

## Handout for Rethinking American History

We, as school children, used to learn U.S. history as well-established facts with important names and dates. Our children were most likely given a somewhat broader perspective that included less-famous everyday people, as well as native, slave, immigrant, and other minority populations.

In recent years, though, the teaching/learning of history has become politicized and weaponized, enough to undermine any sense of a shared story Americans might have had. History has become less of a core subject. Historiography itself has become controversial. Textbook and curriculum wars are underway. We can hardly read a newspaper or magazine these days that doesn't include something about these divisive issues. Some pertinent questions now become:

*Do Americans need a shared story of our past in order to survive as a nation into the future?*

*How did disconnects in our story happen?*

*What is the story that can encompass all of us: displaced and dispossessed natives, slaves, and immigrants?*

*What is patriotism? Is it good? bad? neither? OR When does "love of one's country" become pernicious?*

*Where does the study of Civics fit into our national mission?*

In this seminar, we will use our own experiences of learning and understanding our history to gain insight - if not answers - to the questions above. Our schools certainly taught us American history and government, but was that the major source of our assumptions about our history. What did our families, our neighborhoods, our travels, our careers, our children teach us about our American story. How have our ideas and even information changed and why?

We will work in pairs or teams to lead each session with exercises, discussions, and (if need be) brief presentations. Our sessions will be organized around themes and concepts. Participants may choose to focus on a specific period or event and how it has been used to illustrate America's story. Or you may choose a specific issue of current interest and trace its story, or stories.

As we write this there are competing stories of our origins, and competing ideas of who is entitled to tell those stories. It is difficult to suggest a bibliography. Being familiar with the 1619 Project and the 1776 Report, however, will provide you with the foundations of the divergent thinking about the American story that we face today. Reading any parts of any general histories of America noting the dates of their original publication is instructive. *Albion's Seed* (David Hackett Fischer) provides insights about how regional differences became entrenched and difficult to overcome. A newly published book, *The Dawn of Everything*, (Kraeber and Wengrow) suggests that ALL of human history needs to be reconsidered. Almost daily, you will find in local and national news media articles and essays exploring aspects and fall out from this battle over America's story.