



# BLACKLASH

*The Africana Collective*

REPORT NO. 7

Post-Election Purple Haze: Democracy and its Discontents



## INTRODUCTION

*Blacklash: The Africana Collective* (BTAC) engages in interdisciplinary research to provide analysis and recommendations on a range of issues affecting the African(a) world—linked communities with peoples of African ancestry. Using our collective knowledge and skills, as well as our grounding as thinkers, educators, activists, organizers, and parents, our objective is to support and inform action toward safeguarded humane development throughout the African world. We are independent in our funding, research, and directives, allowing us to work decidedly in the best interests of said communities.

Each month, we consider one topical issue as a collective. In the process, we prepare individual statements, meet (virtually) to hammer out our findings, then prepare our report. That report is then shared with the African world via online outlets and through various networks a week prior to a (virtual) town hall meeting, where we invite members of the African world community to join us, debate, (dis)agree, and come away with perspectives that inform collective action. We strongly request that all attendees at the town hall read the report **beforehand**. This way, you are an active participant in shaping your own views and subsequent decisions. We encourage you to sign up, or register, for the town hall, so we may keep you abreast of upcoming events, key resources, and ways to translate the reports' ideas into collective betterment scaled to wherever you are and with whom you have to work.

In this thought paper, report no. 7, we consider the topical issues surrounding post-presidential election United States, specifically democracy and its discontents for the African world. Join us for the virtual town hall on Wednesday, January 20, 2021, at 6 pm EST/10 pm GMT. We have intentionally if not provocatively held this town hall on inauguration day!



## PERSPECTIVE: DR. IYELLI ICHILE

The present moment does, indeed, feel like a purple haze. As the white citizenry of this settler colony-turned-empire claw at each other over only somewhat divergent political visions, Black people watch. Some of our folks view the national political events of the past two months as irrelevant, someone else's fight. Others of us watch in horror, stricken with the belief that Black people will, as they have before, be the collateral damage sustained in white America's battle with itself. For those of us living/working in/near the capital city, the savagery literally hit close to home. The most urgent need is to protect and defend ourselves against whatever this will turn out to be. We must maintain clarity, not just in the face of overt racist violence, but also in the face of the rhetorical gasping and the figurative pearl-clutching of the mainstream news media. In the face of false premises about the existence of an idealized democracy.

We must refine and hold fast to our own political objectives, even as the American empire crumbles. This is the only way to clear away this purple haze. What we cannot do is remain caught between a red rock and a blue hard place. The prophetic words of Brother Malcolm X have been ringing in my head for days, especially popular phrases like "chickens coming home to roost" and slogans like "the hypocrisy of democracy." Despite all the red and blue trappings, this moment is nothing our ancestors have not already seen. They lived through the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, etc. the sentiments of white hatred and angst have simply returned, their slogans and phrases simply renewed and coming to an ugly head, after the 2020 election.

If he were watching it with us, W.E.B. Dubois might have identified "the frenzy" amongst the crowd that attacked the Capitol. This is the America that we have lived in since before there was an America. Nothing new has been revealed to us. The most revelatory thing to come of all this, perhaps, is the fact that white America appears to have been wearing a mask of its own, to hide itself from itself. We're simply witnessing the ripping off of the mask. On some level, mainstream elements in America are perceiving their own deep ugliness. Revelatory though this unmasking may be—for it is certainly a mask which "grins and lies"—I am not convinced that this will change things in our lives. America will not likely take the next step of looking *intently* in the mirror at its ugliness, much less attempt to fix it. Part of what makes this purple haze, well, hazy, is that many of our folks still hope that America will fix itself. Stacy Abrams and others are even celebrated for the strenuous role they've played in helping to "fix" it.

This haze feels like the red poppy haze on the Wiz, when Dorothy and the crew fell in with the sex workers outside the Emerald City. Reassuring reports that elections and insurrections will be "investigated" are poppies. Politicians with blue ties and blue eyes denouncing the "enemies of democracy" are poppies. Our will to advance our own causes, to meet our own objectives, to make it home, are thwarted by a dreamy, sleepy complacency, and some of us keep sniffing these flowers. I am reminded of a statement I made about the dangers of white paternalism. In it, is the abiding faith that Big White Daddies (and Mommies) will sort things out and all will be put back to normal again. Perhaps this purple poppy haze will remain the status quo until it rains directly on our faces, or we find ourselves crying—again. Some more. In any case, I hope we can find a way to move away from social thirstiness and dysfunctional political relationships. I hope we can locate



alternative water sources (in real life and in our political lives), and continue to tackle the all-important question raised by the Last Poets: “Black people, what you gon’ do?”

## PERSPECTIVE: DR. JARED BALL

Jimi Hendrix was an uncontrollable genius. So unrestrained, his gifts necessitated, perhaps were enhanced by, the freedom of an autodidact learning which allowed him to adapt his right-handed guitar, strung upside down, and played backwards to accommodate his left-hand. This revolution produced more. Hendrix revolutionized the guitar, blues, R&B, rock, and to hear his posthumous influence on the likes of Miles Davis, he had jazz too. Hendrix also revolutionized himself, politically, and went being hazed into an uncharted clarity which, according to researchers such as John Potash, *Drugs as Weapons Against Us*, had him targeted for assassination. When Jimi asked what if “6 was 9, I don’t mind...” the 9 was mad and didn’t want it exposed that, as Dr. Charles Finch has said of what we don’t know about Africa’s contributions to world civilization, that we are still “walking on the ceiling.”

Hendrix has been reported to have said that his iconic song Purple Haze was inspired by a dream in which he was passing through an underworld of sorts requiring that he be saved. Some say that Jimi meant saved by Jesus, but, and referring back to Finch, I’d prefer to think that just as Hendrix was moving ever more radically into his Blackness that this was ultimately a reference to Ma’at and *her* being there to judge and guide the soul back up and toward the arc of Ra, hence the line in Purple Haze, “Whatever it is, that girl put a spell on me...” Regardless, stretch or not, what is relatively clear is that Hendrix considered the song, even as he would tire of playing it and rush through performances to get to newer and ever-evolving forms, as having to do with transformation, advance, and a struggle for clarity.

Purple, a combination of red and blue, is precisely what has become of Black politics in the United States. And no, not the Purple Badness of Hendrix’s most recent nearly-reincarnated (improved?!?) form of Prince either. Bound intellectually by the narrowing of thought to the horror-inducing confines of Republican and Democratic party apparatchiks Black politics have indeed become hazy and purple, and in desperate need of a Hendrix-like transcendence. Given that so much of what purports to be Black political thought is actually sponsored with so much green from Democratic Party PACs that it may be more appropriate to call prevailing Black thought more cyan. Or maybe just plain old White.

Though predictable, it is with some amazement that I watch the ways in which limitations BTAC discussed prior to the elections remain or are refashioned post-election. Trump and his minions remain the easily-blamed boogeymen, Biden is still said to be “pushable” by those clinging to their pre-election claims, and those two poles largely inhibit Black Thought from moving beyond that Late Night stage and on to style much more free! (I could not help that). Biden berates Black civil rights leaders at the simple suggestion of Black concerns being unmet and the meekness of those leaders is only outdone by the woeful cries from a Black *misjournalist* class



who report this as though the real failure was with those leaking the audio. No wonder so little is said by a Black press about, and damn sure not in defense of, Julian Assange.

What are the gains to be expected during a Biden administration already stocked with Wall Street globalists and war mongers? Nothing. Especially while we continue to walk on the ceiling and have our Black radical analyses hazed into purple by red and blue spokespeople dressed, literally and philosophically, as us. We are running out and need to move quickly and militantly leftward to a brighter day, and we need now ask as did Jimi, “Is it tomorrow? Or just the end of time?”

## PERSPECTIVE: DR. KWASI KONADU

After a white mob who believes in the idea of Trump besieged the U.S. Capitol, donning Trump flags and escorted by police as if they were children on a school trip through the halls, Mike Pence declared “Freedom wins.” Joe Biden called the event “an assault on the citadel of liberty.” Liberal pundits summarized the moment as a “breath of democracy.” Oppositional forces saw this as yet another threat to democracy. All agreed this thing called democracy was (and have been during Trump's reign) under siege.

My argument is that the United States, or its forerunner colonies, was never a democracy nor can it become one because, if democracy is a “government by the people,” where sovereign power is vested in “the people” who exercise power directly or by elected official, that system of governance requires rational people and most of the 331 million people in the United States are irrational, including their elected officials. By rational, I mean a person or people able to think clearly, sensibly, and logically. The implication is that it doesn't matter who becomes the president, nor which party is in power, for there's a feedback loop where incoming regimes usually do their best to eviscerate the body of work belonging to the previous administration, regardless if some of that work benefits “the people.”

The most basic premise of U.S. democracy (whatever that ultimately means) is the principle of majority rule. That rule is irrational. A majority rule means 50.1 percent will always win, making the 49.9 losers in a zero-sum game for power--and everything else that flows from it. The majority rule principle is illogical because it always works against “the people,” serving only certain people--an otherwise tyranny of the majority! The majority principle also means that if you live in a majority Republican party state, up to 49.9 percent of the votes will NEVER count, as if they were never casted. So much for the “one person-one vote” mantra. Likewise, in a majority Democratic party state, the results will be the same. What about states flipping? Usually, districts or counties flip rather than whole states, and this explains why so much state effort is (re)invested in (re)drawing districts maps for the maintenance of majorities. The occurrence of “flipping” is relatively rare and never widespread, keeping intact the majority rule principle.

The term democracy derives from the Greek *demokratia* (“popular government”), itself from *demos* (“common people,” originally district or division) and *kratos* (“rule, strength”), in the sense of “rule or government by,” but



more generally power over, might, rule, sway, and authority. Though we are led to believe U.S. democracy has its origins in “Western” and therefore Greek notions of democracy, the late Marxist scholar C. L. R. James, in a 1956 article entitled “Every Cook Can Govern: A Study of Democracy in Ancient Greece Its Meaning for Today,” argued, “the most striking thing about Greek Democracy was that the administration... was organized upon the basis of what is known as sortition, or, more easily, selection by lot. Most Greek officials were chosen by a method which amounted to putting names into a hat and appointing the ones whose names came out.” He went on to say “that was precisely the guiding principle of Greek Democracy. And this form of government is the government under which flourished the greatest civilization the world has ever known.”

Some have criticized James for his view of Grecian society, particularly his understanding of the major city-state of Athens and the role of slavery in this “home” of democracy, and we can fault him for his naive pronouncement (“the greatest civilization the world has ever known”)—and on both counts rightfully so. Some background, however, is important here. Surrounded by mountainous terrain and the sea, agrarian and nomadic life characterized early Grecian history and shaped its politics, economy, and society. Grecian society consisted of non-citizens (enslaved individuals, lower class women, and children nineteen years of age and under) and citizens of low and high ranking. The monarch, nobles, and lords formed the high echelons of the citizenry, while men twenty years of age and older occupied the lower ranks. Enslaved labor, agrarianism, fishing, and maritime activities sustained an economy structured around the core activities of city-states—centers of cultural and military life—and were augmented rural production of goods, foodstuff, and crafts by the enslaved and other non-citizens.

For much of ancient Greece’s history, at times up to one-half of its population consisted of enslaved persons, including war captives. So-called Athenian democracy was built on and supported by its enslaved population, which almost doubled the number of inhabitants. The citizen class of Athens formed a fixed minority, complemented by a preponderance of peasants and chattel slavery. The conditions for rich and poor citizens to participate in democratic politics in Athens were laid by enslaved laborers: these laborers produced surplus that precluded elite citizenry from working and allowed even poor citizenry to push back against elite pressures on their freedoms because they rarely did full-time manual labor, relying also on said surplus. In some ways, democracy in Athens rested on the growth of slavery, much like U.S. democracy for its white male citizens (up until the late 19th - early 20th century) depended on the growth of chattel enslavement. That capitalism used slavery then discarded it suggests democracy has been deployed in similar but not the same way. The key difference is slavery was a visceral practice that could be experienced; democracy is an idea lodged in belief and in the irrational.

## PERSPECTIVE: DR. MJIBA FREHIWOT\*

(\*) No contribution for this report. Dr. Frehiwot will co-host the Town Hall.



## PERSPECTIVE: DR. TODD STEVEN BURROUGHS

**Book review of [Murder, Incorporated: Empire, Genocide, Manifest Destiny. Book Three: Perfecting Tyranny.](#) By Mumia Abu-Jamal and Stephen Vittoria. Foreword by Angela Y. Davis.**

**THE ARC OF** the radical universe is long, and Abu-Jamal and Vittoria are determined to extend it well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by pointing out every aspect of American evil. But they refuse to make it sound like school, so they unapologetically attempt a [Joe Cool](#). The third volume of their group of books on the American empire attempts to historically dissect and ideologically analyze all of the public institutions that make up a nation with the same initials as the old Union of South Africa: the U.S. Supreme Court, the mainstream news media, public campaigns such as the War on Drugs, and the institutional resistance to the people's movements (Native American freedom, suffragists, Civil Rights/Black Power). In doing so, Abu-Jamal and Vittoria summarize their anti-hegemonic lives, leaving it all on the field at the end of Page 385.

The book was officially released the same week the American empire was under siege from its own white male supremacy foundation. Lives were lost and white property was damaged by clashes of agents of white supremacy, egged on by a white supremacist President, a Hela act to do [without Klan masks](#). It's one thing to read the story summary and another to catch the live show. (If there are any CDs of *Hamilton* left in America, they have surely been put away for good by now.) Trump's naked white nationalism is the proof that this book series, published as Obama multi-racial optimism yielded first to Black Lives Matter marching and later to Trump's torch flames, is relevant in all its agit-prop glory.

Metaphorically, Abu-Jamal and Vittoria, often trading twelves like a Left radical equivalent of Albert Murray and Ralph Ellison, are two sole residents of a Leftist *Gilligan's Island* (a snapshot that they might appreciate since this trilogy is filled with 20<sup>th</sup>-century pop-cult references), frantically waving banners for young people to stop and read. Unlike those perpetually-rerun castaways, they don't want to be rescued; they want to be heard above the din of Disney+ and Instagram. So they curse, they enlarge fonts and they have subheads and title chapters that are part hilarious and always unforgettable. They want to win the battle of context and content, emphasizing both in ways they hope will stick.

So, then, Queen Victoria is described as the world's greatest drug dealer, Martin Luther King is recalled from the Federal Bureau of Investigation lens as "the most dangerous Negro" in the United States, Fox News is referred to as The Cartoon Network and President Trump, "the 45<sup>th</sup> CEO of the United States," is renamed "Fuckface von Clownstick."

But in-between the humor and the name-calling is a Hela amount of America's murderous and oppressive history, rocking back and forth through time like a bad TARDIS trip. On the history of U.S. surveillance: "Throughout American history, the pendulum has rocked between civil libertarians who embrace the actual language and spirit of the Fourth Amendment regarding the absolute necessity for *probable cause* along with a *legitimate and very specific warrant*—and the various government factions who continually attempt to stage-manage the Constitution with aggressive, warrantless surveillance."



Like the old era of AM Top 40 radio, the hits keep on coming like its contemporary toy, Rock ‘Em Sock ‘Em Robots: the link they make between the billionaire Bill Gates and his buddy, the convicted sex-offender Jeffrey Epstein alone can raise almost any eyebrows. Whether the topic is Edward Snowden or the complex thoughts of U.S. Supreme Court Chief Judge Roger B. Taney as he took away as much humanity as he could from Native Americans and enslaved Africans, the history is well-researched, the analysis sharp, the language always beautiful and taut. (“Jazz broke out from its southern cradle, lighting then night skies of...”) After 26 years of Abu-Jamal’s books, it would be disappointing for any Abu-Jamal work to be otherwise, and he knows that. No matter how brief the Op-Ed or long the book, he has never written for the cheap seats of American intellectual consumption.

The greatest service the authors do is to make sure to emphasize that resistance to the Death Star is possible, profiling several of the activists of the ages, models of humaneness and courage such as Ella Baker and Emma Goldman. *Democracy Now!*’s Amy Goodman—who, it needs to be pointed out, once upon a time [gave up one-third of her affiliates because she stood by Abu-Jamal and his “writes” to be on the air](#)—gets huge shout-outs here for her *old* work; this book was clearly produced before or while she was in the middle of blotting out all alternatives to the Democratic Party and Joe Biden last year.

**IF MUMA ABU-JAMAL** had written only this trio, he’d be a late 20th-century and early 21st-century Leftist legend. But let’s roll call over the last 26 years:

- [Live From Death Row](#)
- [Death Blossoms: Reflections From a Prisoner of Conscience](#)
- [All Things Censored](#) (edited by [Noelle Hanrahan](#))
- [Faith Of Our Fathers: An Examination Of The Spiritual Life Of African And African-American People](#)
- [We Want Freedom: A Life In The Black Panther Party](#)
- [Jailhouse Lawyers: Prisoners Defending Prisoners V. The U.S.A](#)
- [The Classroom and The Cell: Conversations on Black Life in America](#) (co-authored by [Marc Lamont Hill](#))
- [Writing on the Wall: Selected Prison Writings of Mumia Abu-Jamal](#) (edited by [Johanna Fernandez](#))
- [Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?](#)
- [Murder Incorporated, Vol. 1](#)
- [Murder Incorporated, Vol. 2](#)

That’s five Op-Ed/essay collections, one extended dialogue, two major scholarly works of historical narrative, a pioneering scholarly study of prison life, and now a series of gonzo-infused, Howard Zinn-like history. Twelve by this biographers’ count, all from prison, many from Death Row. This does not count the estimated two-score-plus books he has contributed to since 1993 as a foreword or afterword writer or contributing essayist.



To the sad state of Pennsylvania's ever-grinding institutional teeth, Abu-Jamal is still alive and may write even more books, despite recent health challenges that have left him chronically ill. Ever-learning, he's currently is working on his Ph.D. Thoth willing, more is coming.

How did this happen? It might have something to do with what Che Guevara once wrote: "(T)he true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love." The modern "Free Mumia" movement was born in the Clinton era, when Noelle Hanrahan and Jane Henderson went to Huntington State Prison and recorded an inmate on Pennsylvania's Death Row. They loved what they heard. But they also began to love *who* they heard. Between the three of them, that love was forged into a revolutionary weapon, for life (which happened to be the inmate's religion).

Abu-Jamal was no stranger to love's invisible strength: he loved his family, then [the Philadelphia branch of the Black Panther Party](#), then the power of Black radio, then [the Family Africa](#). Now he is loved and loves those who still protest in his name and those who speak and write for him, almost 40 years since that first jail door slammed. This book is published by Hanrahan, who has stood by him and has sacrificed for nearly 30 years to record him in solitary silence. She has done so steadfastly, when his cause was world-popular and when he was yesterday's news. [His co-author is his film biographer](#). Together, they are a trinity of radical commitment, with Abu-Jamal, his life of 67 years come April, and, most importantly, what they represent as its core.

So if 12 books published and translated around the world makes this fallible human being more than a mere legend, what should this man who long overcame his "cop killer" and "convicted-murderer" soundbite-tags be considered as now? Thinking about his role as cyberspace's first political prisoner, with print and broadcast archives scattered all over the World Wide Web, [a multi-thousand-word Wikipedia entry](#), [YouTube](#) and social media spaces for some of his estimated 2,000 Op-Eds and many interviews, and at least three documentary feature films, the only word this biographer can come up with after this trilogy, totaling 1,000 decolonized pages, is this one: immortal.



## TOWN HALL AND RESOURCES

### Town Hall

January 20, 2021 at 6 pm: <https://www.crowdcast.io/e/blacklashcollectivepurple>

### Resources

#### Books and Articles

Mumia Abu-Jamal and Stephen Vittoria, *Murder, Incorporated: Empire, Genocide, Manifest Destiny. Book Three: Perfecting Tyranny* (San Francisco: Prison Radio, 2020)

C. L. R. James, *Every Cook Can Govern: A Study of Democracy in Ancient Greece* (Detroit: Correspondence Pub. Co., 1956)

John L. Potash, *Drugs as Weapons Against Us: The CIA's Murderous Targeting of SDS, Panthers, Hendrix, Lennon, Cobain, Tupac, and Other Leftists* (Walterville, OR: Trine Day, 2015)

Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Peasant-Citizen and Slave: The Foundations of Athenian Democracy* (London: Verso, London, 1988)