



## A Lesson in History, Now Known as “Social Studies”

And that is why when you ask a young American to name America’s wars in chronological order they are not only stumped when it comes to dates, they don’t even know whom these wars were fought against. Jay Leno has performed a valuable service by interviewing average individuals on the streets of Los Angeles and asking them simple questions about American history. Some of these brightly dressed ignoramuses didn’t even know whom we fought against in the Revolutionary War.



And if you ask any of them about Europe’s wars against the Muslims, you might as well be talking about dancing on the moon. Europe is a place with a tower called Eiffel, a place where the Beatles came from, a place where the Pope lives, and a place where they eat croissants. I’m sure that if you asked the dummies in Los Angeles to tell you where the Pope lives, they’d have no idea. But back in 2006 (Jan. 26-Feb. 1), the French newspaper *L’Express International* thought it a good idea to remind Frenchmen of some of their own interesting cultural as well as culinary history: where their delectable “croissants” came from.

It seems that a set of memorable dates had something to do with it: It started with the victory of the French over the Muslims in 732 at Poitiers; the reconquest of the Iberian peninsula from the Muslims by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492; the defeat of the Muslims in the naval battle of Lepante in 1571; the siege by the Turks of Vienna in 1683; and the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1918. The “croissant” was created, believe it or not, to commemorate Christian Europe’s victory against the Islamic Turkish “horde” before the ramparts of Vienna. The crescent is the symbol of Islam, and the word “horde” is of Mongol origin. So every time you eat a croissant, think of the profound victory it represents.

Of course, you can be sure that this is not the sort of history taught in a multicultural American classroom. And now that we know of the anti-Islamic origin of the croissant, there may be a movement to outlaw it. The multiculturalists may also find the hymn of the U.S. Marine Corps offensive. It has some controversial lines in it: “From the Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli.” Do they not violate the sensitivities of the Mexicans and the Arabs of Tripoli? After all, why should we celebrate and take pride in the defeat of the Mexicans and Arabs? There are Americans, such as Jane Fonda, who were happy with our defeat in Vietnam.

Even public school administrators are concerned about the ignorance of American students, as they should be. Lisa Zamosky expressed her concern in *District Administration* magazine (“Solutions for School District Management”) in March 2008:

Walk into any low-performing middle school classroom in your district and you may be shocked to find children unable to identify the state or country in which they live. Many may not know the continents or the U.S. president. “By fifth grade kids should at least know what the U.S. Constitution is and the Bill of Rights and know that we have a president, a Congress and a court system,” says Peggy Altoff, social studies facilitator for Colorado Springs (Colo.) School District 11



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and past president of the National Council for the Social Studies.

However, because such basics are not being taught at the elementary level, kids in middle and high school are not performing well, according to Altoff. "At any low-performing school, they spend most of their days on reading, writing and math."

It's year six of the No Child Left Behind law, and social studies has suffered greatly. In spite of the public outcry over the law's testing mandates and limited federal funding, some educators believe most of the public doesn't know about core academic subjects being squeezed out of the K12 public school curriculum. Given that social studies education isn't tied to high-stakes testing, instructional time for it has taken a significant hit, particularly at the elementary grades, since the implementation of NCLB. This has educators deeply concerned about their ability to prepare children to become active citizens and about the long-term viability of the nation's democracy [sic].

How much time does it take to inform students of the name of the country or state they live in? As for learning about our Constitution, yes, it does require some time. But the idea that the schools, being forced by No Child Left Behind to teach to the test, have no time to teach basic history or geography is a cop-out. The schools have the children six hours a day, five days a week. There is certainly enough time in that schedule to spend an hour or two on "social studies."

Leave it up to the public educators to make excuses for not doing their jobs. Not enough time, not enough money, not enough books, not enough this or that. The average classroom teacher is portrayed as a harassed human being with not enough support from his or her superiors, not enough training, not enough knowledge, and, unfortunately, not enough intelligence to even know what should be taught.

Of course, since public education is now controlled by the federal government, politicians are expected and eager to get into the act. Thus, when H.R. 3989, the Student Success Act, reached the House Floor in late February, controversy flared up. According to Marion Herbert, writing in *District Administration*, April, 2012:

The Student Success Act is a bill sponsored by Rep. John Kline, chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, that would revamp No Child Left Behind. The bill was approved in the education committee on a party line vote by Republicans on March 6. If it becomes law, it will eliminate adequate yearly progress (AYP) and the federal standards at which students are held, allowing states and local school districts to set their own benchmarks. This move has advocates for minority students and special education and disabled students more than concerned.

"[The Student Success Act] abandons accountability for the achievement and learning gains of subgroups of disadvantaged students who, for generations, have been harmed by low academic expectations," reads a letter led [sic] from the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights sent to Rep. Kline on Feb. 16. The letter was signed by 41 national organizations representing education advocates and includes the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, the National Center for Learning Disabilities, and the Autism National Committee. "The bill would thrust us back to an earlier time when states could choose to ignore disparities between children of color, low-income students, ELLs, and students with disabilities," continues the letter.

Thus, any attempt by Republicans to return to the states and local school districts more control over their public schools will be met by massive opposition from those who want more federal involvement in



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education, not less. And should a Republican win the presidency in November, we can expect no end to the education wars. The only recourse for parents will be to get their children away from the line of fire.

In case you still want to know what the category called "Social Studies" is all about, here is how the National Council for the Social Studies defines its mission:

In 1992, the Board of Directors of National Council for the Social Studies, the primary membership organization for social studies educators, adopted the following definition: Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.

In other words, the purpose of Social Studies is to make sure that every student becomes a liberal Democrat. Also, unknown to this writer until now, "Social Studies" is not plural. The above mishmash of subjects should also reassure you that the educators know what they are doing, despite the fact that some of their students don't know the name of the country they live in.



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