

December 15, 2020

Dear AHI friends,

Last night, at the end of typically gray cold December day here in Upstate New York and as the announcement came about the electoral college vote, I, as I often do, at 21 W. Park Row, perused some of the bookshelves that line the first floor and basement. I pulled out several books that inspired my curiosity in relation to my current project: a book debunking the *New York Times*' "The 1619 Project." One book is no doubt rare and may soon be purged from the shelves of public and college libraries because of its title: *The Mind of the Negro as Reflected in Letters Written During the Crisis 1800-1860*. The editor is Carter G. Woodson and the original publication date was 1926. The AHI owns the 1969 reprint by Negro Universities Press thanks to the bequest of an extensive collection of books to AHI by Eugene Genovese, a mentor to two of AHI's founders.

That morning, I had, as I have done over the last six years, chatted with Bob Paquette about my research, specifically about the abolitionist Frederick Douglass and the books I was reading that Bob had recommended. Our conversations, however, have been ongoing, particularly as I wrote my 2019 book, *Debunking Howard Zinn*. Bob read parts of that manuscript and shared his own writing with me, as well as suggested sources for my research that proved to be invaluable.

On December 14, Bob had come in in order to do what he spends so many hours doing: to deal with the maintenance of this mansion that houses me and gives me a place to work. That morning was spent with the technician who installed a new security system to better safeguard AHI treasures. Of course, this one morning represented only part of the total amount of time he spent on this task—one of so many—involved in maintaining this building and keeping the

Institute going. As a former homeowner, I know how much time is spent on simply researching and choosing a new company, rescheduling appointments, and on. I and others get to see only a sliver what Bob does, from paperwork to driving down to the AHI in the middle of the night to check a leak.

But I am so thankful that Bob has voluntarily been doing this now for thirteen years in order to maintain a safe space for books, scholars, and students. I honestly worry about librarians “decolonizing” library shelves, as many pledged to do in response to the riots of this summer. And who knows when some indoctrinated student might, upon spying the title of Woodson’s book in the library, organize a group and demand its removal? But it is here at the AHI also for Hamilton College AHI student fellows to use—several of whom have also helped me as research assistants.

Things have gotten so much worse since I was “cancelled,” exiled from the college classroom in 2013 because my articles about education displeased a department chair and a college president. And after participating in the panel discussion of the White House Conference on American History on Constitution Day 2020, which preceded President Trump’s speech calling for the teaching of honest history instead of Howard Zinn and the 1619 Project, I am saddened by the prospect that there will likely be no such efforts by the incoming administration—in fact, quite likely the opposite.

Still, we need to keep refuting such propaganda as The 1619 Project. As indicated by the attached preliminary mock-up of my book cover, my concern is over how this project divides America, pitting groups against each other through a grossly distorted history. The enemies of America, the liars about her history, seek a civil war. And civil war, as I can tell you as someone whose own parents took her as a toddler from the communist regime of Tito’s Yugoslavia, is the

universal strategy. I have read and heard stories about how the Communist Partisans literally set brother against brother. And I see it coming here, to the country that is the “last best hope,” as Abraham Lincoln put it, and as my parents saw it.

Those who seek to divide and conquer through the writing of history, push out scholars who do not hew to their ideology. They refuse to engage in debates and simply smear and insult instead. The common attitude is displayed in David Blight’s introduction to his recent Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*. Blight writes that Frederick Douglass, in the twenty-first century, had become “a malleable figure adopted by all elements in the political spectrum, not least by current Republicans, who have claimed Douglass—quite ahistorically—as their own by elevating a single feature of his thought, black self-reliance, at the expense of his enduring radicalism.” Blight gives as illustration the “unveiling ceremony of the statue of Douglass in the US Capitol in 2013,” where “congressional Republicans walked around proudly sporting buttons that read FREDERICK DOUGLASS WAS A REPUBLICAN.” Blight then comments, “Douglass descendants present, as well as some of us scholars with, shall we say, different training and research, smiled and endured.”

Well, I am reading Blight’s book, and I am noticing, shall I say, some contradictions and gaps of his own. Douglass’s firm belief in and reliance on the precepts of the Bible and Natural Law, of which Blight notes, are the very elements embraced by conservatives. In fact, Blight at times displays a patronizing attitude towards his subject. Nor does he mention the views that Douglass expressed to Harriet Beecher Stowe in a March 8, 1853, letter reproduced in the volume I found at the AHI, arguing against colonization: “The truth is, dear madam, we are *here*, and here we are likely to remain.”

In response to her inquiry about how to best help “to improve the condition of the free people of color in the United States,” Douglass proposed the establishment of an industrial college for “colored youth” so that they could learn trades and “find new employment; new modes of usefulness to society,” for “the most telling, the most killing refutation of slavery, is the presentation of an industrious, enterprising, upright, thrifty and intelligent free black population.”

Douglass understood how free enterprise empowers: “We must become mechanics; we must build as well as live in houses; we must make as well as use furniture; we must construct bridges as well as pass over them, before we can properly live or be respected by our fellow men. We need mechanics as well as ministers. We need workers in iron, clay, and leather. We have orators, authors, and other professional men, but these reach only a certain class, and get respect for our race in certain select circles. To live here as we ought we must fasten ourselves to our countrymen through their every day cardinal wants.”

The issue of colonization comes up in the 1619 Project. But Douglass’s letter will form part of my refutation of the Project’s main theme: that racism is in this country’s “DNA” and that oppression has been universal and unrelenting since the first Africans arrived in Jamestown in 1619.

It is because of Bob’s volunteerism and good stewardship that I am able to have a place where I can write my books.

I am happy to report that since my book *Debunking Howard Zinn: Exposing the Fake History That Turned a Generation against America* came out in August 2019 I have been appearing on radio programs, podcasts, on the Blaze TV, at colleges talking to students, at conferences and meetings, including the latest one, the Hillsdale College Leadership Conference.

I am still receiving emails and letters from students and other readers around the country—even a young man in Iran! (Yes, Zinn's book is popular there.)

I hope you will consider contributing before year-end, especially considering the matching grant of \$40,000 offered by a generous supporter. During its thirteen years of existence, AHI has supported and inspired scores of students and educators. Few can attest to AHI's success better than I.

Mary Grabar
Resident Fellow
The Alexander Hamilton Institute for the Study of Western Civilization