

BCA Dispatch

"The issue is not issues; the issue is the system"
—Ronnie Dugger

Newsletter of the **January-February**
Boston-Cambridge Alliance for Democracy **2013**

*It's called the American Dream because
you have to be asleep to believe it.*

—George Carlin

COMMUNITY NOTES

Don't be left out! Join the BCA/NorthBridge planning group—
call Barbara Clancy for time of next meeting: 781-894-1179.

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Jean Marybourn

Jean is with the angels. On December 20, in a hospital in Spokane, she died following an abdominal operation meant to find and remove the cause of pre-existing sepsis. While she was living in Norwell MA, Jean was co-chair of the Boston-Cambridge Alliance for Democracy, and later member of the Alliance for Democracy's national council. (Continued on Page 15 >>)

Police State Puerto Rico

Corruption, Austerity, Rampant Violence

by Belen Fernandez, Pulse Media, 26 June 2012

IN FEBRUARY 2011, US CONGRESSMAN LUIS V. GUTIERREZ, a Democrat from Illinois, addressed the House of Representatives:

"I want to talk to you today about a part of the world where the rights of citizens of all walks of life to protest and speak their minds is being denied, with clubs and pepper spray. A part of the world where a student strike led the university to ban student protests anywhere, anytime on campus, and where, when the students protested the crackdown on free speech, they were violently attacked by heavily armed riot police... What faraway land has seen student protests banned, union protesters beaten, and free speech advocates jailed? The United States of America's colony of Puerto Rico".

Gutierrez was referring to a period of intense crackdowns by Puerto Rican police on peaceful protests that began in response to fiscal austerity measures, the firing of 30,000 state employees, the suspension of collective bargaining rights, and a 50 per cent increase in tuition fees - rendering education prohibitively expensive for many students. Police violence has been amply documented in a new report released by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), titled "Island of Impunity: Puerto Rico's Outlaw Police Force".

According to the report, the Puerto Rico Police Department (PRPD)'s rampant violations of human and constitutional rights range from beatings with batons and nightsticks to sexual harassment of female protesters, from the administration of pepper spray at point-blank range and potentially lethal rubber bullets to the indiscriminate use of chemical agents—including tear gas dispersed from helicopters and a highly toxic form of gas not used in the US in 50 years. Other (Continued on Page 12 >>)



In 1861 this \$10 greenback was worth about \$240 in today's money—enough to pay room and board for 3 or 4 months at that time.

HIDDEN HISTORY

Abe Lincoln: Economic Hero

Greenbacks, Industry, Science, Education

by Ellen H. Brown, excerpt from Web of Debt (2010, p.82-3)

BOTH [PRESIDENTS ANDREW] JACKSON AND [ABRAHAM] LINCOLN were targets of assassination attempts, but for Lincoln they started before he was even inaugurated. He had to deal with treason, insurrection, and national bankruptcy within the first days of taking office. Considering the powerful forces arrayed against him, his achievements in the next four years were nothing short of phenomenal.

His government built and equipped the largest army in the world, smashed the British-financed insurrection, abolished slavery, and freed four million slaves. Along the way, the country managed to become the greatest industrial giant the world had ever seen. The steel industry was launched, a continental railroad system was created, the Department of Agriculture was established, a new era of farm machinery and cheap tools was promoted, a system of free higher education was established through the Land Grant College System, land development was encouraged by passage of a Homestead Act granting ownership privileges to settlers, major government support was provided to all branches of science, the Bureau of Mines was organized, governments in the Western territories were established, the judicial system was reorganized, labor productivity increased by 50 to 75 percent, and standardization and mass production was promoted worldwide.

"How was all this accomplished, with a Treasury that was completely broke and a Congress that hadn't been paid themselves? As Benjamin Franklin might have said, "That is simple." Lincoln tapped into the same cornerstone that had gotten the impoverished colonists through the American Revolution and a long period of internal development before that: He authorized the government to issue its own paper fiat money. National control was reestablished over banking, and the economy was jump-started with a 600 percent increase in government spending and cheap (Continued on next page >>)

credit directed at production... Lincoln's government used a system of payment... popularly called "Greenbacks" because they were printed on the back with green ink (a feature the dollar retains today). They were basically just receipts acknowledging work done or goods delivered, which could be traded in the community for an equivalent value of goods or services. The Greenbacks represented man-hours rather than borrowed gold. Lincoln is quoted as saying "*The wages of men should be recognized as more important than the wages of money.*" Over 400 million Greenback dollars were printed and used to pay soldiers and government employees, and to buy supplies for the war.

"The Greenback system was not actually Lincoln's idea, but when pressure grew in Congress for the plan, he was quick to endorse it. The South had seceded from the Union soon after his election in 1860. To fund the War between the States, the Eastern banks had offered a loan package that was little short of extortion—\$150 million advanced at interest rates of 24 to 36 percent. Lincoln knew the loan would be impossible to pay off. He took the revolutionary approach because he had no other real choice. The government could either print its own money or succumb to debt slavery to the bankers..."

[After Lincoln was killed, the bankers managed to eliminate this government production of money, and resumed lending unearned money at interest to the government! —Ed.]

Ellen Brown, a lawyer based in California, is founder of the Public Banking Institute and champion of transforming government borrowing into government direct investment in all federal or state projects. Author of eleven books, she is currently writing a new book on public banking.

Who Won Lincoln's War?

Black Activists Critical for Union Success

by William Loren Katz, *Portside.org*, 20 December 2012

LIKE JUST ABOUT EVERYONE WHO HAS SEEN IT, I was enthralled by "Lincoln," the Hollywood film directed with authority and creative license by Stephen Spielberg, smoothly scripted by Tony Kushner and crowned by a veritable feast of brilliant acting. But in my case, as the author of 40 books on African American history and editor of 212 library reference volumes (most address Civil War era issues and personalities), I watched with an additional set of eyes.

Spielberg begins his story in January 1865, and on the right foot: Two former slaves, now Union soldiers, approach America's most venerated President to inform him of their battle experiences and of the reality that if captured they would be immediately executed. One soldier adds, "our pay is half of what white soldiers get, and we have to pay for our own uniforms."

Perhaps this scene is meant to evoke the little known truth that by the Civil War's end 178,958 African Americans—one fifth of black male adults under 45, a tenth of the Union army—had proven their courage in 449 engagements and 39 major battles, earning 22 Medals of Honor. Another 29,511 constituted a fourth of the (integrated!) Union Navy. And Black volunteers enlisted when the Confederacy had no reserves, faced mounting desertions, frontline casualties and bread riots at home. As early as August 1864, Lincoln had written that without his African American soldiers he would have been "compelled to abandon the war in three weeks."

Audiences are soon presented with a series of intense and consequential political discussions. A cautious Lincoln (Daniel

Day Lewis), his hand resting on the white public's pulse, duels amicably with Congressman Thaddeus Stevens the grim-faced Chair of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee. As Stevens, Tommy Lee Jones steals every scene he is in as a cantankerous advocate of equality whose tongue, the film maintains, only Lincoln can tame.

Stevens, one of history's most maligned figures, had the power to infuriate and a tongue that reduced political foes to quivering self-doubt. On two occasions he had to fend off knife-wielding fellow Congressmen. In 1863 Jubal Early detoured his Confederate cavalry from Gettysburg so they could burn down his iron foundry in Chambersburg. [See Fawn Brodie's *Thaddeus Stevens* (1959, 1966)].

Also Hollywood twice damned Stevens as a Benedict Arnold-grade "race traitor." The racist blockbuster, *Birth of a Nation* (1915) caricatured him as a snarling foe of white supremacy and champion of "race mixing." In *Tennessee Johnson* (1942) he is played as a conniving, evil, fanatic.

The real Stevens stood with abolitionists pledged to "fight against slavery until Hell freezes over and then continue the battle on the ice." He defended fugitive slaves in court, used his home as an Underground Railroad station, and was a staunch egalitarian. He also practiced what he preached: he worked with African Americans, had an African American common law wife, and asked to be buried in Lancaster's only integrated cemetery. He and Senator Charles Sumner led Congress's effort to free slaves, grant them equal pay as soldiers, and pass the 13th Amendment. In 1867 Stevens, father of the 14th Amendment, died short of his life's goal: a democratic South's ruled not by a planter elite but former slave and poor white voters owning "40 acres and a mule."

Once "Lincoln" concentrates on the 13th Amendment important details beg for inclusion but, unfortunately, are absent. Senator Charles Sumner is mentioned once and Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony—who led campaigns to win over the public's hearts and minds—do not appear. Only Lincoln is left standing . . . the sole hero.

Emancipation Was an Afterthought

Also missing is the vital, rarely revealed, back-story. For two years Lincoln struggled only "to save the Union." Not only did he refuse to challenge slavery, but he also ordered Union officers to deny a haven to runaway slave families whose members had fled to Union lines.

Then the ground beneath the President shifted. The sight of U.S. troops triggered slave stampedes to freedom, rebuking the planters' myth of the happy, loyal, slave and igniting clashes between soldiers in Union camps and the Confederate officers who arrived to brutally reclaim runaways. Indeed, the Black urge for liberty turned the Confederacy's greatest asset into its worst nightmare: an enemy within. "To see a black face was to find a true heart," reported Union soldiers caught behind enemy lines.

The actions of slaves began to dismantle the plantation system. The Confederacy was left without the thousands of slave laborers upon whose backs the agricultural oligarchy had rested. Abolitionist agitators used this news to broadcast a louder wake-up call to white northerners.

Meanwhile, Lincoln's officers reported "contrabands" in their camps wanted to help as nurses, cooks, servants, construction workers, launderers, and blacksmiths. Some were eager to serve as spies and soldiers. This news also reached a war-

wearry northern public fearful they would find the names of their drafted fathers, brothers and uncles in the weekly Union casualty lists.

Blacks Fighting Rebels Out West, Capture Ship in SC

The most dramatic changes came first in the West. In the Indian Territory, only months after Fort Sumter, 10,000 African Americans, Native people and some southern whites battled Confederate armies. Survivors then fought their way to Kansas, where the young men among them joined unofficial Union units. Commanding those units were abolitionist officers who had gained military training a few years before riding with John Brown in Kansas. In the West, a multicultural Union army fought a type of war Lincoln had not ordered: They liberated enslaved people in Missouri.

The Deep South faced new problems. In May 1862 in Charleston, South Carolina enslaved seaman Robert Smalls was thinking that his Confederate battleship, Planter, "might be of some use to Uncle Abe." One night, after the white officers had left, Smalls and his enslaved crew led their families aboard, sailed out of Charleston harbor and surrendered to the Union fleet. Smalls became Captain of the Planter, now a ship of the U.S. Navy. In light of fast-moving events white people began to reconsider their assumptions.

In 1862, Congress took note of the runaways' offers of help and abolitionist pressure with two Confiscation Acts. These laws opened the door to emancipation and the service of black troops. Finally, President Lincoln acted. As a "military necessity," he announced, "We must free the slaves or be ourselves subdued." On January 1, 1863 Abraham Lincoln became "The Great Emancipator"—by performing one of history's great catch-ups. Four months later he admitted as much: "I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me."

By August 1863, Lincoln saw "peace as not so distant." Why? "Commanders of our armies in the field believe the emancipation policy and the use of colored troops constitute the heaviest blow yet dealt to the rebellion." He praised his new soldiers: "There will be some black men who can remember that, with silent tongue, and clenched teeth, and steady eye, and well-poised bayonet, they have helped mankind ... while, I fear there will be some white ones, unable to forget that, with malignant heart, and deceitful speech, they have strove to hinder it."

That November, northern voters rewarded Lincoln for his battlefield victories and successful Black military gamble: He was returned to the White House by all but three states and 212 to 21 electoral votes. He also polled the largest vote percentage—55%—since Andrew Jackson and won a thumping 70% of military ballots.

Five days before his assassination, "Honest Abe" assessed his historic role: "I have only been an instrument. The logic and moral power of Garrison and the anti-slavery people of the country and the army, have done all." Sadly, what President Lincoln himself regarded as vital to his political and military success, Spielberg often leaves out.

After the first scene, the only people of color who appear are pleasant, taciturn servants. Gloria Reuben plays Mrs. Lincoln's quiet, subdued servant, Elizabeth Keckley. The real Mrs. Keckley purchased her freedom, that of her son and sent the son to college (he volunteered and died in battle). She was an accomplished seamstress who served the households of Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee before the Lincoln White House, where she became a confidant of Mrs. Lincoln. She also organized the Contraband Relief Society that aided thousands of wartime run-

aways with donations from the Lincolns, prominent whites and free African Americans. In 1867 she published her Memoir.

During January 1865 Lincoln welcomed some dynamic African Americans to the White House but they do not appear on screen. Among them were Martin R. Delany, whom he characterized as "a most extraordinary and intelligent man" and had him appointed a Major, the highest-ranking Black Union officer. Today, Delany is considered the father of Black Nationalism.

Ex-Slave Frederick Douglass a Lincoln Adviser

Three times the President met with "my good friend Douglass." History knows him as Frederick Douglass: runaway slave, noted speaker, author and editor, an early champion of women's rights, and the foremost recruiter of African American troops. Lincoln regarded Douglass as one of his chief advisers and told him "there's no man's opinion I value more than yours." Some scholars consider Douglass the greatest American reformer of the 19th century.

By overlooking the contributions of Keckley, Delany, Douglass and millions of others who helped end human bondage and win the war, Spielberg makes a white Congress and President the sole creators of history. This is not the evidence provided by the Civil War, nor is it the way Lincoln understood his march to freedom and victory.

Early on, Abraham Lincoln was a frontier lawyer who told "darkey stories" and a Senate candidate who endorsed white supremacy. As President, he returned runaways to their owners and hoped freed slaves would leave the country. He rejected the reasoning of white and African American activists and resented their harsh language.

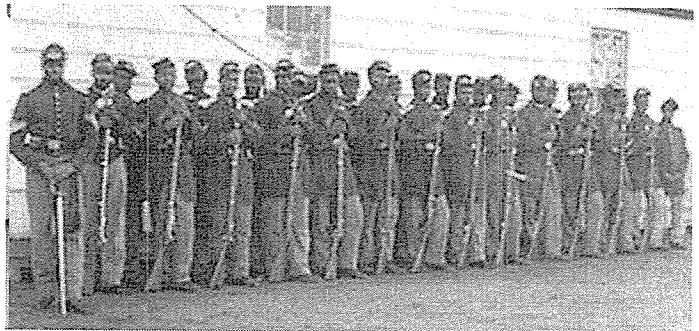
(Like JFK) Lincoln Changed, and...

Later on, he began to listen, learn and change. And much to his credit, he never retreated from any advanced position he had previously taken. When he finally, finally advocated the right of black veterans and educated men of color to vote, he became the first modern President.

Sadly, this "Honest Abe," along with many known and unknown African Americans and their white allies, failed to make the movie's final cut. Yet as runaways, soldiers and anti-slavery agitators they helped determine the course of a war, shaped public opinion, pressed Congress to pass laws and Constitutional Amendments, and altered the thinking and actions of America's greatest icon.

All Americans deserve to know what President Lincoln knew about the country's most important war.

**William Loren Katz is the author of forty books and editor of another 212, most on African American history [New York Times]. He has been affiliated with NYU since 1973. His website is <http://williamkatz.com/>*



A Black unit of the Union army