

America at 250: The Empire Behind the American Dream

As the United States celebrates its 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, we need to look past the parades and fireworks to a history the official commemoration leaves out. America tells itself a lofty story about exceptional virtue, but the documented history is one of colonialism, slavery, and empire.

The story most often told begins with visionary founders and a steady march toward “a more perfect union.” The documented record tells a different story. American history begins with a genocide. Columbus’s arrival opened a period of mass extermination for the Taíno and Arawak peoples, later systematized through forced-labor regimes. The colonies that followed were driven less by religious liberty than by the pursuit of land, resources, and political power. That pursuit was built on slavery. The wealth generated by cotton, tobacco, and sugar was extracted through generations of slavery and coerced labor. This became the foundation of the colonial and early American economy.

Many of the Revolution’s leading figures, including Washington and Jefferson, were slaveholding landowners whose “empire of liberty” excluded the millions of people they held in bondage. Independence consolidated power among a propertied elite rather than delivering broad freedom. Native nations faced escalating wars, massacres and broken treaties regardless of wartime allegiance. Free and enslaved Black Americans saw their position worsen rather than improve, women remained legally subordinate and most poor and working white Americans found that political independence changed little about their daily lives.

The nineteenth century’s westward expansion saw wars of aggression and ethnic cleansing of native populations dressed in the language of Manifest Destiny which was in fact settler colonialism sanctified as a divine mission. The Indian Removal Act of 1830, the Trail of Tears, and the massacres at Sand Creek and Wounded Knee were not unfortunate accidents but deliberate policy. The Mexican-American War of aggression stripped Mexico of roughly half its territory under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Emancipation did not dismantle racial and economic exploitation rather it morphed into new laws. Black Codes gave way to Jim Crow, sharecropping reproduced the economics of slavery, and the Compromise of 1877 traded federal protection for political convenience. The civil rights movement that eventually followed was not a concession granted from above but a hard-won response to decades of state-sanctioned terror. Domestic inequality and overseas expansion advanced together. As industrialists amassed vast fortunes and the state moved troops against striking workers at Homestead and Pullman, the same political economy turned outward annexing Hawaii, fighting the Spanish-American War, and waging a counterinsurgency in the Philippines that killed an estimated 200,000 civilians.

The twentieth century repeated the pattern at a greater scale that saw wartime suppression of dissent during World War I, the incarceration of roughly 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II, Cold War-era coups in Iran, Guatemala, Chile etc., the Gulf of Tonkin lie that escalated the Vietnam War, and domestic surveillance programs such as COINTELPRO that targeted civil rights and antiwar organizers.

This pattern has not ended. Since World War II, America has invaded, bombed, or destabilized 70 countries, with the Muslim world bearing a disproportionate share of that record in recent decades. The War on Terror has resulted in an estimated 4.5-4.7 million total deaths and displaced 38 million people. Since 2001, America has dropped an average of 46 bombs per day in Muslim countries. The current cosponsored genocide in Gaza continues its founding history.

American imperialism follows a consistent pattern across two and a half centuries. Expansion has been justified through the language of civilization, liberation, anti-communism, or

counterterrorism rather than open colonial self-interest in securing resources and markets for corporations and using institutions such as the IMF and World Bank to destabilize or economically subdue nations. Military force, from the early "Banana Wars" to present-day interventions, has consistently protected those economic interests over the self-determination of local populations, producing a long record of installed and propped-up regimes from Latin America to the Muslim world. As formal colonialism became politically untenable after World War II, this control shifted to covert methods of coups, propaganda, and assassination programs. This approach in recent decades has become more overt, direct and unapologetic. Surveillance and policing infrastructure has increasingly been used against dissenters and minority communities, especially Muslims at home.

Islamic Reflection

The Qur'an's account of past powerful nations measures them not by their material or civilizational achievements, but by their oppression and injustice. Allah (swt) mentions 'Ad, Thamud, and Pharaoh as nations with towering monuments and formidable power.

﴿أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ * إِرَمَ ذَاتِ الْعِمَادِ * الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُهَا فِي الْبِلَادِ * وَثَمُودَ الَّذِينَ جَابُوا الصَّخْرَ بِالْوَادِ * وَفِرْعَوْنَ ذِي الْأَوْتَادِ * الَّذِينَ طَعَوْا فِي الْبِلَادِ * فَأَكْتَرُوا فِيهَا الْفُسَادَ * فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ * إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَبِالْمِرْصَادِ﴾
“Did you not see how your Lord dealt with 'Ad, the people of Iram with their towering structures, unmatched anywhere in the land; and with Thamud, who carved their dwellings into the valley's mountains; and with Pharaoh of the mighty monuments (stakes)? Each transgressed throughout the land and spread corruption there, so your Lord let loose upon them a scourge of punishment. Your Lord is ever watchful.” [Surah Al-Fajr 6-14]

Prophets Hud (as), Salih (as), and Musa (as) were sent to call these nations back from injustice but their warnings went unheeded. Allah (swt) reduces civilizational narratives of great empires to a single judgment: oppressive, unjust, arrogant. Despite the lofty propaganda of 250 years, America's true nature is that of a colonial empire that has wreaked havoc across the world. American imperialism, oppression and arrogance are systemic outcomes of its ideological basis of secular liberalism and capitalism.

For us Muslims, there is no need to commemorate 250 years of a Pharaonic civilization. In contrast, the Islamic civilization under the Caliphate (Khilafah) has a documented record of delivering peace and justice across centuries of rule. It safeguarded non-Muslim communities and protected their religious sites. It governed without resorting to colonization or ethnic cleansing. It elevated living standards, cared for the environment, advanced science and education, and honored and protected the dignity of women. It forged a society where diverse ethnicities coexisted and flourished across continents. This is not nostalgia. It is an alternative civilizational order built on revelation rather than man-made law and on justice rather than imperial power. While America celebrates its colonial empire, we Muslims have the mercy of Islam to offer people. The Caliphate is not a relic of the past. It is the necessity of our times to bring true justice and peace, and to deliver humanity out of the darkness of secular liberalism and capitalism. The question before us is whether this generation will be the one to revive it, and whether you will be part of it.

Muharram 15, 1448 AH
June 30th, 2026 CE

Hizb ut Tahrir
America