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# THE PAIDEIA LETTER

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## WHO CARES HOW WELL OUR STUDENTS KNOW OUR NATIONAL HISTORY?



Readers of *THE PAIDEIA LETTER* are quite familiar with PAIDEIA, Inc.'s opinion regarding the threat to American schools and students posed by *The New York Times'* curriculum called *The 1619 Project*. We oppose its central argument, that every ill that afflicts contemporary American life can be blamed on the institution of slavery that began 400+ years ago.

Of course, no reasonable person questions the basic premise, that the arrival of slaves and the perpetuation of slavery by white English colonists was morally calamitous to the developing New World. So too the continuing scourge of “**Jim Crow laws**” following the Civil War and until the 1960s **Civil Rights Movement** ended legalized segregation, although its blight continues even into our own decades of racial violence.

But equally reprehensible is the mangling of *truth* in the name of “**social justice.**” And that precisely is what *The New York Times* and their educational curriculum designers have chosen as their course of action. Never mind that the manic creators of classroom lessons to be taught (already adopted in 3,500 high schools) have filled the curriculum with historical inaccuracies; never mind that reputable historians have called upon the *Times* to revise and temper its presumptuous imposition by activists of bias upon evidence and genuine scholarship. To the contrary, the *1619 Project* advocates have a worldview which they will not abandon, even as their imbalance and its distortions weaken their case.

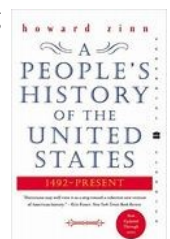
Long before August 2019, when the *1619 Project* began, knowledge about and teaching of our national history were both in disarray and disdain—not just in public schools but also in evangelical schools, colleges, and even seminaries. I have often cited the Christian college student who complained that my convocation address had offended her because—she lamented—“**Everything you talked about happened before I was born!**” In 2018, at another Christian college, following my chapel talk commemorating the attacks of September 11, 2001, a student asked in all apparent sincerity, “**What’s the big deal about 9/11?**” At a distinguished seminary, a prospective preacher told me that he had no time for history because “**my whole focus is on the immediate future and the end times.**”



### THESE ARE THE UNWITTING DISCIPLES OF THE AUTO TYCOON HENRY FORD WHO SAID, “*HISTORY IS BUNK!*”

These young adults were once elementary and secondary students, some in Christian K-12 schools where they learned not *history* but contempt for the teaching and learning of history. Some of the blame for the current unhappy state of history teaching can be attributed to political radicals and their textbooks. One such is *A People's*

*History of the United States* by Howard Zinn, who described himself as “**something of an anarchist, something of a socialist.**” His worldview of American history matches his own image in the mirror. Thus, millions of students have been deceived by Zinn’s skewed portrayal of the American experience because their history lessons were taught by adults who are committed to teaching only what they themselves were

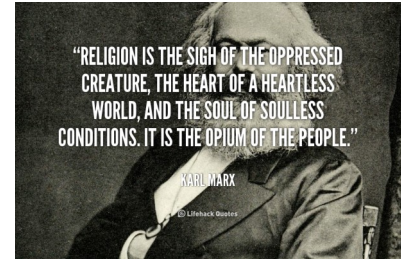




instructed as adolescents: **To despise America.**

The crisis is particularly clear in the present political environment, in which a self-declared candidate for the **Democrat Party's** presidential nomination can claim with impunity the virtues of **socialism** as practiced over the last 100 years in the former Union of Soviet **Socialist** Republics, in Fidel Castro's Cuba, in Daniel Ortega's Nicaragua, and in Hugo Chavez's Venezuela. For his ideological support this outrageous politician from Vermont has enlisted a prevaricating senator from "the People's Republic of Massachusetts" and a "squad" of admirers from New York City, Minnesota, and Michigan. But none of his Democrat rivals and, frankly, far too few Republican opponents seem willing or capable of calling upon history to rebut **Senator Bernie Sanders'** preposterous platform based on his distortions of history.

The origins of Sanders' philosophical stance lie in his own rejection of religion and his perverse vision of American history. The passion for embracing Leftist dogma by his generation of political utopians derives from the experience of his parents and others — who like Sanders—were descendants of immigrants escaping initially from the *pale* and *shtetls* of Eastern Europe or later from Nazi Germany, then radicalized in social clubs of New York City's ghettos and in the classrooms of the New York City public schools or lecture halls at **City University of New York** (Sanders began at **Brooklyn College**, a CUNY branch, before graduating from the **University of Chicago**, a bastion of "*progressivism*"). His teachers and professors taught from the Leftist playbook and its worldview, passing on the same opinions they had learned in their own secondary and university classrooms or as student-members of the **Young People's Socialist League**. Their philosophy and preferred politics sprang from Karl Marx and his theory of history as "*dialectical materialism.*" Critical to Marxist theory is a total rejection of religion, dismissed by him as "**the opium of the people.**"



Yet when did any Marxist historian connect the political radicalism that now inspires a socialist revival to the aftermath of the 1917 Russian Revolution, resulting in the rise of Lenin and Stalin, the murder of at least 20 million persons, the *gulag* labor camps, the Cold War, and the Berlin wall? These were the barbarisms that led to the heroic opposition of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Natan Sharansky, Mstislav Rostropovich, and other émigré-fugitives from Soviet socialist-communist oppression.

Somewhere along this educational journey, the study of history became not only an instrument for indoctrinating students with Marxism but also a passive and deadening chore rather than an active engagement in which each student is also a participant. Far from being a mere list of long-ago and far-away events unconnected to either pupils or professor, history ought to be a dynamic record and retelling of our own heritage and its legacy—including an honest account of the atrocities committed in the name of "**the people.**"

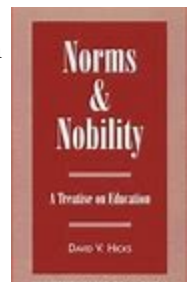
I admit that it's difficult for someone like me who has lived for almost 85 years in the realities of the Great Depression, World War II, the atom bomb, the establishment of the State of Israel, wars in Korea and Vietnam, the moon landing, 35 years as a teacher in classrooms, the rise of Islamic terrorism, and current American populist supremacy, only to endure the fantasies of an economic paradise predicted by an also-ran whose high school sports career he has also inflated. I am convinced that Sanders' appeal to his constituents and to the Left in general is fueled by the widespread ignorance of naïve youth and older adults who have paid too little attention to history or current events beyond their own *Facebook* account or supermarket check-out magazines.

**But there is hope, at least for our students in Christian schools, colleges, and seminaries, if leaders will heed our counsel.**



Last month my longtime friend and former student **David V. Hicks** (photo left), author of the landmark book *Norms and Nobility*, sent me a message alerting me to an opinion piece in the *New York Post* (February 22, 2020), headlined "**Public Schools Are Teaching Our Children to Hate America**" by **Mary Kay Linge**. She reminds some readers and informs most others that, in the beginning of the American nation, Thomas Jefferson declared the purpose of education to be "**a central focus of the school day**" so that "**a strong early grounding in history would ensure that these future citizens would cherish and sustain the republic the Founders had won for them.**" Instead, writes Linge, "**as Jefferson might put it today to our public schools, *You had one***

***job—and you failed.***" Linge takes off the kid gloves and punches hard at the public school curriculum, including the disaster called *Common Core*, that has exchanged genuine history (with all the dates and battles and key players in context and chronological order) for feel-good *social studies* that leave students bereft of any historical knowledge of **what happened when, to whom, for what reasons, and with what consequences.**



Hicks and I share a Canadian schoolboy's background. He came to **The Stony Brook School** as a young boy early in the 1960s from a pastor's family in New Brunswick; he continued his education at **Princeton University** and **Oxford** as a **Rhodes Scholar**, then headed high-profile schools, including **St. Paul's School**, Concord, New Hampshire. He is a widely respected classical educator whose opinions merit careful consideration.



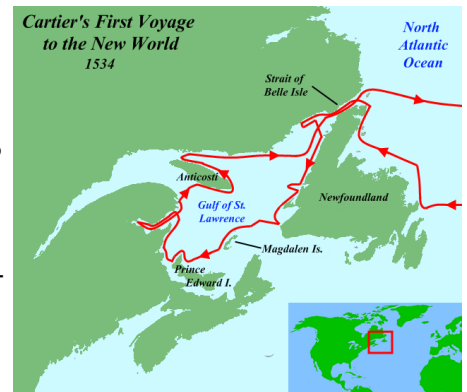
I had started my formal schooling two decades earlier, at age six, in a tiny village schoolhouse on the Niagara Peninsula in Ontario. Just two years previous, I had been one of thousands of children standing with our parents on the curb of King Street in Hamilton, Ontario, to salute King George VI and Queen Elizabeth (parents of the current **Queen Elizabeth II**) on their historic royal tour (**photo left**). Three months later, on September 3, 1939, Great Britain and the Empire, of which Canada was a part, declared war on the Nazi invaders of European neighboring nations. For two years we Canadians were alone in North America as combatants in World War II.

Three months after my first day of school, Japan's attack on the naval base at **Pearl Harbor** joined us as allies with the USA over the next three-plus years. Almost from the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, then in the Pacific, my classmates and I were involved in the effort to achieve peace. We were recruited to clear our homes of disposable metal (clothes hangers, food cans, even excess pots and pans) to be recycled; we were solicited to contribute our nickels and dimes to purchase War Bonds. Almost weekly we were shown newsreel films depicting battle scenes in all their horror, such as the London blitz.



Readers of **THE PAIDEIA LETTER** know that my father's pastorate in Guelph, Ontario, coincided with the residency of the expatriate Queen Wilhelmina (**photo left**) and her daughter Princess Julianna of Holland. At my father's invitation a detachment of troops from The Netherlands attended our Baptist church one Sunday morning, and a few days later I made my only "command performance" as a boy soprano, singing "**There'll Be Bluebirds over the White Cliffs of Dover**" for the Queen herself. At only eight years of age, I was **living history**, not merely hearing it on the radio or seeing it in movies at my school's assembly hall.

But my curriculum wasn't limited to the ongoing battles of World War II. We also learned the history of our own nation, at least since the 16th century. We heard the names of French **voyageurs** (Jacques Cartier, Samuel de Champlain), English explorers and military commanders (the Cabots and James Wolfe "the dauntless hero" who overcame the French Marquis de Montcalm at Quebec), and other Euro-



peans whose purpose was to occupy the vast dominion, claim its riches, subjugate its native tribes, and end the French expansion. It was a very Anglo-centric time, to be sure. The flag was the Red Ensign, combining the Union Jack with a Canadian shield. When we sang "**O Canada,**" none of the national anthem's lyrics had been translated into French!

Then in the summer of 1944, my father's pulpit was relocated to Haslett, Michigan, near Lansing. In 5th grade I began to learn a new version of North American history, starting with locations and names such as Jamestown, Plymouth Rock, and Boston; Christopher Columbus, Captain John Smith, and the *Mayflower*. But here again, news about World War II became intertwined with American history. We had arrived in the Baptist parsonage just after D-Day (June 6), and a member of the church, Captain Cleo Buxton, was serving in Italy under General Mark Clark. His family kept the congregation and the village informed as Clark's 15th Army Group gained ground on Rome. As pastor of the only church in town, my father was esteemed even by the unchurched, whom he comforted when the worst news possible invaded our tiny population. For in that same village were several houses whose front window carried a small banner with a Gold Star—stark evidence that war is costly.



There was no television, only the network radio newscasters such as Gabriel Heatter and H. V. Kaltenborn (**photo left**), whom I came to know 20 years later, when both of us lived in Stony Brook. In our house, we listened to them daily, and I remember learning much of my news of the world from their voices. Because of their broadcasts, I was able to exercise my prerogative as the preacher's kid and ring the church bell to mark the major events in 1945: President Roosevelt's death in April, V-E Day in May, V-J Day in August (following the mysterious bomb that changed the world), and even the World Series victory by my beloved **Detroit Tigers** in October. Once again, I was not just a 10-year old spectator to history, I was a first-hand participant in the history of my own time.

Every one of us alive today is *making history* in one form or another. Like it or not, the omnipresence of closed-circuit cameras throughout our cities, on every campus, in every elevator, and at an increasing number of front doors of homes means that our every movement is being filmed, viewed, then noted by someone else looking for something nefarious. Every time we log on a web site or order a book from **Amazon** or (according to **Julian Assange** and **Edward Snowden**) place an innocent telephone call, we are inscribing a record of our existence and personal preferences for the whole world to know.



Few of today’s teenagers practice the centuries-old custom of keeping a diary—the daily account of their lives, public and private. In its place, today’s adolescents and young adults maintain colossal files of photographs on those phones by which to chronicle their personal stories. Think of what our society has lost as a result: Just suppose Anne Frank (**photo left**) had not written her diary, published in English in 1952? How much poorer would we all be for that loss? She was *making history* even as she lived it in the stale yet frightening boredom of her hidden existence with her family.

## SO IT IS FOR EVERY HUMAN BEING, IF ONLY WE TOOK NOTICE.

### HOW, THEN, DO WE COMBAT BAD HISTORY TEACHING WITH BETTER?

We who govern, administer, or profess to teach in Christian schools at any level have a responsibility to mitigate and, if possible, end the ignorance of and scornful attitude toward the stories of our national heritage—if for no other reason than the fact that we worship the God who entered into human history. Here are a few recommendations to consider, beginning with a new sense of purpose and philosophy:

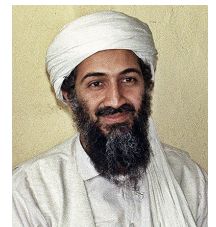
**1. The purpose of instruction in history is not the mere intellectual acquisition of facts, dates, names, and events.** The purpose is to transmit a knowledge of the *consequences* of those facts, dates, names, and events. We ought to be asking and answering such questions as these: **What did humanity learn from those facts, dates, names, and events? To what extent were the consequences for good or ill? How much has the human race been improved or degraded by what happened in a particular historical event?**

**2. Our philosophical starting point must be the Christian school history teacher’s biblical world-and-life view.** Our God is sovereign over the human race, even when our sinful will takes us far from the divine standard of holiness. For the biblical Christian, the study of history is the documented record of our fall from innocence under God’s law by deliberate and prideful violation of God’s law and the terrifying consequences of those actions. Yet in spite of human sinful choices, history is also a record of God’s special grace at work in the lives of those who believe and trust in God—as well as God’s common grace upon those who do not!

**3. God has a plan for organizing the human race.** It begins with the family and extends through the model generated by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the Twelve Tribes, then through the Church. God’s providence ultimately determines the course of human experience, as is best shown by the Incarnation, which is the central event in history.

**4. History matters to God.** St. Paul tells the Corinthians that past events “**happened as examples and were written down as warnings for us**” (1 Cor. 10:11, NIV). As George Santayana implied, we ignore history at our own peril.

**5. Both biblical history and secular records demonstrate that tyrants and other abusers of political power fall of their own *hubris* and corruption.** Based on the Serpent’s lie in Genesis 3, “You shall be as gods,” the fallen quest for pride and power have taken human beings far from the divine intention. From the murder of his brother Abel by Cain to the building of the Tower of Babel and beyond, we can trace stories of Abraham’s victory over Mesopotamian kings (Genesis 14); Egypt’s Pharaoh Rameses II, whom Moses challenged and overthrew; the Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, a long line of Roman emperors. If we believe that God was involved in the collapse of those kingdoms and empires from Noah’s time to Emperor Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus (known as Nero) in 68 A. D., why not also in our modern era with Czar Nicholas II, Hitler, Stalin, Mao, and bin Laden, among others?



**6. We should elevate our *teaching* of history to the *recording* of history.** Every teacher and professor or history must set an example as a *historian*, maintaining a scrapbook or researching a local personage or retracing the development of an important event and its current effects. Only then can every student, at least from upper primary grades on through graduate school, be held responsible to produce one’s own account of history, whether written, sound, or photography; whether personal or family, community or national. Only so will we transform learning history into a dynamic reality.

*D. Bruce Lockerbie, Chairman/CEO/Editor*



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- **THE PAIDEIA WORKSHOP FOR STRONGER SCHOOLS:** Six one-day presentations are planned for locations from New England to Middle Georgia. The topic is **“SERIOUS MONEY: Funding the Christian School for Mission Fulfillment.”** Schedule for each day is 8:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Sites and dates are
 

Tuesday, March 31	<b>Plumstead Christian School, Plumsteadville, PA</b>
Thursday, April 1	<b>West Bay Christian Academy, North Kingstown, RI</b>
Tuesday, April 14	<b>Loudonville Christian School, Loudonville, NY</b>
Tuesday, April 21	<b>Wilmington Christian School, Hockessin, DE</b>
Thursday, April 23	<b>Pillar College, Somerset, NJ</b>
Tuesday, April 28	<b>United Methodist Church, Peachtree City, GA</b>

 For information about the program and cost to register, contact our office [andrea@paideia-inc.com](mailto:andrea@paideia-inc.com) or call **516.659.9684**.
- **D. BRUCE LOCKERBIE’S KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO ACSI ADMINISTRATORS:** On February 5, 2020, Dr. Lockerbie addressed the ACSI California/Hawaii administrators’ conference on the topic **“A Paradigm for Progress: Remain Constant—and Change!”** To receive a free copy (also published as the *Winter Subscriber’s Supplement*), return the stub below.
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- information about THE PAIDEIA WORKSHOP on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.**
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