


Back to Basics

A RETURN TO BASIC VALUES

Betraying Our History

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BY ALAN CARUBA ON JUNE 6TH, 2011

June 6, 1944 is a significant day in American history; the day that the Normandy invasion began, leading to the defeat of Nazi Germany. I was seven years old at the time and blithely ignorant of it.

Though it occurred 67 years ago, I am sure it is regarded as “ancient history” to the current generation in our nation’s public schools. In point of fact, the American Civil War had ended just 72 years before I was born, easily the lifetime of a man born at the end of that war or even one who had served in it.

June 6, 1944 marks D-Day and is the subject of many books and films, but many wars were being fought on the same day in different years.

In 1813, U.S. forces suffered a defeat by the British at the Battle of Stoney Creek in what is now called the War of 1812.

In 1862, during the Civil War, the Battle of Memphis was fought and the Union captured the city.

In 1918, during World War One, it marks the day the Battle of Belleau Wood resulted in the worst single day’s casualties for the U.S. Marine Corps.

In 1942, during World War Two, the Battle of Midway took place, turning the tide of war against the Japanese as U.S. dive bombers sunk a cruiser and four carriers in the Pacific theatre.

Like every single day of the year, a litany of battles and wars fills the history books and on any single day—like June 6, 1944—the lives of people and nations are changed forever in the ancient battle between good and evil.

It is understandable that children should be ignorant of history until they have been taught its highlights in school, but what are they being taught these days?

Most history books represent a *national curriculum* because what they include is determined by statewide purchases in Texas, California, and Florida. They account for thirty percent of the K-12 market.

In 2000, at the beginning of the decade, a study by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation involving 1,000 teenagers nationwide found that:



- 22% could not name the country from which the United States declared its independence!
- 17% did not know there were 13 original colonies.
- 15% did not know the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.
- 24% did not know who fought in the Civil War and 13% thought it was between the U.S. and Great Britain.
- 19% could not identify the three branches of the U.S. government.
- 31% did not know who wrote "The Star-Spangled Banner."

The questions asked in the survey represented a *fourth grade-level test for 8-9 year-olds*, but this level of ignorance must also be seen against a larger figure. By the time it was administered, the U.S. had spent more than \$125 billion on education over the previous twenty-five years. During that time SAT scores had *dropped 37 points*.

Is it little wonder that, in May 2011, the Bill of Rights Institute issued a call for support of civic education based on the discouraging results from the most recent National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP)?

The NAEP had found that fewer high school students reported being taught about the Constitution than in previous years. Only 67% reported studying the Constitution in 2010, down from 72% in 2006. "This leaves nearly a third of American students with no exposure to the Constitution, and 40% of those students are a voting age."

So, yes, we should pause and recall the courage of those men who stormed the beaches of Normandy and we should keep in mind that it is not "ancient history." Though that generation of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines is passing from the scene, some still live. Some veterans of the Civil War were still alive when I was born.

A nation has to have a collective memory of the events that shaped it and a collective knowledge of its most important, essential documents. If the statistics about more recent generations passing through our schools are any indication, they do not.

That is an act of betrayal. I can't prove that it is deliberate, but it surely does not bode well for a nation so poorly led by its elected representatives since June 6, 1944 that it constitutes an insult to the sacrifices and acts of valor that day represents.

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