

# WE'RE SO NOT THROUGH HERE

This is emptywheel, where we have frequently posted work contrary to conventional wisdom, or dissented from political leadership with indifference to party.

Each contributor here has their own voice though we're sometimes confused for each other.

Today is one of those days when you will see a wide gap between emptywheel contributors.

Specifically, I do not personally subscribe at all to Quinn Norton's belief that *the Union is done*.

I have written before, however, on numerous occasions, that the United States has not lived up to its ideals.

The concept of this union was flawed from the beginning, having launched as it did with a concession to slaveowners. That original sin dogs this nation to this day; slavery still exists in the form of a carceral state which is heavily weighted against minorities.

The concept of this union was also predicated upon the occupation of lands belonging to pre-existing nations. I'm a product of one of those occupied nations, whose people were nearly wiped out by disease and greed white American occupiers brought to their land.

But I am also an example of what happens when disparate people come together under a singular proposition: *"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of happiness."*

I am the product of people from Nordic and middle European countries, the product of trips around the Pacific and East Asia. All my forebears came here because they perceived a

freedom to pursue lives and opportunity they did not have in their home nation-states.

They found an appeal in this premise worth risking their persons as well as their fortune, meager as it was: *"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."*

My forebears stayed in spite of being erased in a number of ways – like the records of my French-Canadian family members' existence in Michigan being repeatedly obscured or deleted by majority English- and German-speaking occupants, or my Asian family losing its true name when recorded by customs, and then stranded by the Chinese Exclusion Act. Or my Hawaiian family losing the right to its own land because whites deposed its monarchy and seized the islands, in addition to spreading deadly disease.

In spite of being marginalized then and now, my forebears and family made a comfortable life and felt it was their honor, privilege, and duty to contribute to these United States. Among my family members is a Medal of Honor winner – a second generation American who served in the Navy until he retired. My father and brother both served in the armed forces as well.

This isn't an easy country. If you don't speak English and especially if you're not white, it can really demand a steep price. Try taking the citizenship test.

Witness the harassment Ilhan Omar has faced for her race, ethnic heritage, and religion, in spite of the First and Fourteenth Amendments, yet she continues to serve her constituents as their representatives in our democratic republic system of government.

It's because of the price many Americans have faced to become and remain Americans that I'm

put out at Norton's "the Union is done" essay.

I don't think she truly has a clue what it's taken for a sizable percentage of this country to hold this union together, such as it is. She may have faced misogyny but really, in which countries does misogyny not exist?

She can play with sentiment and co-opt others' pain in her argument that the Union is done, but she hasn't faced the existential threat one's skin can pose in a land founded by slaveowners and their sympathizers.

She has the unacknowledged privilege of associating with people who'd rather see people like my family dead, and yet she thinks she can declare "the Union is done."

Take a hard look at what the Black Americans of this country have been doing since voting began last month as a commitment to form a more perfect Union. Ask them if the Union is done.

Take a hard look at what Native Americans have had to do – forced to change their lifestyle, assigning addresses to places which to them are simply *Home* – in order to vote, otherwise invalidated and erased if they don't. Ask them, too, if the Union is done.

And take note of the naturalized immigrants who are worried they and their kin will be harassed by ICE and potentially incarcerated or deported while trying to vote simply because they aren't white and have come to this country too recently. Ask them if the Union to which they emigrated, many as refugees, is done.

My Chinese family members weren't permitted to emigrate here or own land until 1943, when it suddenly became convenient to have China side with the U.S. against Japan. I tell you this Union is not done, from the house I own under a hyphenated Chinese name.

I've pointed to the words of former escaped slave Frederick Douglass before, with regard to the shortcomings of this nation:

... Allow me to say, in conclusion, notwithstanding the dark picture I have this day presented of the state of the nation, I do not despair of this country. There are forces in operation, which must inevitably work the downfall of slavery. "The arm of the Lord is not shortened," and the doom of slavery is certain. I, therefore, leave off where I began, with hope. ...

The work is slow, so often grinding. It is like farming on a'a and pahoehoe lava, which my family knows well. The biases which are foundational to the problems this country faces are older than this country. We are kidding ourselves if they won't take at least a half-life to fully end, during which time the demographics of this country will force change. Look at what has transpired, the push and pull in the dozen-plus years this site has tackled the nature of security in an open society.

But this union is by no means done and over. It's there in the lines we have seen in the streets for weeks, snaking out the doors of polling places across this country. It's in the cars lined up in a drive-through campaign rally, queued hopefully, trustingly in a drive-through foodbank.

It was there in the streets after George Floyd was murdered.

From goose quill pen's first ink on parchment 244 years ago, this union has always been aspirational, a nation in a state of becoming, a people who must occasionally check themselves and listen to their better angels.

From the speech before a battlefield of nearly 50,000 American dead 157 years ago, we re-consecrated ourselves,

that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people,

for the people, shall not perish from  
the earth.

The union is not over. The dream still lives,  
its work goes on; we will not yield.

It's simply time once again to rededicate  
ourselves to forming a more perfect union.

We can begin this day of all days by exercising  
and protecting our right to vote.