

The Dumbing-Down of America - HUMAN EVENTS

"Is our children learning?" as George W. Bush so famously asked. Well, no, they is not learning, especially the history of their country, the school subject at which America's young perform at their worst.

On history tests given to 31,000 pupils by the National Assessment of Education Progress, the "Nation's Report Card," most fourth-graders could not identify a picture of Abraham Lincoln or a reason why he was important.

Most eighth-graders could not identify an advantage American forces had in the Revolutionary War. Twelfth-graders did not know why America entered World War II or that China was North Korea's ally in the Korean War.

Only 20 percent of fourth-graders attained even a "proficient" score in the test. By eighth grade, only 17 percent were judged proficient. By 12th grade, 12 percent. Only a tiny fraction was graded "advanced," indicating a superior knowledge of American history.

Given an excerpt from the Supreme Court's 1954 decision *Brown v. Board of Education* -- "We conclude that in the field of pubic education, separate but equal has no place, separate education facilities are inherently unequal" -- and asked what social problem the court was seeking to correct, 2 percent of high school seniors answered "segregation."

As these were multiple-choice questions, notes Diane Ravitch, the education historian, the answer "was right in front of them."

A poster put out by the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, circa 1940, was shown and the question asked, "The poster above seeks to protect America and aid Britain in the struggle against ..." Four countries were listed as possible answers.

A majority did not identify Germany, though the poster contained a clue. The boot about to trample the Statue of Liberty had a huge swastika on the sole.

"We're raising young people who are, by and large, historically illiterate," historian David McCullough told *The Wall Street Journal*.

"History textbooks," added McCullough, "are "badly written." Many texts have been made "so politically correct as to be comic. Very minor characters that are currently fashionable are given considerable space, whereas people of major consequence" -- such as inventor Thomas Edison -- "are given very little space or none at all."

Trendies and minorities have their sensibilities massaged in the new history, which is, says McCullough, "often taught in categories -- women's history, African American history, environmental history -- so that many students have no sense of chronology ... no idea of what followed what."

But if the generations coming out of our schools do not know our past, do not who we are or what we have done as a people, how will they come to love America, refute her enemies or lead her confidently?

This appalling ignorance among American young must be laid at the feet of an education industry that has consumed trillions of tax dollars in recent decades.

Comes the retort: History was neglected because Bush, with No Child Left Behind, overemphasized reading and math.

Yet the same day the NAEP history scores were reported, The New York Times reported on the academic performance of New York state high school students in math and English. The results were stunning.

Of state students who entered ninth grade in 2006, only 37 percent were ready for college by June 2010. In New York City, the figure was 21 percent, one in five, ready for college.

In Yonkers, 14.5 percent of the students who entered high school in 2006 were ready for college in June 2010. In Rochester County, the figure was 6 percent.

And the racial gap, 45 years after the federal and state governments undertook heroic exertions to close it, is wide open across the Empire State.

While 51 percent of white freshman in 2006 and 56 percent of Asian students were ready for college in June 2010, only 13 percent of New York state's black students and 15 percent of Hispanics were deemed ready.

The implications of these tests are alarming, not only for New York but for the country we shall become in this century.

In 1960, there were 18 million black Americans and few Hispanics in a total population of 160 million. By 2050, African Americans and Hispanics combined will, at 200 million, roughly equal white Americans in number.

If the racial gap in academic achievement persists for the next 40 years, as it has for the last 40, virtually all of the superior positions in the New Economy and knowledge-based professions will be held by Asians and whites, with blacks and Hispanics largely relegated to the service sector.

America will then face both a racial and class crisis.

The only way to achieve equality of rewards and results then will be via relentless use of the redistributive power of government -- steep tax rates on the successful, and annual wealth transfers to the less successful. It will be affirmative action, race preferences, ethnic quotas and contract set-asides, ad infinitum -- not a prescription for racial peace or social tranquility.