



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on October 8, 2020

490 B.C. Project: Restoring Teaching of TRUE History

I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. I know of no way of judging the future but by the past.

— Patrick Henry, March 23, 1775.

“Today, I am also pleased to announce that I will soon sign an Executive Order establishing a national commission to promote patriotic education. It will be called the ‘1776 Commission.’”

With [that statement](#), on September 17 President Donald Trump announced his intent to create a curriculum for public schools that would increase the appreciation for the miraculous founding of this country.

“It will encourage our educators to teach our children about the miracle of American history and make plans to honor the 250th anniversary of our founding. Think of that — 250 years,” the president explained.

Earlier in this proclamation, President Trump claimed that his 1776 Commission was necessary as a counterbalance to the much-maligned 1619 Project created chiefly by Nikole Hannah-Jones and heavily hyped by the *New York Times*.

The New American has described the reason the [Progressives’ proposed “history” lesson](#) has been so widely denounced:

Even the first sentence of the headline of the first essay in the project contains multiple factual errors: “Our democracy’s founding ideals were false when they were written,” it says. Of course, America is not and never has been a democracy. If Hannah-Jones had bothered studying any American history, she could have read *The Federalist*, No. 10, by James Madison, the Father of the Constitution (and an enemy of slavery), to understand why he rejected democracy as a terrible form of government, and chose to create a republic instead. Instead, the project blasts the “decidedly undemocratic Constitution,” as if that were a bad thing. Also, claiming that America’s founding ideals are false implies that all men are not created equal, a self-evidently racist statement.

The second sentence of the 1619 Project’s opening essay title is deceptive, too. “Black Americans have fought to make them true.” Of course, Americans of all skin tones struggled in the fight, with hundreds of thousands of European-descent Americans dying in the Civil War that freed the slaves in the South. Instead of recognizing that, the racist Project demonizes “white Americans” for their supposed collective “sin” of slavery, while falsely suggesting that black Americans have been left on their own to struggle for freedom against evil “white Americans.”



Battle of Marathon, Georges Rochegrosse 1859



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Now, in fairness, there is no constitutional authority for the president to create curriculum or to issue executive fiats foisting approved history lessons onto the country's public schools.

That said, in light of the outright lies and outrageous maligning of many of our country's Founding Fathers that are the core of the 1619 Project, one could almost forgive President Trump (and those behind his history lessons) for trying to offset the propaganda posing as history.

Recently, however, a few bona fide historians — Morgan E. Hunter, Williamson M. Evers, and Victor Davis Hanson — have proposed their own alternative to the "history" being taught in schools across the country; their suggested curriculum correction is called the 490 B.C. Project.

Why 490 B.C.? The fact that I have to explain why the historians chose that year for the name of their suggested curriculum is evidence of the embarrassing state of classical education in this country.

The Battle of Marathon was fought in that year on the plains near Marathon, Greece, and it saw the victory of the Greeks over the invading Persian forces, thus preventing Athens from becoming a Persian satrapy. Can you imagine the effect on the history of the world if there had been no Golden Age of Athens? There would have been no Socrates, no Plato, no Aristotle, no Pericles, no Demosthenes, no Athenian influence on Rome, no influence of Greece and Rome on England, thus no influence of Greece and Rome on the government of the states and the union.

In short, our society, our government, our very culture would be unrecognizable from that we've inherited and enjoyed for over two millennia.

Here's how the authors of the newly proposed 490 B.C. Project describe the purpose and power of their proposal:

When Americans knew classical history, they could reach beyond partisan differences by drawing on the shared roots of our civilization. American students once learned, for example, about the Greek victory at Marathon in 490 B.C. This kept Greece from being swallowed up by the Persian Empire and ushered in the Golden Age of Athenian democracy which, for all its shortcomings, was a pathbreaking achievement. Democratic Athens, counterbalanced by Sparta's tripartite system, led to broad-based polities and ultimately the Roman Republic. From there we trace a clear line to Magna Carta and the Renaissance republics, to the Enlightenment, and ultimately to the American Founding in the years around 1776.

There is no doubt that when compared to the education in the classics received by the Founding Generation (and for generations before them) modern American young people receive next to no training in the teaching of the events and people of the Ancient Greeks and Romans.

This has left generations of contemporary Americans unable to understand many of the events of their own time in a proper historical context, a context that might help them recognize threats to their liberty. As explained by the authors of the 490 B.C. Project:

Without classical knowledge, Americans are likely to misconstrue the achievements of 1776 — not to mention other significant historical moments (as evidenced in recent inconclusive contentions over the events of 1619). Unfortunately, contemporary school curricula leave students with major gaps in their knowledge of classical history and the humanities more broadly.



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Not surprisingly, these historians make a very good point. Every day I am asked why we've never seen the emergence of another generation of Americans on par with the pantheon of Founding Fathers. There's a very easy explanation for that lack.

For decades, we have claimed that our education system is able to produce a generation of people as dedicated to liberty as were our ancestors. Thousands of American parents enroll their children in this "Classical Academy" or that "American Academy," with the belief that the "ingredients" being mixed into our children's mind are taken from the recipe followed by the parents and teachers of our Founding Fathers.

This is a lie. For over a hundred years we've substituted salt for sugar and then wonder why our cookies tasted so bad!

While the White House's 1776 Project has much to recommend it, the 490 B.C. Project is much more suited to inculcating our country's children with a depth of historical awareness that will propel us a long way down the road toward restoration not only of an appropriate appreciation for the miraculous founding of our country, but of the ability to identify the causes of cultural catastrophes and thereby avoid the devastating effects of them.

The details of the 490 B.C. Project are available [here](#).

My own study of the effect of Greece and Rome on the Founding Fathers can be found [here](#).



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