

## Trump Calls for ‘Patriotic Education’ to Defend American History From the Left

At the National Archives Museum, the president warned against a “radical movement” that has emerged from “decades of left-wing indoctrination in our schools.”



By Michael Crowley

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WASHINGTON — President Trump escalated his attacks on “left-wing demonstrators” and “far-left mobs” on Thursday, portraying himself as a defender of American heritage against revolutionary fanatics and arguing for a new “pro-American” curriculum in the nation’s schools.

Speaking at the National Archives Museum, Mr. Trump vowed to counter what he called an emerging classroom narrative that “America is a wicked and racist nation,” and he said he would create a new “1776 Commission” to help “restore patriotic education to our schools.” The president reiterated his condemnations of demonstrators who tear down monuments to historical American figures, and he even sought to link the Democratic presidential nominee, former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., to the removal of a founding father’s statue in Mr. Biden’s home state, Delaware.

“Our heroes will never be forgotten,” Mr. Trump said. “Our youth will be taught to love America.”

Since the killing of a Black man, George Floyd, in police custody in May in Minneapolis, and the protests that followed nationwide, the president has seized on cultural issues and has sounded many of the same themes — notably including at a showy Independence Day celebration at Mount Rushmore.

Since then, his vision of a Democratic Party hijacked by anti-American Marxists has become a core theme of his campaign. But he elevated the concepts on Thursday by delivering them in the august setting of the National Archives Museum, standing before the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution in what was billed as the first “White House Conference on American History.”

The event was held on Constitution Day, the anniversary of the document’s signing in 1787. Mr. Trump said it reflected “centuries of tradition, wisdom and experience.”

“Yet as we gather this afternoon, a radical movement is attempting to demolish this treasured and precious inheritance,” he added.

The president focused much of his speech on his claim that American schools have become infected with revisionist ideas about the nation’s founding and history, producing a new generation of “Marxist” activists and adherents of “critical race theory” who believe American society to be fundamentally racist and wicked — and who have taken to the streets in recent months.

Mr. Trump said that “left-wing rioting and mayhem are the direct result of decades of left-wing indoctrination in our schools,” adding that “it’s gone on far too long.” He boasted that the National Endowment for the Humanities “has awarded a grant to support the development of a pro-American curriculum that celebrates the truth about our nation’s great history.”

Douglas Brinkley, a historian at Rice University, said that conservatives have long been angry at what they see as a growing emphasis in American public schools on themes of civil rights at the expense of more traditional historical narratives, mainly those revolving around white men.

“I think Donald Trump sees the cultural wars as a pathway to victory,” Mr. Brinkley added. But, he said, “what he sees as a cultural war is just trying to open up the narrative to other peoples’ experiences — not just white males.”

Mr. Trump gave his remarks a campaign twist when he promised to include a statue of Caesar Rodney, who rode 70 miles to Philadelphia in 1776 to cast a tiebreaking vote to declare independence, in a national statuary garden to honor “American heroes” whose creation he ordered in July. Mr. Biden, he charged, “said nothing as to his home state’s history and the fact that it was dismantled and dismembered.

“And a founding father’s statue was removed,” the president added.

Denouncing “propaganda tracts” that “try to make students ashamed of their own history,” Mr. Trump singled out The New York Times Magazine’s 1619 Project, named for the year the first enslaved Africans arrived in the Virginia colony, and which reframes American history around the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans. The project, whose lead author, Nikole Hannah-Jones, was awarded a Pulitzer Prize, has been incorporated into a curriculum and is taught in many schools across the United States.

Mr. Trump said the project in fact “rewrites American history to teach our children that we were founded on the principle of oppression, not freedom.”

“Nothing could be further from the truth,” Mr. Trump continued, saying that the United States’ founding “set in motion the unstoppable chain of events that abolished slavery, secured civil rights, defeated communism and fascism, and built the most fair, equal and prosperous nation in human history.”

A Times spokeswoman, Danielle Rhoades Ha, described the 1619 Project as “landmark, groundbreaking journalism.”

“It deepened many readers’ understanding of the nation’s past and forced an important conversation about the lingering effects of slavery, and its centrality to America’s story,” she said in a statement. “We are proud of it and will continue this vital journalism.”

Seemingly as a counterpoint, Mr. Trump said that he would soon sign an executive order to create the 1776 Commission, named after the year the American colonies declared their independence. He said the commission would promote a “patriotic education” and “encourage our educators to teach our children about the miracle of American history and make plans to honor the 250th anniversary of our founding.”

William R. Ferris, a professor of history at the University of North Carolina and a former chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, criticized Mr. Trump for “treating historians just as he treats scientists — by disregarding our very best voices who have written on American history and race.”

Mr. Ferris said that creating a new commission to promote American history makes little sense. “We already have institutions like the National Archives and others that preserve and promote our nation’s history,” he said. “I would encourage him to request congressional support for the existing programs at the Smithsonian, the Library of Congress, the National Archives and the National Endowment for the Humanities.”

“They do a good job with very little funding, and I know they would welcome his strong support to expand those budgets,” Mr. Ferris said.

Mr. Trump’s speech also singled out the doctrine of critical race theory, the view that the law and other societal institutions are based on socially constructed theories of race that benefit white people. He called the theory “a Marxist doctrine 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,” Mr. Trump said.

In what he called an example of critical race theory in action, the president condemned the Smithsonian Institution for publishing online a description of “whiteness” that included the concepts of rational thinking, hard work and the nuclear family.

“This is offensive and outrageous to Americans of every ethnicity, and it is especially harmful to children of minority backgrounds who should be uplifted, not disparaged,” Mr. Trump said. “Teaching this horrible doctrine to our children is a form of child abuse in the truest sense of those words.”

The president did not offer more detail, but he appeared to be referring to a graphic removed from the website of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African-American History and Culture last month after criticism from conservatives, including Donald Trump Jr., the president’s eldest son.

“Our ‘Talking About Race’ website was designed to help people talk about racial identity, racism and the way these forces shape every aspect of society,” said Linda St. Thomas, the chief spokesperson for the Smithsonian Institution. “We removed a graphic that did not contribute to productive discussions.”

This month, Mr. Trump directed administration officials to halt or revise racial sensitivity training programs that he deemed “divisive” and “un-American propaganda,” and he threatened on Twitter to cut off federal education funding to California over the state’s incorporation of the 1619 Project in its public school curriculum.

Hours after extolling the United States’ iconic heroes, Mr. Trump missed a ceremony honoring a major one. He was absent from the dedication of a new memorial to President Dwight D. Eisenhower in Washington. That was unusual: President Bill Clinton dedicated a memorial to Franklin D. Roosevelt, President George W. Bush dedicated one to World War II, and President Barack Obama dedicated one to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Mr. Trump instead left town for a campaign rally in Wisconsin.

Peter Baker contributed reporting.