U.S.'s 1776 Commission Report

Why in news?

The White House recently released the 1776 Commission report, just days before president-elect Joe Biden would take his oath in office.

Why was the commission set up?

- In September 2020, US President Donald Trump signed an executive order to set up a "national commission to promote patriotic education" in the country.
- The move was aimed at pleasing his conservative voter base in the run-up to the November 3 elections.
- The initiative, dubbed the '1776 Commission', is an apparent counter to The 1619 Project.

What is The 1619 Project?

- The 1619 Project is a Pulitzer Prize-winning collection of essays on African American history of the past four centuries.
    - It explores the Black community's contribution in nation-building since the era of slavery to modern times.
- The Project is a special initiative of The New York Times Magazine.
- It was launched in 2019 to mark the completion of 400 years since the first enslaved Africans arrived in colonial Virginia's Jamestown in August 1619.
- The project was initiated by Nikole Hannah-Jones, a MacArthur Grant-winning journalist.
- The collection aims to reframe US history by considering what it would mean to regard 1619 as the nation's birth year.

What is Trump's intent in countering it?

- By attacking The 1619 Project, Trump hoped to win the support of conservatives.
- The conservatives oppose its central idea that US history should be reframed around the date of August 1619.
- They insist that the nation's story should be told the way it has been over the years – beginning with the year 1776 or from 1788.
    - 1776 was when the Declaration of Independence was signed
    - 1788 was when the US Constitution was ratified

- Trump also threatened to withhold federal funding from public schools that used school syllabi based on the 1619 Project.
- He said The 1619 Project claimed that the US was "founded on the principle of oppression, not freedom".
- He opines that the Left has warped, distorted, and defiled the American story.

What is the 1776 Commission?

- When he set it up, Trump was lagging behind president-elect Biden in polls for the presidential race.
- With this move Trump sought to activate his right-wing supporters by doubling down on what he described as "cancel culture", "critical race theory" and "revisionist history".
- Trump said then that students in their universities were inundated with critical race theory.
    - "This is a Marxist doctrine holding that America is a wicked and racist nation, that even young children are complicit in oppression, and that our entire society must be radically transformed."
- Trump said a new "1776 Commission" would –
    i. "encourage our educators to teach our children about the miracle of American history"
    ii. "make plans to honour the 250th anniversary of our founding,"
    iii. "teach the youth to "love America"
- Reportedly, the 18-member commission formed by Trump includes no professional historians.
- It however has a number of conservative activists, politicians and intellectuals.

What does the report say?

- The following is the declared purpose of the President's Advisory 1776 Commission:

i. to enable a rising generation to understand the history and principles of the founding of the United States in 1776
ii. to strive to form a more perfect Union

- The report mentions that the above required a restoration of American education.
- This can only be grounded on a history of those principles that is "accurate, honest, unifying, inspiring, and ennobling."
- A rediscovery of the shared identity rooted in the founding principles is said

to be the path to a renewed American unity and a confident American future.

Source: The Indian Express

