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USA

The American Summer Begins with Mass Shootings and Protests

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In the United States, summer begins on July 4, Independence Day, with patriotic parades celebrating “the land of the free and the home of the brave,” backyard beer and barbeques, and fireworks everywhere.

Television broadcasts the Nathan’s Coney Island hotdog eating contest—the record is 76 hotdogs in 10 minutes held by Joey Chestnut who won again this year. With school out, a three-day weekend, and some beginning their vacations, the day is given over to celebration.

But not this year.

In Highland Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, a 21-year-old man named Robert E. Crimo, ensconced in a tower fired 83 shots from a semi-automatic rifle at the Fourth of July parade killing seven people and wounding 46. That was the worst of a dozen mass shooting on the United States on Independence Day. Congress refused to ban military-type arms and the Supreme Court recently struck down some gun regulations.

In other cities across the country—Los Angeles and San Francisco, St. Louis and Chicago, Atlanta and New York, among others—the July 4 parades during the day and the fireworks displays that night were interrupted by hundreds and sometimes thousands of women marching for abortion rights. Many women interviewed by the media said the same thing: “July 4 is a celebration of freedom. But the Supreme Court decision on abortion has made us women less free.”

Black people, who have always questioned the notion that they lived in the “land of the free,” have never fully shared in the July 4 celebrations since the Revolution of 1776 and the Constitution of 1787 didn’t free them. Some Black people have celebrated June 19, Juneteenth, which President Joe Biden last year made a federal holiday. The holiday originated on June 19, 1865 when U.S. Army General Gordon Granger proclaimed the freedom of the enslaved people of Texas, an event celebrated ever since in Houston, Texas and some other areas. One might say that Juneteenth was for many Black people their Fourth of July.

Black activists in many American cities protested against white racism on July 4. Black law students held a sit-in for eight hours at the Supreme Court. One of them, Amy Yeboah, a Howard University professor, said, “We’re honoring Black women – the lives that have been lost to police brutality – but also the blind eye that America has to the injustices that face Black women.”

In Chicago, Michael Ben Yosef, helped to organize protests against police brutality. “Independence for people of color has not been part of our lives. We’re constantly murdered, harassed because of police brutality all over the country. The concept of freedom does not seem to come to our doorstep, even though we’ve been here 400 years,” he said. “We look it as an abomination to recognize anything that comes with the Fourth of July.”

Blacks in Brooklyn marched and rallied, with the slogan, “Confronting the Fourth of July. Joe Macellaro, one of the organizers, asked. “What does the Fourth of July mean to people who are still oppressed, marginalized – who don’t have all the freedoms we’re supposed to have in this country?”

In South Dakota, the indigenous Ogalala Lakota people, protested former President Donald Trump’s July 4 visit to Mount Rushmore, the tourist site where busts of four former U.S. presidents—George Washington, Thomas

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Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln—have been carved into the mountain. The mountain, sacred to the Lakota people, had to be partly demolished to carve out the busts. Trump, who supported running the XL pipeline through the Lakota's lands, has proposed that his head should be chiseled there with the others. Not surprisingly then, the Lakota and their supporters blocked a major highway to impede Trump's visit.

The July 4 holiday cannot be a real celebration until all Americans share in the peace and the freedom the country proclaims. Until they do, it will also be a day of protest.

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