

Reading #1 is **Declaration of Interdependence** by Richard Blanco, *Cuban-American writer, 2019 UU GA Ware Lecturer, and the 5th ever inaugural poet - the youngest, first Latino, immigrant, and gay person to serve in such a role.*

Such has been the patient sufferance...

We’re a mother’s bread, instant potatoes, milk at a checkout line. We’re her three children pleading for bubble gum and their father. We’re the three minutes she steals to page through a tabloid, needing to believe even stars’ lives are as joyful and bruised.

Our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury...

We’re her second job serving an executive absorbed in his *Wall Street Journal* at a sidewalk café shadowed by skyscrapers. We’re the shadows of the fortune he won and the family he lost. We’re his loss and the lost. We’re a father in a coal town who can’t mine a life anymore because too much and too little has happened, for too long.

A history of repeated injuries and usurpations...

We’re the grit of his main street’s blacked-out windows and graffitied truths. We’re a street in another town lined with royal palms, at home with a Peace Corps couple who collect African art. We’re their dinner-party talk of wines, wielded picket signs, and burned draft cards. We’re what they know: it’s time to do more than read the *New York Times*, buy fair-trade coffee and organic corn.

In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress...

We’re the farmer who grew the corn, who plows into his couch as worn as his back by the end of the day. We’re his TV set blaring news having everything and nothing to do with the field dust in his eyes or his son nested in the ache of his arms. We’re his son. We’re a black teenager who drove too fast or too slow, talked too much or too little, moved too quickly, but not quick enough. We’re the blast of the bullet leaving the gun. We’re the guilt and the grief of the cop who wished he hadn’t shot.

We mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor...

We’re the dead, we’re the living amid the flicker of vigil candlelight. We’re in a dim cell with an inmate reading Dostoevsky. We’re his crime, his sentence, his amends, we’re the mending of ourselves and others. We’re a Buddhist serving soup at a shelter alongside a stockbroker. We’re each other’s shelter and hope: a widow’s fifty cents in a collection plate and a golfer’s ten-thousand-dollar pledge for a cure.

We hold these truths to be self-evident...

We’re the cure for hatred caused by despair. We’re the good morning of a bus driver who remembers our name, the tattooed man who gives up his seat on the subway. We’re every door

held open with a smile when we look into each other’s eyes the way we behold the moon. We’re the moon. We’re the promise of one people, one breath declaring to one another:

I see you. I need you. I am you.

Reading #2

A Declaration, Not of Independence By [Ralph Salisbury](#), of Cherokee and Irish American heritage, he served in WWII and afterward became an anti-war pacifist.

for my mother and father

Apparently I’m Mom’s immaculately-conceived
Irish-American son, because,
Social-Security time come,
my Cherokee dad could not prove he’d been born.

He could pay taxes, though,
financing troops, who’d conquered our land,
and could go to jail,
the time he had to shoot or die,
by a Caucasian attacker’s knife.

Eluding recreational killers’ calendar’s
enforcers, while hunting my family’s food,
I thought what the hunted think,
so that I ate, not only meat
but the days of wild animals fed by the days
of seeds, themselves eating earth’s
aeons of lives, fed by the sun,
rising and falling, as quail,
hurtling through sky,

fell, from gun-powder, come—
as the First Americans came—
from Asia.

Explosions in cannon,
I have an English name,
a German-Chilean-American wife
and could live a white life,
but, with this hand,

with which I write, I dug,
my sixteenth summer, a winter’s supply of yams out
of hard, battlefield clay,
dug for my father’s mother, who—
abandoned by her husband—raised,
alone, a mixed-blood family
and raised—her tongue spading air—
ancestors, a winter’s supply or more.

Sermon

This weekend was a major event in American History. Hamilton the Musical premiered on streaming for anyone with a Disney+ login!

But Seriously it’s the 244th anniversary of the signing of the declaration of independence, and finally the myths around the founding of this nation are starting to be examined with a critical lens by the general public.

With a spate of books and tv shows and yes, even musicals about the men who founded this country, we as a nation are trying to understand what brought us to this point in history.

Previous to the success of Lin-Manuel Miranda’s hit musical, Hamilton was only famous to me from a Got Milk? TV commercial – and its fictional call in radio question: ‘Who killed Alexander Hamilton in that famous duel?’ As we find out Hamilton’s opening number – it’s Aaron Burr, who was vice president of the United States at the time of the duel.

In the two and a half hour show, recorded live in 2016, an audience, many of you perhaps, experienced a retelling of American history, starring a cast of mainly people of color. As the description says "America then, as told by America now."

This adaptation of American history is not meant to be an accurate series of events, but an inspirational story of people working hard and persevering through the impossible. Maybe this is what the founders of our country would want us to take away from their story. ...

But as, George Washington reflects in the finale of Hamilton, “ Let me tell you what I wish I’d known When I was young and dreamed of glory
You have no control: (over) Who lives, Who dies, Who tells your story. ... But when you’re gone, who remembers your name? Who keeps your flame? Who tells your story?”

Historians tell the stories, build the myths, and the culture picks them up and turns the myths into the narratives that shape the lives of the people.

You might think that the history is plain: the founding fathers freed themselves from the tyranny of taxation without representation, creating a new kind of nation and a government ruled not by a monarch but by a leader elected fairly: by the people.

This is of course the simplified myth of our founding, ignoring the nation’s genocidal colonial past and the fact that more than 20% of the people in the newly formed United States were barely considered people at all, but property.

In her riveting book “An Indigenous People’s History of the United States”, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz reminds us again and again that white people forming this nation were in fact settler colonialists who seized land and territory from the continent’s original inhabitants with the intentional use of genocide – and genocidal tactics such as forced displacement and coerced assimilation.

She also connected this history to England and most of Europe’s transition into capitalism – where the ownership of property, and the resources to be squeezed from that property, was suddenly a commodity that accumulated wealth.

She writes: “In settler colonialism, Europeans export people with the promise of land, and private property, so that land itself becomes the chief commodity in the primitive accumulation of capital.”

And that promise that led settlers to move to the “new world”; the promise that each person (adult man...) would be given, or somehow earn, land to own – thus freeing themselves from poverty.

But the problem with this promise, is of course, that the land was already occupied by indigenous North Americans.

The myth that the indigenous people of the North American continent were savages and murderous was perpetuated by settlers and governments alike to stoke genocidal reactions – moving or killing off the native people was the only way that land would be available for more and more settlers.

In fact, the founders of this nation were so caught up in this myth that this is the last line of the grievances listed in the Declaration of Independence: “... and [king George] has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.”

They accuse the king of encouraging the indigenous peoples that lived near the borders of the colonies to reclaim the lands, when he knew that they were using genocidal tactics to fight back against colonizers.

In other words, the Signers of the Declaration of Independence were claiming that England was encouraging the indigenous people to slaughter the settlers – in the same way that the settlers were being encouraged, by England, to slaughter the indigenous people.

All I hear is “How dare you do to us what we did to them?” All I hear is, “if we give minorities power, they’ll use it to crush us.” All I hear is, “mommy, mommy, little sister is stealing my toy.”

Obviously there is a lot more nuance than that in this history. There were decades of ignoring pleas for justice, and thwarting attempts at creating order, there was excessive use of force, and there were extrajudicial killings by the military.

The birth of this nation freed one set of people, one limited set of privileged white skinned people, but it ensured the destruction and erasure of many more people. Indigenous people are STILL living in a limbo state in this country.

In A Declaration, NOT of Independence, poet Ralph Salisbury writes about this contradiction:

“Apparently I’m mom’s immaculately-conceived Irish-American son, because, Social-Security time come, my Cherokee dad could not prove he’d been born.

He could pay taxes though, financing troops, who’d conquered our land, and could go to jail, the time he had to shoot or die, by a Caucasian attacker’s knife.”

His father couldn’t prove his citizenship, and yet the taxes he paid anyway fed the institutions that historically conquered their homeland, while currently enforcing oppressions.

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I am sitting here at my desk, where last night I listened to hours of constant explosions while writing this sermon.

I used to love fireworks. We would go congregate by the water to watch the annual show and then trek the mile back to where we could park our car and wait in an hour long traffic jam to get home.

Now, as my home is surrounded by explosions, and I cringe worrying about them waking my children, or burning down the neighborhood, as I worry about all of the neighbors with PTSD, about all of the terrified animals, about someone calling the police on our black neighbors, I don’t love them so much anymore.

What a messed up thing that the celebration of our nation’s freedom is to recreate the bombs that were dropped, the destruction they caused, and not even acknowledge the lives that were taken. When we sing “rockets red glare, bombs bursting in air”, we aren’t talking about fireworks, we are talking about WARFARE.

In the words of King George the III in Hamilton: “I will murder your friends and family to remind you of my love.”

The revolutionaries fought for and with their lives, but what were they really fighting for? The myth says Taxation without representation – but what I want to know was it the ability to live a life not in constant fear?

Or did these wealthy and powerful men not want to give up their income? Was this conflict about tea? Or was it about slavery? Or was it about trying to break free from capitalism, except they didn’t know what that was yet, so they just reinvented it even stronger and meaner?

When capital is tied tightly to the labor of bodies, the value of that capital is far less if you have to pay your labor force. If the colonies wanted to not be treated as capital, they had to begin to face the fact that their wealth and financial structures were based on slave labor.

They accuse England of barbaric treatment of them, while perpetrating even more barbaric treatment of the people whose labor and bodies they used to create the world they were living in!

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“This land is your land, this land is my land... made for you and me.” Woody Guthrie wrote those words in the early 1940s and Sharon Jones rewrote the music and used the original

lyrics as found in Guthrie’s personal papers to record her version in 2004. Carol and Craig did an amazing job with their cover.

Charles Leonard wrote this about the song: “Described as a Marxist reply to *God Bless America*, Guthrie wrote it after an extensive, tough road trip during the Depression-torn 1930s, from Texas to Los Angeles and all around the American West.”

“The Jones version is slower, darker and more serious. It includes all the verses and gets Guthrie’s intention of putting the spotlight on a deeply unequal society across in a much clearer way.

“In 2016, her close friend and Dap-Kings bandleader Gabriel Roth wrote a touching tribute after Jones died. ...

“Using a dark reharmonisation of *Yankee Doodle Dandy* as an intro, the Dap-Kings rearranged *This Land* as a rough bluesy march, setting the tone for Sharon to tear into the lyrics of the song with the fiery gusto of a revolutionary,” wrote Roth.

“However, it was the inclusion of Guthrie’s rarely heard original verses that really enabled Sharon to reclaim the song as an urgent and unambiguous demand for equality and human dignity in a nation rife with social injustice and patriotic hypocrisy.”

The question that Guthrie comes down to, is was this land really made for you and me? It seems like the America that we are told stories about didn’t exist, and still doesn’t. This land, if you mean this country, was made for a certain group of people.

“This is my home”, as we sang in our earlier hymn: “the country where my heart is. Here are my hopes and dreams... But other hearts in other lands are beating with hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.” This hymn, this patriotic hymn to the tune “Finlandia” is a call to peace and mutual understanding. But even this hymn and even more so *This Land is your land*, both are based on the understanding that the land, the place is owned by a people.

When we talk about this land, and made for: especially knowing that it was written as a response to *God Bless America*, speaks to an understanding that we were meant to be here all of us, that it was our manifest destiny to “own” this part of the North American continent.

The indigenous people would disagree, because this is their homeland, but know that this land can’t be owned by any one person, or nation, or country. The land, like the tree in our story, is there for everyone. It is here to sustain us all. We are not masters of the land, we are part of the ecosystem.

We are part of the interdependent web of all existence. Who owns the land, who owns the country, who owns the people within it? Whose are we?

What is America now, but a mishmash of stolen and living culture, subdued by the broken dreams of capitalism, and built on stolen land by the hands and the backs of enslaved black people?

How do we face that history?

What Myths do we live into now?

Richard Blanco offers us a picture: Declaration of INTERdependence:

We’re overworked and underpaid mothers and fathers, we’re wealthy progressive folks and farmers, we’re coal miners, we’re black sons of black mothers, dying in the streets. We’re the incarcerated.

“We’re a Buddhist serving soup at a shelter alongside a stockbroker. We’re each other’s shelter and hope: a widow’s fifty cents in a collection plate and a golfer’s ten-thousand-dollar pledge for a cure.

We hold these truths to be self-evident...

We’re the cure for hatred caused by despair. We’re the good morning of a bus driver who remembers our name, the tattooed man who gives up his seat on the subway. We’re every door held open with a smile when we look into each other’s eyes the way we behold the moon. We’re the moon. We’re the promise of one people, one breath declaring to one another:

I see you. I need you. I am you.

I see you, I need you. I am You.

May we live this promise, every day. And I hope you will come and go with me to that land, the much hoped for and dreamed of land of Justice, Freedom and Singing – Sing Hymn 1018- Come and Go With Me.