Teaching History: Fact or Fiction?

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In rare moments when Congress isn't preoccupied with the war, taxes or prescription drugs, Congress is worrying that American students don't know any American history. Congress is right to worry because this is true, but it doesn't follow that the federal government is capable of remedying the problem.
The National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the Nation's Report Card, reported that less than half of high school seniors demonstrate even a basic grasp of history. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni, in a report called "Losing America's Memory: Historical Illiteracy in the 21st Century," charged that 55 colleges and universities, including the most prestigious, have no American history requirement and only a fifth of colleges require any course in history at all.

On the other hand, some colleges do require courses in "non-Eurocentric culture or society," and that requirement can be filled by courses in human development, sociology, theater, dance or film. Social science requirements can be met by courses in women's studies.

In 1994, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) gave funds generously provided by the taxpayers to professors at the University of California Los Angeles to produce a volume prescribing what U.S. public school students ought to be taught about their country. When the 271-page book was published, called "National Standards for United States History," it was shot through with Multiculturalism, anti-Western bias, and the Politically Correct nonsense that all ethnic and gender groups are victims of white male oppression.

"Standards" was such an embarrassment that the U.S. Senate denounced it in a vote of 99 to 1, with even Ted Kennedy voting against it. Longtime American Federation of Teachers CEO Al Shanker said it was the first time a government ever tried to teach children to "feel negative about their own country."

After the public flap, the authors made some cosmetic changes in "Standards." But thousands of copies of the original book were already in use by schools and textbook publishers.

Congress should have learned that if we give taxpayers' money to the current crop of history professors, they will rewrite history to serve liberal dogmas. Congress didn't learn; it continues to include millions of dollars for the teaching of American history in various appropriations bills.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) includes a Civic Education program funded at $28.8 million for FY 2003 to teach the history of the Constitution. In addition to $10 million already provided for history in the NEH budget for next year, legislation is pending to provide another $25 million to NEH to set up state-run workshops to teach teachers of American history.

The easiest way to check out the biases of a history textbook is to look at its treatment of Senator Joseph McCarthy. "Standards," for example, which didn't include a single word about Paul Revere, Thomas Edison, the Wright brothers, Albert Einstein, or General Douglas MacArthur, inflicted 19 unfavorable mentions on McCarthy.

Almost everything the current generation "knows" about McCarthy is false. For example, he had nothing to do with the House Committee on Un-American Activities or with investigations of Hollywood; he limited himself solely to attacking the coverup of security risks in government.

Students and adults who want to learn the history that has been censored out of their textbooks should read Ann Coulter's current best-seller "Treason." Her book does an awesome job of describing the widespread infiltration of the Franklin D. Roosevelt and Truman Administrations by a vast network of Soviet spies and agents.

Coulter tells history with entertaining conservative spin to accentuate the facts, buttressed by 47 pages of fine-print documentation. The official release in 1995 of the Venona Papers proves there is no longer any doubt about the massive penetration of important positions by men who served the interests of the Soviet Union.

Coulter shows there is no longer any doubt about the willful, partisan coverup of this treason by the Democrats whose strategy was to target "McCarthyism" as the enemy and thereby deflect blame from FDR who called Stalin "Uncle Joe," Harry Truman who said "I like old Joe; Joe's a decent fellow," and Vice President Henry Wallace who was a blatant Soviet apologist.

The second way to check out the biases of social studies textbooks is to look at their treatment of Ronald Reagan. The liberal line is to accuse him of dangerous warmongering for challenging Soviet power with an anti-missile defense and rhetoric such as the "evil empire." Then, after Gorbachev did tear down the Berlin Wall, the liberals claimed that the Soviet Union wasn't any threat anyway.

Coulter accords Reagan the credit he deserves for rejecting the advice of the Democrats, the media, and even many in his own Administration, and adopting the brilliant strategy that won the Cold War without firing a shot.

Pulitzer-prize winning historian David McCullough told a Senate committee that "we are raising a generation of people who are historically illiterate." Ann Coulter's book is a must-read because it's a necessary antidote to that illiteracy.