"Gods and Generals" Presents Reality History

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"Gods and Generals" opened in movie theaters this past weekend, and at last we have a movie that presents truthful history rather than fiction or politically-correct revisionism. This epic recounts the gripping history of the Civil War prior to Gettysburg, and there isn't a dull moment in its awesome four hours.
The movie faithfully shows the sincere motives of the valiant men of principle on both sides. The movie shows that the northerners fought to preserve the Union, and Virginians fought to defend their homeland against federal troops sent into their state (southerners certainly did not die to defend slavery, since few southern soldiers owned any slaves).

Defending one's homeland evokes powerful passions. It's no accident that the Bush Administration chose the words "Homeland Security" to get Americans to accept the biggest expansion of government since the New Deal.

"Gods and Generals" doesn't take sides in the War between the States. Script writer and director Ron Maxwell presents a balanced picture of a time long ago, when religious faith defined a man's duty and when leaders, such as General Stonewall Jackson, were devout and outspoken Christians.

President Bush has asked Congress for $25 million to spread knowledge of American history, especially among young people, and to sponsor an annual National History Bee. But will the schools teach history as it really happened, or as the political correctness revisionists wish it had happened?

When the Federal Government financed a 271-page book in 1994 to prescribe "National Standards for United States History," it was a public relations disaster. The U.S. Senate repudiated it by a vote of 99 to 1, and Al Shanker said it was the first time a government tried to teach children to "feel negative about their own country."

The UCLA professors responsible for "Standards" then made cosmetic changes, but copies of the original book had already flooded schools and publishers and were easily available when the Goals 2000 law mandated the adoption of standards.

"Standards" has a 14-page section on the Civil War and Reconstruction, mostly revisionist history. It's hard to see how any historian could write 14 pages about the Civil War and never mention General Robert E. Lee or General Ulysses S. Grant, but "Standards" accomplished that feat.

On the other hand, "Standards" mentions Harriet Tubman six times, the Ku Klux Klan 17 times, and Senator Joseph McCarthy 19 times. The Gettysburg Address is mentioned once, but it doesn't rank as high as the 1848 feminist Declaration at Seneca Falls which is mentioned six times.

"Standards" instructs students to read Civil War fiction, suggesting at least a dozen novels. Conspicuously missing from the list is the greatest American novel about the Civil War period, "Gone With the Wind."

The most amazing example of feminist political correctness in the Civil War section is this question posed for high school students: "Why is the word `male' used for the first time in the Constitution in the 15th Amendment? Why were women excluded in the amendment?"

In fact, the word "male" does not appear in the 15th Amendment! The Constitution is and always has been a sex-neutral document, using only neutral words such as citizen, person, inhabitant, resident, President, Senator and Representative.

The appalling ignorance of American history by students must extend to their professors, too. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as the nation's report card, less than half of high school seniors have even a basic grasp of American history.

A Boston newspaper editorial entitled "The Disappearing History Term Paper" noted that the prize-winning essays for Prentice Hall's nationwide history competition prove that students are expected to write compositions based on feelings and impressions, not on research and evidence.

When I went to college, a student couldn't graduate without taking courses in both American and European history. Learning the basic facts of history was considered necessary to become an educated citizen, to appreciate our heritage, and to avoid repeating mistakes in the future.

Today, 55 colleges and universities, including the most prestigious, have no American history requirement and only a fifth of colleges require any course in history. On the other hand, some colleges do require courses in "non-Eurocentric culture or society," a requirement that can be met by courses in human development, sociology, theater, dance, or film.

Why have colleges and public schools stopped teaching American history? One reason is the fact that more than half of senior and junior high school teachers didn't major or minor in history in college.

Another reason is the current fad for teaching multiculturalism, the code word for teaching that all other cultures are superior to Western civilization. A third reason is the passion for falsely indoctrinating students that America is a land of oppression.

"Gods and Generals" can remedy a glaring gap in the teaching of American history. It's a must-see.