

Summer 2021

DIALOGOS

(Greek: To See Through to Meaning)

A Magazine of the Institute for the Study of Western Civilization

Reframing American History



MISSION: To improve our understanding of how we came to be who we are, why we think the way we do and what assumptions about the world and human nature trace back to earlier periods in the 5,000 years of Western Civilization.



By William Fredlund, PhD

From the Director

The Battle for the Young Mind

M

any of you students who
have been with us at the

Institute for many years know how interested we are in the direction of American higher education, starting with the great culture wars at Stanford in 1987. I was there watching it all happen. At that time Stanford went through the debate over whether to continue to teach freshmen students a one-year course about Western civilization or not. And the faculty senate decided to stop teaching this basic freshman course.

Now some 30 years later Stanford freshman have no introductory course to ground the rest of their education. They have pieces of an education, but no unity. As I have watched the evolution of American higher education in the past 30 years, I have become somewhat pessimistic. So for example, if you want to see how far this has gone, take note of the recent decision by Howard University to close its classics department. Aristotle, Plato, Homer—not worth it. Close it up.

But now in 2021, a new education movement

within the United States might give a reason to be hopeful about the future. It is interesting that the defense of a good, solid, historically-based education has not come from university circles, boards, or alumni. It's coming from parents of children in K-12 education. In other words, the community surrounding university education appears to be less informed and engaged than the community surrounding the education of younger children. Right now in the United States we have more than a dozen movements organizing to resist the destruction of good education, a movement in favor of an older humanistic idea of education. These ideas go all the way back to Greece, to Isocrates, and to the very foundations of classical education.

One example is a new group called Parents Defending Education (defendinged.org), a nonprofit launched at the end of March 2021. This is an organization formed by parents with younger children in the schools and reaches into every state. It has grown explosively and is now handling thousands of emails each week. If you read about

the group or listen to the parents, you can hear their concerns. They just want their kids to get a good solid, historical education—whether in US history or the origins of Europe.

In many cases the spark

Socrates may yet
win another battle
for honest
debate.

for their outrage has been the attempt of fancy school administrators with degrees from places like Stanford, Yale, Harvard, or Princeton to impose on the kids an education conjured up in Critical Race Theory studies. There is no need for us to delve into the complex ideas of CRT. Much of it is rooted in the same pessimistic French and German postwar philosophies that motivated the attack on Western civilization studies in the 80's. That is, that the West is bad, oppressive, ignorant of other cultures, and most important of all, racist. But the important thing to notice is that once the dark, nihilistic philosophies of people like Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and Herbert Marcuse were foisted onto young children, something happened. Their parents became more awake and alert than the parents sending their kids off to the Ivy League.

It is fascinating to see. So many in this new movement are immensely brave. One example is Paul Rossi who until recently was an honored, celebrated teacher at the very expensive Grace Episcopal School in Manhattan. In April of this year Paul risked everything. He published a letter about conditions at his very elite private school: "I refuse to stand by while my students are indoctrinated. Our children are afraid to challenge this repressive ideology that is coming to rule our school." He was, of course, immediately fired. But his letter lit a fire that is now illuminating a vast national movement to end the lies being foisted on five- and six-year-olds.

It is worth noting that the Rossi letter was not published by any of the major newspapers such as *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, but rather on a new web platform supported by Bari Weiss who was herself run out of the *Times* for challenging their orthodoxy. Her story is another one of risking all with honesty and bravery. Now in May

of 2021, Bari Weiss has achieved a whole new fame and leadership role.

Many others have been bold enough to speak up to defend good education—just ordinary people, teachers, and writers. They oppose the malicious indoctrination into the same dark lies that have been taught at Stanford ever since 1987. It gives me hope that after all these years American education may be changing.

Socrates may win yet another battle for honest debate.



Got Opinions? *From the Editor*

Have you read anything in *DIALOGOS* you'd like to comment on? "Letters to the Editor" will be a new feature in this publication going forward. Send your thoughts to Michele McCarthy:

MicheleAnnMcCarthy@gmail.com

Submissions may be edited for length based on space available.

DIALOGOS is published quarterly by the Institute for the Study of Western Civilization for our teacher scholars, members, and students.

Editor: Michele McCarthy

Contributors: Patricia Fredlund, William Fredlund, Joan Niemeier, Eno Schmidt

Founder: William Fredlund, PhD

Institute for the Study of Western Civilization

10060 Bubba Road (408) 864-4060
Cupertino, CA 95014 WesternCiv.com

Notable Books from the Classroom

Mark Twain and His Territory Ahead

By Joan Niemeier, chief financial officer of the Institute for the Study of Western Civilization

But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest.”
—Huck Finn

Ernest Hemingway declared in 1935 that “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*. It’s the best book we’ve had. All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since.”

Samuel Langhorne Clemens was a man of the West. When he was born in Missouri in 1835, Missouri was the West. His family moved to Hannibal on the bank of the Mississippi River when he was four years old. His childhood there, his apprenticeship to a printer, his early anecdotal writings for his brother Orion’s newspaper, and his years as a river pilot were followed by trips to the Nevada Territory in 1861 and California in 1863. After working for newspapers in Carson City, Virginia City, Sacramento, and San Francisco, Sam Clemens changed his signature to Mark Twain. His satirical

sketches, tall tales, and outright hoaxes launched his reputation with western readers. One of his most famous stories from that period is “Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog,” later published as “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.”

While traveling to Europe and the Holy Land in 1867 as a correspondent for the San Francisco newspaper *Alta California*, Clemens met young Charles Langdon onboard ship. Langdon introduced him to his sister Olivia when they returned to New York. Sam and “Livy” were married in 1870. The following year, Sam and Livy sold the home in Buffalo, NY that had been given to them as a wedding present by Livy’s father, Jervis Langdon. Clemens also sold his one-third interest in a newspaper, the *Buffalo Express*. He felt constrained in the newspaper business and wanted a change. The couple moved to Hartford, CT.

Clemens had first seen the city of Hartford while visiting his publisher and already had friends there. He and Livy began to build a home in 1873 to accommodate their growing family. They took trips

back to New York and to Europe during the construction. After the publication of *Roughing It*, his stories about the West, Clemens and Charles D. Warner co-wrote a book they titled *The Gilded Age*. While this satire of greed and corruption following the American Civil War was

Hemingway declared that
“All modern American
literature comes from
one book by Mark Twain
called *Huckleberry Finn*.”

not a great success, the title gave its name to the times.

The Clemens family moved into their uncompleted Hartford home in September 1874. A far cry from the grand homes built by the “titans of industry” in New York City or their ornate “cottages” in Newport, RI, the Hartford home was designed to be a beautiful and comfortable place for a family. The house itself is an example of the Stick-style architecture that was popular in the 1860’s and 70’s, marked by steeply pitched roofs, many eaves and bays, verandas, and covered walkways. It is also one of the few remaining American homes with interiors by Tiffany & Co., with many stunning examples of their work. To please the world travelers, the artists incorporated patterns from Morocco, India, China, Japan, and Turkey into the stencil work and the embossed wallpaper. The master bedroom includes their carved bed from Venice. The library has a mantelpiece from a castle in Scotland and many small works of art from around the world. The billiard room doubled as Clemens’ study and office, where he wrote major works: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, and *Life on the Mississippi*.

Construction expenses and other investment speculation consumed Sam and Livy’s income and her inheritance. The growing Clemens family lived in the home for about 17 years, interrupted by periods of their extensive travels.

Next door to the Clemens family was the home of author Harriet Beecher Stowe. Sam Clemens would



The Mark Twain House in Hartford, CT

cross their adjoining lawns to visit her. Stowe would send flowers home to Livy. It was Stowe’s grand niece, Kathryn Seymour Day, who in 1929 helped to establish the Mark Twain Memorial and Library Commission. The Friends of Hartford lobbied the state for many years to stop the demolition of the historic home. Now carefully preserved, it is The Mark Twain House & Museum. Tours of the home (and the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center) are available. All tours of the Mark Twain House are guided, some by guides in character. On my tour, a Black retired English teacher portrayed the Clemens’ family butler. He explained that Sam Clemens loved to sit by the window on snowy days to converse with the butler, and that Clemens had modeled the character of Jim in *Huck Finn* on that gentleman.

In 2010 on the 100th anniversary of the death of Mark Twain, the University of California Press released a portion of the Mark Twain Project: *The Autobiography of Mark Twain, Volume I*. At over 700 pages, the book seems a daunting read. Because it was never completed as a traditional autobiography

(continued on page 16)

Odysseys

Sojourn in Normandy

By Patricia Fredlund, travel guide editor

Bayeux, in many ways, seems to be defined by war. It houses the famous tapestry depicting the events of the Norman Conquest of England and remnants of World War II are found throughout in the form of museums and memorials. While it's impossible to forget its somber past, a visit to this charming medieval town is anything but gloomy.

Bayeux Tapestry Museum

The **Bayeux Tapestry** is truly amazing. It is technically not a tapestry but rather an embroidery, 230 feet long and 20 inches high, made in the 11th Century. This marvelously preserved textile is almost a thousand years old, in beautiful condition with vivid colors and characters that bring to life the story of the **Norman Conquest**. Lighting in the hall is kept low to protect the artwork and keep the viewer's attention. An audio guide is included in the price of admission, and the narrator explains the 58 scenes that depict the Norman Conquest, culminating in the Battle of Hastings in 1066. Those

scenes realistically include severed limbs and other evidence of battle. All along the tapestry are scenes of travel and adventure. Colorful ships sail across the sea and horses prance and gallop across the plains as William the Conqueror leads his troops into battle against the English King Harold. Halley's Comet, which was visible in 1066, even appears in the tapestry. The visit takes a minimum of 20 minutes, but you may want to allow extra time to simply admire the beautiful, detailed embroidery.

In addition to the tapestry itself, the museum also includes interesting exhibits about William the Conqueror and the Norman Conquest, as well as a 15-minute video on how the tapestry was made. Special exhibitions are also offered periodically.

For a meal break, the **Restaurant Le Garde Manger** at the Reine Mathilde Hotel offers lovely indoor/outdoor dining and excellent burgers and beer.



Normandy American Cemetery

The Normandy American Cemetery overlooks Omaha Beach, the launching point of the US invasion of Nazi-occupied France and the continent. This cemetery contains the graves of 9,386 American soldiers who died at Normandy and a memorial to another 1,557 whose bodies were never recovered. Established by the US Army on June 8, 1944, this is the first World War II American cemetery in Europe. Most of our military dead here lost their lives in the D-Day landings and ensuing operations.

The **Walls of the Missing Memorial** inscribes those names. The **Normandy Visitor Center** opened and was dedicated on June 6, 2007 during the commemoration of the 63rd anniversary of D-Day. In addition to exhibits, the center also offers three films—*Letters*, *On Their Shoulders*, and *Ok, Let's Go*. *Letters* is shown in the lower level auditorium every 30 minutes.

The cemetery employs French citizens whose families have lived in Normandy for generations. Be sure to sign up with one of the guides who will escort you through the cemetery and tell you about the lives of people buried in this hallowed French soil. Our lovely French guide had worked at the cemetery for over 10 years, and her Norman family went back for generations. As the tour was ending and people were moving away, I asked her quietly, “Is it possible that you wouldn’t be alive today if the Americans hadn’t landed in June 1944?”



“Yes, that is true,” she said softly.

A visit here could be one of the most memorable experiences of your entire trip to Europe. It certainly was for me.

Bayeux Tapestry Museum

13 bis rue de Nesmond, 14400 Bayeux

Phone: +33 (0)2 31 51 25 50

Website: bayeuxmuseum.com/en/the-bayeux-tapestry

Restaurant Le Garde Manger

23 rue Larcher, 14400 Bayeux

Phone: +33 (0)2 31 92 08 13

Website: hotel-bayeux-reinemathilde.fr/en/restaurant-bayeux.html

Open 7 am—10 pm

Normandy American Cemetery

14710 Colleville-sur-Mer

Phone: +33 (0)2 31 51 62 00

Website: abmc.gov/normandy

Open: April 1—September 30, 10 am—6 pm

October 1—March 31, 10 am—5 pm

(Closed December 25 and January 1)

Western Civ Then and Now

The 1619 Project Examined

By Eno Schmidt, a Silicon Valley retired executive and entrepreneur, community volunteer, and student at the Institute



any of us by now have at least heard the term “The 1619 Project.” *The New York Times* launched it in an August 2019 special issue of *The New York Times Magazine*¹. The *Times*’ website explains the project as “an ongoing initiative... [marking] the 400th anniversary of the beginning of American slavery. It aims to reframe the country’s history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative.”² The project consists of long-form journalism and an evolving, developing initiative.

Why should we learn about it? The mission of the Institute is “to improve our understanding of how we came to be who we are, why we think the way we do, and what assumptions about the world and human nature trace back to earlier periods... of Western civilization.” Accordingly, since The 1619 Project aims to reframe American history, it is quite appropriate to make a deeper inquiry into the

The 1619 Project aims to reframe the country’s history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative.

nature of the project and understand its connection with Western civilization.

What are the key elements of the ongoing 1619 Project?

The project consists of six distinct components. Each remains accessible online, although the *Times* has done some editing in response to historians’ criticisms of the original version.

- 1) 10 essays on “different aspects of contemporary American life, from mass incarceration to rush-hour traffic, that have their roots in slavery and its aftermath”
- 2) A photo essay
- 3) 17 literary works “that bring to life key moments in American history [and] original compositions by contemporary black writers”
- 4) A broadsheet section comprising two additional essays
- 5) “A brief visual history of slavery” from the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African-

American History and Culture

- 6) An education partnership with the Pulitzer Center³ “including curriculums, guides, and activities for students”

Key Themes

To identify and understand

The New York Times Magazine

August 18, 2019

In August of 1619, a ship appeared on this horizon, near Point Comfort, a coastal port in the British colony of Virginia. It carried more than 20 enslaved Africans, who were sold to the colonists. America was not yet America, but this was the moment it began. No aspect of the country that would be formed here has been untouched by the 250 years of slavery that followed. On the 400th anniversary of this fateful moment, it is finally time to tell our story truthfully.

The 1619 Project

more of the content comprising the project, *Times* editor-in-chief Jake Silverstein advises reading the lead essay by Nikole Hannah-Jones “from whose mind this project sprang.” This essay “provides the intellectual framework for the project and can be read as an introduction.”⁴ Here are its key themes:

- “The United States is a nation founded on both an ideal and a lie. Our Declaration of Independence, signed on July 4, 1776, proclaims that ‘all men are created equal’ and ‘endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.’ But the white men who drafted those words did not believe them to be true for the hundreds of thousands of black people in their midst.”
- “The year 1619 is as important to the American story as 1776. Black Americans, as much as those men cast in alabaster in the nation’s capital, are this nation’s true ‘founding fathers.’” 1619 is important because in August of that year “Jamestown colonists bought 20 to 30 enslaved Africans from English pirates.”
- “Conveniently left out of our founding mythology is the fact that one of the primary reasons some of the colonists decided to declare their independence from Britain was because they wanted to protect the institution of slavery.”
- “Like many white Americans, [Abraham Lincoln] opposed slavery as a cruel system at odds with American ideals, but he also opposed black equality. He believed that free

black people were a ‘troublesome presence’ incompatible with a democracy intended only for white people... . Anti-black racism runs in the very DNA of this country, as does the belief, so well articulated by Lincoln, that black people are the obstacle to national unity.”

- “For the most part, black Americans fought back alone.... This nation’s white founders set up a decidedly undemocratic Constitution that excluded women, Native Americans, and black people, and did not provide the vote or equality for most Americans.”

The Pulitzer Center’s reading guide, part of its free educational resources, provides excerpts and guiding questions not only for the lead essay but also for all the project’s essays. To consider the various themes covered by the essays, one can gather a flavor by sampling the leads:

- “If you want to understand the brutality of American capitalism, you have to start on the plantation.”
- “Why doesn’t the United States have universal healthcare? The answer begins with policies enacted after the Civil War.”
- “America holds onto an undemocratic

assumption from its founding: That some people deserve more power than others.”

Some Scholarly Critical Responses

A number of scholars have responded publicly – so many that space allows only to cover some

Was the American Revolutionary War waged to preserve slavery?

highlights. (For an in-depth look, see the book review of 1620: A Critical Response to The 1619 Project on page 14.)

Sean Wilentz: One important scholarly response has come from Sean Wilentz who has been an American Revolution professor at Princeton University since 1979. He has written many books including *The Rise of Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* which was awarded the Bancroft Prize and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. In *The New York Review of Books* December 2019 edition, he criticized *The 1619 Project*: “Cynicism about

the Revolution gives way to cynicism about the Civil War and, in particular, about Abraham Lincoln – rendered as a white supremacist who, whatever his qualms about human bondage, supposedly had no interest in ending slavery, but only in preserving the Union.” Wilentz provided counter arguments and evidence in his letter. For example, *The 1619 Project* in effect characterizes American independence from Britain as a precursor of Southern secession in the American Civil War and argues that the Revolutionary War was waged to preserve slavery. Countering these claims, Wilentz points out that –

- Frederick Douglass in his most famous speech “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” “excoriated American hypocrisy and white racism but also praised the US Constitution as ‘a glorious liberty document.’”
- “Neither the British government nor the British

FOR SALE.

LONG COTTON AND RICE NEGROES.

A GANG OF 460 NEGROES, accustomed to the culture of Rice and Provisions; among whom are a number of good mechanics, and house servants. Will be sold on the 2d and 3d of March next, at Savannah, by **JOSEPH BRYAN.**

TERMS OF SALE.—One-third cash; remainder by bond, bearing interest from day of sale, payable in two equal annual instalments, to be secured by mortgage on the negroes, and approved personal security, or for approved city acceptance on Savannah or Charleston. Purchasers paying for papers.

An advertisement published in The Savannah Republican on February 8, 1859, by the slave dealer Joseph Bryan for a two-day auction that became the largest in history. 436 men, women, and children were sold for \$303,850, equal to about \$9.4 million today.

people were ‘deeply conflicted’ over slavery in 1776.... Had the Americans not won their independence in 1783, it is almost inconceivable that the British government would have ended slavery in any of its colonies thereafter.”

- Because Jefferson “blamed the introduction of slavery on the monarchy, this hardly turned the fight for independence into a fight to sustain slavery.”
- The 1619 Project would have us “forget that the [Civil] War was a Southern counter revolution against the victorious Republicans’ explicit intention to place slavery, in Lincoln’s words, ‘in the course of ultimate extinction.’ ... The Emancipation Proclamation officially turned the struggle against secession into a struggle for liberation.... From the very start, however, the war for the Union was inherently anti-slavery.”

Five distinguished historians: In December 2019 five historians wrote a letter published in the *Times*⁵ expressing their “strong reservations about important aspects of The 1619 Project. The project is intended to offer a new version of American history in which slavery and white supremacy become the dominant organizing themes.... We are dismayed at some of the factual errors in the project.” They continue:

“These errors, which concern major events, cannot be described as interpretation or ‘framing.’ They are matters of verifiable fact, which are the foundation of both honest scholarship and honest journalism. They suggest a displacement of historical understanding by ideology. Dismissal of objections on racial grounds – that they are the objections of only ‘white historians’ – has affirmed that displacement.”

The project asserts that the founders declared the colonies’ independence of Britain ‘in order to ensure slavery would continue.’ This is not true.... Some of the other material in the project is distorted, including the claim that ‘for the most part,’ black Americans have fought their freedom struggles ‘alone.’ ... The project criticizes Abraham Lincoln’s views on racial equality but ignores his conviction that the Declaration of Independence proclaimed universal equality, for blacks as well as whites, a view he upheld repeatedly against powerful white supremacists who opposed him.”

Concluding Thoughts

What is the context? As

Despite their criticisms,
these five historians
“applaud all efforts to
address the enduring
centrality of slavery and
racism to our history.”

an ongoing program of one of the nation’s major news organizations, The 1619 Project is the product of journalism. What does that mean for our understanding of the project? One way to answer that question is what would most of us typically expect when reading journalism? Who, what, when, and where did it happen? Probably a simplification and some attention-gathering headlines? We typically understand the enterprise as not historical scholarship but rather stories written to capture our attention and encourage readership. That approach is very different than saying, as do most historians, that the story – whatever it might be – is complicated, and many threads and facts must be considered in the narrative.

One of the underlying foundational concepts for the Institute is that even a three-month survey class focused on a particular topic cannot do justice to the narrative necessary to explain complex issues. Rather, a series of in-depth studies lasting nine months are more appropriate to learning the history, for example, of Western civilization or even an individual country. It seems at least problematic that a journalism project suddenly would uncover the key concepts of a complex issue, the founding of the country, which scholars have been debating and seeking to understand for 200-plus years. It is even

more problematic if that project takes particular events or statements out of context.⁶

One criticism of The 1619 Project is that the initiative took one very significant issue – the existence of slavery – and made that the key and sole focal

point of a multifaceted topic – the founding of the United States. It is worth noting that in the criticisms by the five professors of history described above, they specifically “applaud all efforts to address the enduring centrality of slavery and racism to our history.... Raising profound, unsettling questions about slavery and the nation’s past and present, as The 1619 Project does, is a praiseworthy and urgent public service.”

How strong a frame? Historians often will describe a particular event (or more likely a series of them) and then point out that ultimately the causes are linked to other considerations and events which also should be evaluated. Consider the Greek historian Herodotus and his description of the battle between East and West. Or take the famous digressions of Thucydides, Polybius, or Sallust in the midst of their explorations of the causes of various wars and failures or successes. If The 1619 Project were the only strong explanation of the facts, then a reframing of a less robust understanding might well be appropriate. However, a significant body of scholarly, fact-based research devoted to the origin of the country already exists. A recent example is the book *America’s Revolutionary Mind* which discusses the complex issues involved in the country’s founding and develops theses in great detail with references to source materials and many other scholarly works. In a simplified summary, the author traces the founding of the country to certain key ideas of the Enlightenment, including scientific and philosophical ideas of Bacon, Newton, and Locke; the reactions of individuals to the complex situation in the Americas at the time, including slavery; while ultimately distilling and applying key traditions of Western civilization.



An 1852 photograph of men in front of the slave pens of Bernard Lynch, who ran one of the largest slave markets in St. Louis.

Notes:

1. [nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html)
2. New York Times content accessed at [nytimes.com/interactive/2019/12/20/magazine/1619-intro.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/12/20/magazine/1619-intro.html).
3. Note that the Pulitzer Center is completely unaffiliated and different from the organization awarding Pulitzer prizes. The Center’s reading guide can be found at pulitzercenter.org/builder/lesson/reading-guide-quotes-key-terms-and-questions and its education portal at pulitzercenter.org/1619.
4. Essay is available at [nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html).
5. [nytimes.com/2019/12/20/magazine/we-respond-to-the-historians-who-critiqued-the-1619-project.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/20/magazine/we-respond-to-the-historians-who-critiqued-the-1619-project.html)
6. For more on this topic, see the review of *The War on History* in the [DIALOGOS spring 2020 issue](#) on page 10.

Book Review

In What Year Was America Really Born?

Review by Eno Schmidt

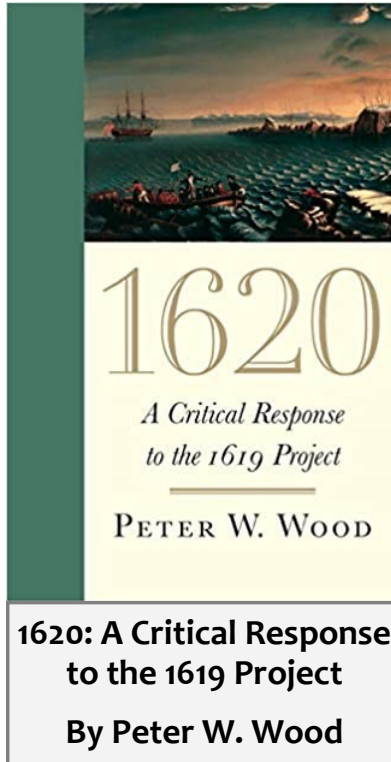
Peter Wood has provided cogent answers to the questions of what The 1619 Project is and why we should care. In the process, he has assembled key counter arguments by respected historians and scholars critical of the project.

In the words of *The New York Times* editor-in-chief Jake Silverstein, “The goal of The 1619 Project is to reframe American history by considering what it would mean to regard 1619 as our nation’s birth year.” As Peter Wood describes it, “The central tenets of The 1619 Project are that Americans have grossly misunderstood the origins and nature of American society, and that slavery is the pivotal institution in American history... The 1619 Project offers the fullest and most vigorous exposition of the view that America is a racist, oppressive country.”

Peter Wood enumerates four themes in the publication by *The New York Times*:

“America began with the arrival of slaves in Virginia in August 1619.”

“The primary purpose of the colonists who declared independence from Britain in 1776 was to preserve



American slavery from the danger of Britain’s outlawing it.”

“The Southern plantation system of growing cotton with slave labor is the foundation of modern American capitalism.”

“[Abraham] Lincoln was a racist who had no interest in conferring real citizenship on those who were enslaved.”

In addition, Nikole Hannah-Jones, who in 2020 won a Pulitzer Prize for her lead essay in The 1619 Project, has spoken about the project’s impact in many interviews. She has stated, “I don’t think you can come away from it without understanding the project is an argument for reparations.” She has also accepted the term “The 1619 Riots” as the

honorific name for the destruction that followed the death of George Floyd in 2020.

Lastly, the project consists of *The New York Times* teaming with the Pulitzer Center to disseminate to school districts throughout the US free teaching materials and curricula supporting the project.

Peter Wood raises many objections and references the work of numerous historians who have countered the claims of The 1619 Project. The objections by no means want to justify slavery, and in this review there is no space to cover all of the material, but consider these points as examples:

- The project can lead people to believe that the origin of African slavery was Virginia in 1619, but slavery was common practice in Africa and in many other parts of the world long before 1619.
- Native peoples encountered in 1492 in the New World practiced slavery and “saw the Europeans as fair game for slavery as well.” Furthermore, “slavery continued among American tribes beyond the reach of Western law well into the 19th Century.”

To reiterate, Wood is certainly not trying to defend slavery but demonstrates where The 1619 Project takes events and actions out of context. “The truth... is that the slaves who landed in Virginia [in 1619] were the first we know of who were brought to an English colony on the North American mainland. That indeed is something, but is it the country’s ‘very origin’? The answer given by many historians who have responded to The 1619 Project is no, definitely not.”

Peter Wood chose “1620” for his title “mainly as a riposte to the claim that the arrival of slaves in Virginia was the real founding of America” and also in order to highlight that year’s Mayflower Compact. An agreement to outline how relationships would be governed after arrival in Plymouth, the Mayflower Compact of 1620 is often seen as the start of “ordered liberty in the New World... and is humanity’s great attempt to create a society based on principles of freedom and equality.” Ripostes and reframing aside, scholars commonly have identified 1776 as America’s starting point with a revolutionary mindset embodied in the Declaration of Independence. (See review on page 18 in [DIALOGOS winter 2021 issue](#) of *America’s Revolutionary Mind*.)

So why would school districts start to adopt a reframing of American history when the facts do not support that position? According to Peter Wood, there are a couple of broad reasons:

- Some want to avoid being labeled “racist” regardless of the facts, while others wish to pursue a political cause over historical accuracy.
- Another reason involves “postmodernism” which posits that there are no facts, but rather only opinions expressed by the writers of history. From this point of view, another writer could express an opposing opinion with equal validity. To better understand this postmodernist approach to history, it is worth quoting at length Wood’s depiction of how this works in The 1619 Project:

“The poor and oppressed... rarely get to tell their own versions of history, but they do enjoy a special kind of truth-telling. From the vantage point of being unfairly disadvantaged, they have insight into the lies and self-serving stories told by their oppressors. These insights are necessarily fragmented because the rich and powerful control the main opportunities to build grand and comprehensive accounts of the past. The oppressed often have only unofficial and slight hidden ways to tell their stories, such as popular songs, folktales, graffiti, and blogs. The 1619 Project offers a particular version of this kind of postmodernism. The ‘privileged’ in this version are American whites, and their self-serving explanations for their privileged position are a version of history that covers up and excuses the reality of ‘white supremacy.’ The 1619 Project aims to unseat white supremacy by bringing forward a powerfully unified version of those insights that Black Americans have had all along but have never before had the opportunity to express as a complete narrative.”

Peter Wood counters the fear of being labeled racist and the postmodern insistence on there being no provable facts, with a powerful full-throated cry: “But I for one don’t think we can take discrediting off the table. How far from the truth can a historical interpretation run before we conclude that it is, fundamentally, a misinterpretation?”

Mark Twain continued from page 5:

the book consists of a lengthy introduction to the project, shorter essays and papers written or dictated by Clemens and members of his family, and a large section of explanatory notes. This makes it easy to pick up and read in bits and pieces. Using the extensive index, one can move around in the text based on topics. It's very much like reading a diary. Clemens eventually used dictation to speed up his work on the autobiography, and as he was an experienced public speaker, his voice comes through to the reader in an authentic way.

Here are some examples of sections on Clemens' life:

- He attended a reading by Charles Dickens in New York in 1867 and was very impressed with Dickens' props and theatrical lighting which "threw down a glory on the gentleman.... Style!"
- In 1888, Clemens saw "drawings and description of an electrical machine lately patented by a Mr. Tesla" for his alternating current.
- Clemens worked on a project about Joan of Arc, whose life he had great interest in.
- He met with Anne Sullivan and her pupil Helen Keller in 1894 when Helen was 14 years old.
- He worked with General Grant who was trying to finish his *Memoirs* before dying. The special relationship between Clemens and Grant is also explained by author Ron Chernow in the introduction to and the final chapter of his 2017 bestseller **Grant**.

Chernow's book (along with the Clemens and Warner book) were recommended reading for Professor Bruce Thompson's 10-week class *The Gilded Age*, presented at the Institute in 2018. That lecture series is available to members for streaming at the Institute's website.

Who's Who at the Institute: Spotlight on Patricia (Patty) Vucurevich

PATRICIA (PATTY)

VUCUREVICH is the office manager at the Institute. She says YOU are the ones that make her job interesting because she has the opportunity to talk to you every day. Patty



was born in Boston into an Italian family with four brothers and three sisters. Her grandparents came from Gaeta, Italy, and her maternal grandfather was a fruit distributor in Cambridge, MA. Her siblings all live within a 20-mile radius of each other northwest of Boston near the New Hampshire line. (Her mom and dad now reside in heaven.) Patty met her husband at their mutual place of employment. One of the first things she said to him was that she would never get married and never move West. She learned to never say never! Patty has two wonderful, intelligent, and handsome sons. The younger son works at Apple. She cannot tell you where the other one works or in her words, she "will have to kill you!" Patty and her husband have enjoyed a most auspicious decision of bringing a puppy into their home in September who was born in July. (The puppy is a Cancer; her husband is a Capricorn; and Patty is an Aquarius). They named their Maltipoo puppy Mona Lisa who is the joy of their lives and the apple of her husband's eye. She is adorable, lovable, playful—everything you would wish for in a puppy. It is Patty's pleasure working with you in this very special place called the Institute for the Study of Western Civilization that Professor William Fredlund has personally worked so hard to create and bring this cultural adventure to you.