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"Between Too Much & Not Enough," A Meta-Analysis of The 1619 Project

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Between "Too Much & Not Enough"

A Meta Analysis of The 1619 Project

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Abstract

When the *New York Times* released the 1619 Project in August 2019 it was met with enthusiasm and critical review. The outcome of the public debate, as of now, is mixed. Research is also mixed. Education findings suggests the project has the power to heal. Case study evidence indicates culturally centered approaches positively impact academic outcomes and mental health of historically oppressed peoples. By emphasizing and affirming African American experiences 1619 has potential to narrow the achievement gap and disrupt rising suicide rates. However, philosophy and psychology warn against overemphasizing culture. Excessive affirmation can cause groupthink. Continual praise aggrandizes the in-group to the detriment of individuality. Members are stripped of autonomy and the ability to function outside in-group norms and expectations. Experimental case studies show the power of in-group allegiance to become divisive and even predatory when interfaced with an out-group. The cultural (mis) attribution bias offers a window into the balance between the opportunity costs of too much culture and not enough culture. Too much culture strips away individual identity whereas not enough culture strips away group identity. Both are damaging. The project's embrace and criticism are expressive of the juxtaposition.

Introduction

In August 2019 *The New York Times Magazine* released the 1619 Project, lighting up national media, and igniting a firestorm of public debate. Within months, *The Magazine* was embattled as criticism came from all directions. In De-

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cember, historians issued objections in a pair of letters to the editor. In February 2020, a public action committee of scholars formed. By April, the first full-length retort was released. In February 2021, a second full-length critique was published. Slavery and its place in American history consumed school systems launching another round of curricular wars. The district for which I work embraces the 1619 Project. Since its release, we engage in long and robust dialogue. This article attempts to summarize my argument as it unfolded over time. In short, the 1619 Project can heal, but its overuse can harm.

Psychologists report positive results with culturally affirmative approaches to treating mental health problems in minority communities. Similarly, in education, ethnic studies also have a positive impact on academic achievement. The 1619 Project has the potential to do both. However, educators must be aware of, and tend to, the project's flaws. Failing to do so could cause antagonism between student's individual and group identities.

Both classical psychology and twentieth century philosophy postulate conflict between individuals and cultural subgroups; problems extend beyond the collective to society at-large. The 1619 Project exacerbates the tension. Predicated on flawed assumptions, it fails to account for variance in black American perspectives. Without a critical framework for examining the project, tension will be repressed and pressure to conform powerful. If unrestrained, groupthink can lead to targeting of in-group and out-group members. Existentialism offers a framework for learning how to mitigate repressive conformity and hostile groupthink.

Placing the individual at the center of growth, existentialism provides cognitive and emotional tools for resisting repressive and dehumanizing forces of culture and society. Critical analysis of the 1619 Project renders a conflict between the process by which it was developed and the validity of its historical arguments. The juxtaposition between process and conclusions reveal personal bias of its authors and project supporters. At best, the 1619 Project is a cultural expression, not scientific history. Yet none of its weaknesses warrants legislative bans. Such is equally misguided. Every piece of literature offers an opportunity to learn through critical inquiry. But critical frameworks must be evenly applied.

As with culturally responsive approaches, individual-centered approaches are supported by contemporary research. Psychological data indicates that over-valuation of culture strips away individual differences. The denial of psychological processes [such personality traits and cognition] deprives individuals of their unique self and free-will. Referred to as the cultural (mis)attribution bias, it can be as dehumanizing to the individual as denying and rejecting cultural identity. Therefore, the solution to how much individuality and how much culture to emphasize, comes down to knowing the difference between too much and not enough.

The Healing Power of 1619

In February 2021, Ed Prep Matters published a blog on T*eaching with The 1619 Project*. Its author, Christina Sneed, describes it as a "tool of liberation," great for engaging students "in life-giving, revelatory educational experiences (Sneed, 2021)." There is theoretical support for her assertion. In his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire criticizes the traditional teacher who "expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students (Freire, 1970, 2)." This method Freire calls the "banking" concept, whereby information, selected by the teacher, is deposited in the student (*Ibid*, 53). Learning is passive and curriculum performs the function of currency, a medium of exchange, "knowledge" for grades. Sneed is suggesting the 1619 Project offers a meaningful solution. It gives students the opportunity to develop their "critical consciousness."

As an educational approach, the concept originated with Freire. He calls it *conscientizção.* It is defined as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality (*Ibid*, 17)." The 1619 Project has the potential to assist in developing critical consciousness. In her blog, Sneed cites some evidence. She writes that students "questioned how" the murder of unarmed black citizens "could occur in such a short span of time, in the most 'exceptional' country in the world." Quoting one testimony, "I know you couldn't have predicted this, but your teaching prepared us for this moment... (Sneed)." Psychological research suggests that 1619's emphasis on the centrality of the black role in American history could produce better academic outcomes. There are numerous case studies demonstrating the power of ethnic studies courses.

Stanford's Graduate School of Education (GSE) ran one in San Francisco's Unified School District from 2010-2014. The focus was on two groups of ninth graders, each containing students with a near 2.0 GPA; some below, some above. One group was encouraged to enroll in ethnic studies courses while the other was not. The group receiving encouragement increased their average attendance, GPA, and credits earned. Co-author of the paper, Emily Penner, said "schools have tried a number of approaches to support struggling students, and a few have been this effective. It's a novel approach that suggests making school relevant and engaging to struggling students can really pay off (Donald, 2016)." Psychological research supports the GSE's findings.

The February 2018 edition *Monitor on Psychology* has an article titled "The Power of Heritage." It describes how mental health interventions designed around indigenous practices assist in lowering addiction and suicide rates among Native Americans. "Our awareness of the importance of culturally relevant care has grown, and evidence to this effect has accumulated," reports Heather Stringer. "Today's work in indigenous communities is informed by these lessons from the past, and cultural heritage is proving to be a powerful force in combating these

public health crises." The Center for American Indian Health is helping repair "broken connections with their heritage (Stringer, 2018, 46)." Broken heritage is also affecting black youth.

Historically, suicide has never been a significant cause of death among black youth in America. This is changing. A recent report by the National Institute of Mental Health shows that as of 2018, suicide became the second leading cause of death for black children, ages 10-14, and third leading cause for black adolescents, ages 15-19. Data from 2001 to 2015 indicates black children are more likely to die by suicide than their white peers (Gordon, 2020).

The research cited above suggests teaching the 1619 Project should have a positive impact on academic performance and mental health. Even one of the projects critics, John McWhorter, describes "the 1619 idea" as "bolstering" to "the black American soul with the substitute pride of noble victimhood (McWhorter, 2020)." From a cultural point-of-view, shared history has the power to unite members in solidarity against oppression. But solidarity also has a shadow. If improperly valuated, if placed at the center of lessons wrapped in the language of singular essentialism, divisive othering can set in as believers and non-believers target each other.

Critical Theory & Its Place in Education

In 1929 Sigmund Freud published *Civilization and Its Discontents*. An application of his personality theory to all of society, he argues civilization erects social, economic, and political institutions to protect itself from humanity's dark side. Indicating that "cultural development seems to tend towards...a caste or a stratum of the population or a racial group" that "behaves like a violent individual towards other, and perhaps more numerous collections of people (Freud, 1961, 49)." But, by the very nature of being restrictive, institutions are at odds with tribal impulses. However, institutional limiting is not direct. Instead, limits channel aggressive impulses through socially acceptable forms. Laws and customs allow for sublimation. Unconsciously, and collectively, institutions are exalted as symbols of freedom. Repressed is the reality that desire, is in-fact, restricted. In this arrangement human antagonism and hostility are kept at bay. Freud's theory was later provided experimental support.

In 1955 psychologists Solomon Asch conducted a fundamental experiment in social conformity. Participants were asked to compare lengths of lines. Measured were decisions when forced to choose between their perception and that of the group. Approximately 75% of test subjects conformed to the group standard even though it required denying evidence of their own eyes (Hock, 2009, 297). Imagine the silent agony subjects experienced. Grown adults denying fact to remain included. What if the stakes were higher than arbitrary lines on giant display cards? What if stepping outside the group brought slurs of "a white man's n***a" or "n***er lover?" In either case, a person moved against the group and

paid an emotional price. What if the price of individuality is more than one is willing to pay?

In 1972 Philip Zimbardo discovered how quickly dehumanization can become the norm. In the infamous Stanford Prison Experiment participants were separated into two groups and asked to play the role of a guard or prisoner. Within a day individual identities disappeared and the line between "play" and "real life" vanished. Zimbardo said that "the majority had indeed become "prisoners" and guards," no longer able to clearly differentiate between role playing and self...In less than a week, the experience of imprisonment undid (temporarily) a lifetime of learning; human values were suspended, self-concepts were challenged and the ugliest, most base, pathological side of human nature surfaced (*Ibid*, 291)."

Asch and Zimbardo were interested in the behavioral dynamics of situational forces. Both witnessed individuality disappear in the face of group pressure. In the case of the Stanford Prison, group pressure was toxic and conformity destructive. What if group membership necessitated slurs like "n***er" or "cracker?" What if simple disagreement with 1619's narrative rendered an individual an out-group affiliate? In either case, you have in-groups pressing its membership to denigrate out-groups of non-member dissent. Freud described this behavior.

"Against the suffering" he says, "which may come upon one from human relationships...from other people (Freud, 1929, 27)." Freud is postulating an inherent conflict between individual desires and social expectations. By the mid-twentieth century, Freud's theories fell out of favor among psychologists, supplanted by the behaviorist revolution of the 1920s and 30s. Philosophers, however, advanced his critique, detailing the areas in which conflict between individuals and society manifests.

In 1964, Marcuse published a critique of both capitalist and communist nations entitled *One-Dimensional Man*. He argues that the emergence of mass consumerism in post-war industrial society has created false needs. Distracted by consumption, media, and technologic toys, the interference has created a "one-dimensional" universe disabling critical evaluation. Marcuse suggests one cannot break free of the system's matrix of oppressive forces without challenging the validity of their own perceptions, and if social psychological experimentation is correct, perceptions are heavily influenced by conformity. Thus, perceptions are not one's own, but that of the group. In the conclusion he writes that "self-determination will be real to the extent which the masses have been dissolved into individuals liberated from all propaganda, indoctrination, and manipulation, capable of knowing and comprehending the facts and evaluating the alternatives (Marcuse, 1964, 252)."

Freud and Marcuse agree on two points. First, there exists conflict between individuals and society. Second, liberation is achieved through self-determination where one breaks free of the group by clearing away distractions and critically

evaluating norms, expectations, and beliefs. Essential to the process is a cross examination of the mind's internal knowledge with external evidence. Epistemological examination renders existential awareness.

If educators are to affirm culture, they must also be critical of it. Simply affirming the 1619 Project encourages conformity to in-group bias rendering all critics out-group targets. Simply criticizing the 1619 Project also encourages conformity but flips the in-group/out-group divide. In either case, students become targets. White kids who criticize the project will be called "racists." Black kids who criticize will be told they "ain't black." Neither are true, and kids will suffer. Case study evidence supports this hypothesis.

In 1968 Berkeley High was one of the earliest schools to voluntarily desegregate. In the early nineties, when PBS's *School Colors* was filmed, student body demographics were distributed rather evenly: 38 percent white, 35 percent African American, 11 percent Asian-Pacific Islander, 9 percent Hispanic, and 7 percent mixed race. Course options included fifteen offerings in African American studies (*School Colors*, 1994). Yet, forty years after *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*, despite a diverse population and ethnic studies options, segregation persists. Most concerning are the interactions. Students group themselves by ethnic, racial, and cultural identities; non-conformity is met with antagonism and hostility.

In one frame a Hispanic student says it is an insult to be called American. A black teacher tells his African-American students, "America denotes the nation you live in...but the African part is your essence." A Chinese-boy is labeled "white-washed" for having white friends. An Hispanic girl is pushed to tears for dating a white boy. A different white boy describes himself as "White, real white," and says he "likes to promote whiteness." Describing spaces allocated for each group, a student says, "this is Africa. That's Europe. I don't go over there. I stay here, maybe [at the] the snack bar, something like that, that's about it." Another explains how "Berkeley High is like the real world and the real world is totally segregated. No such thing as integration when it comes to America. We all want to be with our own kind and that's the way humans are (*Ibid*)."

These comments represent the outcome of over-valuing cultural identity. To be sure, it is difficult to determine whether the film accurately portrays just Berkeley High School or if the findings can be extrapolated across the United States. However, the comments themselves indicate the social-emotional state of the kids speaking. Their perception is that race and ethnicity are untranscendable. It is a limited and short-sighted worldview. There is a remedy however. A small body of literature arguing the benefits of existential education.

In 2013 G. M. Malik and Rukhsana Akhter published "Existentialism and Classroom Practice" in the *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Establishing their premise, they first quote Kierkegaard maintaining that "the individual is solely responsible for giving his or her own life meaning and for living that passionately and sincerely…in spite of many existential obstacles and dis-

tractions…(Malik & Akhter, 2013, 87)." Known as the Sartrean proposition, this means existence precedes essence. That is to say, life precedes definition. In the Heideggerian sense, "being," precedes the "self" as defined by "everyday life." Thus, "being" is "life" and "self" is "presence in everyday life." For Freud and Marcuse "being" and "everyday life" are at odds because daily life predetermines a person's essence. Predetermination is superficial—marked by ascribed characteristics, not achievement. Therefore, the path towards meaning begins with the individual, not the group.

Malik and Akhter declare "the way of good life does not go through social traditions, customs, and social reform. Authentic life begins by realizing himself by asserting his individuality and making his own choice instead of being stamped into the choices of collectivity. Instead of there being a predetermined essence that defines what it is to be human, the human being, through their own consciousness, creates their own values and determines a meaning to their life (Malik & Akhter, 88)." Norms and expectations are predetermined entities predating an individual's "being;" social forces into which a person is born, not things a person determines for themselves. From this point of view, race does not exist; unless one chooses to first define it, and second, adopt it as part of their essence. Teaching to think beyond society and culture empowers students to confront insults from both inside and outside their social circle.

A black person telling another they "ain't black enough," or chastising as a "white man's n***a," for conclusions leaning towards those of a white person, is attempting to force an in-group member's conformity. Blacks referring to whites as "crackers" because their interpretation differs is an example of out-group othering. White folks do this as well. Calling another "ghetto" or a "n***er lover" because they might agree with, or value to some varying extent, the interpretation of a black individual, is doing the same. Or ridiculing black folks as "n***ers because they subscribe to shared narratives different from white America. Thus, for existentialists, the way toward "social improvement" is to "choose the path of individual improvement (*Ibid*, 88)." As a means of navigating destructive social forces, individual improvement necessitates the questioning of out-group and in-group collectives.

Malik and Akhter believe existential pedagogy "promotes self-worth" by accounting for "individual learners as opposed to a prescribed curriculum that disregards individuality (*Ibid*, 88)." Unless students are making the selections, standards and curriculum are, by definition, prescribed. Even the 1619 Project and its curricular package from The Pulitzer Center. Therefore, they must be evaluated for validity. As the five historians wrote to the editor, their objection was "not on interpretation," but "matters of verifiable fact (Letter to the Editor, 2019)."

So teach a black perspective, and question it. Just as one would do for a white perspective, Hispanic, LGBTQ, etc. The way to self-determination and authentic freedom is by asking questions, even those one is not suppose to ask. As Malik

and Akhter state, "existential pedagogy embraces neither realism nor relativism (Malik & Akhter, 89)." Think of it not as exclusion but an extension of a philosophical process for self-determining an authentic identity rendered through critical inquiry. It is bound to uncover inconsistencies between the internal mind and external world. This includes inconsistencies between claims and evidence.

"Revise, Don't Ban"

The criticism of Sneed's Ed Prep blog is categorically similar to that of the 1619 Project. Both presume the writing of history remains informed by white supremacy. Sneed writes that teaching with the 1619 Project "forces reflection on the quandary, who gets to write history? The answer is rooted in white supremacy (Sneed)." In the 1619 Project this presumption is not stated directly but revealed by a combination of happenings around the project. Most notable, a response from Hannah-Jones to initial criticism in which she tweeted "LOL. Right, because white historians have produced a truly objective history (Hannah-Jones, 2019)." A century ago this was true but no longer so. The contemporary issue is not, who is writing history, but who is deciding which interpretations are presented to the public.

Sneed cites the United Daughters of the Confederacy's (UDC) campaign to reorient public perception of the Civil War. Characterizing their efforts as propaganda manifested as monuments, memorials, and indoctrination in schools is accurate, but to suggest the monuments are evidence of anything more than illusions manifested, is a misnomer. The statues, and what the UDC created, are a myth of origin. They are not history, but folklore. The statues are real, what people believe in their minds about the statues are real, but all other forms of evidence indicate the statues and public perception to be an inaccurate representation of what happened during the Civil War era. What Sneed is referencing is the myth of the "Lost Cause."

The Lost Cause has a variety of origins; most scholars agree it began as a literary tradition infused with history. The term first appeared in 1866, written by Virginian author and journalist Edward Pollard. The United Daughters of the Confederacy were just one agency in its development. Formed in 1894, the UDC was a major proponent of monumenting and memorializing the former Confederacy. The cause found a sympathetic ear in President Woodrow Wilson. After viewing *The Birth of Nation* he said it was "like writing history with lightning." The Lost Cause was not rendered by trained historians, but produced by novelists, journalists, politicians, filmmakers, and interest groups. Historian Rollin G. Osterweis calls it "legend" characterized by a collective "expression of despair...over a lost identity." In order to bring "a sense of comfort to the New South," southerners perpetuated "ideals of the Old South (Osterweis, *The Myth of the Lost Cause*, 1973, ix)." The myth permeated academia.

The Dunning School of history is often cited as an example. Named after Columbia University's William Archibald Dunning, in the early twentieth centu-

ry he trained students in an approach to race relations excessively charged with social Darwinism. Focusing on the reconstruction period, Dunning vilified Radical Republicans and glorified Southern Redeemers. Dunning and students tried to support his assertions with evidence but ultimately produced little more than commentary. However, stamped with Ivy League approval, their work became mainstream scholarship. Dunning was a product of his time. Many sciences were infected with white supremacy. In a 2015 interview, Reconstruction expert Eric Foner said the "Dunning School of Reconstruction was not just an interpretation of history. It was part of the edifice of the Jim Crow System." For over half a century, politics, academia, art, school, and society were aligned in their desire to preserve white supremacy. But as Foner says, "the Civil Rights revolution swept away the racist underpinnings of that old view (Foner, 2015)."

The civil rights era produced wide historiographical re-evaluations. Both the Lost Cause and Dunning School were debunked. However, much revisionist scholarship never broke into secondary education. The reason is not racist historicism dominating academia but the operations of gate-keeping agencies like textbook publishers. In *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, James Loewen says "the stories that history textbooks tell are predictable. Every problem has already been solved or is about to be solved. Textbooks exclude conflict or real suspense. They leave out anything that might reflect badly upon our national character (Loewen, 2007, 5-6)." The narratives remain unchanged, very traditional, unaltered by recent scholarship, and damaging. "Even male children of affluent white families think that history as taught in high school is 'too neat and rosy.' African American, Native Americans, and Latino students view history with a special dislike." Of all the core subjects, students of color do…most worse in history." They "don't even know they are alienated, only that they 'don't like social studies' or 'aren't any good at history (*Ibid*, 2).'" State legislatures and school boards are also obstructive.

In 2010, Tucson Independent School District's Ethnic Studies Program was shut down under provisions of Arizoma House Bill 2811. Signed by Governor Brewer, the law was tailored specifically for eliminating the program. Despite student success directly attributable to enrollment in the program, members of the board disliked the Latinx-centered curriculum. They claimed it was "racializing" students. Three years later Texas made a similar attempt when Republican Dan Patrick proposed Senate Bill 1128—to eliminate ethnic studies courses from college degree requirements. Less aggressive than Arizona, Texas did not aim to destroy ethnic studies classes, however its goal was the same, to limit non-traditional narratives. Maribel Falcón reported that claims in each state were similar, that "current teaching of a multicultural curriculum is divisive (Falcón, 2020)." In May 2021, the Texas legislature passed House Bill 3979 limiting the extent of race education. Its author, Republican Steve Toth, said the bill is about "teaching racial harmony by telling the truth that we are all equal, both in God's eyes and our founding documents (Clack, 2021)."

The attack on the 1619 Project was launched by Arkansas Senator Tom Cotton. In July 2020, he proposed a ban, stating the project teaches children to "hate their country (*Ibid*)." President Trump followed up with his 1776 Commission. Numerous states, Idaho, Iowa, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, and Tennessee all have introduced and/or passed similar measures to block 1619. The Arkansas and Mississippi bills both call the Project "a racially divisive and revisionist account (Schwartz, 2021)." Iowa's bill claims it "attempts to deny or obfuscate the fundamental principles upon which the United States was founded (*Ibid*)." In each state the consequence for using project materials is loss of state funds.

Reasons for blocking the project are indefensible. As demonstrated, the project has the potential to heal and contribute toward national reconciliation. Equally demonstrated is its potential to harm. Neither potentials are enough to warrant violating the First Amendment. Every piece of historical literature offers an opportunity to teach critical thinking skills. Criticality and revisions are necessary for sharpening the precision of historical inquiry and understanding. In doing so educators may correct for Loewen's criticism by installing debate into the process. The 1619 Project is just such an opportunity. Stefanie Wager of the National Council of Social Studies said "any good social studies teacher is certainly using a variety of things in their classroom, and asking their students to critique what they are reading (*Ibid*)." A critical analysis of the project and its production process is an excellent lesson.

If caught between administrative support for the project and community rejection, do as Philip Magness did, vet the project against its criticism. He concludes that the project "contains kernels of truth that complicate the historians' assessment, without over turning it (Magness, 2020, 44)." To avoid biasing the results of individual inquires [since teachers may wish to use this article as an introduction to just such a lesson] I digress from examining the evidence. However, with concern for best practices—the extension of freedom to determine one's self—understand the project presents as a cultural appeal to pathos using a singular narrative.

Not all students wish to identify with the legacy of slavery, or at least not emphasize it as primary to their identity. In a piece for *1776 Unites*, John Wood Jr. describes how slavery impacted the "evolution of American institutions, and... the education and psychological formation of black Americans themselves." Then he flips the argument. "Black Americans—and all Americans today—should also recognize that it is possible that the effect of slavery and racial oppression on our society today grows out of the power that we choose to give it." Doubling-down Wood declares "the legacy of slavery is not what determines the fundamental character of our country—unless we choose for that to be so (Wood, 2020)." McWhorter equates the project to a "Genesis-style scenario" in which the "original sin of being born privileged" harbored by the individual "is a product of a grand original sin, permeating the entire physical, sociological, and psychological

fabric of a the nation." He concludes "the 1619 idea, presented as enlightenment, is actually a rejection of history in favor of what we might call lore (McWhorter)."

Commenting on the curricular wars, Falcón says conservatives "pushed for American individualism, downplayed slavery, and attempted to erase people of color's contribution to history (Falcon)." Republicans in Texas tried to limit exposure to ethnic studies and in Arizona they were dissolved entirely. Underlying nativist and racist sentiment were rationalized through the ether of American ideals and laundered by the democratic process. In the name of preserving American individualism, ethnic studies were targeted for political gain. Underemphasizing culture is not the answer to preserving individualism, but neither is overemphasis.

Cultural (Mis)Attribution Bias

Psychologists are uncovering a "cultural (mis)attribution bias." It is a bias that "reinforces the notion that the behavior of Whites is normative, value-neutral, natural, and therefore, a prototypical manifestation of 'normal' modes of human experience—the standard against which all other modes of psychological functioning should be compared," writes José Causadias in the *American Psychologist*. Therefore, "minority differences or deviation from the White standard is understood as an expression of deficiency (Causadias, et al., 2018, 245)." Taken at face-value, this definition suggests a kind of racism downgrading the culture of non-white peoples. Responsively, minority culture needs to be asserted as valid and valuable. To this end districts around the country implement professional development in cultural proficiency. The research featured by Stringer in the *Monitor* supports such initiatives. At the same time, there are potential consequences of overvaluation.

Causadias and colleagues conducted a meta-analysis of subject selection procedures and attitudes of scientists. The findings reveal a disproportionate quantity of non-white minorities selected for studies in cultural psychology and a disproportionate quantity of white subjects selected for cognitive and personality studies. Findings also indicate a majority of the scientists believe studies of cultural processes to be "more appropriate" for minorities and cognitive and personality studies to be "more appropriate" for white people. Reciprocally, the majority of scientists believe cognitive and personality studies to be "less appropriate" for minorities and studies in cultural process "less appropriate" for white people (*Ibid*, 249).

Survey data indicates many in the profession believe white people are less shaped by cultural elements and minorities less shaped by cognitive abilities and personality traits. In both cases a part of humanity is denied. For minorities it is individuality. The study concludes that "by overemphasizing the role of culture, we might reinforce rigid and essentialist views of minorities that may dehumanize them by denying their individuality and the fact that they are agents with unique characteristics, not simply group members that wholeheartedly subscribe to, and are defined by, their heritage culture (*Ibid*, 252)."

The tendency of some readers when presented with these findings may be to assume that scientists believing cultural studies are for minorities, are white. This is incorrect. Causadias and his team "obtained evidence that both white and minority psychologists who participated in the study overemphasized the role of culture and under attributed psychological processing in shaping behavior of minorities (*Ibid*, 252)."

It is well established in a variety of fields that structural bias built into American institutions produces long-range negative impacts. Unspoken signals of disregard and undervaluation are internalized by recipients. This study simply uncovers another. It is equally concluded that some, not all, recipients perpetuate the biases themselves [through unconscious processes]. Such are the mediums through which prejudice and racism spread. By symbolic interactive behavior, individuals, as members and agents of cultural groups, organize institutions. The bias of the dominant group becomes the standard to which all others are evaluated.

The last few years have seen a rise in black power. The lives of black people and black culture are being exalted in effort to force some reckoning of justice. As the spirit of our time continues it is only natural that biases reveal themselves. The 1619 Project is just such a manifestation. Marketed as an empirical history it is more accurately defined as an expression of Black consciousness. The mistaken identity of culture as history is suggestive of the cultural misattribution error's presence within *The New York Times*.

"Between Too Much and Not Enough" – A Final Analysis

Research supports the notion that culturally affirmative approaches to mental health and education have the potential to produce positive results. Such is demonstrated by both longitudinal and case studies for both Latino and Indigenous people. There needs to be culturally affirmative approaches for Black Americans as well. The rising numbers of suicide indicate an urgent situation never before experienced. Although the African American Studies program at Berkeley High may have had a positive impact for black students, there is clear evidence of a segregative side-effect. Reason would have it that teaching with the 1619 Project is also susceptible to unintended consequences.

A year after the project's release, Hannah-Jones gave an interview with Shamika Sanders at *Only-At-Essence*. When asked about her motivation Jones said, "I remember thinking if Black people don't love this, don't embrace this, I would have failed…I didn't want to let our people down (Sanders, 2020)." As a cultural expression, the project is narrowly focused. It portrays only one point-of-view; resurrecting a very old view not held by all whom Hannah-Jones claims to represent.

Forty-five year ago, Lawrence Levine wrote *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* in which he criticizes previous scholars for their rigid view of intellectual history. "The familiar urge to see in heroes only virtue and in villains

only malice has an analogue in the desire to see in the oppressed only unrelieved suffering and impotence (Levine, 1977, xxv)." Two years ago historian Harold A. Black wrote in *The Cult of Victimhood* that "those who insist that slavery is the root of all evil in America and that, as a result, blacks are victims, denigrate the strength of black Americans (Black, 2020)." To the same point Levine said, "upon the hard rock of racial, social, and economic exploitation and injustice Black Americans forged and nurtured a culture: they formed and maintained kinship networks, made love, raised and socialized children, built religion, and created a rich expressive culture in which they articulated their feelings and hopes and dreams (Levine, xxv)."

To honor his subjects and their decedents, Levine articulates a part of black people's humanity never before conveyed. The 1619 Project is an artifact expressive of Black American consciousness, but one guilty of Black and Levine's criticism. Yet even they present their subjects as a monolith. A decade later Howard Zinn identified this as a problematic tendency among scholars when writing *A People's History of the United States*. In the introduction he says "we must not accept the memory of states as our own. Nations are not communities and never have been. The history of any country, presented as the history of a family, conceals fierce conflicts of interest between conquerors and conquered, masters and slaves, capitalists and workers, dominators and dominated in race and sex (Zinn, 2003, 10)." Zinn was speaking to the conflict between interest groups, yet even his approach to history places individuals into menhirs. Monolithic grouping is perhaps, to an extent, unavoidable when writing history. But the 1619 Project does is it in a way more commonly heard in the rhetoric of politicians and activists. Hannah-Jones's opening essay presents African American history as a collective using "we," "us," "our," and "ourselves" no less than twenty-seven times (Hannah-Jones, 2019, 16-26).

In his treatise on nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Arnold writes that such identities are "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each live the image of their communion (Anderson, 2006, 6)." Writing history from a first person plural point-of-view insinuates the narrator lived through the times about which they write and assumes all those about whom they write hold the same perspective. The first is epistemologically impossible and the second existentially rude. Hannah-Jones does both. Each conflict with psychological findings. The cultural (mis)attribution study indicates "larger within-group variation than between-group variation in most psychological traits (Causadias et al., 246)." Presentations of African American history as a singular narrative emanating from a single ship docked in Jamestown on a single day in 1619 runs counter to historical and psychological dynamics.

Evidence of 1619's overvaluation is in its collective language and tone. The arrogance with which it aggrandizes the African American contribution overstates

significance beyond what is provable. On separate occasions Hannah-Jones claims grandeur: "more than any other group in this country's history, we have served, generation after generation, in an overlooked but vital role: It is we who have been the perfecters of this democracy (Hannah-Jones, 16)." "For the most part, black Americans fought back alone. Yet we never fought only for ourselves (*Ibid*, 24)." "What if America understood, finally, in this 400th year, that we have never been the problem but the solution (*Ibid*, 26)?" "It was by the virtue of our bondage that we became the most American of all (*Ibid*, 26)." Scholars from all fields have warned against such hubris. The effects can be damaging.

In 1973, cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker penned *The Denial of Death*. A meta-analysis of fundamental human behavior and emotion, it performs a literature review wedding together psychoanalysis and existentialism. Becker describes the work of Erich Fromm: "He has kept alive Freud's basic insight into narcissism as the primary characteristic of man." How it "inflates one with the importance of his own life and makes for the devaluation of others' lives" and "draw sharp lines between 'those who are like me or belong to me' and those who are 'outsiders and aliens (Becker, 1974, 134)." Zinn cautions against such exaltation. The consequences can be severe: "my point is not to grieve for the victims and denounce the executioners. Those tears, that anger, cast into the past, deplete our moral energy for the present. And the lines are not always clear. In the long run, the oppressor is also a victim. In the short run, the victims, themselves desperate and tainted with the culture that oppressed them, turn on other victims (Zinn, 10)." There are hints of this in the 1619 Project and students can feel it. I had my students do an analysis. One wrote "the 1619 Project emphasizes that white people are evil."

Decades after Stanford Prison, Zimbardo synthesized situationism into a meta-analysis describing a network of social forces that turn good people evil. *The Lucifer Effect* works through a series of case studies each explained by elements found across the major laboratory studies. To prepare readers, Zimbardo says "we will meet a host of people who have done very bad things to others, often out of a sense of high purpose, the best ideology, and moral imperative (Zimbardo, 2008, 20)." His treatise demonstrates the human propensity for individual acts of harm in the name of a cause. Causes defined not by the individual, but their in-group affiliation. "When group identity becomes salient, individuals seek to ascertain and to conform to those understandings which define what it means to be a member of the relevant group, writes Haslam for the APA (Haslam, Reicher, & Bavel, 2019, 812). A common misconception is that variance between cultures account for individual difference. This is incorrect.

Citing a series of studies, Causadias says "there is an implicit assumption that 'cultural difference' are the main source of ethnic group differences (Causadias et al., 245)." Furthermore, the assumption is so pervasive even researchers are impacted. Many were found to "hold the belief that minority groups in the United States are less individualistic than Whites (*Ibid*, 246)." This too is false.

"Meta-analyses have revealed that African Americans are more individualistic than Whites (*Ibid*, 246)." It is a plausible hypothesis that widely held notions of "shared history" are a major variable in cultural misattribution. If bias is present in psychologists and conjectured by philosophers it most certainly is present among educators.

Denying individuality encourages groupthink, which leads to identity politics, division, and uncompromising irrationality. Yet denying entire cultural groups produces the same outcome. Psychoanalysis and existential philosophy tells us there are rewards, risks, and loss in the choice between group membership and individual freedom. On the one hand, group membership offers the warmth of inclusion but risks thoughtless conformity, which, if given the necessary conditions, can slip into darkness. On the other hand, individual freedom protects one from destructive groupthink but gives up the comfort of acceptance. There are opportunity costs. When it comes to embracing individuality at the expense of culture, or embracing culture at the expense of individuality, when making the choice between group membership and autonomy, it comes down to knowing the space between "too much" and "not enough."

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