Operation Failed

The United States at 250

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The US experiment has failed. It's failed from sea to shining sea. Democracy, liberty and equality for all is just a dream some of us had. The ones who could care less about that dream were and are mostly among the wealthiest in the population. Amber waves of grain are nothing but numbers on the commodities exchange. They have their followers among the rest, but it is their money that gives them their power, not their supporters. The fact that most of its founding fathers never intended for that experiment to extend beyond white men with property has a lot to do with that failure. The fact that the entire premise was based on the taking of land from other humans has a lot to do

with that failure. The fact that millions of those whose land was taken were slaughtered is more often denied than acknowledged is equally crucial to that failure. The fact that enslaving millions for the benefit of the few is also crucial. The fact that democracy has been defined as the right to vote is also related to that failure. As we watch the court they call supreme eliminate voting rights for those who weren't originally granted them (including the descendants of those whose ancestors were killed and enslaved), even the pretense of democracy fades into the ruins of the White House lawn. Ladies, your right to vote is next to go.

This government hyped (with a straight face, mind you) as the world's greatest democracy sells its gold-plated gimmicks for the benefit of the con-man they call the president. He's a man whose health remains a question and

whose humanity reminds the world that humanity can be a pretty ugly thing. In fact, this entire nation—from the Delaney ICE detention camp to Mar-A-Lago, from the UFC ring on the White House lawn to the data Centers across the Midwest—reminds one of that fact. Pete Hegseth's gelled hair competes with Gavin Newsom's, both of their swelled heads filled with emptiness, greed and a self-centeredness surpassed only by the white supremacy their power depends on and protects.

It's nothing new. The Trump administration may be the worst many have seen in their lifetime, but it is truly only unique in its brazen disrespect for the rules the powerful pretend to play by. Then again, actions and words from the opposition party are mostly nothing but echoes of the hatred and ignorance proclaimed by the party in power.

Democratic rulers claiming to be against gestapo forces known as ICE demand they unmask themselves while providing those same forces with backup when protesters block ICE kidnappings. When all is said and done, when Donald Trump is gone, ICE or some other named gestapo force will carry on its work with the support of those in power. Kidnapping and torture in the name of democracy and freedom isn't much different than enslavement and genocide in the name of the Republic for which it stands. The nation is a burial ground and the intruders are the ones who make it so.

I visited Florida recently and was struck by the gross commercialism of the so-called 250th birthday party. I shouldn't have been, but I was. Even for Florida, it was over the top. After all, the only true freedom in the US of A is the freedom to make a profit and if

you ain't got the money then the rulers don't have the time for you. I've been told that all freedom stems from that one freedom; if people can't make a profit from you then no other freedom exists. Of course, the ones telling us this are the ones making that profit. Then again, there's a lot of others who think they're going to get their piece, too. Ring your bell, fly your flag, pocket your profits, drink up and pay your bills. One nation under profit, with freedom for those who can buy it and debt slavery for the rest. Blame the homeless for their poverty and give the war industry your tax dollars. Blame the people the Pentagon attacks for their suffering and glorify the troops whose bodies your nation's wars have destroyed. Thank you for your service and put that pricey gas in your big-ass truck. Somebody died for it. Speaking of Florida, when I go there I think it must be what it was like for visitors to

1930s Germany, with Nazis on the rise and a population either supportive or apathetic. Of course, it's a particularly US version of the phenomenon—with right-wing bikers and racist suburbanites who have FoxNews on 24-7—but it's fascist no matter what colors are on the national flag.

The event being celebrated in the United States this July 4th wasn't a revolution as much as it was a war by settler-colonialists against the king who enticed the colonists to go to North America and chase its inhabitants from their lands. The colonists weren't fighting for freedom in any manner most of us claim to understand it. They were fighting so that wealthy white men could own, buy and sell Africans and their descendants as slaves and so that religious zealots could enforce their particular insane

version of faith on others and kill indigenous people after classifying them as less than human. When all is considered it's clear that the only true god was that which brought gold. The colonists didn't want to pay taxes to the crown because the wealthy among them wanted those taxes for themselves and their wars of expansion. Don't let the giant flags at your local car dealer fool you, the burial ground those wars created are reconsecrated in blood and oil each time you pay at the pump. Don't buy the cheesy display of roids and misplaced masculinity on the White House lawn and think you're celebrating freedom. Freedom to be an asshole is freedom of a sort, but the fact that it is celebrated as a virtue in 2026 only proves that assholes rule your nation. It's another thing you can thank Donald Trump and his devotees for.

Indeed, one thing we can be thankful of in these years of national decline is the presidency of Donald Trump. In its own vainglorious way, his reign proves that money, no matter how it is obtained, is the only true god in the USA and the more you steal the holier you are. All others bow to its glory. Its power is in its ability to render empathy, trust and truth the stuff of fairy tales that shall remain fantasies as long as the pursuit of profit and power in the name of more profit remain the gods to which all other churches bow. Capitalism has always been a grift that needed to be controlled by other forces equal in power. Arguably, that control should be the role of governments. The fact that governments also exist to defend the expansion of those capitalist entities within its borders when their pursuit of profits send them across borders has always been one of capitalism's

contradictions. In 2026, that contradiction has been mostly eradicated. There is no conflict between the interests of the government and the capital it serves. The president can claim that the US is getting rich because the war he started is making the energy companies tens of millions of dollars a day while those who voted for him are spending hundreds more to buy their product. The identification of Joe and Josephine citizen with their corporate masters and the military that serves them is essentially complete. If you don't agree, corporate media will convince you. If it doesn't succeed, the police state will. Freedom, after all, isn't free. Not only does it cost you money, it's going to cost you your freedom, too.

If it hasn't already.

Some folks reading this will dismiss my words, assuming I am just being hopelessly negative. They're wrong. I'm being honest, not hopeless; the existing political infrastructure is designed to continue the scenario described here, not change it. I have plenty of hope, but not in the system we tend to channel our efforts through. I began this with the opinion that the 250 year experiment has failed and I end it with the hope enough of us will understand its illness is not curable using the means it offers.

2026 is a midterm election year. In what has become a familiar and (in my opinion) mostly pointless exercise, elements of the US Left are once again hitching themselves to candidates they believe will make the United States a more livable place again. If they weren't intelligent people I would

attribute their repetition of a failed exercise to their ignorance. However, they are smart people. They read fancy books and teach college, yet they reject an obvious need for revolutionary organizing, choosing instead to believe that their latest social democrat (or is it democratic socialist?) candidates are going to stop the rape of the land, the destruction of the educational system, the kidnapping of their neighbors by masked thugs doing the work of the white boss man, the wars and the monied oligarchs who profit from them. Maybe they'll even construct a health care system that puts health care before dollars and data centers.

I'm not buying it. Yeah, I'll vote for them, even though in my hands the ballot is a cynical exercise that certainly doesn't represent support for the system the candidates hope to succeed in. The problem isn't candidates.

It's capitalism. It always has been, but never like it is now. In the past there was land to steal and workers to exploit. Unions actually fought for something beyond survival and their leaders didn't fly private jets or have administrative assistants to order their meals and hotel rooms. Unless capitalism goes, this whole fucking thing we call civilization will be swallowed, chewed and spat out. The Data Center kings and queens will observe from their towers while they prepare to launch into the stars. Meanwhile, our every move will be monitored, recorded and dealt with appropriately. This kind of scenario might make a cool film but you can be pretty certain Philip K. Dick will tell you it ain't any kind of paradise in real life.

I wrote this earlier in 2026:

I was working as a short order cook at an

IHOP in 1976. The best thing about the job was the access to food and the fact that my paycheck—as paltry as it was—covered my expenses and left me with money to spend on various entertainments, from beer to weed and concerts. This had a lot more to do with the price of things (and my side gig of selling weed to friends) in the mid-1970s than it had to do with the $2.50 an hour I was making for my fifty-hour work weeks. The US Left, which was in disarray but still capable of raising a fuss, was planning protest actions for the big day when the Bicentennial party would climax in a spasm of nationalist celebration from sea to shining sea. If Irving Berlin were alive, his royalties would certainly jump in the year to come. Francis Scott Key's paean to the rocket's red glare would be set on permanent repeat. The rulers were still convinced that God was on their side and that this land was their land. And

don't you forget it. The ultraleft in the form of the Maoists of the Revolutionary Communist Party and the remnants and political allies of the Weather Underground were looking towards Philadelphia for their marches, while the more mainstream Left formed a coalition called the Peoples' Bicentennial Commission and began acquiring permits for their rally in DC. Meanwhile, the official celebration that took place every July Fourth on the National Mall was booking bands and musicians. The myth became ever more magnified. Rumors flew among the remaining freaks that the Grateful Dead were going to give a free concert in DC. They didn't, but Johnny Cash did. So did the Marine Band. A friend and I went to DC, hung out at the Peoples Bicentennial Commission rally drinking Natty Bo and smoking some crappy weed. Both were appropriate to the situation. We thought about going over to the Johnny Cash

show at the other end of the Mall, but some redneck family men tried to start a fight with us because of our long hair. We ignored them and left, while feeling bad for their kids. God Bless the USA, motherfucker.

1976 was a presidential election year. Jimmy Carter was running against Gerald Ford. Jimmy quoted Bob Dylan and touted his friendship with members of the Allman Brothers entourage. Ford hosted George Harrison at the request of his son Jack and had The Captain & Tenille do their thing at another time. The youth vote was something to be manipulated with promises not meant to be kept. Hunter S. Thompson, whose journalism during the 1972 Nixon and McGovern contest had ripped apart elements of the façade the establishment press corps like to maintain, gave a half-assed endorsement of Jimmy Carter in the pages

of Rolling Stone. He titled it ”Third Rate Romance” presumably after a song by the Amazing Rhythm Aces popular at the time. The song was about a tawdry affair carried out in cheap motel rooms. I felt like the guy left at the bar after talking up the woman who was just waiting for her married lover to show up with his bottle of Jim Beam (or maybe George Dickel) bourbon.

Jimmy Carter won, partially on a pledge to reduce, remove and privatize some social services. After Carter’s inability to extract some US Embassy personnel being held hostage in revolutionary Iran, Ronald Reagan finally achieved what the far right in the United States had been attempting since Barry Goldwater won the GOP nomination in 1964. They took back the White House in the person of Ronald Reagan. The stage was set, the lights were on and never again

would the word democracy have the meaning understood by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. In the years from 1980 to the present the US government would mostly be returned to the people it was originally intended for—white men with property. In 2026, immigrants who may or may not have the proper documents are kidnapped like Africans were so long ago, locked into hellholes and told to work for a dollar a day. Some of those who defend the migrants are shot down in the street. White supremacy on a repetitive loop that can only be broken when the machinery that facilitates it is as broken as the spirits of the drunken hobo on the streets of your hometown..

Ron Jacobs's articles, reviews, and essays have been appeared in anthologies and numerous print and online journals around the world. He is a regular *Counterpunch* contributor.