



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on March 3, 2015

## Advanced Placement History Standards Create Controversy in Oklahoma

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*, largely sum up the contest over AP (Advanced Placement) history standards in Oklahoma.



When conservative State Representative Dan Fisher (97 percent Conservative Index score on the *Oklahoma Constitution* newspaper’s ratings of the state legislature) introduced a bill to force changes in the AP history class standards as they are presently taught in Oklahoma’s public schools, he provoked a firestorm of opposition.

AP American History classes, offered in high school, allow students an opportunity to obtain college credit without having to take the college course and pay tuition. The College Board, which developed the course, recently redesigned it, and herein lies the controversy. Conservative critics claim that these modified standards have created a course with an overall theme that America’s history is simply that of one oppression after another.

Peter Wood, of the National Association of Scholars, said in his description of the new course,

One group oppressing another is the dominant motif of AP U.S. history, a history of the oppressors always finding new ways to impose their desire for wealth and gain and the people being repressed always resisting.

National Public Radio (NPR) noted that concerns about the liberal slant of the standards have been expressed in other states as well, including Texas, Georgia, Nebraska, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

NPR said that not only are America’s Founders “hardly even mentioned,” but neither are civil rights leaders Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King. The College Board responded that the guidelines are not intended as a “comprehensive curriculum.”

Not surprisingly, Oklahoma Representative Fisher’s effort to thwart the one-sided presentation of American history led to predictable news reports, such as the *Tulsa World* story claiming that he wanted to “do away” with AP history. Fisher told *The New American* that he “never called for the abolition of AP history classes.”

Fisher said the content of the newly revised course is “very skewed overall,” with “an agenda to emphasize all things wrong with America.” Certain events and individuals, he said, are emphasized to the “omission of other events — designed to give a negative view” of the country.

“We do not object” to bad things in American history being taught, such as slavery and the Indian removals, Fisher asserted, explaining that he just wants a balanced presentation of the nation’s history,



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to include a study of the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and America's War for Independence.

While some defenders of the new AP American history course deny the charge that the class does emphasize negative events in the nation's history while largely ignoring its positive aspects, other supporters of the new course actually celebrate the changes. *The Guardian* quoted a student at Jenks High School (outside Tulsa) who said it was *good* to "emphasize the negative" events in American history. George Kirk of Norman (home of the University of Oklahoma) had much the same view. "Our classes ought not to be indoctrinating young minds with an intentionally nationalistic compromised view of history," he insisted.

But one of the more interesting comments about the course came from an AP instructor at Edmond, Oklahoma's Memorial High School. Patti Harrold, who describes herself as a "conservative Christian," told the *Oklahoman* newspaper that she teaches that America is an exceptional place. "America is exceptional at turning things around," she noted, adding, "There were capitalists who gouged people, but we turned it around, and many things grew out of it — the Progressive Era, Teddy Roosevelt, national parks."

Harrold's words illustrate how American history is often taught to promote an ever-growing government, even by someone, no doubt sincere, who describes herself as a "conservative." According to this "conservative" AP American history teacher, the country was suffering under the "capitalists who gouged people," until it was rescued by Teddy Roosevelt and other progressive politicians. Labeling capitalism as negative and the progressive era as positive can hardly be described as "conservative." This partly explains why so many young people emerge from our nation's public high schools with a warped sense of conservatism, the free enterprise system, and the proper role of government.

The progressives largely rejected the concept of limited government, as it was structured by the Founders in the U.S. Constitution, insisting that government should be freed from the shackles of the Constitution and allowed increased power so as to correct real or alleged "evils" of society. This was *not* the conservative view of the proper role of government, and 1920 Republican presidential candidate, Senator Warren Harding of Ohio, summed up the conservative opposition to the progressive philosophy: "All human ills are not curable by legislation." (See the article in the January 19, 2015 *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, is it any surprise that liberals are so desperate to control the teaching of history in our public schools? To paraphrase 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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