the first to enter the slave trade and number one in the number of slaves transported, followed by the British, French, Spanish, and Dutch. In Britain, merchants of Bristol and Liverpool flourished in the slave traded, one out of every four ships leaving Liverpool was a slave trader. African scholars call it the *Maafa*, which in Swahili means ‘the great disaster.’ Of fifteen million enslaved Africans, 400,000 were brought to the U.S., 1 million to Muslim countries, 1.5 million to Spanish Central America, 4 million to the French, British, Dutch and Danish plantations in the Caribbean and 5 million to Brazil.”



A Liverpool Slave Ship – Painting by William Jackson, Merseyside Maritime Museum

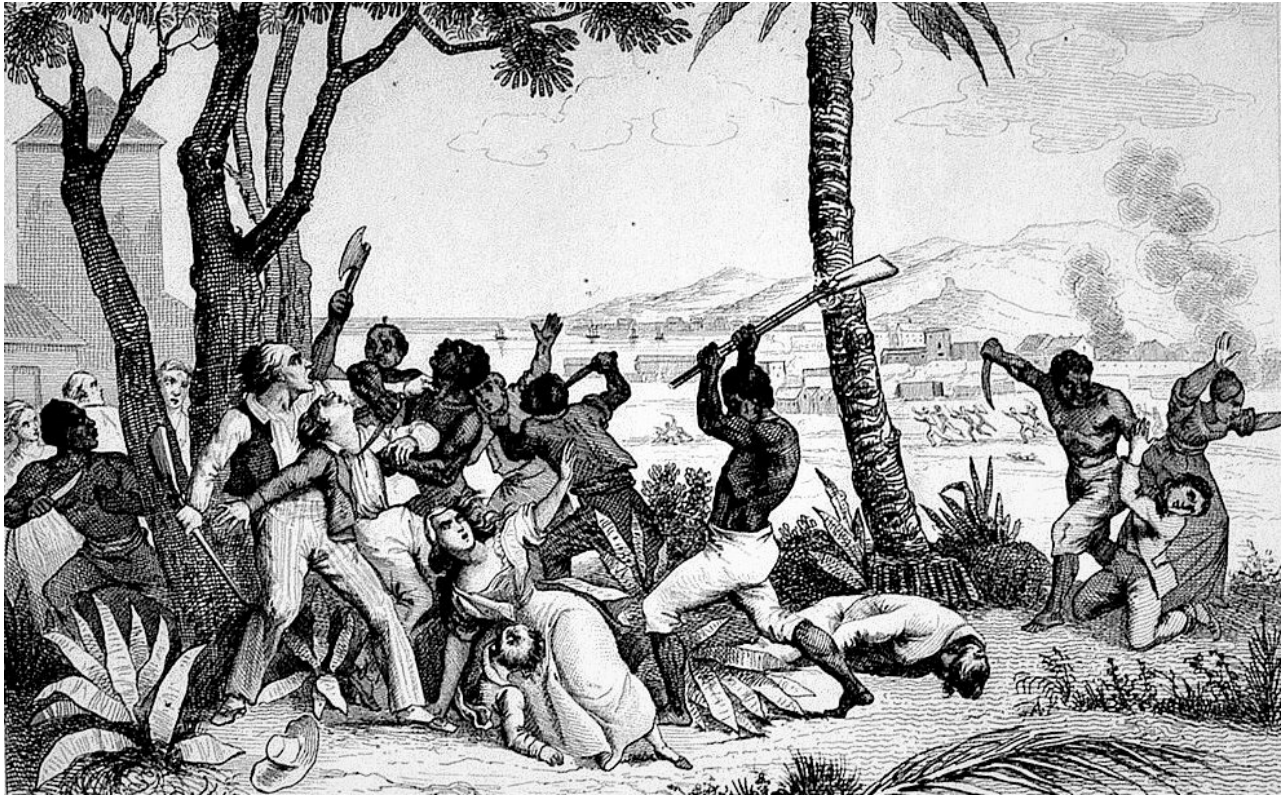
“Wait a minute,” I said, “Those figures add up to about 12 million. I thought you said 16 million.”

“Three to four million died during the voyage,” Yvonne replied. “Millions more died during the African wars for procuring slaves to be sold to European traders. Of course, the number are only conjectures. Records are hard to come by during centuries of the slave trade out of Africa. Some scholars say it was closer to 20 million with millions more during hundreds of years of the Muslim slave trade.



Stowage of the British slave ship *Brookes* under the regulated slave trade act of 1788 – Plymouth Chapter of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Library of Congress

“In Haiti, the French Revolution had a big effect on the slaves. The egalitarian ideals of the Revolution inspired the slaves to dream of freedom. After the National Assembly in Paris granted suffrage to freed blacks in the colonies, the white planters refused to comply and violence broke out all over Saint-Domingue between the French forces and Creoles backed by Spain and Britain, both sides recruiting black slaves, free blacks, and mulattoes to fight in the civil war. Originally, the revolutionary leader, Toussaint Louverture, sided with the Spanish, but when the Jacobins, led by Maximilian Robespierre in the French National Convention, abolished slavery in the colonies, Toussaint switched his allegiance from the Spanish to the French.



"Burning of the Plaine du Cap - Massacre of whites by the blacks." Slaves set fire to plantations, torched cities and massacred the white population, 1791 – Illustration by Martinet and Masson, France Militaire, Wikimedia



Battle of Vertières, 1803 – Illustration by Auguste Raffet, engraving by Hébert. *Histoire de Napoleon*, M. de Norvins, 1839, Wikimedia



Revolution. *La Liberté guidant le peuple* – Painting by Eugène Delacroix, Louvre Museum

“After the British general signed a treaty with Toussaint lifting the British blockade on Saint-Domingue in exchange for his promise that he wouldn’t export the black revolution to Jamaica, Toussaint took military control over most of Hispaniola. Without consulting France, Toussaint appointed himself governor for life and drafted a new constitution which confirmed the abolition of slavery and established a multiracial society composed of blacks, whites, and mulattos with a new constitution which declared: ‘All men are born, live, and die free and French.’

“But Toussaint’s moment of freedom didn’t last long, for as soon as a time of reduced hostilities appeared in Europe, Napoleon sent an army of 20,000 under the command of his brother-in-law, General Charles Leclerc to invade Haiti and depose Toussaint Louverture. With many fewer troops and guns, Toussaint’s military genius allowed him to create a stalemate which forced General Leclerc to negotiate. In exchange for a guarantee of the abolishment of slavery and amnesty for his generals, Toussaint agreed to lay down his sword and retire to his plantation. But Toussaint’s enemies conspired to have him arrested and imprisoned in France. But Toussaint’s dream of freedom for Saint-Domingue lived on. His followers renewed the fight against General Leclerc’s and Vicomte de Rochambeau’s 50,000 French troops who were decimated by yellow fever and malaria.”

“Rochambeau, was he the general who helped George Washington defeat the British at Yorktown?”

“No, the Vicomte was the son of General Jean-Baptiste Rochambeau. Historians say that the Vicomte’s brutality enraged the blacks and *gens de couleur* and united them against the French. When war resumed in Europe, Napoleon was forced to sell the Louisiana Purchase to Thomas Jefferson and withdraw his troops from Saint-Domingue. One year after Toussaint’s death in a French prison, his followers declared Haiti’s independence. After 300 years of colonial rule, Toussaint’s slave revolt established the first black republic of Haiti.”

“But what does this have to do with Charleston?” I asked.

“A great deal,” Yvonne responded. “Fearing that the creation of a slave republic would arouse American slaves to rebellion, the U.S. banned slaveholders from importing Haitian slaves, though in many cases the ban was ignored by the plantation owners. Due to the widespread fear of a slave rebellion, Jefferson refused to accord Saint-Domingue diplomatic recognition while at the same time, he allowed weapons and contraband goods to reach Saint-Domingue because he wanted to prevent France from rebuilding an empire in the Western Hemisphere. It was not until 1863 that the United States finally recognized Haiti.”

“That sounds like,” I said, “working at cross purposes.”

“The history of diplomacy is full of cross purposes. Jefferson had reason to be concerned for the Haitian Revolution set off a wave of immigration to Charleston. With their plantations in ruins from the war and Governor-General Jean-Jacques Dessalines’ massacre of the whites in Haiti, many planters fled to Charleston bringing their French speaking slaves with them. After the wave of settlers from Barbados, a wave of French Huguenots came to found three French language newspapers and a French theater. The reputation of Charleston for religious tolerance drew Sephardim refugees from Europe, becoming the largest community of Jews in colonial North America. The slaves had come from many places on the Guinea coast, Angola, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria, many who were Muslim and spoke Arabic. The slaves brought by the planters from Saint Domingue, called the ‘French Negroes,’ spread news of the successful revolution in Haiti which over time enflamed the Carolina slaves’ longing for freedom. The French Revolution’s proclamation that all men were equal had a powerful effect on rebels like Denmark Vesey. To memorialize the French abolition of slavery in Saint Domingue, he selected the day that the Bastille was destroyed, 14th of July as the day the slaves would rise in revolt.”

“I see your point,” I said. “As you’ve said before, one event triggers another event which 10 or 50 or

100 years later produces another and then another. You might call it the pool table theory of history.”

“While that has some merit,” Yvonne laughed, “I think that the analogy might break down quickly. Vesey was sixty years old, a minister of the African Church, well versed in the Old Testament and a master of the Israelites’ Exodus from Egypt. Vesey was much like Nat Turner who was called the prophet by the slaves who followed him in a revolt nine years later in Virginia. Like Nat, Vesey was often seen reading the Bible, praying and receiving words from God. Vesey told the Charleston slaves that they were the Israelites of the present, the chosen people of God who he would lead to freedom. It was not the first time that a charismatic messianic leader had led a slave revolt in Charleston. Eighty years before, an Angolan slave by the name of Jemmy led a group of twenty slaves in breaking into a country store, seizing weapons and gunpowder and beheading the white owner. Recruiting a hundred slaves the rebels headed for freedom in Spanish Florida. Apprehended at a river crossing by the Charleston militia which applied the severe Barbadian slave code adopted in the 17th century. On their return to Charleston, the militia killed their black prisoners, cut off their heads and set them up on every Mile Post. The Stono River Rebellion engraved a memory upon Vesey’s generation. They knew their fate if they failed.

“It was the time of the bitter debate in Congress over Missouri’s application to be admitted as a slave state. Senator Rufus King of New York declared that Congress had the power to prohibit slavery in a new state. Vesey said that Mr. King was a friend of the blacks a man who would fight against slavery until the South emancipated the slaves. Vesey made much of the debate in Congress on the Missouri Compromise, telling the slaves that Congress had ended the debate by making all men free.



The United States in 1819, shortly before Denmark Vesey’s rebellion in Charleston. The Missouri Compromise prohibited slavery in the unorganized territory of the Great Plains (dark green) and permitted it in Missouri (yellow) and the Arkansas Territory (blue.) – United States Geological Survey, Wikimedia

“Vesey told the slaves that they were being held in bondage against the laws of the United States. Now was the time to take back their freedom. Although Vesey completely misrepresented the Missouri Compromise, the debate in Washington was the harbinger of the devastation to come. When former president Thomas Jefferson heard of the compromise which admitted Missouri as a slave state and Maine as a free state, he said that a principle based on a geographical line cutting across the United States at a latitude 36°30’ would never be obliterated. It was the death knell of the union.”

“You were talking,” I said, “about Vesey starting a new church. With the prohibitions against learning and freedom of assembly, I would think that the creation of the church would enrage the whites.”

“Indeed, it did. When the leaders of Charleston suppressed the African Church with a membership of two or three thousand, it played right into Vesey’s plans. The suppression supplied the catalyst for revolt. Vesey chose able lieutenants, Jack Pritchard, an African priest from Mozambique, known as Gullah Jack, a conjurer and shaman in Africa who commanded the respect of an African king from the country slaves, possessed immense influence over the slaves in their clandestine meetings on river plantations reached by boat under cover of darkness.”

“I could see this story as a powerful movie.”



Slave rebellion – History of American conspiracies, a record of treason, insurrection, rebellion in the United States of America, from 1760 to 1860 – Orville James, Library of Congress

“Don’t hold your breath. It’s not going to happen in America. Another of Vesey’s lieutenants was Peter Poyas, a ship-carpenter, a natural born military leader, who planned the night attack, prepared a list of the arsenals and gunsmith shops where arms and ammunition were for sale and organized a mounted troop to comb the streets to stop the white resistance. The conspirators trusted no house slaves who were close to the masters, instead relying on the country slaves and the French slaves from Saint Domingue who had long before been seduced by the song of freedom. Little by little, the slave revolt built a network of thousands in the plantations in the lowlands of South Carolina. Since the weekend was the time slaves came into town, it wasn’t unusual for a thousand to arrive for shopping and errands, a natural cover for an unusual number of country blacks on the day of insurrection. The plan was to form a coordinated attack on the arsenal, seize the powder magazine, secure weapons, set fire to the city and kill every white on sight, liberate all the slaves, commandeer the ships in the harbor and sail to freedom in Saint Domingue, the republic of liberated Africans. When some protested the killing of the ministers, women, and children, in his magisterial voice, Vesey would read to the slaves from the Old Testament about the invasion of Palestine in Zechariah 14: 1-3. ‘Behold the day of the Lord cometh... For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the Lord go forth and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.’”

“Vesey’s insurrection,” Yvonne said warming to her story, “was the most intricately planned revolt ever mounted by American slaves and it came close to succeeding. But it was impossible to keep word from leaking out. Fearing betrayal from a house slave, Vesey pushed the date up to June, but a slave who heard word of the uprising told his master that thousands of slaves were going to rise up and kill the whites. Once the plot was betrayed, the leaders were swiftly arrested and interrogated. The thing that astounded the slave owners of Charleston was that the slaves who the masters had trusted the most, were the ones most determined to kill them.”

“The owners,” I said, “were blind to the true feelings of their slaves.”

“The masters had convinced themselves that slaves liked being slaves. The Governor of South Carolina, concerned by the secrecy of the trial and the inability of the defendants to confront accusers even though they faced capital punishment, asked an legal opinion of the Attorney General who ruled that under the state Constitution slaves weren’t protected as freedmen by *habeas corpus*, which since the time of the Magna Carta

rules that no free man shall be seized, imprisoned, exiled, or deprived of freedom except by judgment of his peers and without due process of law. The few who were in the closed courtroom were the masters of the accused slaves. The slave was represented by and interrogated by his master. The slave had no rights except through his master. In court, Vesey skillfully cross-examined the witnesses against him. When it appeared that the evidence was overwhelming, he presented the argument: why would a slave who had been freed, a man of impeccable reputation with wife and children and a successful carpentry shop, sacrifice everything he'd worked for so many years? If the court found this incredible, then why not give him the benefit of the incredibility? But his defense was in vain and the court condemned him to die. On the day that Denmark Vesey was hung, the South Carolina militia and federal troops were called out to suppress any demonstration by the slaves. Although the city passed an ordinance that any slave who wore a badge of mourning would be flogged with thirty-nine lashes, dressed in mourning the slaves stood in silence as Denmark Vesey was hung.”

“Was Denmark’s death the end of the black church in Charleston?”

“Convinced that black religion was the origin of the uprising, Charleston officials ordered the church destroyed and the church was burned to the ground. With their church suppressed, the slaves had to worship in secret until the end of the Civil War. But after the Civil War brought emancipation, the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church was rebuilt by architect Robert Vesey, the son of Denmark Vesey.”

Yvonne opened the wicker basket, pulled out a bottle of effervescent water, poured a glass for me and one for herself and sat thoughtfully her eyes cast down. After a time, she continued her story. “For a couple of centuries, the spirituals sung by slaves in their churches, helped the African Americans endure the chains of slavery. Karl Marx called religion the *anodyne of the masses*. But if it is indeed a drug, there is a universal need for it. We mortals dream of immortality. We crave immortality. Our belief in eternal life is our wish to continue our psyche existence as we have existed in this lifetime. Though it is hard to explain how this is possible once our souls lose our corporeal bodies. Most religious faiths reassure our yearnings for immortality. Belief in God and life everlasting soothes our anxieties of death. Malinowski saw that the function of religion and magic was to ritualize man’s optimism, to strengthen his faith in the victory of hope over fear.”

“Through eons, life has been hard for homo sapiens. Just getting enough to survive was the daily task of the great masses of mankind, right down to this moment in time. While the Gestapo executed our resistance heroes, we struggled to find enough to eat. People need psychological support. It was the role of the family and the tribe to provide this support. But above all, it was the shaman or priest who negotiated with the powers of the

universe. Ever since our evolution from more primitive forms, we have nourished the need for spiritual inspiration — to reach out to the divine. Music, dance, meditation, incantations, and prayer are our ways of communicating with the divine.



Steeple of “Mother Emanuel”, African Methodist Episcopal church, the oldest AME church in the south – Spencer Means, Wikimedia. The original church was burned down by whites after co-founder and rebel abolitionist Denmark Vesey was executed in 1822 for leading the Charleston Rebellion. Led by architect Robert Vesey, son of Denmark, the congregation rebuilt the church between 1865 and 1872. Demolished by an earthquake in 1886, the current church was constructed in 1891-1892 on Calhoun Street. On June 17, 2015, 21-year-old white supremacist, Dylann Roof shot and killed nine people at a prayer meeting in the church. The victims included South Carolina State Senator [Clementa Pinckney](#), [Cynthia Hurd](#), [Depayne Middleton-Doctor](#), [Sharonda Coleman-Singleton](#), [Susie Jackson](#), [Myra Thompson](#), [Tywanza Sanders](#), [Ethel Lance](#), and [Daniel Simmons](#).



San Bushman rock art North of Mossel bay, Cape Town, South Africa – Andrew Moir, Wikimedia

“Before it was repressed, ecstatic dancing was common in 12th century Catholic churches. Ecstatic dance and rhythmic drumming have been practiced throughout history to alter consciousness — from prehistoric man, to the maenads of the wine-god Dionysus in ancient Greece, to the Sufi dervishes of the Mevlevi order whose Sama whirling dance represents man’s ascent to a beatific state of being.



Mevlevi dervishes whirling in Pera, painting by Jean-Baptiste van Mour – Rijksmuseum Amsterdam



A Bacchanalian Revel before a statue of Pan, 1632 – Nicolas Poussin, National Gallery, Wikimedia



Contemporary ecstatic dance – Viapastrengo, Wikimedia

“Ecstatic dance is a form of meditation which relieves the stress of our ordinary lives and helps us attain serenity. The music of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance was composed for the glory of God. It gave us a glimpse into his presence. Religion interprets the calamities of nature, the failures of fortune, thereby allowing us to transcend the pain of life. Like Sisyphus, we must seek this transcendence again and again each day of our lives.”

“Which faiths have influenced your ideas of God?”

“Like Lao-Tzu, a Chinese sage of the 5th century B.C., I don’t believe in a personal or creator God. The Tao, or ‘The Way’ that Lao-Tzu speaks of, implies the essential, unnamable process of the universe, infinite and eternal, the mysterious force underlying and sustaining all things. I think of the words of Walther Rathenau, ‘We are not here for the sake of possessions, or of power, or of happiness, but we are here to transfigure the divine out of the human spirit.’ Lao-Tzu didn’t create a religion but rather a philosophical path, a way to live in harmony with nature and mankind. When Master Zhuangzi, the author of one of the great philosophical works of China, was asked where the Tao was, he said, “It is in the ant, the grass, even in excrement.”



Xuankong Temple, The Hanging Monastery built into a cliff, Mount Heng, Shanxi province, China – [Zhangzhugang, Wikimedia](#)



Portrait of Baruch de Spinoza, 1665 – Unknown artist, Gemäldesammlung der Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüchel, Germany, Wikimedia

“God is in all things,” I said. “And all things are in God.”

“The idea,” Yvonne went on, “that God is omnipresent throughout the universe has many followers. The Portuguese Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza believed that individual souls are not things, but merely aspects of the divine Being. He said that the greatest good is the union we have with the whole of nature. The Brahmins of India believe that virtue lies in the recognition of our identification with all other selves—the sense of union with all things. The British philosopher and theologian, Alan Watts said, “But I’ll tell you what hermits realize. If you go off into a far, far forest and get very quiet, you’ll come to understand that you’re connected with everything.”

“Did Spinoza believe in personal immortality? There’s an afterlife?”

“Spinoza didn’t believe in personal immortality as Christians believe, but rather that the mind of God is all of the mentality scattered over space and time. God is the diffused consciousness that animates the world. Spinoza’s ideas on metaphysics got him in trouble with the Talmud Torah congregation of Amsterdam which issued a *cherem* excommunicating and expelling him from the people of Israel. The record of censure said, ‘Cursed be he by day and cursed be he by night; cursed be he when he lies down. The anger and wrath of the Lord will rage against this man and bring upon him all the curses which are written in this book, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven.’”

“They didn’t mince words.”

“It’s believed that the Jewish community censured Spinoza because his ideas were also opposed to Christianity and they didn’t want to bring down on them the same religious persecution that forced them to flee Portugal. Sufism, a mystical form of Islam, has pantheistic beliefs like Spinoza’s. The Sufi believes that by quelling the self, it’s possible to maintain a union with the divine in which the human self dissolves into the infinite. I believe everything is the divine process, the cycle of life and death. Not only man, but all of nature has a soul. I believe if we desecrate nature, we are desecrating God. I believe that the divine is not a male god existing somewhere outside of nature. The divine is both male and female. The divine is the life force itself.”

“Many nineteenth philosophers believed that the force of will is paramount, Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson, and in America, William James and John Dewey. Before them, Schopenhauer said the life force



Sufi Mausoleum. Tomb of Shah Rukn-e-Alam in Multan, Pakistan, “City of Saints” – ZainShadid117, Wikimedia

is the key to existence. Schopenhauer, a German philosopher, had a painful childhood and a crazy mother. Schopenhauer was unique among philosophers in the 19th century for unlike the others, he focused on sex. He said the force of procreation and the accompanying romantic impulse is an immensely powerful force lying invisible in our psyche. Schopenhauer believed that Will is dominant over intellect. Mankind's will to survive is an expression of the Will of the universe.

“When I spend long hours in the fields in Vezelay, I see the will to survive in animals and birds. All of wildlife constantly forages for food and water. They improvise. They scavenge. Philosophically speaking, animals are utilitarians. They're opportunists. Nothing is wasted. Evolutionary survival traits guarantee that they will propagate enough offspring to overcome high mortality rates due to predators. In all wildlife at every moment I see the powerful will to live.”

“I used to sit on a hilltop,” I said, “and admire the distant outline of Orvieto perched on its high tufa cliffs. One day I was watching a hawk circling on the wind for a half an hour not once flapping its wings, gliding in circles, rising and falling on invisible currents of air. Then at last, the hawk swiftly dived on its prey. Without predators, nature would get out of whack. That's why we have annoying bugs like mosquitoes and flies. They provide food for the birds and lizards, and the birds and lizards provide food for the hawks and eagles.”



Giovanni's beloved town of Orvieto is a medieval hill town in Umbria, Italy. Built on a butte of volcanic tuff, its defensive wall rising from the valley floor. Orvieto was a center of ancient Etruscan civilization eight centuries before Christ – Tatiana Popva, Shutterstock

“Schopenhauer believed that nature is amoral,” Yvonne said, “but humans struggle with the question, why is there so much pain? Schopenhauer said that if you don’t believe that there is more pain than pleasure in the world then consider the case of one animal devouring another. One is merely eating dinner, the other is being eaten alive. Schopenhauer agreed with the Buddhists; the life force is the source of endless suffering. But as profound as were some of Schopenhauer’s insights about human nature, his persona was not on the same level as his philosophical perspective. He was known for brief, shallow affairs and an irascible temperament. Probably due to his relationship with his distant mother, he held animosity towards women. And yet he pursued them. It is ironic that men who hate women the most are usually the ones who pursue them the most. However, I like his idea that music is the most metaphysical of all the arts. He thought music expressed the essential nature of the world. Schopenhauer said, ‘bass notes are analogous to inorganic nature, the harmonies are analogous to the animal world, and the melodies are analogous to the human world.’”

“Sentient beings crave pleasure. They seek to avoid pain from birth to death. Gautama Siddhartha told us that being controlled by one’s desires, by fleeing from pain we only perpetuate the suffering of *saṃsāra*, continual rebirth and endless pain. Like the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, Buddha noted that everything is in flux, all is constantly changing, eternally coming into being and ceasing to be. Many centuries after Siddhartha, Schopenhauer came to a similar conclusion: our instincts, our search for pleasure, our drive to procreate only brings a new occasion for suffering and death. The goal of enlightenment is to see that the distinction between the self and the universe is a false concept. There is no distinction between consciousness and physical matter, no distinction between mind and body, between spirit and substance.”

“Christians,” I said, “believe the spirit is independent of the body.”

“Christianity,” Yvonne said, “divides the body and the soul, while religions in Asian have tended to unite them. Hindus, like Taoists and Buddhists, speak of the mystical oneness of the self and the universe. The American Transcendentalists and the Unitarians of New England had similar ideas. Henri Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson believed that organized religion often sullied the purity of the individual. Instead of religious doctrine, a mystic achieves spiritual insight through intuition. Whether a Catholic, Jew, Muslim or a primitive tribesman, the realm of the spirit is the same — we are transported from the temporal to the eternal. T. E. Lawrence said, ‘The Bedouin could not look for God within him, he was too sure that he was within God.’

“Thoreau read the sacred text of the Hindus, the *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita* and practiced yoga. Thoreau advocated in *Walden* to live close to nature, to live in harmony with the Divine Soul of the universe. Thoreau said that the water of Walden Pond was commingled with the sacred water of the Ganges. Kijwaja Mohammad said, ‘When no one is looking and I want to kiss God, I just lift my own hand to my mouth.’ Hindus believe that all life is sacred and revered. Therefore, we practice *ahimsa*, noninjury to others in thought, word and deed. The *Bhagavad Gita* says, ‘I am the source and dissolution of the whole universe.’”

“How do the Hindus and the Buddhists feel about Jesus Christ?”



Wood carving of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, Shanxi, China, Liao Dynasty 11th century – Rebecca Arnet, Wikimedia

“Some Hindus consider Jesus to be an avatar who preached the same teachings as Hindu thought. But in the realm of religion, every ethnic group has their own solution. There are conflicting interpretations even among Christians. Thomas Jefferson, a strong supporter of the separation of Church and State, examined the New Testament for the consistency of its ideas and noted two conflicting aspects of the Bible — one which was the purest moral teachings and the other, a willful distortion of Jesus’s teaching by religious authorities. In his writings in *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, Jefferson said that Christianity represented the most sublime code of morals ever known to man while at the same time was full of deceptions and contradictions to the teachings of Jesus. The priestly caste, Jefferson said, have often failed to believe in liberty for the common man.”

“It was a paradox,” I said, “that Jefferson would write about liberty for the common man, and then deny it to his slaves.”

“Man has the ability,” Yvonne replied, “to remain ignorant of contradictions. Jefferson’s wealth was dependent upon slavery. He separated his philosophy from his economic reality. He was guilty of the same deceptions of which he was accusing Christianity. Different sects of Christianity often have opposing ideas. No one group has an indisputable claim on the truth. That is why tolerance is essential. Irish writer, C.S. Lewis whose radio broadcasts during the Blitz inspired British morale in the worst moments of the war, encouraged tolerance in all forms of Christianity and in all religions. C. S. Lewis was an atheist who was enamored of pagan Celtic mysticism as an adolescent, but under the influence of J. R. R. Tolkien, Lewis rediscovered Christianity. Lewis said, ‘If you are a Christian you do not have to believe that all the other religions are simply wrong. If you are an atheist, you do have to believe that the main point in all the religions of the whole world is simply one huge mistake.’

“Pantheism,” Yvonne continued, “rejects the idea of God being separate from the world. Philosopher William James pointed out that the dualism of Christianity defines the human as external to God, while pantheism stresses the intimacy and connection between the human and the divine. The institutions of religion were not James’ focus. He was only interested in the religious experience — what one experiences emotionally while in a sacred moment. A Catholic has a different approach than an African American reverend, a Tibetan Buddhist monk, a Bantu tribesman, or an Islamic dervish. He was fascinated by how varied humans are when in the religious moment. James was drawn to mystical experiences, experimented by transporting himself into psychic states induced by chloral hydrate, amyl nitrite, nitrous oxide, and peyote.”

“Peyote?”

“Peyote has psychoactive properties when consumed. That’s why it’s called the “Divine Messenger.” Mescaline produces hallucinogenic experiences that enhance the religious ceremonies of Indian tribes in Oklahoma. Yvonne laughed, “William James said that only under the influence of nitrous oxide could he understand Hegel. Maybe if I take some peyote, I’ll be able to understand Hegel too.”



Peyote Drummer, 1927 - Edward Sheriff Curtis photogravure, gift of Jo and Howard Weiner, Museum of Photographic Arts Collections,

“There are Buddhists,” she added, “who believe Christ’s view of the world is irreconcilable with the principles of Buddhism. But on the other hand, others like the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, viewed Christ as a *bodhisattva* who dedicated his life to the welfare of the people.”

“For me,” I said, “Jesus is the great moral teacher. The most spiritual image of Jesus I’ve seen was a painting by Georges Rouault. The painter captured the melancholy of the true Christ. Jesus expresses the suffering of all mankind. Although I’ve fallen down at times, I’ve tried to follow the Christian principles Mama gave to me as a child.



The Exhortation to the Apostles – opaque watercolor by James Tissot, Brooklyn Museum, Wikimedia

“When Mussolini was massacring the people of Abyssinia, Mama told me that in the book of the apostle Matthew, Jesus rebuked Simon Peter for drawing his sword to defend against his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus said to Peter, ‘All who take to the sword will perish by the sword.’ And that’s exactly what happened to Benito — the glorious emperor was slain by the partisans and hung by his heels in the piazza.”

“Although I’ve not felt the need to join a specific religion,” Yvonne said, “I have great respect for the role of religion. It is hard for most humans to maintain esteemed values based only upon their own volition.

From primitive times unto the present, humans have attempted to humanize the universe, to give human interpretations to natural phenomena. Even before the Greeks, primitive man endowed the gods with the same passions as mankind. Greek mythology gave the gods the same characteristics as man — lust, jealousy, competition, and revenge. Throughout history, humans have sought moral guidance — a search for a community of values, a quest to find the inspiration to do the right thing. People need a road map how to coexist with others, how to love others than themselves. The philosophical problem is how do we determine what is the ‘right thing to do? For a Nazi or a Stalinist, it could be exterminating enemies of the state. For a Ku Klux Klan member, lynching a Negro could be viewed as the right thing. Evil has its own moral code. What is considered good by one moral code can be considered an abomination by another.”



**Reinhard Heydrich, head of Gestapo,
Butcher of Prague – Bundesarchiv, Wikimedia**



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

“But don’t we agree,” I said, “democracy is the ideal form of government? It ensures that all humans have equal rights.”

“Over a hundred years ago, John Stuart Mill outlined the limitations of democracy in his book *On Liberty*. Majority opinion reflects the prevailing opinions of the people. If it is the majorities’ wish to discriminate against or subjugate a section of society that is in a minority, it has the power to do so. The majority can prevail in restricting the freedom of the minority, whether a race, gender, or religious faith. Slavery existed within a democratic system of government because of *public approval*. There were some Americans who realized that slavery couldn’t be justified under any circumstances, especially the Quakers in New England. One Quaker freed 100 slaves that he’d inherited, provided them with them several hundred acres, built a school and financed their education. A cousin of Jefferson’s emancipated all of his slaves upon his death and gave them 10 acres of land. He said he regretted he’d ever owned a slave. But these were rare acts of conscience. The Americans are rightfully proud of their Constitution and the Bill of Rights. But it wasn’t a broad democracy because only a minority of people could vote, certainly not women or slaves. Leaders of the Confederacy believed that the ‘barbarous tribes of Africa’ could only be Christianized through enslavement. The Bible was used to rationalize slavery. If I remember his words correctly, the Vice President of the Confederacy said, ‘All of the white race, high or low, rich or poor are equal in the eye of the law. But not with the Negro. Subordination is his place. By reason of the curse against Cannan, Negroes are only fit for the condition which he occupies in our system.’”



Confederate Vice President Alexander H. Stephens, author of the *Cornerstone Speech* – “Our new government is founded upon . . . the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.” – U.S. Library of Congress

“I understand,” I said, “that after the Civil War, freed slaves were guaranteed the right to vote and hold office under the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments.”

Yvonne laughed, splintered sunlight flashing from her cheeks.

“I can see you’ve been studying for your citizenship test. After General Lee surrendered to Ulysses Grant at Appomattox, the Union Army marched across the South, occupying hundreds of towns, decreeing emancipation by force. Southern soldiers formed insurgent groups and in a guerilla war terrorized blacks across the South. During the quarter of a century after emancipation, it is estimated that 50,000 African Americans were murdered by whites. Congress passed the Reconstruction Act in 1867 to guarantee that blacks were entitled to the same political rights and opportunities as whites. After the 13th Amendment abolished slavery, the government didn’t quite know what to call the four million citizens who’d been freed. Between the Civil War and the 1930s, the United States census labeled people of African descent as black, mulatto, quadroon, octoroon, or Negro. The 14th and 15th Amendments established equality for all races and guaranteed the right for blacks and poor whites to vote, there by transforming the Constitution from a white man only to one for all of mankind, though not yet for womankind. It also gave the national government the power to protect the rights of citizens against violations by the states. The Southern States had to accept black enfranchisement or lose congressional representation. Over ten thousand Confederate senior officers and officials were barred from holding office.”

“How did that work out?” I said.

“During the first years after the war, Reconstruction offered miraculous hope to the freed slave. They could vote and own land. They could ride with whites on trains and eat in restaurants. For the first time, African Americans were elected to political office. Educated Northern blacks returned to the South to become sheriffs and judges, city council members and formed biracial state governments. Mississippi elected a black senator and Louisiana elected a black governor.”

“I didn’t know that there were black senators and governors.”

“The rise of black legislators,” she replied, “only lasted a few years before the South put it down. When a radical change is made by force, it produces a venomous counterattack from those who’ve lost power, a violent backlash, creating a poisonous atmosphere with disastrous consequences a decade later just as the harsh provisions of the Versailles Treaty created the conditions for Hitler’s rise to power. In the ten years after the

war, the Southern Democrat Redeemers took away the freedoms of African-Americans which had been guaranteed by the 14th and 15th Amendments.”

“A war was fought to guarantee the rights of black people. How could their rights be taken away?”

“By the paramilitary forces in the South — the Ku Klux Klan, Knights of the White Camellia, the White League in Louisiana and Red Shirts in Mississippi, the secret terrorist organizations which intimidated blacks from voting through lynching, rape, massacres and terror. The terrorist groups were the military arm of the Democratic Party. The terrorist groups consisted not only of former Confederate soldiers and poor whites, but also the upper and middle classes, the merchants, ministers, and professionals who put on their white hoods, burned crosses and killed in the name of white supremacy.



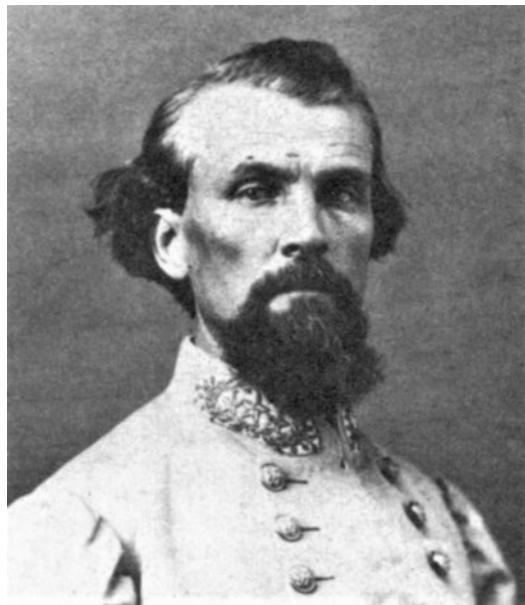
Ku Klux Klan members burning a cross, Denver, Colorado. William J. Simmons, the founder of the second Klan in 1915 introduced cross burning to terrorize African Americans – Denver News, Denver Library Digital Collections

Lawlessness was widespread after the war. After Robert E. Lee’s surrender to Ulysses S. Grant, armed bands of Confederate soldiers roamed at will. Several veterans of the Confederate Army formed a secret paramilitary

group in Pulaski, Tennessee, combining the word, Klan with *kuklos* which means circle in Greek and selected the Confederate Calvary General Nathan Bedford Forrest as the Grand Wizard of the Klan.”

“Les was cursing Nathan Bedford Forrest the other day. He said he was waiting for someone to take a sledgehammer to his statue in Memphis.”

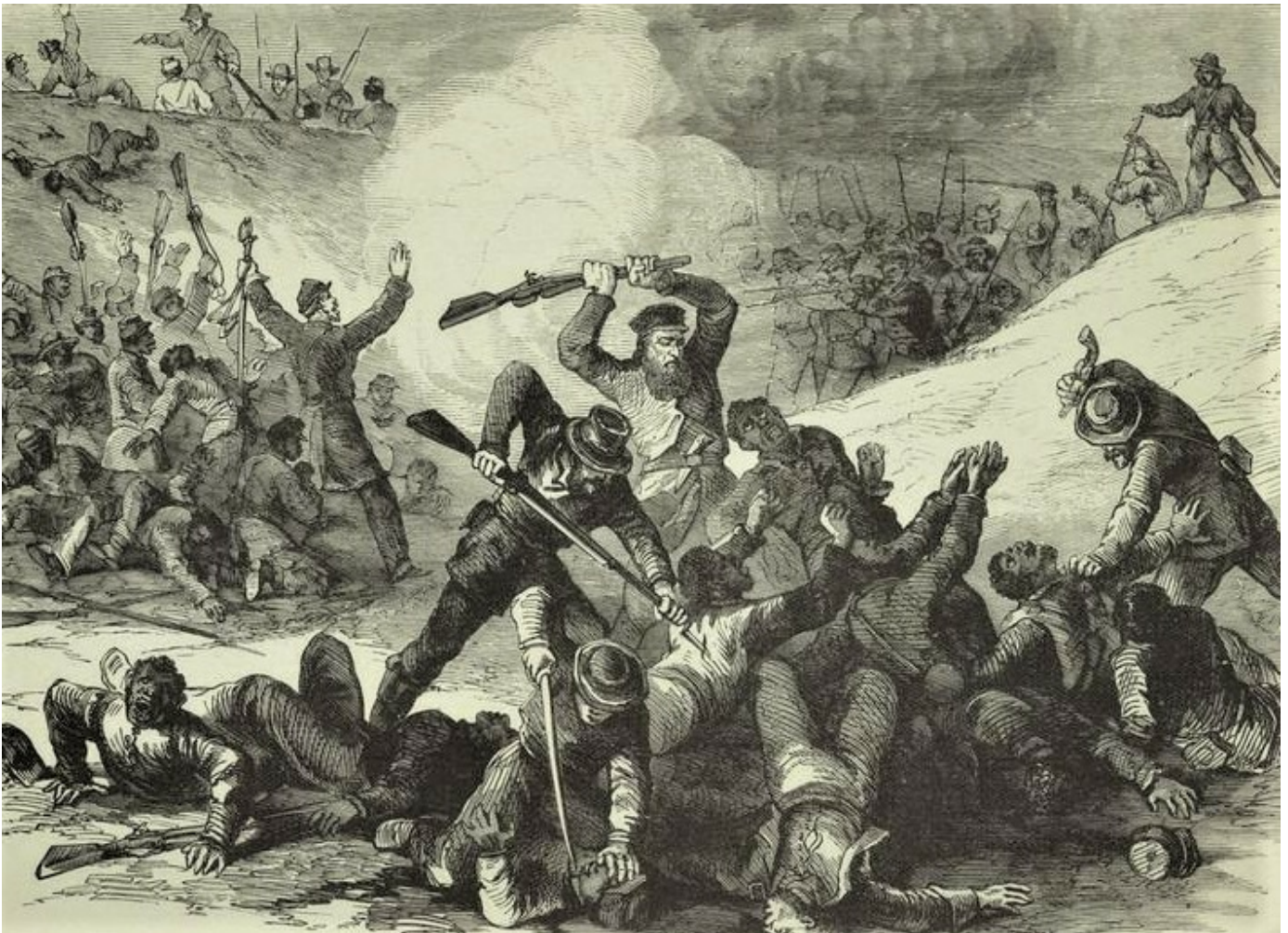
“A lot of black folk would agree,” Yvonne said. “Forrest terrorized the Union troops with lightening attacks coming out of nowhere. With no military background, Bedford Forrest invented a mobile style of warfare that preceded Heinz Guderian’s doctrine of *Blitzkrieg* which Erwin Rommel and George Patton exploited in World War Two. But instead of motorized tanks, Forrest’s troops traveled on horses. Using hit and run guerilla tactics to exhaust their pursuers, never directly engaging superior Union forces in combat, Forrest’s cavalry cut off Ulysses Grant’s lines of communication and supplies, leading Grant and General William Tecumseh Sherman to declare that if they could kill the demon Bedford Forrest, it would be worth losing 10,000 troops. A driven man who’d established a great fortune as a planter and slave trader, Forrest enlisted as a private but when he saw how poorly equipped the Confederates were, he volunteered to finance and equip a battalion of several hundred cavalry troops. Promoted to lieutenant colonel and rising to lieutenant general, Forrest became a scourge against the Union forces due to the speed of his movements, furious charges and withdrawals. Celebrated for killing thirty Union soldiers in hand-to-hand combat, Forrest was wounded four times, 29 horses shot out from under him, a legend in his own time earning the sobriquet of ‘The Wizard of the Saddle.’”



Confederate Calvary General **Nathan Bedford Forrest**,
The first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan – Unknown
photographer, Wikimedia

“I see how the Klan got the name of the chief,” I said, “The Wizard of the Saddle became the Wizard of the Klan.”

“Black leaders,” Yvonne said, “would call Bedford Forrest the Wizard of Darkness. In the last year of the war, Forrest’s cavalry surrounded Fort Pillow on the Mississippi near Memphis Tennessee. Forrest demanded surrender of the federal forces of 600 which included 300 African American soldiers of the U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery. When the Union command refused, Forrest’s cavalry overran the fort and the garrison surrendered. Upon seeing hundreds of black men wearing the Union uniform, convulsed by rage, the Confederates cried, ‘No quarter, no quarter,’ slaying disarmed black soldiers in a sickening slaughter.



Confederates massacre African American Union soldiers after they surrender at Fort Pillow, April 12, 1864 – Frank Leslie, New York Public Library Digital Collections

A Confederate soldier later testified, ‘Negroes would run up to our men, fall down on their knees and raise their hands, begging for mercy, but were shot down in cold blood.’ Historians have called the atrocities of Fort Pillow, a mass lynching. For the rest of the war, ‘Remember Fort Pillow,’ became the battle cry of the

African American soldiers fighting for freedom. The war crimes committed against prisoners of war at Fort Pillow have haunted the reputation of Bedford Forrest to this day.

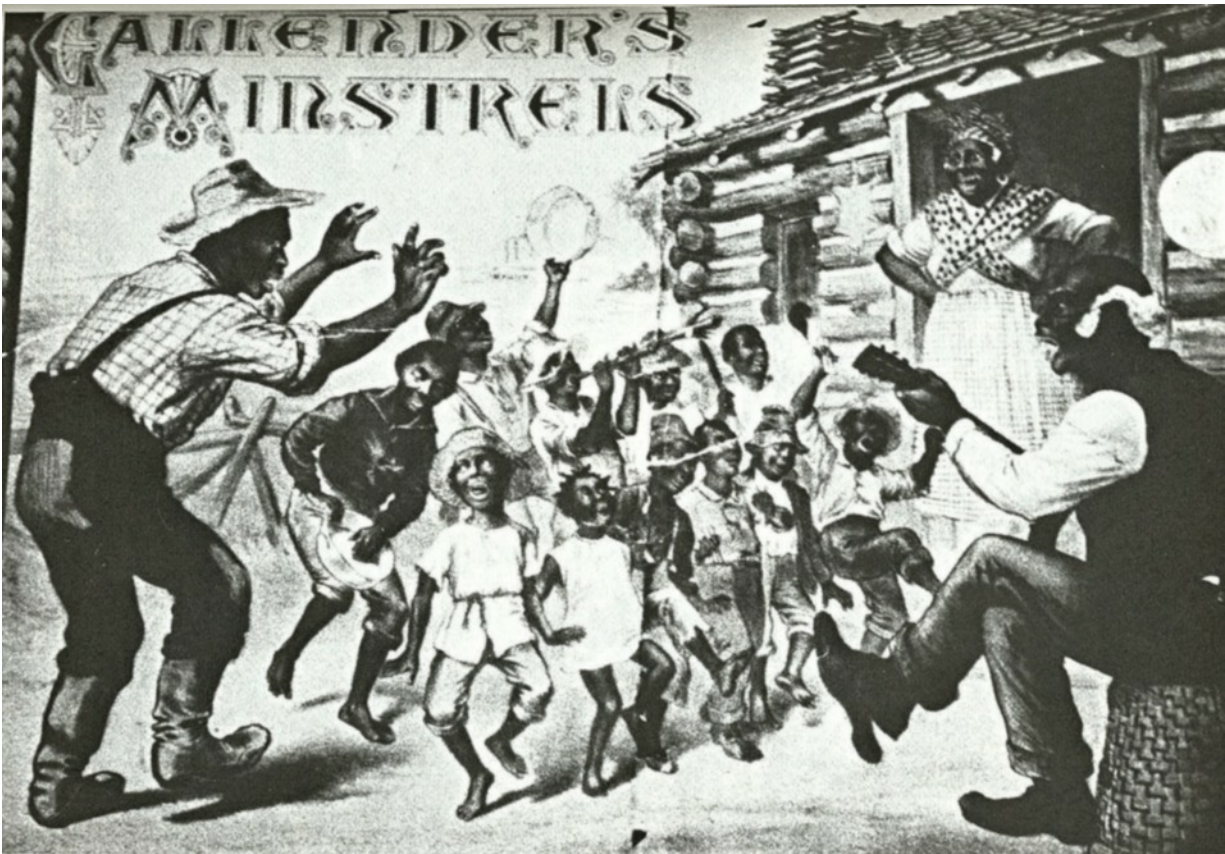


Fort Pillow Massacre – Kurz and Allison, 1885, Wikimedia

“The Klan,” Yvonne continued, “was invincible for a time. When the Republican Governor of North Carolina used state troops to suppress the Klan, he was impeached and driven from office. Poor whites and members of the planter caste formed paramilitary groups throughout the South dedicated to the destruction of the Republican Party and Reconstruction, burning houses and churches and killing African Americans, leaving their bodies on the roads. In the 1875 Mississippi election, the Red Shirts shot enough Republicans to throw the race to the Democrats. Republican leaders and state representatives were assassinated. Vigilantes killed hundreds of black men. Voter suppression worked. After one series of murders, not a single Republican voted in the election. Each State wrote new constitutions requiring poll taxes, literacy tests and other hurdles to disfranchise nearly all blacks and thousands of poor whites, removing hundreds of thousands of people from voter rolls. By the turn of the century, the Southern States had succeeded in completely denying the black man’s right to vote. In the decades after the Civil War, an apartheid society was created by terror and violence.”



Freedmen Voting in New Orleans, 1867 engraving showing African Americans who had been enslaved but a couple years later participating in election – New York Public Library Digital Collection, Wikimedia



Callender's Colored Minstrels in a plantation scenario – *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* by Robert Toll, Wikimedia



Drinking fountain on the Halifax County Courthouse, North Carolina, 1938 – John Vachon, Library of Congress



Separate drinking fountains for African Americans and whites in streetcar terminal, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma – Library of Congress, Wikimedia

“But there was a Constitutional Amendment,” I said, “to guarantee the right of blacks to vote. How could the states pass laws taking that Constitutional right away?”

“Supreme Court decisions allowed the South to repress the African American’s right to vote. Throughout the end of the 19th century, the Supreme Court upheld the right of states to make their own laws even in contravention of federal law. The Supreme Court held that the Fourteenth Amendment applied only to acts of the federal government, not to the state governments. In 1883, the Supreme Court sanctioned segregation by ruling unconstitutional the Civil Rights Act of 1875 which prohibited racial discrimination in public accommodations, trains, and hotels. The court said that the Equal Protection Clause couldn’t be applied to the owners of private business. Consequently, African Americans and poor whites were shut out of the political process. If you couldn’t vote you couldn’t be on a jury. In criminal trials, there were no black people on the juries to insure fair judgment of blacks.”

“That’s crazy!” I said. “A Constitutional Amendment had been passed to guarantee the right of blacks to vote. How could the states pass laws taking that Constitutional right away?”

“The Compromise of 1877,” Yvonne said, “was the final death of Reconstruction. The Democrats who controlled the House of Representatives agreed to the election of Republican Rutherford Hayes, if he would agree to remove federal troops from the Southern States. The Mephistophelean bargain between the Democrats and President Hayes ended the brief freedom of blacks. Once the troops were removed there was no way to prevent the Southern Redeemers from enacting in state after state constitutional amendments and Jim Crow laws which terminated the ability of blacks and poor whites to vote.”



Sign on a restaurant, Lancaster, Ohio, 1938 – Ben Shahn, Library of Congress, Wikimedia



Political cartoon portraying anti-slavery Senator Roscoe Conkling as Mephistopheles watching Rutherford B. Hayes stroll off with the prize of the Solid South, a satire on The Compromise of 1877. The Democrats in the House of Representatives agreed to the election of Republican Rutherford Hayes on the condition that he remove federal troops from the South. The removal of the army led to the death of Reconstruction and the victory of the Redeemer Democrats who as soon as the troops were removed, moved to pass Jim Crow laws that eliminated the right of African Americans to vote in the South – Joseph Kepper in *Puck*, 1877, Wikimedia

“What does Jim Crow mean?”

“It’s believed to have come from a song and dance by a white man in black face satirizing Andrew Jackson. Eventually Jim Crow became an ugly term for Negroes. Thus, the laws passed to segregate and disenfranchise African Americans were called Jim Crow laws.”

“The freedman’s greatest hardship was he didn’t have land or money. After supporting the war and giving up his labor for free the whole of his life, the freedman aspired to a plot of land that belonged to him alone. In some cases, it was given by the government then taken away from the freedman and returned to the white landowners. Owning no land, the freedmen had no choice but to sharecrop plots of land of plantation owners. Half of the crop went to the sharecropper and half to the owner, the one who was determining the value of the crop. Borrowing from the owner to pay for seed and supplies at inflated prices meant that the sharecropper would be burdened by debt for life. The horrible truth was that the sharecropper was as dependent on the owner as he was when he was a slave. The black sharecropper was a serf chained to the soil. Slavery had been perpetuated.”



Black refugees evicted from sharecropping, Parkin, Arkansas, 1936 – John Vachon photo. Library of Congress

“The South had lost the Civil War, but in the next two decades, they won the war back by keeping the black under the thumb of the white man. The black man and woman remained cheap labor. They were limited to unskilled jobs, the men working on the railways and in lumber mills, the women working as cooks, maids,

and laundresses. A war had devastated the South and the black man still wasn't free. The black man could not participate in the government. W.E.B Du Bois said, 'The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery.'"

Yvonne paused, stood up and stretched out her arms to the sky.

Clouds were moving swiftly overhead, a cool wind ruffling the current of the river.

"I love this stiff breeze," she said, pulling off her pullover. "I feel so alive. I'm going in."

"How can you take that cold water?"

She laughed like a schoolgirl, ran to the shore and dived in like a porpoise. I lay down to watch the swiftly changing clouds, feeling more content than I had in a long time. I'm a different person than I was in New York and the reason is Yvonne."