

debate forum



PERVERTING OUR CURRICULUM

By Rana Odeh

The Texas State Board of Education, on a 10-5 vote (with all Republicans on the board voting in favor on March 12, 2010), gave preliminary approval to new social studies curriculum standards that will be used in Texas public schools after reviewing about 300 amendments during its January and March meetings. The new amendments would particularly stress the superiority of American capitalism and question the Founding Fathers' commitment to a purely secular government.

One amendment specifically includes deleting the word "capitalism" from all textbooks, replacing it with "free enterprise system." Of course, if you put the word "free" in front of anything, Americans will love it! Neoliberal economics began when Reagan was elected in 1981, introduced by Friedman and Hayek, the two leading philosophical architects of dismantling the Welfare State, deregulating the economy, and promoting free enterprise without government regulations. The new curriculum will add the teachings of Friedman and Hayek to all economics textbooks. Making sure students get a well rounded view of the benefits and shortfalls of alternative economic systems is crucial, but considering the dramatic shift to the right and appraisal of the "free enterprise system," students will be taught to favor neoliberalism over the other schools thought. Many Americans finally realize (now that unemployment has reached double digits) that capitalism, big corporations and big banks, provide no support or benefit to the common people. Republicans fear that the support for capitalism is dwindling, and the best way to guarantee its continuity is to brainwash the next generation of students.

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2003 shows that American students spend 1,061 hours of time in school each year which puts us in third place, closely following Korea (1,067 hours) in the number of hours students spend in school per year. The U.S., however, has the smallest differential gap between total time (hours) in school vs. time of instruction, which means American students spend the most proportional time listening to a teacher lecture vs. lunch, play, exercise, etc. Teachers in the U.S. are allotted more time in the classroom to breed a new generation of programmed robots.

During the week, many American students spend more time in the hands of teachers than in the hands of their parents. Teachers help raise their students and greatly influence their mind sets, thought processes, characters and personalities. It is crucial that students are taught to think critically from an early stage of childhood in school and out of school. Unfortunately, the American school system already fails to do so. The current pedagogy already lacks a critical thinking quality, and the current curriculum already fails to recognize or teach many significant historical figures and events. Shifting curriculum'sofar(onedirection)anddeletingmore historical, influential figures will only further

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demolish any hope for teaching children how to think critically. American students do not think for themselves; they come out of high school knowing what they were taught in grade school and not much, if anything, else. Perverting our curriculum furthermore will create a new generation of even more narrow minded adults.

The fear of communism has been engraved into the American psyche, even though communism is not taught in American schools. People, old and young, fear and oppose communism along with any system that resembles it (socialism), but will admit that he/she does not know anything about it. The problem with brainwashing children is that the fear or bias is passed down from generation to generation. The young people in opposition to communism today did not even have to rehearse bomb drills during the red scare.

The Board of Education members are elected, they are not teachers, educators or experts. They are elected politicians who know nothing about pedagogy or social studies. It is an offense that they are allowed to make such significant changes in our children's curriculum. The board should consist of teachers elected by other teachers or educators and such significant decisions should be reviewed by other professional experts including child development scientists and sociologists.

People everywhere should be outraged; this decision goes beyond Texas because it is one of the largest textbook buyers in the country. Other states can choose to, and are likely to, adopt the same textbooks that would misinform Texans. Imagine the future potential of the world with thousands of Rush Limbaughs or Glenn Beck's.

It is not too late; there is still something we can do about it! Once the Texas Education Agency posts the extensive revisions on their Web site in mid April, an official 30-day public comment

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period will begin. At that time, you can send comments with suggested changes to: rules@state.tx.us. After the comment period, the board will then consider additional updates and final adoption at its May meeting. I urge you to send all your comments to the above address. Our children are counting on us for a positive future.

Rana Odeh is a graduate of the University of Dayton with a degree in English and philosophy. Her research and writings focus on issues of race, class and gender. She can be reached at contactus@daytoncitypaper.com

AMERICAN HISTORY: THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE LEFT WING HISTORIANS

By David H. Landon



I am both an official student of history with my B.A. in history and political science from Manchester College and an unofficial student of history from my hobby of closely following the current events as they have unfolded during my lifetime. Determining who decides exactly what history should be taught to the children of our country is a critical issue and for the last 30 years has been a one-sided affair.

For decades the decisions on what is taught have been influenced and skewed by an increasingly left-of-center academia. The end result is that most American History textbooks for high school and college students paint a picture of our history as primarily a collection of abuses to minorities and people from other countries by old white guys who were "capitalist pigs," while either ignoring or giving scant coverage to the events of this nation which are examples of "American exceptionalism."

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An examination of the textbooks now in use show example after example of this bias. Normally speaking, the issue is not whether or not this historical event or that historical event happened. I'm sure most of the texts are probably factual although I recently read of one text that covers "Truthers" raising questions about Bush planning 9/11. Please, snap out of it! The issue is what weight to give each of the events in relationship to the other events discussed in the text. What emphasis to place on each event and whether or not the text provides an interpretation of the events that is biased are the critical questions.

For example, obviously both Iran-Contra and the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union really happened. One widely used high school textbook spent three pages on Reagan's role in Iran-Contra and one paragraph on Reagan and the fall of the Soviet empire. Surely America's role in the freeing of millions of people living under the harshness of the Soviet system merits more than a paragraph in a text that devotes three pages to Iran-Contra. The balance for most of the texts being used in our high schools and colleges has long since vanished.

For another popular story in current history texts, the authors apparently channeled the late President Kennedy who assured them that it was his intention to get us out of Vietnam in his second term, despite all evidence to the contrary. At the same time these same texts credit Richard Nixon with the build-up of U.S. troops in Vietnam.

Facts are troublesome things as some wise man once said. When Kennedy died there were 25,000 American troops in Southeast Asia. And at the time of his death there were plans for the withdrawal of 1,000 troops, which were for the most part an engineering battalion whose mission had been completed. However, there wasn't a plan to withdraw the other 24,000 troops. When Nixon took office five years later there were 553,000 U.S. personnel in Vietnam, which was reduced to fewer than 155,000 by the end of his first term in office. And yet in many texts Nixon is credited with escalating the war. Again, these texts show a liberal bias that distorts the actual history of the war. There are many, many such examples.

The State of Texas through the Texas Board of Education recently attempted to address this growing imbalance. In Texas, the State Board has approved a social studies and history curriculum that will put more emphasis on conservative ideology and accomplishments, while at the same time looking at some iconic liberal ideas and personalities with a more critical eye. (For example: What was so great about the Great Society whose policies by many accounts encouraged the break-up of families and also locked many families into generations of poverty?)

The proposed history text approved by this Texas board begins with the notion that there are some things to celebrate about the history of this country. The book for example recognizes American capitalism as an economic system that has brought unprecedented prosperity to this country and that there is no reason to apologize for that success. It also attempts to bring balance by covering not only liberal thought and movements that have swept this country during our history, but attempts to show conservative thought as well. It also addresses the issue of the Founding Fathers and the degree to which this country is a strictly secular nation.

While I am heartened by the push-back against the creeping liberalization in the writing of American history texts, this board does give me some concern. When the pendulum has swung so far to the left there is the danger that it will now swing too far to the right in order to compensate.

America is still the shining city on a hill and our history books should reflect that fact. We still must discuss our failures and shortcomings, but let's keep them in perspective. Slavery was a dark passage that needs to be revealed and reviewed in these texts. But let's not make the KKK the rule rather than the exception. Our history books should not be written as an apology for who we have been as a people. America is as much a noble idea as it is a country, an idea that is the embodiment of freedom as the natural state of man and his pursuit of that idea. This is what our history books must teach future generations.

David H. Landon is the former Chairman of the Montgomery County Republican Party Central Committee. He can be reached at contactus@daytoncitypaper.com

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126 N. Main Street | Suite 240 | Dayton, Ohio 45402 | Phone: 937-222-8855 | Fax: 937-222-6113