

## **Do American History Teachers Value Feelings over Knowledge**

**By Robert Holland and Don Soifer**

Nearly half of American history teachers believe it is less important that their students understand the common history, ideas, rights, and responsibilities that tie the country together as Americans than that they learn to celebrate the unique identities and experiences of its different ethnic, religious, and immigrant groups.

Advocates of radical "social-justice" multiculturalism in many university schools of education -- the places where most K-12 teachers are trained -- continue to oppose assimilation with a common culture while instead seeking to radically transform an "oppressive" America.

A new survey of public high-school social-studies teachers done for the American Enterprise Institute indicates that they have gained a strong foothold in high schools.

Another sign of the indoctrination of this radical strain of multiculturalism was the finding that 37 percent of the history teachers believed it was "absolutely essential" that they teach their students "to be activists who challenge the status quo of our political system and seek to remedy injustices."

Not surprisingly, only a little more than one-third of the teachers deemed it "absolutely essential" for their students to "know facts" (such as the location of the fifty states) or dates (such as the attack on Pearl Harbor). After all, why let facts get in the way of advocacy?

While only about six in ten teachers thought it imperative for their students to (1) understand such concepts as federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances, and (2) know about the American Founding, the Civil War, and the Cold War, a whopping 76 percent deemed it critical for students "to be tolerant of people and groups who are different from themselves."

Given that feelings trump facts in so many classrooms, is it any wonder that there has been such a precipitous decline in Americans' knowledge of their own country's history?

While ideological indoctrination is a major concern, perhaps an even bigger one is the lack of academic preparation of prospective K-12 history teachers. Numerous studies have found that tiny minorities of history teachers have majored in the subject, and many have taken little more than a few survey courses.

A basic problem is that history commonly is fitted under the umbrella of social studies, a mishmash of everything from global studies to sociology. State certification requirements equate "social studies education" with knowledge of history, when in fact a would-be teacher may not even have studied any history, or may have very little formal preparation in the subject.

Nearly a third of history teachers responded to the AEI survey that textbooks are "becoming less and less important in the classroom." When teachers are guided by little background studying history themselves, and only fuzzy state standards to guide curriculum, a parent should wonder what precisely his or her children are learning in American history class.

This is especially a problem in schools where state content standards for American history are regarded as weak or vague, providing little guidance about what facts, concepts, and historical figures students at different grade levels are expected to know.

A survey of federal applications by school districts seeking dollars to expand their teaching of American history exposes many stark shortcomings in this regard.

Such is the case in Illinois, where state officials responded to a looming shortage in qualified teachers of American history by lowering the passing score on the state certification exam. The change raised the passing rate from 56 percent of candidates to over 80 percent. Lincoln's home state also has among the nation's weakest American history standards.

The Sacramento, CA school district explained that its students get only twelve instructional minutes per day in American history. So it is little wonder that only a third of their eleventh-graders score at a proficient level on the state history test.

Meanwhile, the radical National Association for Multicultural Education, which exerts a strong influence on teacher training, receives a large chunk of its operating funding from taxpayer-funded contracts with schools and school districts in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

With Americans' knowledge about our country's compelling origins and ideals in steady decline, and with classroom study of U.S. history increasingly replaced by facilitated conversations about feelings and social justice, it should be a matter of urgency for policymakers to improve both the quality and quantity of history teachers' academic preparation.

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**[http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2010/10/do\\_american\\_history\\_teachers\\_v.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2010/10/do_american_history_teachers_v.html)**