Workers and oppressed peoples of the world unite! workers.org Vol. 65, No. 28 July 13, 2023 $1

By Monica Moorehead

Jill Scott sings truth about U.S. racism

“Ah, say, can you see, by the blood in the streets, that this place doesn’t smile on you, colored child. Whose blood bled this street with sweat and their hands. But you’ll never turn and make me cry or erase...”

These lyrics were sung to the melody of the “Star-Spangled Banner” (the U.S. national anthem) by the brilliant African American singer, Jill Scott, at the Essence Festival July 2 in New Orleans. The annual music festival, which takes place over the Fourth of July weekend, is one of the largest African American music events in the U.S. This year’s festival attracted 500,000 people.

Scott’s anti-racist, anti-patriotic, powerful rendition is reminiscent of the year-round protest that Colin Kaepernick, the former National Football League quarterback, conducted throughout the 2016 football season by taking a knee during the playing of the anthem to protest racial injustice.

The police murders of Philando Castile in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul area and Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, during the summer of 2016 happened just months before Jill Scott performed this protest anthem in Washington, D.C. This historic protest movement amongst athletes from all sports, professional and amateur. During this same period of protests, Francis Scott Key, who wrote the text of the anthem in 1814, was exposed for being a slaveowner and for writing pro-slavery lyrics for the third verse of the anthem.

Jill Scott’s rendition drew the ire of right-wing news pundits, with media like Fox News and the New York Post – along with right-wing politicians – accusing her of “shaming” and “trashing” the national anthem with her “alleged” racial injustice lyrics. They accused her of being hypocritical because of her financial success as an entertainer. But many praised her rendition for telling the truth about the legacy of slavery that is alive and well throughout every aspect of today’s society.

If she did not sing this version of the anthem at such a public event, it might have gone unnoticed, but she stated that she sang the anthem at previous lesser known events, having written these lyrics over 30 years ago in her hometown of Philadelphia before she burst onto the music scene.

Jill Scott’s bold action must be defended because her lyrics express the class truth of the second-class, institutionalized status that still exists for Black people in the U.S. That can never be denied or silenced. Go to workers.org/watch/video/BTVid to see Scott’s performance. □
Workers World Party is a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party inside the belly of the imperialist beast. We are a multinational, multigenerational and multigendered organization that not only aims to abolish capitalism, but to build a socialist society because it’s the only way forward.

Capitalism and imperialism threaten the peoples of the world and the planet itself in the never-ending quest for ever-greater profits.

Capitalism means war and austerity, racism and repres-

sion, attacks on im/migrants, misogyny, LGBTQ2S+ oppression and mistreatment of people with disabilities. It means what Black, Brown and Indigenous youth and trans people are a “bridge of supplies” while the U.S. works to increase production of other types of artillery to send to Ukraine. But the U.S. has thrown nearly every type of weapon in its arsenal into Ukraine with no significant gain, just more massive destruction, and mounting death tolls for soldiers and civilians.

Biden’s decision was announced ahead of a NATO summit in Lithuania July 11-12, where it is anticipated that Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky will push for membership in NATO, thus opening the door to direct NATO intervention and escalation of the war.

Since the U.S. war in Korea ended in 1953, beginning a 70-year stalemate, the U.S. has failed to “win” a single war it has engaged in from Vietnam to Afghanistan, despite the massive loss of lives and damage to infrastructures. Ukrainian workers need to know that they have nothing to gain from this war.

Intervention by the U.S. in any war has always been about maximizing the blood-soaked profits for the weapons manufacturers and expanding U.S. imperialism’s empire.

Workers World
121 W. 27th St., Suite 404
New York, NY 10011
Phone: 212.627.2994
Fax: 212.627.0185
Email: wwp@workers.org

Workers World Party
229 W. 27th St., Suite 345
New York, NY 10011
Phone: 212.627.2994
Fax: 212.627.0185
Email: wwp@workers.org

Workers World
121 W. 27th St., Suite 404
New York, NY 10011
Phone: 212.627.2994
Fax: 212.627.0185
Email: wwp@workers.org