

Talking Turkey

'Critical Race Theory' May Not Be Taught in K-12, But Perhaps It Should Be

By JIM SMITH

I have received quite an education from reading *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* about the history of slavery and racism in America. As a "history major" in college, I'm embarrassed at how little I knew about this aspect of American history.

Republicans, at least the Trumppers, would like to burn this book, and have succeeded in getting it banned from schools and libraries, because, for them, ignorance is bliss. They don't want Americans to know their history, and they deny our systemic racism.

I think this is an essential book that every student (and grown-up) should read and study.

Did you know that the capture and return of escaped slaves was primary to the creation of many police departments, especially in the South?

Did you know that 10 of our first 12 presidents were slave owners? That of the 84 clauses in the U.S. Constitution, six deal directly with the enslaved and their enslavement, and five more hold implications for slavery? That the Constitution prohibited

the federal government from intervening to end the importation of slaves from Africa for a term of 20 years and allowed Congress to mobilize the militia to put down slave revolts and forced states that outlawed slavery to turn over escaped slaves to their enslavers in other states? That slavery existed in all 13 colonies, not just the South?

I was fascinated by the story of Virginia's royal governor, the Earl of Dunmore, a slave owner himself, who warned colonists taking up arms that he would "declare Freedom to the Slaves," prompting hundreds of slaves to join the British. Indeed more slaves joined the British than joined the colonists during the Revolutionary War.

It's generally understood that the U.S. Constitution went against the noble statements in the Declaration of Independence regarding "all men being created equal," but check out this excerpt from Chapter One:

"Thomas Jefferson spoke for other white Americans when he stated in the largest and angriest complaint in the Declaration of Independence,

that Dunmore's emancipation proclamation was a major cause of the American Revolution," [Woody] Holton writes. Or, as historian Michael Groth put it, "In one sense, slaveholding Patriots went to war in 1775 and declared independence in 1776 to defend their rights to own slaves."

Holton was referring to the last grievance in the Declaration of Independence that "He [the King] has excited domestic insurrections amongst us," a specific reference to insurrections by slaves against their enslavers.

Another quote I highlighted:

As Frederick Douglass would explain in 1849, the Constitution bound the nation "to do the bidding of the slave holder, to bring out the whole naval and military power of the country, to crush the refractory slaves into obedience to their cruel masters."

Northerners (like myself) were led to believe that racism, racial segregation and discrimination of all sorts was a Southern phenomenon, one which children born after the 1970s or 1980s might totally accept. But this

book reminds readers that white politicians in the North implemented policies that segregated Blacks into slum neighborhoods and all-Black schools, and "Whites Only" signs were common in Northern businesses. California was among the non-Southern states which barred interracial marriages. It was the FHA which introduced (and mandated) racially tinged redlining to the mortgage industry.

This is history which all Americans need to know. And we need to know that right-wing opposition to teaching American history is anti-American. (Or perhaps we should label it "highly American," given our history.)

The 1619 Project provides insight regarding the members of the Supreme Court who call themselves "originalists." To be an originalist in that context means to support not just denying women the vote but supporting slavery and systemic racism.

Talking Turkey columns are posted at www.JimSmithBlog.com. Columns going back to March 12, 2020, are archived at TalkingTurkey.online.