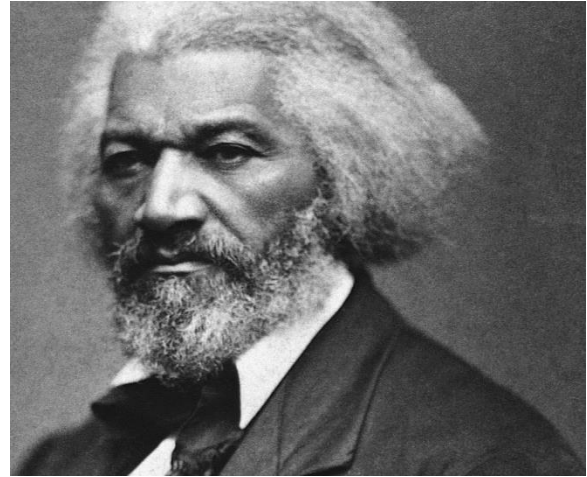


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America's formation Continues: Let's Proudly participate

Steve Bakke  July 18, 2023



**Frederick Douglass, former slave,
orator, abolition leader, American
critic, and patriot**

For too many Americans, old-fashioned national pride and patriotism is difficult to experience and impossible to express. Many things contribute to this: political polarization, rampant crime, terrorism, and chaotic immigration are examples.

Humans display a need to blame problems on something or someone. Too often our founding principles and form of government bear the blame. When America is blamed, valuable traditions and beliefs are rejected.

For example, our founding documents have been a frequent target. I'm referring to the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of rights. After an evaluation of its operations, the National Archives issued a description of those documents as potentially "harmful or difficult to view.....because some users believe they depict 'outdated, biased, offensive, and possibly violent views and opinions.'" The Archives decided, at least initially, to issue a "trigger warning" statement for all documents, alerting readers to potentially distressing material.

Here's another example. Our founding documents are commonly published and sold for gifts, reference material, and keepsakes. Publishers often require that a "trigger warning" precede the text. I found the following on the copyright page of one such reprint: *"This book is a product of its time and does not reflect the same values as it would if it were written today. Parents might wish to discuss with their children how views on race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and interpersonal relations have changed since this book was written before allowing them to read this classic work."*

Those apologetic words caution young Americans against taking our founding documents too seriously. It's clear to me we're witnessing the results of that warning.

Consider "The 1619 Project." This is a retelling of dark aspects of the U.S. – slavery and racism wrapped in violence and cruelty. While not a history book, it contains unique essays and personal impressions. Projects like "1619" can enhance the historical record by adding varied impressions of witnesses and others. Unfortunately, the trendy disparaging of our founding has led to suggestions that "1619" should represent the centerpiece of a revised history of America. Such thoughts and diversions squander the potential value of "The 1619 Project" and similar productions.

It's easy to question whether, given the nation's mood, America could fight and win another war for its independence. A recent Quinnipiac poll asked Americans if they would be willing to stay and fight, or leave the country, if faced with a situation like exists in Ukraine. A thin majority would stay and fight. Breaking it down by party affiliation showed a majority of republicans and independents would "fight" while a thin majority of Democrats would "leave." That's disappointing.

Americans must reject any efforts to ignore elements of our history that don't reflect our ideals. Yet, in spite of our many flaws, let's agree that the United States is unique and deserving of considerable credit for its many accomplishments and being something very unique. Neither before our nation's founding, nor since, has there been a nation that recognized its citizens as sovereign, rather than the government. Think about that. What a wonderful idea! That's American exceptionalism.

Policy analyst Douglas Andrews reminds us that too often, those who consider themselves Americans first and foremost are often "derided as xenophobes, racists, white supremacists – or even worse – as patriots." Let's resist and deny that sentiment and avoid the temptation to define ourselves in terms of specific groups, or political tribes and "hyphenated-Americans."

On July 5, 1852, America witnessed what is often considered "the greatest abolitionist speech in US History." Former slave and amazing American Frederick Douglass emphasized America's flaws, boldly and with moral outrage, using references like "hypocrisy, crimes and unholy license." Yet just as emphatic was his belief in America's potential to deliver the promises of its founding which he considered so important. He demanded those promises be delivered. Let's be true to his powerful example.

Our founding ideals are worthy, and we shouldn't let them fade. We must deliver on those promises and principles at which we've failed. Commitment to that objective will keep us on track as we assume the task of achieving many ideals we've yet to accomplish.

The formation of America is far from over. Let's be proud and dedicated participants in the process.