




Minnesota's Proposed Social Studies Standards

Excerpts of Review by John Fonte (senior fellow at the Hudson Institute)



Some University of MN History Professors

"A letter from a group of academic historians at the University of Minnesota essentially calls for replacing this draft with the ideological framework of the national history standards. These historians complain that the current draft paints American history in too positive a light. Instead of using terms like 'settlement' and 'exploration'" they prefer to describe early American history as one of 'conquest,' 'subjugation,' 'exploitation'" and 'enslavement.' Thus, they want the standards to emphasize the 'genocidal impact' of the 'European incursions' in the Americas.

They see American history primarily in terms of slavery for African-Americans, genocide for American Indians, subjugation for women, xenophobia for immigrants, exploitation for poor people, and economic bullying for other nations. (One wonders why so many people from all over the world are trying (sometimes disparately) to emigrate to this 'racist' land and become Americans.)

They ridicule the idea that America was 'defending freedom' in the struggle against communism in Viet Nam and Korea. (That would be news to the thousands of Vietnamese and Korans who fled communist tyranny for American freedom.) They even ridicule the idea that there is such a thing as 'our history.' "

"Any fair-minded observer would recognize the [proposed] Minnesota standards as balanced and comprehensive."

"Far from being 'inappropriate,' nothing is more 'appropriate' in a democracy than for American public schools to teach American values to American children. This is why Americans created public schools in the first place. This is why we agree to pay taxes for public schools. This is at the heart of American democracy."

"These critics need to be reminded that the national history standards that were published in the 1990s, unfortunately turned out to be a biased and flawed set of standards. They not only created a great uproar across the nation, but were actually condemned by the US Senate in an overwhelmingly bi-partisan 99-1 vote. Not surprisingly, both of Minnesota's Senators at the time (1995), Democrat Paul Wellstone and Republican Rod Grams, voted to condemn the national history standards."

"It is not 'Eurocentric' to emphasize the study of Western ideas and institutions and the principles of America's founders; it is common sense and essential for education for citizenship in our nation."

"To understand today's world, students from all over the globe, not just American ones, have to be thoroughly grounded in the history of Western institutions. Not surprisingly, this is exactly what the top students in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan are doing today. It is not 'Eurocentric' to emphasize the study of Western ideas and institutions and the principles of America's founders; it is common sense and essential for education for citizenship in our nation.

In fact, the large influx of non-Western immigrants into the U.S. means that it is more, not less, important for all American students to gain a thorough understanding of the principles and origins of our liberal democracy and our Western heritage. As Sidney Hook put it more than a decade ago, precisely because America is a 'pluralistic, multiethnic, and uncoordinated society' all citizens need a "prolonged schooling in the history of our free society, its martyrology, and its national tradition." Just as a hundred years ago it was more important for immigrant children to understand the ideas and institutions of eighteenth century America than those of the Czar's empire, the Ottoman provinces, and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, so today it is more important for the children of new immigrants to understand the (Western) ideas and institutions of eighteenth century America than those of eighteenth century Asia, Africa, and Latin America."