

# Patriotism Isn't Fascism

Last week my friend John was chatting with a trainer at the gym, who complained that patrons were putting their trash into the wrong recycling bins. John, who keeps up with [this sort of thing](#), explained to him that it probably made little difference since the United States only recycles a fraction of its plastic waste. “We used to ship a lot of plastic to China for recycling, but they quit accepting it a couple of years ago.”

“Well, I guess I can't blame them,” the young man replied. “We did bomb them two times.”

The kid had confused Japan and China.

I laughed when John told me this story, but more from amazement than amusement. If we hope to have strong, patriotic, American citizens, then the next generation's knowledge of history needs to be much more solid than this.

Sadly, that young man doesn't seem to be an anomaly. While having my car inspected, I overheard a mechanic and the shop's owner complaining about how little their children and grandchildren knew about American history. The owner's grandson was going off to college, and his grandfather was astounded at his ignorance of past events, saying the boy knew nothing about the Civil War and had little knowledge of basic events such as the signing of the Declaration of Independence or the causes of World War II.

Evidence for this ignorance is more than anecdotal. For years the vast majority of our students have [flunked](#) national tests on American history, with less than a quarter of the test takers winning the grade of “proficient.” Many students don't understand, for example, why we fought the British in our Revolution, or what year the Constitution was ratified.

One reason for this decline has to do with sheer neglect. The once commonplace memorization of historic dates, events, and names has in many classrooms gone by the wayside.

Moreover, many history textbooks and teachers focus these days on social justice issues: racism, sexism, transphobia, the evils of capitalism, and the past sins of America. Certainly, our students should leave the classroom aware of the imperfections of their country's past, but the pendulum has swung too far. We are not only failing to educate our young people, but we are also teaching them to despise their country.

Aware of this deficiency, the day before Election Day President Trump established the "[1776 Commission](#)." As Alexandra Kelly of *The Hill* [reports](#), this executive order will set up an advisory commission "to create a 'patriotic education' focused on the United States' founding principles." This document boldly decrees, "many students are now taught in school to hate their own country, and to believe that the men and women who built it were not heroes, but rather villains." This order then states:

*As these heroes demonstrated, the path to a renewed and confident national unity is through a rediscovery of a shared identity rooted in our founding principles. A loss of national confidence in these principles would place rising generations in jeopardy of a crippling self-doubt that could cause them to abandon faith in the common story that binds us to one another across our differences. Without our common faith in the equal right of every individual American to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, authoritarian visions of government and society could become increasingly alluring alternatives to self-government based on the consent of the people. Thus it is necessary to provide America's young people access to what is genuinely inspiring and unifying in our history, as well as to the lessons imparted by the American experience of overcoming great national*

*challenges. This is what makes possible the informed and honest patriotism that is essential for a successful republic.*

The left immediately attacked this commission, with some [comparing](#) the Trump administration's proposals to the indoctrination of Hitler Youth organizations in Nazi Germany.

These critics seem upset not only by the administration's criticism of programs such as the "1619 Project," which contends that the history of America is one of racism and oppression, but also by the use of the word "patriot." Once a garland most Americans coveted, patriotism is to these people a sign of fascism.

Americans were once taught a history of their country that was both objective and a platform for pride. We learned, for instance, that our Founding Fathers created a Constitution that guaranteed liberties, especially those natural freedoms not derived from the state; that our ancestors ended slavery and eventually Jim Crow; and that we fought a century of wars against totalitarians. For most Americans, love of country was a given, summed up by the schoolboy's boast on the playground, "Hey, it's a free country."

If Joe Biden becomes president, we should expect the 1776 Commission, which came to life by executive order, to also die by executive order. Those who regard patriotism as fascism will win the day.

A day or two after the election, I was driving to town and listening to a talk radio show. A woman from Peru ended her description of why she loved America with these words: "I'm not just a citizen. I'm a patriot."

The host of that show applauded.

And so should we all.

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