



Critics: Advanced Placement History Standards Promote Leftists' Cause

Critics charge that authors of the Advanced Placement (AP) American History standards have as their goal to indoctrinate students to take a favorable view of big government, as well as the various and sundry causes of those on the Left. The authors, however, insist that they mean only to “train a generation of students to understand their nation’s history and to be active citizens who can apply their understanding of the past to their daily lives.”



“Those who control the present control the past, and those who control the past control the future.” These words, penned by George Orwell in his classic dystopian novel *1984*, explain what is at stake with the effort of the private (but federally subsidized) College Board to develop a nationalized history curriculum.

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AP American History classes, offered in high school, allow students an opportunity to obtain college credit without having to take the class in college and pay tuition — thus making the course enticing to cost-conscious parents, and at least partially explaining its popularity.

It is essential to note that the students receive college credit not by the grade they make in the class, but by making a certain score on the national test.

The College Board, which developed the course, recently redesigned it, and conservative critics contend that these modified standards have created a course with an overall theme that America’s history is simply that of one oppression after another, with the predictable solution: increased federal government power.

Of particular concern to critics of the left-wing bias of this course is that many of the students who take this class will likely be the *leaders* of tomorrow.

As Daniel Henninger of the *Wall Street Journal* expressed it, it is an example of Orwell’s “memory hole,” providing a “mechanism for separating a society’s disapproved ideas from its dominant ideas.” In an article for *The New American*, Alex Newman quoted experts who argue that “the biggest problem with the new curriculum is its brazen effort to teach history through what analysts describe as a progressive lens.”

Larry Krieger, a retired AP history teacher, is considered the man most responsible for calling attention to what is happening. After examining the new “framework” of the revised curriculum, he declared, “I was shocked by what wasn’t in the framework and what was in the framework.” According to Krieger, the AP framework “ignores the philosophical underpinnings of the Declaration and the willingness of the signers to pledge ‘our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor’ to the cause of freedom.”

Stanley Kurtz, writing in *National Review*, agreed with Krieger, arguing that the new framework was



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tied to a “movement of left-leaning historians that aims to internationalize the teaching of American history.”

The authors of the new “framework” (course material over which the student will eventually be tested) have countered such criticism with an open letter defending their work. “The AP U.S. History course is an advanced college-level course — not an introductory U.S. history course,” they wrote in response to the charge that many important events and personalities are simply left out of the curriculum framework. “It is not meant to be students’ first exposure to the fundamental narrative of U.S. history.”

This raises an interesting question. If students do not receive “the fundamental narrative” of U.S. history in the AP class, exactly when *are* they going to receive it? The AP class is a substitute for the regular high-school class in history — students do not take *both* classes.

So what is left out and what is covered?

Krieger wrote a detailed analysis of what he considers the shortcomings of the College Board’s framework, noting, for instance, that it stated, “Many Europeans developed a belief in white superiority to justify their subjugation of Africans and American Indians.” He also found that the framework claims that, *unlike* other European colonizers, “the British-American colonies were characterized by the development of a rigid racial hierarchy.” Left out, however, are references to the Virginia House of Burgesses, the Puritan mission to build “a city upon a hill,” and the contributions of leaders such as Roger Williams and Benjamin Franklin. The AP class also fails to discuss the spiritual consequences of the Great Awakening and the pivotal role of the great preacher Jonathan Edwards.

The curriculum authors argued in their letter that local teachers could “populate the course with content that is meaningful to them and that satisfies their state mandates”; however, this misses an important point. *If a person or idea does not appear on the test, the pressure is intense not to teach it.* Classroom teachers across America understand this very well, since they have seen valuable class time taken away to meet the demands of increased federal testing requirements imposed by President Bush’s No Child Left Behind law. What gets taught is on the test, which covers only the framework, not whatever additional material a teacher opts to use in the classroom.

When Krieger read some of the practice test questions, and the proposed correct answers, he considered it obvious that the intent is to indoctrinate students into a liberal, big government viewpoint. For example, he noted a question that showed an image of a family living in poverty conditions. The “correct” answer, according to the College Board, was, “Government should act to eliminate the worst abuses of industrial society.” A suggested answer, which was the “wrong” answer, was, “Capitalism free of government regulation would improve social conditions.”

“What we have here,” Krieger said, “is a repetition of a theme: There’s another problem: the progressives come to the rescue, and who are the villains?” The villains are those who favor limited government.

It seems that those who created the new standards believe the assertion “intents equal results” — that is that progressivism’s good intentions means that progressivism was thereby “good,” though by most objective standards, progressivism has dramatically failed. Take, for instance, the well-being of minorities thanks to progressive efforts to help them. As Kurt Williamsen explained in “[Do Progressive Policies Hurt Black Americans?](#)” almost every government policy claimed to help black Americans — from wage laws to welfare and education initiatives — has done the opposite, oppressing blacks.

Those pushing the new framework insist that local school board members are not qualified to set



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standards, compared to professional historians. The goal is clear: the establishment of a national curriculum, determined by those of a more liberal persuasion. One of the AP standards' authors, Timothy Thurber, wrote a book entitled *Republicans and Race: The GOP's Frayed Relationship With African-Americans, 1945-1974*, in which he argues that some Republicans "believed that discrimination was not a serious problem." Suzanne Sinke, another of the AP "standards," teaches "migration and gender studies."

While school board members are understandably not experts in all the diverse subjects taught in their district's classrooms, in a representative form of self-government, at least they were elected to supervise the curriculum, and hire those who are qualified to teach history classes. Professional history teachers, at either the college or high-school level, should first teach the facts of American history, and then introduce the student to differing interpretations of those facts. It is not appropriate for the federal government or even a federally subsidized for-profit organization such as the College Board to dictate for the entire nation what students are supposed to think about our nation's history. Certainly an *opinion* about the facts of our history should not be considered "correct" on any evaluation instrument, whether it is a liberal or a conservative opinion. That would be the very definition of indoctrination.

Sadly, the Left's opinion of history has already been taught in the schools for decades, long before the left-wing nationalized standards. When the AP standards became a hot topic in Oklahoma, an Advanced Placement instructor at Edmond's Memorial High School told the *Oklahoman* newspaper that she teaches that America is an exceptional place. Although she described herself as a "conservative Christian," she argued that America is "exceptional" at turning things around. "There were capitalists who gouged people," she explained, until rescued by Teddy Roosevelt and other "progressive" politicians. However, labeling capitalism as negative and the progressive era as positive can hardly be called "conservative." This example partially explains why so many young people emerge from our nation's public high schools with a warped sense of conservatism, free enterprise, and the proper role of government.

The progressives of the early 20th century largely rejected the concept of limited government, as it was structured by the Framers of the U.S. Constitution. They insisted that government should be freed from the "shackles" of the Constitution and allowed increased power so as to correct the real or alleged "evils" in society. This idea, however, was decidedly *not* the conservative view of the proper role of government. In 1920, the Republican nominee for president, Senator Warren Harding of Ohio, summed up the conservative opposition to the progressive philosophy as follows: "All human ills are not curable by legislation." (See this author's article in the January 19, 2015 issue of *The New American*, "The Libel: Warren Harding Was Our Worst President.")

If "conservative" can be recast as supporting the "progressive" philosophy of increased governmental regulation, and the denigration of capitalism, it is no surprise that liberals are so desperate to control the teaching of history in our public schools. In my upcoming book, *History's Greatest Libels*, a chapter is devoted to the charge that Thomas Jefferson had at least one child by a slave woman. This accusation, which I concluded was unlikely, was mentioned by defenders of President Bill Clinton during the Monica Lewinsky scandal, in a prime example of how the falsification of history can be used for political purposes.

To paraphrase George Orwell, if one can control what is taught about our nation's past to the next generation of Americans, then one can surely expect to control the future.



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Steve Byas is a professor of history and government at Hillsdale Free Will Baptist College in Moore, Oklahoma. His book, History's Greatest Libels, will be available in August.



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