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The New York Times Magazine's '1619 Project' Is Mostly Progressive Propaganda

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Recently, The New York Times Magazine unveiled the “1619 Project,” a series of stories, interviews, and essays that commemorate the 400th anniversary of when slavery began in the country that would become the United States.

While education about slavery is an important aspect of America’s history and a way to ensure such evil doesn’t ever occur again, it’s clear that much of this project is a result of the NY Times’s progressive, revisionist historical approach, not a genuine desire to inform its readers.

The NY Times said, in its own words, that the project “aims to reframe our country’s history, understanding 1619 as our true founding, and placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of the story we tell ourselves about who we are.”

This approach not only requires a biased starting point, but a lack of nuance, historical accuracy, or global understanding of slavery at the time. Does any historian recognize 1619 as America’s founding? Yet the NY Times presents this as an accurate depiction of America’s origins, because the project’s origins are biased toward the concept of racism only, leaving out the Founders’ attempts to create an equal, free society.

New York Times journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones pitched the project to the magazine. A recipient of numerous awards, she’s clearly educated, bright, and proud to be an American. In her opening essay, she writes, “Black people have seen the worst of America, yet, somehow, we still believe in its best”—a relief to Americans who feel the project is merely a platform for stoking white guilt.

The project not only purports to sell the idea that slavery was immoral and that America shouldn’t have participated in it—things that most reasonable, moral people would agree on today in hindsight—but attacks America’s core ideals, labeling them “false” and a “lie.”

The project spreads the myth that “one of the primary reasons the colonists decided to declare their independence from Britain was because they wanted to protect the institution of slavery,” something I had not only never heard of, but that is clearly false, based on this country’s founding historical documents, including the Federalist Papers, the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and documents written by slave owners themselves.

The project seeks to define America by one thing: racism. It's not only disingenuous but ignorant to claim that our country's origins were defined by only one mistake, especially when it's a mistake that our country has owned up to—repeatedly and in myriad ways—for centuries.

The project has already received criticism. On Twitter, historian Daniel Pipes wrote that he was “speechless at this ignorance” and “appalled at this ugly revisionism.” Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) wrote on Twitter that as a result of the newspaper's focus, the NY Times is a “propaganda outlet for liberals by liberals.”

While a research associate at the Cato Institute applauded the project and suggested it's an important piece of journalism, they also wrote that “libertarians specifically will find certain claims about the relationship between modern American capitalism and slavery to be off-putting, and there are economic and historical claims that are already being contested by scholars.”

However, the writer continued to encourage people to read it. “One need not agree with everything a writer says to benefit from reading it,” the post says.

I do agree that one of the greatest ills of U.S. citizens today is misinformation, ignorance, and a lack of knowledge—or some combination of the three. Everyone in America should be fully informed and aware that slavery existed and perpetuated here during the founding of this country and against the better moral judgment of many.

However, at the same time, no history book should call out slavery as the only foundation, the only pivot upon which this country's ideas rest, or claim that slavery was the beginning and end of the American concept of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

That's merely progressive propaganda, seeking to misinform and smear this country's hard-fought war against tyranny, even if slavery played an important role.