

## Schools Are Crucial Battlefield in the War of American Ideals

**W**ho crammed U.S. culture into the Cuisinart? It's being whirled and chopped, mashed and sliced, into an unrecognizable and unpalatable mass.

One disagreeable instance is the Smithsonian Institution's dispute with World War II veterans, plus a few million Americans with memories, over the museum's exhibition on the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Japan.

Word got out that trendy Smithsonian revisionists were spinning an MTV version of the war in the Pacific — that is, a vengeful United States devastating a Japan that was valiantly defending its traditional culture.

The critical barrage that resulted now has put the museum's tendentious script into major rewrite. It reportedly is at last reflecting that World War II may have been just a bit more complicated, and that the Japanese played very rough.

The Smithsonian seems to be running amok in a crusade to reeducate us dummies about the American past. Rejection of the Western tradition and liberal democracy, along with distaste for the centrality of science and technology, are pervading the institution these days. (The *Wall Street Journal* published a scathing and specific editorial on Oct. 25.) Visitors to Washington be warned — walk skeptically through “the nation's attic.”

Another case of roughing up the culture is the proposed national standards for teaching U.S. and world history, mandated by Congress.

Fueled by \$2.2 million in tax money, a study group devoted two years to devising standards for teaching history in elementary and high schools. The result conforms to the current academic conceit that race, class and gender determine all.

The recipe consists of 1 cup stale Marxism, 3 tablespoons of visceral disdain of the American experience and 2 heaping teaspoons of “inclusion.” (Inclusion these days means pretty much the exclusion of those who aren't, in the fashionable

phrase, people of color.) Add dollops of radical egalitarianism, anticapitalism and angry feminism; blend well and pour down the kiddies' throats.

As indicative instances, the Constitution is barely mentioned, and the “Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments” (from the 1848 women's suffrage organizing session) is judged significantly more important than the Gettysburg Address.

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Other recommendations are that it would be dandy if pupils became familiar with Mansa Musa, a 14th-century West African king, and if the youngsters were able to analyze the “architecture, skills, labor systems and agriculture” of the Aztecs (though without noting their practice of human sacrifice).

There's also a chain-jerker of a question in the world history standards: “To what extent may the spread of (European-transmitted) disease have made it easier to make converts to Christianity?”

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On and on it perversely goes. “We really need to open up the mental prison that we have created” in teaching U.S. history, solemnly opines Professor Gary Nash, director of the University of California at Los Angeles National Center for History in the Schools and a standards guru.

Well, these “standards” are to be merely advisory, we're assured. Local school boards still will make the calls — those not yet captive of the educrats and unionists — won't they?

Sort of, but there are two big problems here. One is the textbook industry. Not surprisingly, publishers will tailor their books to whatever intellectual imprimatur will ensure sales.

The second and allied problem: Should the history standards be ratified in their present form by a commission to be appointed by President Clinton, the momentum, and the pressure, will be for local boards to take up that march.

Lynn V. Cheney, director of the National Endowment for the Humanities when the standards were funded, called the product “a travesty.”

“I think they're not only likely to bring an end to the standards movement but will cause a final erosion in people's faith in public education,” she said.

How in the name of Herodotus did such politicized standards get formulated? Historian Paul Johnson has written, “In the last resort, our civilization is what we think and believe. The externals matter, but they cannot stand if the inner convictions which originally produced them have vanished.”

History is our common memory, and those who define it are also largely defining the future — and for many of the “definers,” the “inner convictions” that have been America's ballast are unacceptable.

If the mass of Americans don't go berserk soon over the contempt with which the national nannies are manhandling (so to speak) tradition and institutions, we might as well shred the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to insulate the attic.

These revisionist teaching standards need a whole lot of revising.

**By Woody West  
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