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 **Competing versions
of American History –
A closer look at
The 1619 Project**



vs.

Steve Bakke  *February 10, 2021*

**Logos for The 1619 Project and The
1776 Commission Report**

Two versions of American history are battling it out at the highest levels of the U.S. government and education. Who could have predicted that this 100-page project, “The 1619 Project” (“1619”) could have gained major influence so rapidly? In this article I’ll expand on my recent introduction to this topic.

The 1619 Project was released in August 2019 under the auspices of the New York Times. The report was authored in part by Nikole Hannah-Jones whose introductory essay won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for Commentary. The report concludes that America was fraudulently created in 1776 and declares that the true history of our country started in 1619, the year slaves were first brought to our eastern shore.

The message is that 1776, America’s traditional birthday, and the Revolutionary War, merely served to preserve America’s tradition of slavery. This means that our core national narrative, i.e., our history and traditions, is false. America’s assumptions and underpinnings, such as history books and the United States Constitution, must be disregarded – cancelled. We should start anew.

The report is a collection of essays, not a detailed history book. It’s an eloquently presented collections of anecdotes, impressions, and declarations of the several authors’ ideas about America, without the burdensome detail expected of history books. And it imagines way too much. For example, it claims to understand, without much evidence, the thoughts and motives of historical figures, particularly our Founders. It needs “more proof in its pudding.”

For example, the report describes a conflicted President Lincoln as he wrestled with racial issues and slavery. 1619 recognizes philosophical and practical conflicts in Abe’s ideas, some imagined I’m sure. I don’t think he’s given much credit for all he did to advance the ideal of emancipation. As a result, the reader comes away unaware of Lincoln’s greatness. Rather, it seems to diminish him, and the importance of emancipation is lost in its imperfections.

The report is a compilation of perspectives and suggestions that would have greater value if the result were to make room for adding important historical information about leaders and heroes in the struggle for racial justice. It sends the message that slavery played a significant, albeit tragic role in the history of our culture and economy. It recalls the worst of slavery’s ugliness – its frequent violence and cruelty.

Dealing with those things are fine. It would be great if 1619 inspired adding valid detail, but instead, it prefers to elbow out important historical realities. Activists are tempted to cancel all history not presented using the prism of slavery and racism. Considering how 1619 has been used thus far, I think it's been more destructive than helpful.

It's impossible to evaluate the impact of 1619 without reconsidering the history of Critical Race Theory (CRT), a related ideology being taught in schools and seminars. 1619 seems to have provided emotional fuel and historical justification for the efforts of CRT. Young and old alike are asked to study history using a different approach. Students aren't taught to learn by asking "what's this was all about?" Rather, they are taught to judge persons and events in history based on current standards.

Events of the last year demonstrate this changed objective. I believe the lack of reaction to the lawlessness of 2020's urban violence came in part from the indoctrination of too many Americans into these new mindsets. Relative silence among the left and even traditional liberals reflects collective guilt felt by many who've been "so carefully taught" in our schools, in seminars, and by many in the press. And the good vs. evil distinction when comparing 2020 violence to January 6, 2021, could only be achieved by the well indoctrinated, or the politically blinded.

The Biden administration encourages use of the 1619 historical approach in educational curriculums for youth and adults alike. President Biden reauthorized government agencies to require 1619 and CRT sourced training, something Trump had terminated. Biden also eliminated Trump's 1776 Commission and banned its report from government publications.

Next, I'll provide more background about The 1776 Commission and Report. It's important for us to be informed about the collision of these competing versions of history.