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Utilizing American History to Understand Present Day Events

From a presidential election creating distinct divides in politics, to the Black Lives Matter movement, and a worldwide pandemic, the year 2020 has been one filled with remarkable historical events soon to be filling students' textbooks across the country. In the media abundant world of 2020, many Americans drew parallels between past and present events through the use of different platforms such as social media posts, memes, podcasts, news articles, and so on. Whether it's to support their political opinions or dispute ideas of the past, contemporary Americans rely on past events to draw similarities to current events and express that while hundreds of years have passed since the beginning of American history, our country continues to fight the same issues.

From the earliest years of American history, over a thousand years ago, historians have created misconceptions that continue to be seen in today's society. One theory that has become a common misconception in American politics and even in elementary education is the discovery of North America and its inhabitants. In the late 1400's European countries such as Spain and Portugal began to set out in search of the "New World," or North America as it is known today. During this time, Bancroft's Thesis was introduced, suggesting that land in North America was uncivilized and unadvanced. Furthermore, it expressed that the Natives who inhabited the land were "barbaric" and simply part of the landscape. This theory acted as an excuse for European

conquest as they argued they were being invited to make use of the resources on Native American land. Unfortunately, the idea of Natives lacking culture and value in American history is one that has carried over into today's society with talk of white supremacy and the misconception that whites were the first to begin life in the Americas. In their younger years, many Americans are taught that Christopher Columbus acted as an idol to Native Americans, blessing them with European culture. However, it is reasonable to argue that many remain uneducated on the damage European colonization did to pre-existing Native American civilizations, including disease and death. As seen in the image to the right, the history of Native Americans is often overlooked, as many Americans, including President Trump, fail to acknowledge the historical accomplishments made by Natives prior to European colonization and view them as an inconvenience to our society. Throughout his presidency, Trump has reinforced this idea of white or European superiority and the ignorance this creates within our society. While native inhabitants of North America assisted European colonists by providing them with resources for survival, especially in the first American colony of Jamestown, the benefits these individuals have to our land is often disregarded. The image above expresses how white Americans believe they are the originators of the land and how this misconception leads to arguments regarding immigration. However, we must acknowledge that the term native suggests these individuals were associated with the land by birth and were making history in North America long before Europeans arrived.



Arguably, one of the most significant events of 2020 was the presidential election that sharply divided politics within the nation. Differences in race, ethnicity, economic standing, and

gender, to name a few, stood as a basis for who Americans cast their vote. Another significant factor was religion as voters sided with a candidate who would best support and enforce their views. As stated in the United States Constitution, America is a land of religious freedom as individuals are granted the right to freely practice any religion they please; however, whether this idea is encouraged is up for question. In the early 1600s, religious conflict plagued England as radical Protestants, often called “Puritans,” faced growing persecution. Between 1630 and 1640, these Puritans began the Great Migration of traveling to New England in hopes of religious freedom. In New England, Puritans dominated politics, religion, and culture, striving to create a utopian and “godly” society that many viewed as too intense. Because of this, the emergence of other religions became a new normal as Quakers, Jews, and other persecuted groups came together to live in harmony and promote religious toleration. While colonists experienced this movement of acceptance towards new groups, the fundamentals of Christianity continued to dominate society. While Americans continue

to practice religious freedom, the differences in beliefs fail to be acknowledged by all. The image to the right shows a tweet from

President Trump as he argues that Americans “worship God.” This idea is

reiterated further in the United States Pledge of Allegiance that states “one nation, under God.”

While the term “god” is unique to each individual religion, one can’t help but notice the religious superiority that is suggested in President Trump’s tweet. It is understandable for President Trump to wish to express his religious beliefs but the insensitivity this creates to those of other faiths is disappointing to see from the leader of our country. While Americans United refutes Trump’s



Americans United 
@americansunited

Following 

Wrong! In America, we have the right to worship or not worship whatever we want. It's entirely our choice. #ReligiousFreedom

Donald J. Trump  @realDonaldTrump

IN AMERICA WE DON'T WORSHIP GOVERNMENT - WE WORSHIP GOD! 🇺🇸
45.wh.gov/POTUSInsta

statement by expressing the idea of religious freedom, Trump's tweet suggests his ignorance to other religions. This is supported in the results of the election as a majority of Trump supporters were white Catholics and Protestants whereas a majority of supporters for Biden were Black Protestants, Hispanic Catholics, Jews, and Atheists. Both the 2020 election and the image above display the divide in American politics in relation to religious affiliation, a divide that is nothing new for American history as some Americans fight for Constitutional law and others fight for the superiority of their own opinions.

Another notable event in 2020 was the rise of the Black Lives Matter Movement. While the campaign was founded in 2013, the movement has begun to grow louder due to an increase in police brutality and the violent killings of innocent African Americans including George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, and unfortunately many others. BLM advocates for non-violent civil disobedience in response to the racially motivated violence against African Americans. Many have referred to this movement as the

second Civil War as black citizens fight for equality in our society. The image to the right shows a tweet reiterating this idea. The original United States Civil War began in 1861 as sectional tensions reached a breaking point. The country divided into the Union Army made up primarily of Northerners and the Confederate Army which consisted mostly of Southerners. The war became one of

emancipation as the Union Army utilized freed slaves as soldiers and fought for the equal rights of whites and black, whereas the Confederates feared equality and the negative effects this would have on the economy as slaves were the backbone of the cotton industry. While the war resulted



in the passing of the 13th Amendment which legally abolished slavery, racial inequality has remained an issue in American society. For years following the war, white Americans discriminated against blacks through violent protests and segregation laws. It is fair to say that contemporary Americans compare the BLM Movement to the Civil War in an effort to express that while much has changed legally, there continues to be a divide in our country between those who support African Americans and those who remain politically overwhelmed by the idea of racial equality.

In the event-heavy year that 2020 has been, contemporary Americans have utilized media outlets to draw connections between significant elements of American history and current events, such as the election and BLM Movement. Many of these similarities focus on the political divide our country is facing and reveal the ignorance of Americans failing to evolve and accept new ideas in our modern society. Connections drawn to past events have revealed that while the country has advanced legally, the United States remains divided on many topics.