

# The Critic<sup>©</sup>

## Jamestown Year 1

*Capture the past and shape the future*

ARTILLERY ROW

By Bruce Gilley

18 June, 2020

In retrospect, they will say, Year 1 in the New American Calendar had been foretold long ago. What was needed for the fixing of a new book of days had been merely a minor distraction sufficient to rouse the New America. People talked of the death of George Floyd in the way that the French *sans culottes* still spoke excitedly of the ill-timed banquet for royalist soldiers hosted by the king on October 1, 1789. Time, even revolutionary time, moved faster now. It took the Jacobin legislature a full four years to adopt a new chronology, and extend it proleptically back to 1793. The American movement, with the support of major media, corporations, entertainment figures, and universities, had adopted Year 1 before the year 2020 was out.

The resetting of time was a culmination of the resetting of the American imagination. The seat of the mind is in memory, Augustine had insisted, and the American memory had long abandoned the mythical founding of 1776. The true founding, the revolutionaries had insisted not nine-months before the uprising began, had been at Jamestown in 1619, hence their addition of that moniker to the new epoch. Capture history, they knew, and the rest was a cakewalk. Dislodging founding ideas, moments, and fathers was sufficient to bring down a nation. In Jamestown Year 1, previously The Year of the Lord 2020, newborn children were given names like Georgefloyd and Antifa.

The failure of the revolution of the 1960s had been precisely its failure to debunk the year 1776. The hippies were too wrapped in the tradition. Black leaders too had appealed for inclusion as equals in the grand republic, a fatal mistake in retrospect because it legitimated the unbearable oppression of that system. As the exiled German philosopher Hannah Arendt had noted in the midst of that turmoil: “As long as this tradition was uninterrupted, authority was inviolate; and to act without authority and tradition, without accepted, time-honored standards and models, without the help of the wisdom of the founding fathers, was inconceivable.” Since those missteps of the 1960s, the revolutionaries had made it a point of “interrupting”. This favorite gerund of *les enragés* had at last broken the tradition, a necessary act of vandalism.

Previously, 1776 had been taken as the continuation of a great inheritance. It began, the myth insisted, with the Romans who established the idea of a “founding” with their appeals to Greek ideals. It had been transmitted through the Judeo-Christian tradition and the critical ethical emergence of the state in medieval Europe. The codification of the founding at Runnymede had borne the British parliamentary and legal traditions. These were the rights to which the founders of the republic had appealed in their very English transition of 1776.

The defacement of that myth had been abetted by conservatives with their counter-revolutionary squawking for “law and order.” For such appeals reflected the same loss of faith in a providential order and the inherited authority of tradition. Truncheons were no argument. The more the conservatives called for “action,” the more they convinced the revolutionaries of the rightness of their course, a *dance macabre* of the slide into totalitarianism. Those conservative moods were not up to the task of restoring the republic because they did not take seriously the inheritance on which it was founded. The tyranny of force, no less than the tyranny of ideology, was a bayonet pointed at the freedom of tradition and authority guided by a providential order.

The revolutionaries had been hard at work of course for decades. They had instilled a bitterness and cynicism in the young towards their history. This could flower by 2020 because the flowerchildren were their parents. Families had no memory of ever thinking anything else. By 2020, the faith, tradition, and authority of the American founding were, in Arendt’s apt phrase, like “a child’s pocket-knife in competition with atomic weapons.” What hapless poet or teacher would dare to broach the reasons why America was the most prosperous and powerful nation in the world – the preferred destination according to polls, of something like 2 to 3 billion of the world’s people – when faced with *The Terror of 1619istas*? What feeble couple living in an apartment above a store in Rochester could withstand muscular youths clubbing them with two by fours?

An *eminence grise* of the New Order, Howard Zinn, had called on historians to abandon “disinterested scholarship” in order to bring about “a revolution” in America. His book, as the dissident writer Mary Grabar mutely warned in the last Year of our Lord, 2019, was “intended to inspire anger of such magnitude that its readers want to overthrow the American Republic.” By Jamestown Year 1, the work was accomplished. There was no longer history, but History. That is why an urgent task of the ephemeris of the revolution was to predict when all of the celestial pieces of this new universe would be perfectly aligned. It was finally announced at a rally in D.C. in August that by Jamestown Year 10, it would be paradise.

Major elites rallied around the new cause, much as shop owners hurriedly unfurled revolutionary banners as the Viet Cong drove into Saigon on captured American tanks. They promised to hunt down systemic racism and economic inequality with a fervor that had previously been reserved for customer service. They wielded coercive tools, having been told by the commune leaders that freedom was now widely agreed to be a cover for privilege and oppression. They were bringing a New Freedom that brooked no dissent.

The Committee of Surveillance, created on that muggy DC day in August, monitored the social media and writings of Americans, seeking evidence of a lack of enthusiasm for the new order. The MIT Math Department, which had suspended its work on June 10 for an “anti-racism

reading group”, compiled a selection of the best quotations and short essays from the movement in what they called a Little Black Book. It was a founding moment, and a generation of schoolchildren would be taken on pilgrimages to the room where the numerates met, clutching their state-issued copies of the Little Black Book like nuns of Notre-Dame de Soissons with their psalters.

There were some unfortunate desiderata that the revolutionaries faced in Jamestown Year 2. One was the plaited presentation of revolution and religion in the memorials to George Floyd the previous year. The Immortal Legislators of the new order knew in their hearts that the revolution could not be completed until religion was denied scope. One should move carefully, and with stealth if possible, much as the French revolutionists pledged loyalty to the king right up until the day before his neck (actually his lower skull and jaw) was severed in January 1793. As with the Saigon shopkeepers, this could be accomplished simply by instilling fear. Churches and synagogues draped themselves in Gay Pride and Black Lives Matters banners to show to the outside world that they too had abandoned faith in God’s working out of His plans. Once individual hearts had been replaced by collective will, religion was a spent force.

The bigger problem, as always for revolutionaries, was the working class. They clung tenaciously to their backward notions of individual responsibility and freedom from interference, damnable peasants who did not know where their true interests lay. They were a frustratingly stubborn pack, bound in their tight-knit families and communities, all potato-salad and lawn chairs. The longer this working class resisted transformation, the more dangerous it was for the revolution. If the new annals reached, say, Jamestown Year 5 with too many communities continuing to shuffle rather than hasten towards the Future, then the threat of Thermidor would grow. Revolutions cannot work themselves on human time, which is ponderous and generational. They need to reset not just the counting of time but its pace.

Yet the thought-leaders had tools that their revolutionary forebears would never have imagined to beat the working class into submission. All that was needed to convince them to leap across the chasm was promises of easy credit and guaranteed income, child’s play really as long as the national credit held up. And therein lay the dirty secret of Jamestown Year 1: the tradition that it “interrupted” was the thing on which it stood. Until that secret was revealed, the promise of paradise would be enough. --