# Opinion | The miseducation of America

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The words “patriotic education,” recently introduced by President Trump, bear an unfortunate similarity to patriotic reeducation, a term not generally associated with liberty. Authoritarian rulers with genocidal tendencies have often used patriotic education — otherwise known as brainwashing — to turn children into little tattle-taling implants of the state. This isn’t what Trump intends, even if some on the left prefer to see it that way. And there are some other forms of American reeducation taking root around the country that merit examination.  
  
Trump announced his intention to create a commission to study a pro-America curriculum during a speech Thursday, Constitution Day, from the National Archives. He said he wanted to “restore patriotic education to our schools,” largely in response to the Black Lives Matter movement and the New York Times Magazine’s “1619 Project,” a series of essays that reframed American history as beginning with the arrival of the first slaves in the Virginia colony. The project, now being embraced by some colleges and already headed for grades K-12, places “the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative.”  
  
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While this would have been an interesting idea for a doctoral dissertation, I’m not sure the country is quite ready to rebrand the Founding Fathers as little more than cruel, greedy bigots. Trump, while hardly the best narrator for this story, is not alone in worrying that the Black Lives Matter movement, for all the awareness of police brutality that it has created, has become a cudgel for those who want to deconstruct America, monument by monument.  
  
Equally concerning are efforts underway to educate some federal employees about “White privilege,” “systemic racism” and “White fragility.”  
  
In July, a whistleblower at the Treasury Department leaked documents about a diversity training course titled “Difficult Conversations about Race in Troubling Times.” According to Christopher F. Rufo, who received the documents and wrote about them in the Manhattan Institute’s “City Journal,” the course is based upon the “premise that ‘virtually all White people contribute to racism’ and have internalized ‘fairly consistent narratives about race’ that ’don’t support the dismantling of racist institutions.’ ”  
  
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Let’s just say, not really. At least not consciously, which is the conversation we’re not having but should: how the unconscious mind harbors racist attitudes. In his 2010 book, “The Hidden Brain,” former Post writer Shankar Vedantam argues that all people — Black, White and everyone else — are 100 percent racist in their subconscious minds. These biases form at early ages, and we basically spend the rest of our mature lives trying to tamp them down or eradicate them. Sometimes we fail, usually when stressed, afraid, angry or just plain tired.  
  
This is also the underlying premise of the “diversity consultant” Howard Ross, who happens to be White, and who has led at least 17 training courses across federal departments, including at Treasury, since Trump’s inauguration. The problem, however, is that telling people they’re unconsciously racist, which requires about five minutes of explanation, doesn’t mean that all Whites are standby racists.  
  
While I don’t worry much about adults being inconvenienced at work by a relatively innocuous time-waster, I do worry about programming young children to feel good or bad about their history. Ross tells his conferees to go home and talk to their children about race, which is fine to a point. The extent to which schools incorporate critical race theory into their curricula is bound to vary widely by state and district. Learning about the realities of slavery, Jim Crow, the ongoing fight for equality and other historical facts is justified and necessary, but the age-appropriateness of material should be scrupulously overseen by parents and pediatric psychologists, not agenda-driven ideologues.  
  
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It doesn’t take a degree in politics to see that, with Election Day six weeks away, Trump is creating a cultural conflict he thinks will get him reelected. Plainly, “patriotic education” is a coded dog whistle at a time when self-proclaimed “patriots” tend to cluster on the far-right fringes, bearing arms and waving battle flags. It’s the kind of tactic Republicans have employed for years, usually late in close campaigns. What a coincidence.  
  
This much is certain: Trump isn’t the only one calling for a new curriculum in America. But he won’t be the one instructing children to go home and quiz their parents about their racism and white privilege. No, that job falls to the authorities from the Diversity Educational Complex, who are busy rewriting history as we speak.  
  
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# When it comes to race relations, the left and the right are miles apart

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We know there’s a difference between Republicans and Democrats when it comes to views on race relations, but just how far apart they really are is eye-opening According to a survey from the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, racial inequality is a top three issue for Democratic voters. But it does not even crack the top 10 for Republicans.  
  
The low prioritization of race relations among GOP voters helps put into perspective why President Trump and the Republican Party have chosen to respond to the issue in the way they have.  
  
Even if that’s not surprising, it matters. Here’s why: As long as addressing systemic discrimination against people of color remains of low priority to his voters, Trump is likely to continue to minimize the effects of racism on American life.  
  
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The state of race relations in the country has become one of the defining aspects of the Trump political era. Since the earliest days of his presidential campaign, he has communicated a vision of the country that views America at its best when rooted in the past. From defenses of white nationalists marching to preserve the honoring of Confederate soldiers to critiques of the Black Lives Matter movement, Trump has arguably become one of America’s chief protectors of Whiteness during a time when the demand for racial justice has become mainstream. Most GOP voters have followed him lockstep — and have since the earliest days of his 2016 campaign, when he promoted ideas that arguably exacerbated America’s racial divide.  
  
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Trump gave remarks Thursday to mark the 233rd anniversary of the signing of the Constitution. His speech amounted to a defense of “Whiteness” following a summer in which Americans nationwide have examined how white supremacy has continued to negatively shape the country since its earliest days. The remarks — which included Trump criticizing the New York Times’s “1619 Project” and other efforts to grapple with the role of slavery in America — provide some insight into how the president is likely to respond to racism in America moving forward.  
  
He said:  
  
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The narratives about America being pushed by the far left and being chanted in the streets bear a striking resemblance to the anti-American propaganda of our adversaries, because both groups want to see America weakened, derided, and totally diminished. Students in our universities are inundated with Critical Race Theory. This is a Marxist document holding that America is a wicked and racist nation, that even young children are complicit in oppression, and that our entire society must be radically transformed. Critical Race Theory is being forced into our children’s schools, it’s being imposed into workplace trainings, and it’s being deployed to rip apart friends, neighbors, and families.  
  
Trump’s critics have focused on this from the moment he began running, when his campaign announcement speech stoked white supremacist ideals by portraying immigrants from Mexico as a threat to the American way of life in part because of their Latino heritage.  
  
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Most Americans — especially those left of center — have concluded Trump is racist, according to a Yahoo News-YouGov survey. But voters on the right have been consistent and unapologetic in their support of the president — including on matters of race, as the survey suggests.  
  
Learning how Republicans see the world and what issues in America they believe are most pertinent helps Americans overall and the individuals who lead the GOP understand what these voters desire of their political leaders — and perhaps why those in need of their support continue to respond to matters the way they do, especially on a problem many Americans view as having worsened under Trump.  
  
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