

A politically motivated smear: Canada's Globe and Mail blames "Marxists" for discredited racist 1619 Project

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The *Globe and Mail*, Canada's "newspaper of record," last month published a scurrilous, politically motivated smear against Marxism. Authored by Konrad Yakabuski, one of its leading columnists, and titled, "The new Marxists rewriting US history," the *Globe* op-ed claims that the *New York Times*' 1619 Project—a right-wing racist reinterpretation of American history—was inspired and authored by Marxists.

This is absurd and manifestly so. The *New York Times* is the daily most identified with the Democratic Party, one of the two parties of Wall Street and US imperialism, and as such an irreconcilable opponent of Marxism and socialism.

Moreover, anyone with a passing acquaintance with the major intellectual and historiographic controversy that has surrounded the *Times*' 1619 Project knows full well that the opposition to it has been led by the Marxists of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

But Yakabuski, a Thatcher enthusiast whose brother is a cabinet minister in Ontario's hard-right Conservative government, is not going to let facts get in the way of his McCarthyite smear. He attributes the *Times*' 1619 Project to "self-anointed arbiters of history" advancing a "Marxist interpretation of US history." Underscoring his political motivations, he concludes his tirade with a Canadian nationalist-infused denunciation of revolution.

David North, the chairman of the WSWs International Editorial Board and the author of many of the WSWs articles that have exposed the omissions, distortions, and outright falsifications in the 1619 Project's rewriting of American history, sent a letter to the *Globe* protesting Yakabuski's column on Dec. 21. It read:

Re: The new Marxists rewriting U.S. history (Dec. 19):

Contrary to Mr. Yakabuski, the New York Times' falsification of American history has nothing to do with socialism. The 1619 Project promotes a racial variant of identity politics. It is rooted in critical race theory, which explicitly rejects the class struggle which Marxists prioritize as the driving force of history.

Mr. Yakabuski fails to reference the fact—acknowledged by Establishment publications like the American Historical Review and Wall Street Journal—that the Trotskyist World Socialist Web Site (wsws.org) has played the leading role in opposing the 1619 Project. The United States' foremost historians, including Gordon Wood and James McPherson, critiqued the 1619 Project in interviews conducted by the WSWs.

Socialists defend the heritage of the United States' democratic revolutions. That is why the WSWs has opposed the New York Times' racialized version of history.

David North

Detroit

WSWS Chairperson

The *Globe* has refused to publish North's letter, although it scrupulously conformed to the guidelines for its Letters to the Editor section, including a word-limit of 150 words.

This act of political censorship provides further proof, were any needed, that Yakabuski's column was not a product of mere ignorance or journalistic incompetence. Rather, it was a politically motivated attempt to discredit Marxism and the socialist movement, by identifying it with racist politics.

Readers of Yakabuski's column learn nothing of the debate over the 1619 Project—a debate, it need be emphasized, that is not only extensively documented, but is undoubtedly the most politically significant and widely commented on controversy over American history and historiography in years.

The exposure and rebuttal of the 1619 Project's racist narrative was initiated by the *World Socialist Web Site*, beginning with an essay published on Sept. 6, 2019, less than three weeks after the Project's publication by the *New York Times*. This critique was developed in further WSWs essays and lectures over the next four months, and through the publication on the WSWs in November-December 2019 of interviews with leading historians of the American Revolution and Civil War, including Gordon Wood, James McPherson, James Oakes and Victoria Bynum. These historians, together with their colleague Sean Wilentz, then addressed a letter to the *Times* protesting a number of gratuitous errors in the 1619 Project.

Yakabuski would have his readers believe that the 1619 Project's historical falsifications and distortions were "nearly unanimously savaged" by "professional historians," but just the opposite is the case.

The majority of historians either remained silent or sided with the 1619 Project. An editorial in the Feb. 2020 issue of the *American Historical Review* (AHR), the country's foremost academic history journal, came out in defence of the 1619 Project. It claimed the *New York Times*-sponsored racist narrative represented a positive contribution to American historiography and portrayed its grossest historical revisions and falsifications as legitimate differences of interpretation. In their reply, David North and the historian Tom Mackaman noted that the AHR's defence of the 1619 Project "reveals the extent to which racist mythology, which has provided the 'theoretical' foundation of middle-class identity politics, has been accepted, and even embraced, by a substantial section of the academic

community as a legitimate basis for the teaching of American history.”

Whilst he deplores that “countless Americans” have “bought into this Marxist interpretation of history,” Yakabuski conveniently skirts over the 1619 Project in two brief paragraphs.

Instead, he makes the centre of his claim that Marxists are “rewriting American history” the San Francisco District School Board’s decision to rename high schools named after Lincoln, Washington, Jefferson and other leaders of the American Revolution and Civil War. This reactionary move, as the WWS has explained elsewhere, is motivated by the same right-wing racist politics that guided the writing of the 1619 Project.

Just as when he libels Marxists as being responsible for the 1619 Project, Yakabuski fails to identify a single Marxist associated with the San Francisco school board’s attempt to purge its schools of the names of leaders of America’s two democratic revolutions. The only person he mentions is Jeremiah Jeffries, a black nationalist member of the school board’s renaming committee, who has endorsed San Francisco Mayor London Breed for reelection. Breed is a right-wing Democrat who backed the short-lived presidential campaign of billionaire investor and businessman Michael Bloomberg.

The *Globe*’s denunciation of the 1619 Project as the work of “Marxists” and “socialists” is in fact cribbed from none other than Donald Trump. The billionaire US president and would-be dictator has sought to rally ruling class support for his anti-democratic conspiracies with repeated warnings that “Marxists” and “socialists” pose an existential threat to American capitalism. As an example of this threat, Trump disingenuously pointed to the “Marxist” 1619 Project.

Yakabuski concludes his diatribe with a snide attack on revolution and the fight for equality that draws on key tropes of Canadian nationalism, the principal ideological weapon of the Canadian bourgeoisie. He likens the 1619 Project’s authors and the members of San Francisco’s school renaming committee to “those who formed the Committee of Public Safety that sent anyone suspected of disloyalty to the guillotine during the French Revolution.” “In their zeal to purge the infidels,” he continues, “the revolutionaries always end up eating their own. Their claims to be fighting for equality quickly become exposed as a thirst for retribution.”

Here is not the place to examine the role that the two American bourgeois-democratic revolutions played in the ultimate emergence, under the aegis of the British Empire, of a rival capitalist state in the northern tier of North America—Canada. But it should be noted that the Canadian bourgeoisie’s origins lie in the United Empire Loyalists, the pro-British opponents of the American Revolution, and the remnants of the ruling elite of *Ancien Régime* New France.

Confederation, the unification of the colonies of British North America in 1867, was not a popular movement animated by democratic principles, but a business deal put together by colonial politicians, railway promoters, bankers and the British government. A key object was the annexation of what is today Western Canada, the dispossession of the native peoples, and the destruction of their communal property relations. Like the leaders of the British Empire in London who plotted to extend diplomatic recognition to the insurrectionist Confederate States of America, Canada’s Fathers of Confederation had hoped that the slaveocracy would prevail in the American Civil War.

Confederation was based on an explicit repudiation of the revolutionary democratic principles that had animated the American

Revolution, and that constituted the ideological-political foundation for what Lincoln described as “a new birth for freedom”—the abolition of slavery and the granting of full citizenship rights to the African-American population. Whilst America’s Declaration of Independence, inspired by the Enlightenment’s ideological assault on absolute monarchy, religious obscurantism and inequality, proclaimed “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” to be “inalienable rights” and asserted the “right of the people to alter or to abolish” a government that violates these rights, the Fathers of Confederation celebrated “peace, order and good government” and proclaimed their loyalty to the British Crown and Empire.

Till the 1960s, the dominant current of both English and French-Canadian/Québécois nationalism derided the United States as “too democratic, and too egalitarian.” Subsequently, and very much as part of their efforts to control an increasingly rebellious working class, the ideologists of the ruling class gave Canadian and Quebecois nationalism a liberal-“left” gloss. Canada was now promoted as a kinder, gentler society to the rapacious dollar republic to the south.

But whatever changes may be made to the Canadian nationalist narrative, the animus to revolution remains. It is bleached into the very bones of the Canadian ruling class.

Yakabuski’s attack on revolution echoes a 2018 *Globe* editorial, “Why 1867 was better than 1776,” published on the occasion of Canada Day. It lauded Canada’s purported origins in “incremental change and improvement” brought about by “negotiation and compromise” over the American and French Revolutions, “abrupt, radical and bloody—extremely bloody—rejections of the past.” Making clear that Canada’s “newspaper of record” abjures revolutionary violence, but not the state’s suppression of opposition from below or aggression in pursuit of the Canadian bourgeoisie’s predatory interests on the world stage, the *Globe* editorial went on to celebrate Canada’s participation in the two imperialist world wars of the last century.

The real concern of Yakabuski, the *Globe* editors and their employers, Canada’s richest family of billionaires, the Thomsons, is not history. What motivates their lurid denunciations of revolution, embittered attacks on the fight for equality and attempts to smear Marxism and identify it with right-wing racist politics, is fear of mounting working-class opposition in Canada, as around the world, and the growing support for socialism.



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