

1619 And 1984

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I have entitled my comments today, “1619 and 1984.” I think you will see the connection between the two dates as I go along.

George Orwell wrote about what the Germans call *Umerziehung* in his book *1984*. It means “reeducation,” or even “retraining.” It carries the idea of reschooling. Perhaps the most infamous practitioner of reeducation was the Reich Minister of Propaganda during the Nazi period, Joseph Goebbels.

Totalitarian states, by their nature, display a penchant to reeducate their citizens, sometimes brutally, for their own purposes. Tibet has received attention lately for its reeducation of certain Buddhist factions in the country. The Chinese, not to be outdone, herd large numbers of Muslims living in its western provinces into reeducation camps in an effort to neutralize cultural and religious elements which they consider to be subversive to the state.

But, my discussion of reeducation today finds its focus a bit closer to home. Satan is a master of deceit. During the 1700s, that is, during the period we call the Enlightenment, and the decades after it, he got almost everyone who was anyone to accept the proposition—almost as an axiom—that education would resolve all difficulties, whether they be interpersonal or international. Problems at any level. So it was that, early on, Congress required that territories seeking statehood implement and enforce programs of free, compulsory public education. It sounded like a good idea at the time: That public policy should support education by making it universal and required. No state joined the Union without such a program in place.

Well, the other shoe did not drop for decades. But, drop it did! As jurisdictions came to consider constitutional government under law to be more of an obstacle than a blessing, they became more intrusive into individual’s lives. In time, they came to understand that they could use the educational system they controlled to modify peoples’ ideas about economics, family life, religion, even sexual mores—you name it. In doing so, they could modify behavior. What Satan initially sold as a boon became the bane we recognize public education to be today.

Anecdotally: I remember a conversation I had in the 1990s with two church boys educated in the public schools. The topic was their 11th grade American History class. I learned that the teacher had covered the period from Columbus through Truman, from 1492 through the early 1950s, in the 2½ months from early September (when school opened) to Thanksgiving break. The teacher spent the rest of the year talking about the civil rights movement (beginning in the 1950s) and the anti-war movement during the Vietnam Era. These boys had not the foggiest notion about the first war the United States fought, the first Barbary War (1801-1805), where Jefferson sent a number of frigates to clean out pirates in the Mediterranean Sea. Many do not realize that America was projecting her naval power into Europe that early, and quite effectively too. (That is why the Marines sing of “the shores of Tripoli” to this very day.) These fellows told me their teacher had devoted “a day or two” to the Civil War. But, they knew all about Claudette Colvin. To them, she was the most important figure in American history.

You remember Claudette, do you not? Sure you do: Claudette Colvin of Montgomery, Alabama, was the 15-year-old black girl, exploited by agitators, arrested in 1952 for refusing to give up her seat to a white woman on a crowded, segregated city bus. I mention it only because the incident is a good example of reeducation. You see: In the 1990s—you understand, some 40 years after the incident, a picture of her, taken at the time of the incident, appeared on the cover of a first-grade social studies textbook. The subtitle of the textbook indicated that it was a primer of American history. A church mother assessing the textbook for use with her homeschooling activities, rejected it because, while it talked plenty about Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Elizabeth Eckford, Colvin and other prominent players in the civil rights movement, the author failed to mention the role President Eisenhower played in sending troop to Little Rock, later on in the '50s, in order to enforce court rulings regarding segregation and integration. There was absolutely no mention at all of any of the founders—Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, for example—in this “primer of American history.” A six-year-old studying this book would come away with the notion that American history started with Claudette Colvin in Montgomery, Alabama in 1952 and that the Revolutionary War was fought in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957. Talk about reeducation.

One thing is sure though: Satan is adept at making lies readily accessible, even the wildest lies. A good example of that is the "1619 Project." Some of you may have heard of it. There is a number of videos about it on the YouTube. It is a collaborative effort between two strongholds of liberalism, *The New York Times* and the Pulitzer Center. The Project is based on the alleged arrival of a ship carrying 20 or 30 black slaves off the Virginia coast in August, 1619. (That would be about 12 years after the founding of Jamestown.) Supposedly, these were the first slaves sold in North America. Hence, 2019 represents the 400th anniversary of slavery in the land that was to become the United States. The sponsors of the Project aver that its aim is

... to reframe the country's history, understanding 1619 as our true founding, and placing the consequences of slavery ... at the very center of the story ...

Hang on to that word, *story*.

... at the center of the story we tell ourselves about who we are.

The person who apparently dreamed up all this was Nikole Hannah-Jones, who took her master's degree in journalism in 2003 from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and who currently is a reporter for the *New York Times Magazine*. She believes, “The United States is a nation founded on both an ideal and a lie.”

To introduce the Project, the *New York Times Magazine* offered an edition over 100 pages long, with articles arguing, among other jokes, that segregation causes our traffic jams and that America was not a democracy until the blacks made it so. I mean to tell you, the level of historical revisionism here is as deep as it is broad. And, it gets pretty deep! Reading these people's ideas leaves one aghast, virtually speechless.

To kick-start the Project, the Pulitzer Center updated its website to include a resource library for teachers. It contains extensive lesson plans, quotations, graphic aids, and the such. If you want to wander through some truly stupefying material, some unbelievable stuff which is an education in itself, check out that website (www.pulitzercenter.org).

John Kass offers a measured response to the 1619 Project. He writes in *The Chicago Tribune*, August 21, 2019:

The story ...

There is that word *story* again.

The story of slavery in America is compelling and worthy of such attention. But reducing the whole of America to the sin of slavery and racism that America has tried so hard to reject—by shedding blood in the Civil War, by passing the Civil Rights Acts, by twice electing Barack Obama to the White House—is absurd.

Look at the word *history*. *Story* is its last five letters. History is story. But, the value of any story and the truth of any story depends on how you tell it, on what you say and how you say it—as well as what you leave out. *How* a parent reads the story of Goldilocks determines whether the child understands the three bears to be good guys or ghouls. It is often a matter of inflection, such things as stress in the voice, pitch, intonation, speed. Story is voice. A cagey reader can leave a child, especially an affective (emotional) one, in tears by simply reading the three little pigs to him.

But, I use the noun *inflection* in its oldest sense, a sense we do not use much today. Inflection can refer to “deviation from a straight or normal course.” Please, do not get me wrong: It is fine to know about the civil rights movement. After all, it is a part of American history. But, to deem the combination of slavery and race to be the be-all and end-all of American history is to miss major threads of the story of America.

At Isaiah 14:12, God calls Satan the one who destroys nations. One of Satan’s tools to that end is to inspire historians to inflect history such that they voice a deviated, a bent story, by that token a deviant one, a perverse history. As such, it is merely disinformation, propaganda cloaked as history.