

Trump executive order revives discredited 1776 Commission, mandating the falsification of American history in K-12 schools

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On January 29, President Donald Trump issued an executive order reviving his “1776 Commission,” which seeks to promote “patriotic education” in K-12 schools throughout the country. The purpose of the order is to impose a falsified, religiously based view of American history, in line with the far-right Christian nationalists who made up the original commission Trump created in 2020.

The order, titled “Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling,” explains that the commission will “promote patriotic education” and advises administrative agencies to “prioritize federal resources” to do the same. The executive order defines “patriotic education” as one that has “an accurate, honest, unifying, inspiring, and ennobling characterization of America’s founding ... [and] a clear examination of how the United States has admirably grown closer to its noble principles throughout its history.”

It also takes aim at what it terms “discriminatory equity ideology.” Among other definitions, the order defines this as treating “An individual, by virtue of the individual’s race, color, sex, or national origin, [as] inherently racist, sexist or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously” and determining “An individual’s moral character or status as privileged, oppressing, or oppressed ... by the individual’s race, color, sex, or national origin.”

Those who promote identity politics and critical race theory present inequality and injustice as rooted in what they deem the incurable antipathy supposedly felt by “privileged” identities toward other identities, not the capitalist system that divides the population, regardless of race or gender, into economic classes.

These anti-scientific and anti-Marxist conceptions of race and gender privilege have opened the door for Trump—someone who has made a political career out of appealing to bigotry, prejudice, and ignorance—to absurdly pose as a defender of racial and gender equality and opponent of discrimination, with the order stating he will eliminate federal funding for “discriminatory treatment and indoctrination in K-12 schools.”

Trump’s campaign of falsification and censorship must be opposed in its entirety. His attack against postmodernist identity politics and critical race theory is only the opening

wedge in a campaign that will seek to ban all views that Trump’s far-right accomplices label as “unpatriotic” or “indoctrination.” It marks a new stage in the assault on students’ right to be exposed to views they may agree or disagree with and teachers’ right to hold critical and dissenting views, free from censorship.

The high-water mark to date for critical race theory was the 2019 publication of the New York Times 1619 Project, which the *World Socialist Web Site* played the leading role in exposing as a fundamental falsification of American history. Trump’s original 1776 Commission, formed in late 2020, was a direct response to the 1619 Project from the right. This commission issued its “1776 Report” two days before he left office.

The report, drafted without the input of any professional historian, was filled with fact-free claims. Among the more notable, it falsified American history with frequent references to religion and Christianity, including statements such as “religious faith is indispensable to the success of republican government.” These and other statements turn the historical meaning of the American Revolution upside-down. The First Amendment, ratified in the wake of the revolution, established the principle of the separation of religion from the state.

The Trump-sponsored report also bizarrely equates late 19th century progressive era reforms with fascism, communism and slavery, describing them as “challenges to America’s principles.” As for the Civil Rights era of the mid-20th century, as the *World Socialist Web Site* explained, “the authors have no coherent explanation for why the civil rights struggles were necessary at all.”

In summary, as we noted, the report “has a distinctly fascistic hue. Americans must be taught to speak of America with ‘reverence and love,’ the report threatens, and must ‘stand up’ to those who ‘deny her greatness.’ Schools must be purged of ‘any curriculum’ or theories that ‘demean America’s heritage, dishonor our heroes, or deny our principles.’”

The report was immediately condemned by historians. “It’s a hack job. It’s not a work of history,” James Grossman, then-executive director of the American Historical Association, told

the *Washington Post* at the time. “It’s a work of contentious politics designed to stoke culture wars.”

“It’s very hard to find anything in here that stands as a historical claim, or as the work of a historian. Almost everything in it is wrong, just as a matter of fact,” said Eric Rauchway, a history professor at the University of California, Davis, to the *Post*. “I may sound a little incoherent when trying to speak of this, because the report itself is not coherent. It’s like historical wackamole.”

Given the make-up of the original commission, it is no surprise that it produced an unscientific, fantasy history, based on right-wing Christian ideology. Larry P. Arnn, the chair, is president of the right-wing Christian Hillsdale College and its vice-chair was a Christian conservative retired political science professor at Vanderbilt, Carol Swain.

Hillsdale has produced its own “1776 Curriculum” for K-12 education, created six months after Biden took office and dissolved the Trump commission. The college has set up K-12 charter schools in more than a dozen states to carry it out. According to a 2023 report from NBC, “The college says over 8,400 administrators and teachers have downloaded the curriculum, and a growing number of state and local policymakers are also seeking Hillsdale’s guidance.” South Dakota has already implemented a social studies curriculum based on Hillsdale’s model.

Hillsdale enjoys close relationships with the Trump administration. Ginni Thomas, the wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and one of the architects of Trump’s January 6, 2021 coup attempt, helped establish a satellite campus in Washington D.C. in 2010. And the family of Betsy DeVos, education secretary in the first Trump administration, is a major donor to the school. Her brother, Erik Prince, founder of Blackwater, graduated from Hillsdale. Prince is working with the Trump administration as it enlists private mercenaries to carry out the mass deportation of immigrants.

As for vice-chair Swain, Vanderbilt students quickly gathered over a thousand signatures calling for her suspension in 2015. Foreshadowing the tactics of Zionists against pro-Palestinian students, Swain was accused of resorting to name-calling and doxing those who sought to challenge her in open debate. Earlier that year, Swain wrote that Islam “poses an absolute danger to us and our children unless it is monitored. ... If America is to be safe, it must ... institute serious monitoring of Islamic organizations.”

Later in 2015, she wrote, “If we must live side-by-side with gay couples in a culture with a strong crusading homosexual agenda, our only hope is to strengthen ourselves spiritually and intellectually for the battle that awaits us.”

In reviving the 1776 Commission and promoting so-called “patriotic education,” Trump will attempt to force public schools nationwide to adopt a Hillsdale-style curriculum.

In falsifying history, the oligarchs in charge are attempting to erase any critical thoughts youth may have about American

policy in the present, especially the massive growth in economic inequality, the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the ever-present threat of war against China, Iran, and Russia. In this vein, Trump is also attempting to crush student dissent through brute force, including the deportation of foreign students and educators who express pro-Palestinian or other “unpatriotic” views, as well as through bogus investigations of purported antisemitism on university campuses.

By demagogically posing as the opponent of discrimination and promoter of equality, Trump also seeks to distract attention from the “shock and awe” campaign he is waging to destroy all programs that are of benefit to the working class, including through massive cuts to education. Over a billion dollars in federal education funding has already been cut, impacting various research and teacher training programs.

Trump has also signed an executive order aimed at closing the federal Department of Education, putting working class students at particular risk.

Recently appointed as secretary of the Department of Education, former World Wrestling Entertainment executive Linda McMahon has pledged to carry out Trump’s policies on education, which would dismantle the national public education system by replacing federal funding for low-income students and those with particular needs with block grants to states, while diverting funds to private and religious schools through voucher programs and so-called “school choice.”

In 2024, the federal education department provided \$21 billion to low-income schools through its Title I program and \$15 billion to assist schools with special education. Without these funds, school systems in working class districts, already starved of funds, will be decimated.



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