

Critical Thinking in Contentious Times

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1

The Truth is...
That the truth is complicated and difficult



2

Wise words from Joe Biden January 20, 2021

- Recent weeks and months have taught us a painful lesson. There is truth, and there are lies. Lies told for power and for profit, and each of us has a duty and a responsibility as citizens, as Americans, and especially as leaders, leaders who have pledged to honor our Constitution and protect our nation to defend the truth and defeat the lies.



3

Critical Thinking is *Love of Wisdom*

φιλοσοφία

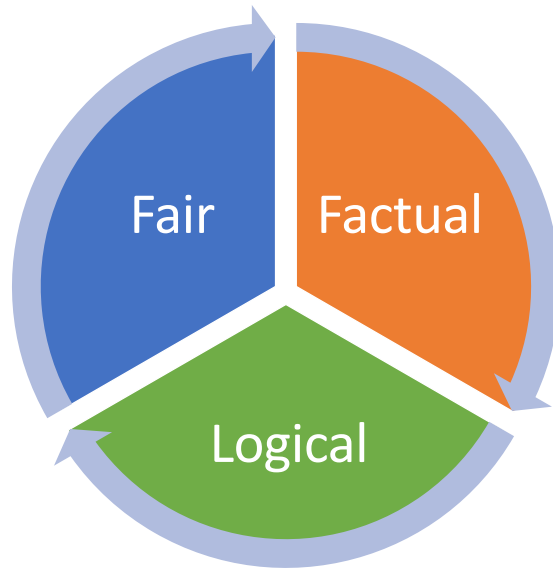
- Philosophy = Critical Thinking
- Critique = to judge and evaluate
- How do we know what we know?
- How do we judge without ideology?
- Socrates
- “the unexamined life is not worth living”
- “I know that I do not know”
 - or “I know that I know nothing”



4

Critical Thinking 101

Andrew Fiala, Ph.D., Director of the Ethics Center at Fresno State



Is it fair?

Is it true?

Does it make sense?

5

Three Contentious Topics

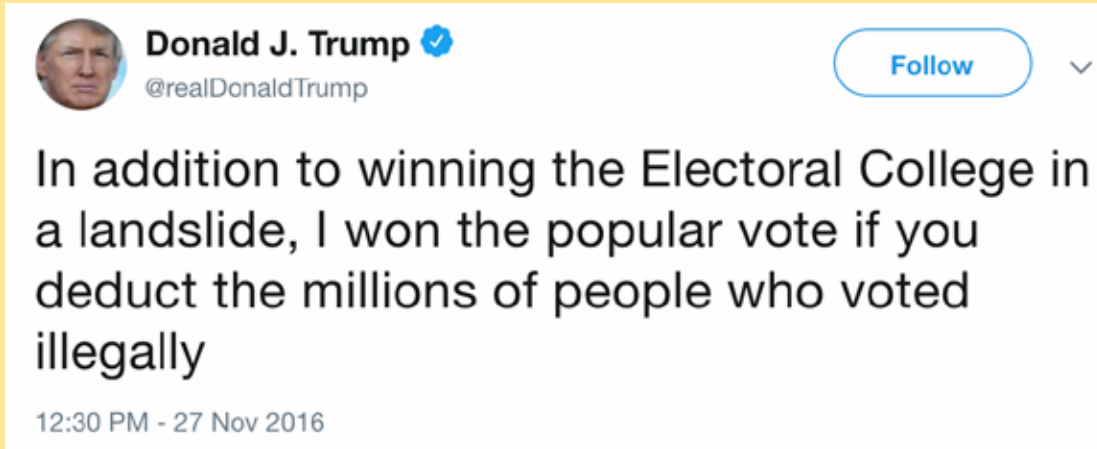
- Voter Fraud, Trust in Elections, and Democracy
- The Trump Twitter Ban and Free Speech
- The Meaning of American History
- **PROBLEM:** Can we have reasonable discussions of these things in a polarized and divided world?

Also: Pandemic Science, Masking, Vaccines, Racism, Immigration, Climate Change, Abortion, Sexuality, etc.



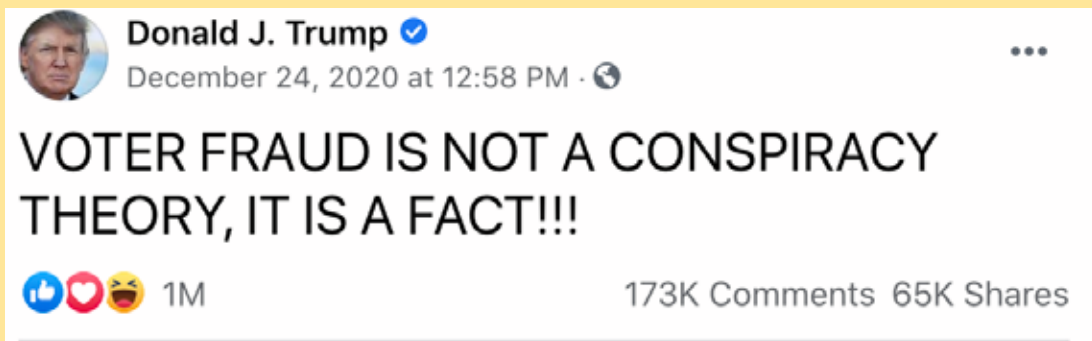
6

President Trump on Voter Fraud
November 27, 2016
From Twitter

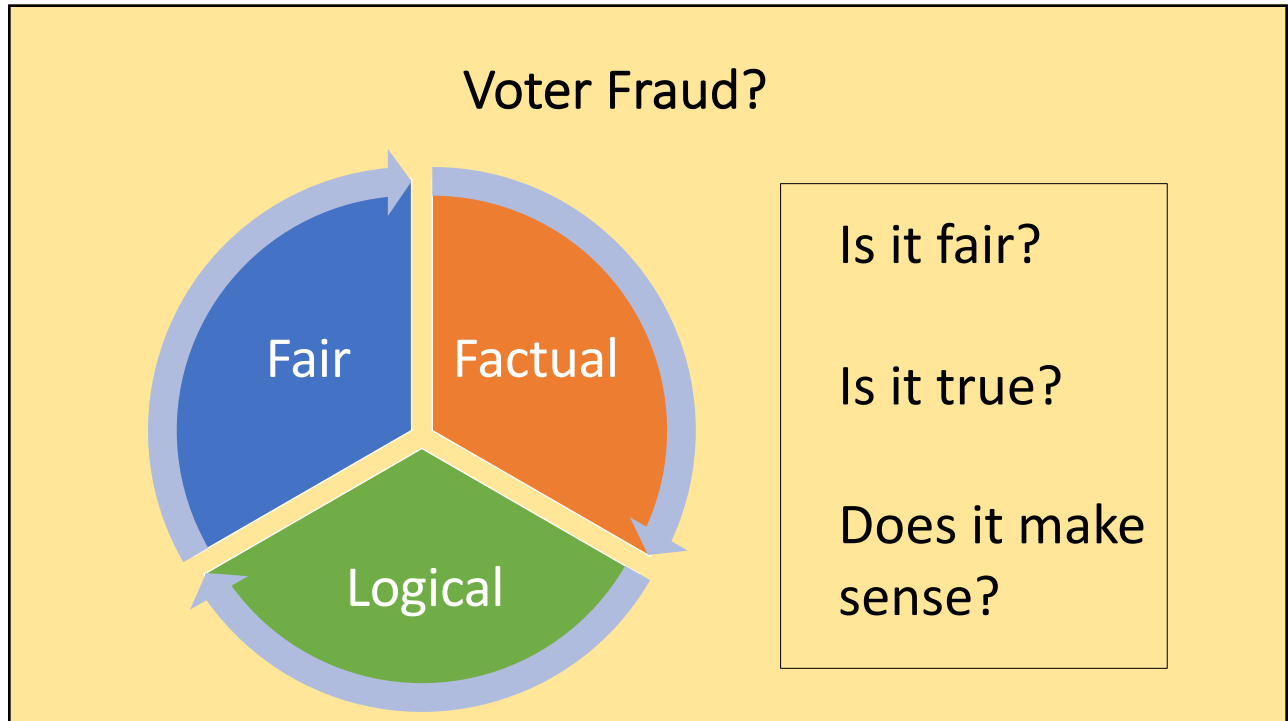


7

President Trump on Voter Fraud
December 24, 2020
From Facebook—now that Trump is banned from
Twitter



8



9

Trump banned from Twitter

Will He Be
BANNED?

**Why is Twitter Censoring
Free Speech?**

10

Twitter bans President Trump permanently CNN, January 9, 2021

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/08/tech/trump-twitter-ban/index.html>

- *"After close review of recent Tweets from the @realDonaldTrump account and the context around them we have permanently suspended the account due to the risk of further incitement of violence," Twitter said.*
- *"In the context of horrific events this week, we made it clear on Wednesday that additional violations of the Twitter Rules would potentially result in this very course of action."*
- **Twitter's decision followed two tweets by Trump Friday afternoon that would end up being his last. The tweets violated the company's policy against glorification of violence, Twitter said, and "these two Tweets must be read in the context of broader events in the country and the ways in which the President's statements can be mobilized by different audiences, including to incite violence, as well as in the context of the pattern of behavior from this account in recent weeks."**

11

Twitter bans President Trump permanently CNN, January 9, 2021

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/08/tech/trump-twitter-ban/index.html>

- The first tweet was about Trump's supporters.
- *"The 75,000,000 great American Patriots who voted for me, AMERICA FIRST, and MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN, will have a GIANT VOICE long into the future. They will not be disrespected or treated unfairly in any way, shape or form!!!"*
- The second indicated Trump did not plan to attend Joe Biden's inauguration.
- *"To all of those who have asked, I will not be going to the Inauguration on January 20th."*

12

Twitter bans President Trump permanently CNN, January 9, 2021

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/08/tech/trump-twitter-ban/index.html>

- **Twitter said** the tweet concerning inauguration could be viewed as a **further statement that the election was not legitimate**. It also said that the tweet could be **interpreted as Trump saying that the inauguration would be a "safe" target for violence** because he would not be attending.
- Trump's other statement about American patriots suggested that "he plans to continue to support, empower, and shield those who believe he won the election," Twitter said.

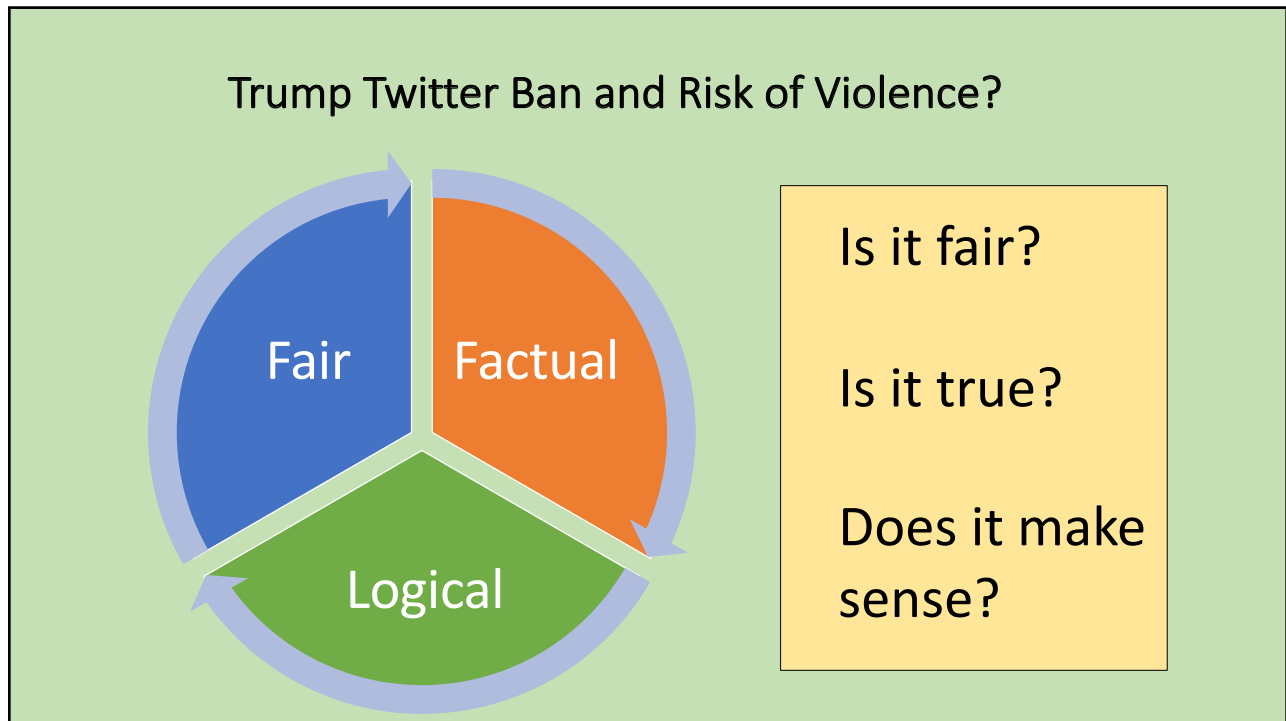
13

Twitter bans President Trump permanently CNN, January 9, 2021

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/08/tech/trump-twitter-ban/index.html>

- Trump sought to test Twitter's ban evasion policy at roughly 8:30 pm ET Friday evening, when he or someone acting on his behalf published four tweets from the @POTUS account.
- ***"As I have been saying for a long time, Twitter has gone further and further in banning free speech, and tonight, Twitter employees have coordinated with the Democrats and the Radical Left in removing my account from their platform, to silence me," Trump tweeted.***
- The tweets disappeared almost instantly.

14



15

An Article by Victor Davis Hanson, Dec. 3, 2020
(suggested by Bob Kittredge)

<https://tribunecontentagency.com/article/victor-davis-hanson-progressives-are-no-longer-defenders-of-free-expression/>

- Efforts to censor, cancel, discredit or destroy the work of anyone with contrasting viewpoints are canonized by the wealthy, powerful left-wing elites and their institutions.
- In Orwellian fashion, they have redefined being illiberal and vindictive as being woke, enlightened and progressive — and for the public good rather than their own interests.
- How ironic that the kindred spirits of today's progressives are not Socrates, Galileo and Harper Lee, but the Athenian mob, Joseph McCarthy and the Taliban.
- Past and present, all of these zealots and character assassins cloaked their intolerance in the pretense that they were advancing truth — by destroying it.

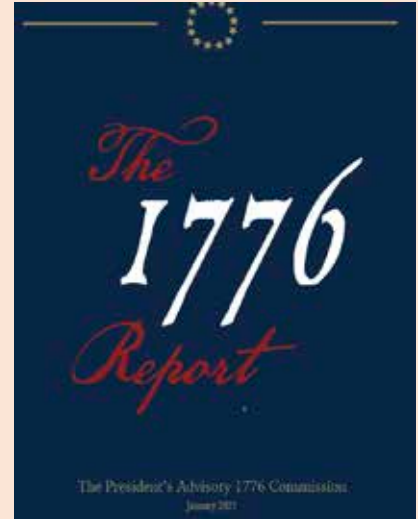
16

President Trump's 1776 Project

Published January 18, 2021 (MLK Day)

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-Presidents-Advisory-1776-Commission-Final-Report.pdf>

THE PAGE NO LONGER EXISTS (as of January 21, 2021). Biden Administration took it down immediately



17

Trump's 1776 Project

...to "enable a rising generation to understand the history and principles of the founding of the United States in 1776 and to strive to form a more perfect Union." This requires a restoration of American education, which can only be grounded on a history of those principles that is "accurate, honest, unifying, inspiring, and ennobling."

Universities in the United States are often today hotbeds of anti-Americanism, libel, and censorship that combine to generate in students and in the broader culture at the very least disdain and at worst outright hatred for this country.



18

Trump's 1776 Project

Problem of Progressivism

The Progressives held that truths were not permanent but only relative to their time. They rejected the self-evident truth of the Declaration that all men are created equal and are endowed equally, either by nature or by God, with unchanging rights....

Based on this false understanding of rights, the Progressives designed a new system of government.



19

President Trump's 1776 Project

Problem of Identity Politics

This new creed, loosely defined as identity politics, has three key features. First, the creed of identity politics defines and divides Americans in terms of collective social identities. According to this new creed, our racial and sexual identities are more important than our common status as individuals equally endowed with fundamental rights.

Second, the creed of identity politics ranks these different racial and social groups in terms of privilege and power... It divides Americans into two groups: oppressors and victims. The more a group is considered oppressed, the more its members have a moral claim upon the rest of society. As for their supposed oppressors, they must atone and even be punished in perpetuity for their sins and those of their ancestors.

Third, the creed of identity politics teaches that America itself is to blame for oppression... According to this new creed, Americans are not a people defined by their dedication to human equality, but a people defined by their perpetuation of racial and sexual oppression.



20

Response to Trump's 1776 Project *Inside Higher Ed*, Jan. 20, 2021

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/01/20/historians-trump-administrations-report-us-history-belongs-trash>

Historians, in turn, generally agree that the report -- released by the Presidential Advisory 1776 Commission -- is garbage. The document lacks citations, fails to mention Native Americans entirely, traffics heavily in American "values" at the expense of objective truths and bemoans the "radicalization of American politics" from the 1960s onward.

Less clear to historians is how much of an impact the report will have on already divided and fact-challenged culture.

David Blight, Sterling Professor of American History at Yale University, said that academic historians, "even those with conservative instincts, will discredit this report whenever asked. **We value research, facts, evidence, and then interpretation and debate above ideology. At least most of us do.**"



21

Response to President Trump's 1776 Project *New York Times*, Jan. 18, 2021

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/18/us/politics/trump-1776-commission-report.html>

The report drew intense criticism from historians, some of whom noted that the commission, while stocked with conservative educators, did not include a single professional historian of the United States.

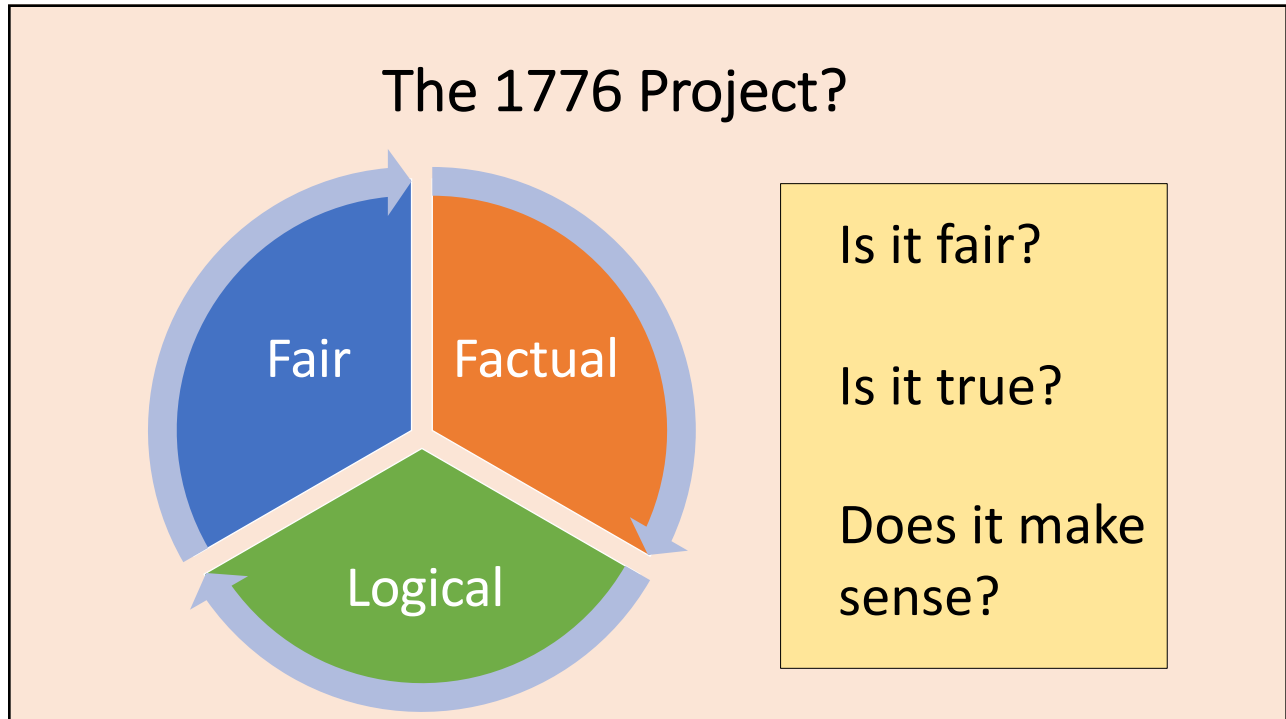
James Grossman, executive director of the American Historical Association, said the report was not a work of history, but "cynical politics."

"This report skillfully weaves together myths, distortions, deliberate silences, and both blatant and subtle misreading of evidence to create a narrative and an argument that few respectable professional historians, even across a wide interpretive spectrum, would consider plausible, never mind convincing," he said.

"They're using something they call history to stoke culture wars," he said.



22



23

Conclusions

- Truth is difficult to find...But not impossible
- Polarization makes it more difficult
- We all benefit from better critical thinking and less polarization
- Democracy is at risk if don't think better

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24