

**Episode 2,361: How Not to Produce a Generation of Ignoramuses**

**Guests: Connor Boyack and Elijah Stanfield**

**WOODS:**  Well, this is a great day, ladies and gentlemen, because there is a brand-new book now available to the world as of today. And it is a beautiful volume. I'm holding it in my hand. You can't see me, but why would I lie about something like this?

I'm holding in my hand Volume Two of the Tuttle Twins U.S History series. And this runs from the period 1776 to 1791. It is called *America's History: 1776 to 1791*.

And I have here with us the creator of the entire series, which is Connor Boyack. And the guy has a resume as long as his arm. And we're also talking to the illustrator of the whole series, and that's Elijah Stanfield. First of all, welcome to both of you guys.

But Elijah, did you do – I'm sorry that I don't remember this distinctly, but for me, 11 years is, like, an eternity. Did you do some animation for us when we had the Revolution PAC for Ron Paul in 2011 and 2012?

**STANFIELD:** Yeah, as soon as I saw you guys launch that revolution pack, I sent Gary Franchi an email and said: *Hey, I want to be a part of whatever you guys have for me*. And you guys gave me a couple opportunities to do some animation.

I think we did – what did we call that, like, “Puppet”? Anyway, it was Mitt Romney and some other goon.

**WOODS:** Yes, that's right. We called it "Plastic Men."

**STANFIELD:** Right. Yeah.But also shot some video – I think it's called "The Passion of Dr. Paul". Some of those other videos I helped Chris Rye shoot. And yeah, it was a great time. I loved that whole experience.

**WOODS:** Yeah. So, for anybody who has no idea what we're talking about, at least at that time – I don't know how election law has changed at all since then. If you had something called a super PAC, there were no donation limits, but you could not coordinate with the official campaign.

So, just to be safe, I didn't even talk to Dr. Paul for the longest time. I didn't even talk to anybody over there. And I think they liked some of what we did. They definitely liked that "Passion of Dr. Paul" ad that we put together.

In fact, Dr. Paul did an interview in Iowa, and he said it was the best ad of the whole campaign. And we did that, so that made me happy. But anyway, what I think I'm going to do, by the way, is I --no, you know what? I don't want to distract from your project.

One of these days I'll put on a show notes page the videos for the ads that we made for Ron Paul, because they were great. This brings back such great memories.

But anyway, let's talk about what you guys are doing. I loved Volume One. And Volume One, if I'm remembering correctly – and I've got it right here on my shelf somewhere. Did it start all the way back in 1215 or some crazy prehistory time?

**BOYACK:** Yeah, that's right. We started Volume One back with kind of the Magna Carta. And also, for us, this was kind of – not a response to the 1619 project, but definitely meant to respond to it.

The goals of the people behind the 1619 project, from my perspective, is they want to reframe history so that we understand our past differently. And if we see the founders as these white supremacist bigots, then we can discard not only their actions but their ideology.

And so, these are very, kind of, Marxist people who want to just disconnect us from our classical liberal heritage. So, we said, what's the true background, the ideological, kind of, underpinning of America?

And Elijah and I felt like if we go back to Marco Polo and the Silk Road, all these people are trading, they're trying to have these, like, win-win arrangements that mutually improve one another's lives.

That trade led to explorers going to far off lands in search of treasure and spices and so forth to bring back to the Silk Road. That exploration later led to colonization, which led to America.

So, we liked this idea that this kind of burgeoning trade route really planted a lot of seeds that later sprouted into what became America. That for Elijah and I, is a more positive vision of so many of the colonists coming to America, trying to improve their lives.

Yes, there were warts and bumps and problems, and we acknowledge those. But we think it's better to cast history from a positive, constructive standpoint or reference so that we can then have a better outlook on the future.

Not this Marxist, like: *Let's just see the past as horrible and we can only improve.* But: *Let's recognize the good from the past and retain it and build upon it.*

**STANFIELD:** I think that's where Rothbard started with his history books, *Conceived in Liberty*, was Marco Polo and Christopher Columbus, and he started with free trade, I believe.

**WOODS:** Right. In fact, I think the early chapters – or, like, the European setting the stage for the colonization of the Americas, the European setting, I think that portion of the book may have been written by Leonard Liggio, who was his colleague, who was an expert in European history.

But you're right, it doesn't just start with: *History began five minutes ago and all of a sudden we're in 1607*. It sets a good contextual stage. Now, obviously, these volumes are aimed at a young audience.

And want to talk a little bit in a minute about some of the techniques you use to reach a younger audience.

But before we do that, I want to contextualize this and the significance of this in light of some recent data that Connor, you were pointing out to me, about what we now know about the knowledge that American kids have of US history.

Now, there's some statistics that just came out about the academic performance of American eighth graders, 13-year-olds. Even beyond that – but I would like you to comment on that a minute. But if you recall, if you ever read Bryan Caplan's book, *The Case Against Education* (very provocatively titled), he's got in there some evidence from various disciplines, history included.

And what he'll do is he'll go through and tell you, question by question, what kinds of pieces of information about American history Americans are completely confused about when you quiz them. And it's things like, they can't put the civil war and the war for American independence, and maybe one other thing, even in chronological order.

Now, if you can't even put those in order, then you don't understand anything. You're not entitled to an opinion on anything related to any of this. And we're talking about American adults being polled. These are people who, by and large, went through the official course of instruction. And what they have is a hodgepodge of absolute meaningless bits of nothingness.

**BOYACK:** Right. Well, I'll put my tinfoil hat on for a minute, Tom. I think that's intentional. I think those in power ultimately don't want a knowledgeable citizenry. Because if they understand the mistakes of the past, then they'll better be on guard to make sure they don't happen in the future.

The best way for authoritarians to get away with all their shenanigans is to dumb down the population. So, they're distracted, they lack context, as you point out.

They might be bombarded with content, all these factoids that in school they have to memorize and regurgitate for the test. So, there's no shortage of content, but they're deprived of context.

And so, what that leads to, what you were referencing with this statistic that just came out a few weeks ago from the NAEP score, what's called the nation's report Card, where they aggregate all the assessments and all the public schools, and they're kind of measuring english and math and history for all the kids.

And the recent result that came out was that for eighth graders, across the whole country, only 13% of eighth graders in American public schools are proficient in American history. 13%, these are future voters. These are future elected officials.

These are people who are going to have the reins of power in our constitutional republic, such as it remains today. But the problem, as you point out, applies to adults as well. Like, only 51% of adults can even name all three branches of the federal government.

A majority of Americans fail a US citizenship test that immigrants have to take when they're applying for citizenship. So, we have this widespread problem. Gore Vidal once called us, as a result of all this, "the United States of Amnesia".

And so, for Elijah and I working on this project, like, I'm actually going to compliment you here, Tom. I may have mentioned this in the past, but as a kid, as a student, I hated history.

**WOODS:** Me too. I was bored to death by it, really. I was bored to death by it.

**BOYACK:** Yeah, same. And for me, it was all these factoids. You have to memorize what happened, on which date, to whom, between which group, and what the weather was like that day. Who cares?

It wasn't until after college I had encountered Ron Paul. I Googled Ron Paul. I started kind of branching out from there to his recommended books and trusted people.

And your book, *Nullification* was one of the early ones that I read that was teaching me history in a way that I'm like: *Huh, this actually is super interesting.* Like, when it's in narrative form and you're telling these insights and intrigues.

And it's just like an adventure, almost, in the past, it made it kind of come alive. And I was like: *Oh, this is actually kind of fun to read*. So, I started reading biographies and started getting more into history.

And so, the way that we've formatted this book, Elijah and I (or both of the books) is in narrative form. It's not bombarding kids with a bunch of factoids. It's just a big, long story. And so, through the story, the kids are introduced to a lot of history and a lot of ideas.

But I know Elijah relates to, Tom, what you and I just expressed. And that is going through being "taught" history in a way we don't like. We're really trying to solve this core problem. Because we feel like if we're not teaching kids the lessons of the past, then it's tabula rasa.

It's just this constant blank slate where all the socialists and leftists and progressives can just imprint whatever version or vision of society they want.

We want to say: *No, let's honor the past. Let's learn from it. There's a lot to extract from it, and let's take those positive ideas and protect them for the future.*

**WOODS:** You have adopted an interesting pedagogical technique with this book that I rather suspect you invented. I don't think you opened a book on, let's say, early educational theory or anything.

But the way this book is written and presented, I think is unique. I've never seen anything like this for a children's book.

So, of course, as with all children's books, there are a lot of illustrations. Every single page, a beautiful illustration. But beyond that, it's not just a straight narrative of: *Here's what happened in 1776. And then at the end, now we've reached 1791*.

It's interrupted with stories from this family, the Tuttle family, that are meant to bring out the significance of the historical events that are being talked about.

So, if these people, for example, are fighting for local self-government, well, you know what? Here's something we had happen the other day where we want to do X and they wouldn't let us do X.

So, the idea is to show that these events from the past are not just dusty old occurrences that you have to memorize, but that don't have any relevance today. They really do have relevance today. Like, Ron Paul is somehow in a book covering the period 1776 to 1791.

**STANFIELD:** Yeah, I mean, that's exactly what we want to do with these history books is we want to have them learn from it and be able to apply it in everyday life.

So, these kids – like, the example you gave Tom. They're at a city council meeting and there's a new project. They discover that there's these cronies, these special interests that are trying to get this thing passed.

And the Tuttles are trying to teach the economic principle of why this is a bad idea. Well, it turns out that there were special interests that wanted the Constitution, the centralized national government, to take the place of the Articles of Confederation.

So, there's an opportunity there to create a parallel story. They can learn the history of the past and see the dangers of it and then see the dangers of it playing out in front of them in the present time. And that's exactly what we want to do.

**BOYACK:** Tom, I need to note here that Elijah really is a co-author for this book. We kind of tackled it together because I think he read way more Rothbard than I did and really doing a deep dive in *Conceived in Liberty.*

Because what Elijah has always brought to the table with this project is not just drawing stuff, or me saying: *Hey, I need an illustration of this.* It's him understanding these ideas so deeply so that he can then come up with creative ways to visually depict them.

And so, it's something that he and I have like really just talked a ton about and figuring out together how we can frame this. And think there's two levels. Tom, you recognize one. I guess you actually mentioned the second.

The one is the fictional examples through the Tuttle family, what Elijah was just talking about with some of these story elements that allow the twins to see in their own world what they were learning from history about and then apply those lessons to their own life.

But then at the end of the chapter, we also have some analysis, some thoughts that Elijah and I take turns sharing. Where we first say: *Okay, here are the ideas that we went over in this chapter*. And then we give a modern example, a little – we call it, "Let's talk about it."

A little section where we can say: *Okay, these ideas that we read in this chapter, here's a modern example of how this is taking place.* So, that the kids (and frankly, their parents) when reading these books can realize: *Oh, this isn't just for a book, this isn't just in history, this isn't just fiction*.

Like, this stuff – because I saw the twins apply it to their own lives in the story. I can now have a better idea of how I can apply it in the real world, in my life today.

For us, the whole critical thing of this whole project, *America's History*, is the quote that we put on the back of the books, *"Those who don't learn from the past are condemned to repeat it."*

And all the other books out there – you know this, Tom. All the other social studies textbooks used in school, they are not teaching kids to learn from the past. They're simply teaching kids about the past. It's the content without the context.

And so, what our goal anyways is with this book (and I think we've landed the plane successfully here) is: Yes, we're going to teach content, but we are going to infuse it with context so that kids can observe what happened in the past, learn from it in order to apply it to their lives today.

Because why else do we learn history? Who cares about history? In my view, like, really the primary and perhaps sole purpose of history is so that we can better understand ourselves and figure out a path to move forward.

At least in my idea, it's a very utilitarian approach. We need to frame history in a way that serves us to move forward positively. I mean, it's also curious on its own. And yeah, let's memorize stuff for interesting conversation about what happened a long time ago.

But I think history can serve this very utilitarian, positive purpose in our lives. We just have to teach kids in a way that makes it interesting. And everyone else isn't, and so that's what we're trying to do.

**WOODS:**  I like that there is a mention in there of Shays' Rebellion, because Shays' Rebellion is one of these things where everybody thinks they know the story. And it was just debtors who were upset at their creditors, and of course, those people need to be suppressed, and that's the end of the story.

Turns out the story is much, much more complicated and interesting than that. But it took a long time before historians really dug out the documentation they needed to tell the real story about it.

What's interesting is that didn't really happen until a book called *Shays' Rebellion: The American Revolution's Final Battle,* which is a book by Leonard Richards.

It came out in 2003. Rothbard was writing in the 1970s, and he already smelled a rat in the official version of Shays' Rebellion. And he was vindicated in this book.

But the point is, you have a little box in this book, in your *America's History* book, in which you say that Shays' rebellion was portrayed propagandistically to the public and then used as justification for why we need a strong central government, in order to put down things like this.

And then a connection is made to today (or roughly today) saying: *These kinds of things (called "false flags") we see quite a bit throughout history. So, for example...*

And then you give the example of, in 1990 – well, why should I tell the story? What's the example from 1990?

**BOYACK:** So, this is the young girl, Nayirah, this young woman was testifying to a congressional committee. She was from Kuwait, a country in the Middle East.

And she told, through tears, these senators, that she had witnessed soldiers in Iraq taking newborn babies out of their incubators and leaving them to die. So, everyone gets outraged. And here's this credible testimony from this girl. And she was a witness.

And all these senators, the resolution to go to war passed, I think it was by five votes in the Senate when they later passed it. And seven senators all cited Nayirah's testimony as very influential in their reasoning why we need to go to war against Saddam.

And so, as it turns out, it was completely false. She was actually – this girl was the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador. She was coached by an advertising agency who had a $1 million plus contract to find a way to induce America into war against Iraq because that would benefit Kuwait.

So, yeah, we put this in the book (and so many other examples like this) because this stuff didn't just happen 250 years ago. As you point out, the propaganda around Shays' Rebellion and the real reasons behind it are far more interesting. And it's that way with modern examples as well.

**WOODS:** Now, let me ask a really key question. These years that you're covering are obviously of the utmost importance, not only because of the war for independence, but also because of the drafting and ratification of the Constitution.

And to the extent that there is material in existence for younger people about this period of American history, it treats the Constitution like a sacred, perfect text. And we get an analysis that is very, very predictable and that might not be exactly what they need to hear.

Yeah, obviously, we would be better off if the government would confine itself to what's in the Constitution. But apparently the Constitution was written in a way that does nothing to prevent them from ignoring it.

And you say: *Well, no piece of paper could prevent them from ignoring it.* Well, okay, that goes to show we shouldn't put that much confidence in a piece of paper. But the other thing is, there are things that could have been done.

You could have had a provision in there saying that if a single state thinks the federal government is doing something unconstitutional, we expressly authorize it to enter its protest and to suspend its operation.

Now, I can give you an implicit argument that that exists, but that's harder to make than if it were just written in there. In other words, that wouldn't just be adding some words to the Constitution, that would actually be adding teeth to it, teeth that were not present.

So, yes, it could have been better, and it was not perfect. Now, Rothbard, of course, is not super enthusiastic about the abandonment of the Articles of Confederation and the adoption of the Constitution. And that is not a perspective that I have ever seen presented in a children's book.

So, how did you guys handle that?

**STANFIELD:** Well, I mean, I think that's what we're trying to offer with these history books, is giving the other side of the typical narrative, the typical propagandized version of history. We talk a lot about the Founders.

Whether you're talking with a person from the right or the left, they're always going to have this reverence for the Founders and the Constitution. Well, it turns out our favorite revolutionaries, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, Sam Adams, they were actually against the creation of a national government.

And at the same time, we're saying "the Founders". And then the Alexander Hamiltons', they called themselves "the Federalists" when they were actually against the federation. They wanted total nationalization.

So, these are these nuances that we really want to bring back up so that we can actually have deeper discussions in our nation about what we're trying to get at. Because if you just go, "constitution, constitution, constitution", Hillary Clinton saying, "constitution", we're all saying "constitution".

We need to understand these details about what we actually are wanting to do. What are our real goals? What do you really want? What do you really believe in?

Yeah, I think that's just what we're trying to do with these books in general is just open back those discussions that haven't really been had for 100 years or more.

**BOYACK:**  When I was in high school, I remember reading (or being required to read, I should say) the Federalist Papers. Very common practice, right? Very common assignment given to high school kids in civics class or whatever.

And at no point was I ever told that such a thing called "the Anti-Federalist Papers" ever existed. I think I was, like, a college senior or something. And I stumbled across it online and was like: What is this?

And so, for us with Elijah and I, how we're approaching this is really just trying to plant a lot of seeds for alternative perspectives. Because the victors always write the history in a way that flatters them and reinforces their narrative.

And so, of course, the people who favored adoption of this central government are going to cast history in a way that portrays that as the inevitable conclusion of the progress of Americana. And how dare we question anything else but this inevitability?

We want to spark some conversation in families and say: *Eh, is that true?* *How might they have improved the Articles of Confederation?*

*How could they have preserved and tweaked them in a way that would maybe make them a little more "functional" to the agreement of the critics, but still preserve that core Confederate power of preserving state sovereignty?*

Like, that's a provocative question. It's a great analytical question for discussion and homework, research for kids. But kids are never afforded that opportunity to think critically about what ended up happening. It's just taken for granted that this is what had to happen, so let's move on.

And so, our goal really is just to spark that debate, challenging these assumptions and these narratives that the victors have had in place for generations to say: *Well, actually there is a different perspective here. Let's at least consider it and go have a discussion about it.*

**STANFIELD:** One of the things that we found that blew my mind the most was that the central bank passed before even the Bill of Rights. It was the very first thing on the docket.

And that really just goes to show what the intention of Alexander Hamilton and his people, what they really wanted with this national taxing power. There's just all sorts of great nuggets in that time period to point out that we usually don't know about.

**WOODS:** What I want to ask is, I was – before I looked at the website, which of course I should have done first. I was going to ask if there's an easy way for a homeschooling family to integrate this into their American history curriculum.

And now I see that actually when you get the book, it automatically comes with some kind of curriculum material.

**BOYACK:** Yeah. So, each of our two volumes has its own curriculum that goes with it. So, each chapter in each of the books has some additional lessons and projects and activities to help the kids, kind of like we have with our children's books.

We have activity workbooks for each of those. So, each of these history books has about 200 pages of curriculum. It's a PDF, so you can print out multiple pages for each of the kids for various activities.

And it's designed to kind of reinforce the lessons and the ideas that they're learning about in the book. So, the bundle that we have right now – you get the book. It's a hardback, large, beautifully illustrated book.

So, you get the book. You get the 200 pages of curriculum. You get the audio book for the full thing – it's like six hours' worth of audiobook. And then you get some bonus videos that we've created as well about some lessons from history.

So, all of that is kind of bundled together in what you get. And homeschooling families – what we've seen with Volume One is that if they kind of stretch it out – like, typically what happens is they'll get the book and the kid will read through it in like two days, just blaze through reading the story.

And so, then the parents, often what we've been hearing and seeing is they'll say: *Okay, great, you read it. Now let's do a chapter a week and let's reread it a little bit more slowly. Let's do some of the activities and take our time as part of homeschool curriculum.*

So, each book/curriculum, what we've seen so far is that that's kind of about a "semester" worth of content. And so, these two volumes together is like a full year of history curriculum for homeschoolers. Now, half of our audience are not homeschoolers.

The other half, they're all public/private charter schools. And so, for them, it's a supplement at home. It's a summer thing right now, while they're not in school. It's a weekends and vacation thing when there's more downtime during the school year.

But for those families, this is a supplement because they recognize that their kids are not being taught this kind of stuff in the school. And so: *Hey, let's do our part at the home to make sure they're learning these true ideas and non-woke corrupted history.*

**WOODS:** When you and I talked about Volume One, however many months ago that was, you said that you were at work on a Volume Two. And wanted to know, how far are you planning to take this? Are you going to keep going to a future Volume Three and Four and beyond?

And you were noncommittal, saying: *I obviously have to wait and see how the first one does and the second one does.* Now, the second one is being released today, so you don't have any data on that. But what's your confidence level in terms of future volumes at this point?

**BOYACK:** Tom, I think that's like asking a woman who just had a baby when she'll have her next one.

**WOODS:** Well, okay. But however, in my defense,

**BOYACK:** [laughing] I'm teasing you. I'm teasing.

**WOODS:** In my defense, each child doesn't say "Volume One", then "Volume Two" on them.

**BOYACK:** [laughing] Fair enough. So, Elijah and I have talked about this last year when we released – basically the same time, 4th of July, we released Volume One. And so, what we charted out then (and I think what we're still on the path to doing now) is four volumes, maybe five.

Now, I don't think we're going to get Volume Three out next year. We did Volumes One and Two kind of overlapping and together. And so, by the time we published Volume One, we actually already had a decent chunk of Volume Two done.

We were kind of ahead a little bit. We're not there with Volume Three. We haven't even started talking about Volume Three. But roughly, the idea is, now that we've taken us all the way through the Bill of Rights and the adoption of this new federal government.

Volume Three would be, *Birth of a New Nation*. It would be 1791, say, through the war between the states, the civil war. So, we would cover that whole span of time. And then Volume Four would be, *Dawn of an Empire* – or, now what did we call it?

I think Volume Four was – I can't remember Volume Four. It would be from, like, post-Reconstruction all the way through the Progressive era. And then a potential Volume Five could be – it was like going to be, like, the rise of the military industrial complex or something.

But all the way from the Progressive era through the World Wars and then the modern day. Elijah, what have I missed?

**STANFIELD:** Yeah, I think that's basically it.

**BOYACK:** So, we'll see how quick we can pump that out. These books are a lot of work for us. I mean, they're kind of like 11 – I mean, because each chapter in these books is roughly the length of one of our children's books, which typically take us, in the past, I don't know, three, four months to produce.

And so, when you have 11 of them all packed together, it's just – it's a lot of work. It's a joy to work on, but these ones take a team like Elijah and I a little bit of time. So, I don't know on timing what Volume Three looks like. I can't commit to that. But think we do intend to move forward and do some more.

**WOODS:** It is so illustration heavy too, that, Elijah, I don't know how you did it. I mean, it must have seemed almost insurmountable when you started.

**STANFIELD:** Yeah, all of the projects seem crazy when I start. Like: *There's no way I'm going to get this done*. But you just get into a zone, and you end up at the end.

**WOODS:** Well, congratulations to you guys on this, and I'm really glad to be able to have this conversation and release it on the day that the book comes out. So, again, we're talking about the second volume in your American history series.

This one is called, *America's History: 1776 to 1791*. And you can pick it up, at TomWoods.com/history. As simple as can be, TomWoods.com/history. Go get it. As I say, not only is it beautifully illustrated, not only is it written in a way that's compelling for kids, but it's a beautiful volume.

It's actually – it's kind of heavy when you hold it in your hand. It's meant to last. It's meant to be with your family for a long time. So, it's a great investment to have for the children you have now, the children you'll have in the future, the children they'll have.

They can all benefit from the tremendous work put into this particular volume. So, check it out, again, TomWoods.com/history. Gentlemen, thank you very much for your time.

**BOYACK:** Thank you, Tom.

**STANFIELD:** Thanks, Tom.