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Subject: [natural_persons] the Constitution

Cheers to Ward on his letter to the *NYT*. Not suprisingly, we're thinking along the same lines -- here's an op-ed I submitted Friday to a local paper on the Cape.

LET THE SUN SHINE IN!

by Mary Zepernick

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July 4th found me in the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia on opening day. A friend had passes to admit us ahead of the "mob at the gate," as Alexander Hamilton dubbed the majority of his fellow citizens.

In the magnificent sandstone building, a large, dimly lit hall features bronze statues of the more prominent framers, most of them smaller than today's average man and dressed more nattily. We signed a petition of dissenters, in company with such anti-federalists as Cape Cod's Mercy Otis Warren, who refused to support ratification until amendments were added to protect individual rights -- the very civil liberties imperiled by today's USA Patriot Act.

I was dressed for the occasion in my t-shirt reading: "Slavery is the legal fiction that a person is property; corporate personhood is the legal fiction that property is a person." As we emerged from the founders' hall, a reporter spotted the slogan and asked to interview me. Here's what I told him.

In 1787, 55 white propertied men gathered in Philadelphia with a mandate to address some problems in the Articles of Confederation. Instead, they closed the doors and sealed their deliberations for half a century [only after Madison's death were his detailed notes on the constitutional convention published] as they created an entirely new form of government. Neither the word slavery nor corporation was mentioned in the Constitution, but the former was institutionalized in several articles and the latter gained inclusion as "persons" under the 14th Amendment more than a century ago.

People of color and women have since breached the gate and driven ourselves into the Constitution, changing the culture through generations of struggle by powerful movements. Property is no longer a qualification for voting, but it certainly continues to govern -- today through those shielded by the corporate form, which has accumulated more wealth, power and rights than "we the people."

I was reminded of this interview last week, when the Massachusetts House of Representatives met behind closed doors to discuss the people's business -- specifically the budget. Like their forefathers, they didn't share their deliberations with the mob at the gate.

Massachusetts has the distinction of being among only a handful of states who allow secret bipartisan sessions, and in the last several years the House has reportedly availed itself of this self-proclaimed privilege some 22 times and the Senate at least five.

What to do? We could follow in the footsteps of our own forebears, who did not take kindly the British removal of the 1691 charter granting the Massachusetts Bay Colony a considerable measure of self-governance. Thousands of men lined the streets and stood in courthouse doors, demanding the resignation of Crown-appointed fellow colonists and preventing them from conducting business -- all this without a shot being fired. These colonists overthrew British rule in every county outside Boston, including Barnstable.

Few know about the Massachusetts Revolution of 1774, and the last "acceptable" revolution in U.S. history was launched the following year at Lexington and Concord, in what some consider a British counter-revolution.

People in Philadelphia have been organizing to include African-Americans in the history portrayed there. We the people of Massachusetts might well follow their example, to include ourselves in our own governance. Write to your state senator and representative (The StateHouse, Boston 02133), and demand an end to secrecy.

Open the doors and let the sun shine in!

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