Trying To Teach Kids History

by Phyllis Schlafly Nov. 3, 2004

Google Ads are provided by Google and are not selected or endorsed by Eagle Forum

The flap over the Department of Education consigning 300,000 copies of "Helping Your Child to Learn History" to the dumpster is evidence anew that the Federal Government should have no role in education. Illiteracy and low scores in public schools are a national scandal, but it's hard to see how federal spending improves anything.

During the presidential campaign, both candidates vied with each other about how much federal money they would spend. John Kerry claimed that the Bush Administration failed to provide necessary funding for No Child Left Behind, and Bush spokesmen bragged that Bush "increased education funding more in four years than Bill Clinton did in eight years."

So what do we get for all this taxpayers' money? A case in point is the teaching of history.

"Helping Your Child Learn History" was a 73-page booklet published by the Department of Education to give advice to parents of pre-school through fifth-grade children. The booklet gratuitously included several favorable references to the infamous "National Standards for United States History," even obliquely suggesting that President Bush supports those Standards.

When Lynne Cheney, the wife of the Vice President, spotted these references, her staff communicated displeasure to the Education Department. The Department then destroyed its inventory of 300,000 copies, or in bureaucratese "recycled" them.

The UCLA professor who had been in charge of the National Standards project found this decision "extremely troubling." He called it "a pretty god-awful example of interference — intellectual interference. If that's not Big Brother or Big Sister, I don't know what is."

Note the inverted mindset of the typical academic. He thinks it is OK for Big Brother Federal Government to order students to study a revisionist, distorted, and inaccurate version of American history, but it is offensive for parents and citizens to demand that inaccuracies be omitted.

I suppose the liberals will soon be whining about "book burning," but as the media say, let's have a reality check. The National Standards for History was financed ten years ago by a $2 million grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to UCLA to write standards for how American history should be taught in grades 5 through 12.

The 271-page result, called National Standards for United States History, turned out to be so faulty as well as so anti-American that the Senate denounced it by a vote of 99-to-1. Lynne Cheney, who was NEH chairman when the grant was given, turned into a vigorous opponent, denouncing the volume as "politicized history," which it surely was.

National Standards was not a narrative of past events but was leftwing revisionism and Political Correctness. Almost every event in American history was described as though it had race or gender motives and effects, and all ethnic groups except white males were portrayed as oppressed and mistreated.

The P.C. flavor was established right off the bat when National Standards taught that calendar dates should be identified as B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) or C.E. (Common Era), rather than as B.C. (as in Before Christ) or A.D. (as in Anno Domini).

Leftwing bias showed itself in the skewed selection of historical figures. Dozens of obscure persons were singled out for study, while Paul Revere, Thomas Edison, the Wright brothers, General Robert E. Lee, Albert Einstein, Jonas Salk, and Gen. Douglas MacArthur were all omitted.

The anti-Communist Senator Joseph McCarthy received 19 unfavorable mentions, while students were told to study the influence of MTV, Madonna, Murphy Brown, and Roseanne, and to read Ms. Magazine and the writings of Betty Friedan and Margaret Sanger. The 1848 feminist Declaration at Seneca Falls was mentioned six times, putting it on a par with the Declaration of Independence and making it more important than the U.S. Constitution and the Gettysburg Address.

The late American Federation of Teachers chairman Al Shanker said that the History Standards was the first time a government ever tried to teach children to "feel negative about their own country."

After the national flap about the National Standards of United States History, the volume was slightly revised with cosmetic improvements. However, by that time the original volume had been shipped to school districts and book publishers, and no one knows which version is in more common use today.

Despite the discrediting of the taxpayer-financed History Standards project, it is obvious that the current crop of academic professionals is determined to drop the DWEMs (Dead White European Males) down an Orwellian Memory Hole and to replace history with Multiculturalism and Oppression Studies, featuring third-rate writers who attack Western Civilization as sexist, racist, and oppressive. Parents should check out the history books used in their local schools.