

America: Good and bad  
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Just when we think we know what kind of country we are, history comes in to correct the record. We currently have Reactionary governors who want our children to uncritically love our country and think it the best in the world. On the extreme other side Radical Leftists want our children to see our dark underbelly, slavery and its consequences, and dwell on it.

These two extreme views fail our children, who, unlike other children in democracies around the world, are taught about the past: its horrors (religious wars, Inquisition, witch burning, and world wars) and its glories (the march of progress, the emancipation of women, and the ultimate promise of their revolutions). European children love their countries, despite their histories, which ours could do also.

People vote with their feet. We are still the world's model.

When we teach children about our country's founding, two ideas conflict: the best group of intellectual founding fathers ever, who created a country that aspired to a government unlike anything we have seen in 2,000 years; and yet half of these intellectuals were slave owners. That was the system they inherited. They assumed it would melt away in time.

Slavery was finally abolished, but not without a horrendous war and much backsliding over the next century. Slavery was gone, but unequal treatment and unfair citizenship for the former slaves still darken their lives. Yet over the next half century, we have seen the old horrors addressed and for some, remedied. We have even had a half-black President, black men and now a black woman on the Supreme Court, and black men and women in every reach of society, from the military to sports, the theater, law, and advertising. (Watch TV commercials today.)

One of the characteristics of the modern world has been that most of us behave in a friendly manner to our neighbors, do not beat our wives and families, and want our children to be as educated as possible. We are a much better-behaved population than were our ancestors (just watch comedy films of the 1920s to laugh, but be embarrassed).

Yet, a dark streak of primeval evil pops up from time to time. We may think that our own time is the worst: (criminal gangs, gun-armed thugs, savage and brutal families), yet there are still fewer than before. But here is one from our newspaper's daily "Dates in History" item for 1927:

"In America's deadliest school attack, part of a schoolhouse in Bath Township, Michigan, was blown up with explosives planted by local farmer, Andrew Kahoe, who then set off a bomb in his truck. The attacks killed 38 children and six adults, including Kehoe, who earlier killed his wife. Authorities said Kehoe was seeking revenge for losing a township clerk election."

Note that the murderer was neither a Hispanic gang member nor an angry Black man; he used explosives instead of military weapons; and his motives were wife abuse and a lost election.

I recently learned of another horror: In 1994, a man named Edward Begley wrote to the Siskiyou County Historical Society. He said that nearly 50 years earlier, in 1947, he saw a black man lynched in front of the one-room school house in Callahan, California. He was in first grade at the time.

He writes: "On the morning of January 6th, 1947, all of us students arrived at school to see a man hanging from a telephone pole across the road from the school."

His teacher told the whole class not to tell anyone about what they saw and all issues of a local paper were destroyed by local authorities who, he says, were involved in the murder.

Ken Gonzales-Day, a historian and the author of the book *Lynching in California*, included the Callahan lynching story in his book, although as an unconfirmed case. But he says that people don't often realize how common racist violence was in the history of the Western US. Three hundred fifty Latinos, Filipinos, and Native Americans were lynched in the same proportions as African Americans were in the deep South.

We are certainly better than that!

685 words

Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of "How Do You Know That?"  
Contact her at [Lfarhat102@gmail.com](mailto:Lfarhat102@gmail.com) or [www.globalthink.net](http://www.globalthink.net).