

The American Dream, Indigenous Peoples and Slavery

By Arnold August, March 2012

U.S. scholar Jim Cullen, an admirer of the Pilgrims, the Puritans and the “American Dream” (which he uses as the title of a book), writes that the Puritans massacred the Indigenous peoples and established self-righteous religion and politics. They were no better or worse than other colonizers, such as the Spanish.¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, the classical proponent of “democracy in America” wrote, in a book with that very title (published in 1835), that “the colony was scarcely established when slavery was introduced [1620].”²

In the course of the new settlers’ development, what later emerged as the Thirteen Colonies came into conflict with England. The Declaration of Independence of July 4, 1776, provides innumerable reasons for the break from England. Its preamble proclaims the necessity to sever the political bonds “and to assume among the powers of the earth” equality with other countries.³ They wanted nothing more than to have an equal standing among other countries. “It was a *revolutionary* document with respect to Britain, but not in domestic matters”⁴ (emphasis added). This created a contradictory situation: the Thirteen Colonies were opposed to British colonial rule, but, at the same time, they not only had incorporated slavery as part of society, but also harboured their own colonial ambitions “domestically.” Francis Jennings, a leading historian of Indigenous peoples in the U.S., wrote, “White Americans were fighting against British imperial control in the East and [for] their own imperialism in the West [Indigenous peoples’ territories].”⁵

France supported the Thirteen Colonies in its rebellion to separate from England. This support was based on the rivalry between England and France for world domination. The Thirteen Colonies represented a pawn for France in the chess game. However, the Thirteen Colonies resumed commerce with England almost immediately after the war with England and thus betrayed its collaborator, France.

¹ Cullen, Jim. 2003. *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*. NY: Oxford University Press, p. 12–13.

² Tocqueville, Alexis de. 2004. *Democracy in America*. NY: Bantam Books, p. 33.

³ The Declaration of Independence (as adopted by Congress, July 4, 1776).
2007. In *Michael Hardt Presents Thomas Jefferson: The Declaration of Independence*. NY: Verso, p. 16.

⁴ Phillips, Kevin. 2003. *Wealth and Democracy*. NY: Broadway Books, p. 5.

⁵ Woodiwiss, Michael. 2001. *Organized Crime and American Power*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 39.