

Will the American Past Become Propaganda?

By Don Sutherland

Back in February when news about the Trump Administration's possible closure of the U.S. Department of Education first broke, I discussed [four potential scenarios](#). Scenario 2: Partial Rollback/State-Led Ideological Control was rated as being the most likely outcome.

That scenario is as follows:

Rather than a total shutdown, budget cuts and policy shifts could significantly weaken the ED. This approach would grant states greater control, allowing conservative regions to implement ideological education policies, leading to stark curriculum differences nationwide.

On September 17, U.S. Constitution Day, the U.S. Department of Education took a step toward an ideological focus. It [announced an initiative](#) to renew patriotism, strengthen civic knowledge, and foster a shared understanding of America's founding principles among students and communities nationwide. On the surface, this would seem to be a timely announcement, given that the United States is nearing the 250th anniversary of its declaring independence.

Content matters. The principles and examples on which shared understanding will be advanced are key. The coalition behind the initiative includes numerous ideologically-driven organizations. It notably excludes leading sources of historical information including the American Historical Association, Organization of American Historians, American Antiquarian Society, and Society for Historians of the Early American Republic. Hopefully, their exclusion is an oversight and will be corrected soon.

If not, a dangerous foundation will be laid. When history is pressed into the service of ideology, it ceases to be a mirror for understanding and becomes a tool for control. A curriculum filtered through political litmus tests erodes the public's capacity to think critically, replacing evidence with myth and inquiry with loyalty. When governments or coalitions decide which chapters to exalt and which to erase, classrooms turn into echo chambers, and students inherit a narrowed vision of their nation's past. Such selective storytelling not only distorts the record but also weakens the very civic fabric it claims to strengthen, sowing division where shared understanding should flourish and leaving future generations vulnerable to manipulation and distrust.