



## Testimony on the American Heritage Act

Testimony by Michael J. Chapman given before the Minnesota House Education Committee on March 6, 2001. The American Heritage Education Bill HF 1028 was heard in Room 200 of the State Office Building at 8:15 AM. Thursday, March 29. See the footnotes below Michael's source references.

My name is Michael J. Chapman. I am a resident of Eden Prairie, a father of two children, a full time technical writer, and an author and education researcher. I am the founder of American Heritage Research, and many years, I have conducted curriculum reviews and given in-service training on teaching accurate, balanced history to educators throughout the nation.

Thank you the opportunity to speak in favor of House File 1028.

The purpose of the American Heritage Act IS NOT about the state "dictating" curriculum to local school districts. Rather, it is about the preservation of freedom. President Woodrow Wilson once explained: "A nation which does not remember what it was yesterday, does not know what it is today nor what it is trying to do." How can the people of the state of Minnesota "perpetuate the blessings of civil and religious liberty" as stated in our state constitution, if we no longer teach the next generation of leaders and citizens the truth about the source of our freedom?

I have found that textbooks within Minnesota schools frequently omit the truth of our heritage simply because of religious references. Example: in order to determine the root ideas behind our government, this popular eighth grade Minnesota textbook sites a study of 15,000 quotations from our founding era that were matched to the sources most often quoted by our founders. The textbook reports that the three most often quoted individuals were Montesquieu, Hume and Lock. Attributing these three to the enlightenment movement sweeping Europe, the authors conclude that America must be enlightenment-based.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, the authors ignore some important facts from the original study. Not mentioned in the textbook, but revealed in the actual study, THE BIBLE was directly quoted by our founders TWICE as often as the top three individuals combined! Ignoring this fact, the textbook concludes, "Here they were, the first people in history to have the chance to create an entirely new government based on Enlightenment principles." Clearly, the complete study indicates that the Bible had much more to do with our founding era than the enlightenment.

The French revolution, based on enlightenment principles led to anarchy and the reign of terror, and finally to the dictatorship of Napoleon. France has been through seven completely different forms of government since its revolution.<sup>2</sup> America alone, has remained a stable nation and is now the longest running constitutional republic in history.

This kind of omission is typical of lessons I've found in Minnesota from second grade through college. Example: a popular second grade Silver, Burdette and Ginn textbook <sup>3</sup> includes the "pledge of allegiance to the flag," but omits important phrases in a discussion list of definitions.

Not only is "under God" omitted from discussion, but also left out is the entire phrase, "...and to the Republic which it stands." These phrases represent the real importance of our national symbol. According to the accompanying lesson worksheet, children learn that "We say the pledge to honor our flag," not the Republic which it stands! Without a constant reminder of our true heritage contained within this simple pledge, our children will readily trade the "pledge of allegiance" the new "pledge to the earth" becoming popular in some schools. After all, isn't the "earth" more important than a "flag?"

Minnesota textbooks often present a negative bias of our Founders and the American Revolution, while portraying other nations in strictly positive terms. Without an accurate foundation from which to draw, it is easy to see how our students may come to view America negatively.

Example: even Thomas Jefferson, of all people, is accused of being a sexist and racist because of his use of the phrase, "All men are created equal" within the Declaration of Independence. This popular 4th grade Social Studies textbook states, "When Jefferson wrote that 'all men' were equal, he really meant 'all citizens.' Women and blacks were not included."<sup>4</sup> This is just silly. The publisher has simply applied a 20th century definition to a common 18th century use of the word "men." Jefferson was clearly referring to the species "human-kind," not a specific gender or race!

Likewise, this 8th grade textbook only mentions John Quincy Adams once, stating [quote]: " Adams stood [for] the old republican values [and] he represented the ruling elite, the wealthy, and the well educated. He was known as a harsh, stubborn person... [he] was not a strong leader because he received no popular support from the people."<sup>5</sup> [end quote]

Left out of this Minnesota textbook: At age 14, Adams received the Congressional appointment to the Court of Catherine the Great in Russia; He was a US Senator, US Minister to France and a US Minister to Britain, where he negotiated the Treaty of Ghent, ending the War of 1812. He was Secretary of State President Monroe. He was our 6th President, and after his term, he was re-elected to the Legislature and served as a US Congressman 18 consecutive years! (This doesn't sound to me like "he received no popular support!") He also tirelessly fought against the slave trade earning the nickname, "The Hell-Hound of Slavery."

The American Revolution is often debased, and our founders often described as [quote] "mobs of angry patriots." [end quote] Example: this textbook describes our war Independence as [quote], "a destructive civil war and a rebellion against England"<sup>6</sup> [end quote]

Yet in World History textbooks, the Russian Revolution is portrayed as [quote], "an extremely important event in modern world history," <sup>7</sup> in which, "Lenin captured the hopes of thousands..." [end quote]

Our children get fed a steady stream of inaccuracies supporting socialist history. example, this painting showing smiling peasants surrounding the benevolent Mao Zedong is portrayed as true, and includes this lesson text, [quote] "The Communists, meanwhile, had become very popular...Mao and his followers talked with thousands of people. The Communists also worked with farmers, showing them ways to produce more crops."<sup>8</sup> [end quote]

Compare that positive bias to the negative slant placed on this painting by Paul Revere depicting The Boston Massacre. It is introduced as "a propaganda piece," and the text states, [quote] "A band of unemployed laborers attacked the [British] guard...Patriots immediately branded the incident a "massacre" to gain sympathy their cause. ...Anti-British feeling ran highest in...Boston...Samuel Adams...whipped up crowds of protesters and wrote inflammatory newspaper articles."<sup>9</sup> [end quote]

Upon further study, one finds that these "inflammatory newspaper articles," were actually the "Committees of Correspondence," which were largely responsible the unity and cohesion of the Colonists preceding the Revolution. The three goals of the committee were: 1) to delineate the rights of Colonists; 2) To detail how these rights had been violated; and 3) to publicize these rights and the violations throughout the colonies. Samuel Adams labored over 20 years as a Patriot leader. He instigated the Boston Tea Party, signed the Declaration of Independence, called the first Continental Congress and served as a member of Congress until 1781. He helped draft the Massachusetts Constitution, served as Lt. Governor, under John Hancock, and later became the Governor of Massachusetts.

When it comes to economic lessons, the bias is even worse! While students get political cartoons of our Founding Fathers such as these [examples]; they are treated to scholarly-looking pictures of socialist leaders like this one of Karl Marx. The lesson text teaches the ideals of Marxism without explaining that his ideas failed. Notice the "thinking question:" "How might the point of view of a working class person differ from that of a middle class person?"<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, the lesson is meant to support the idea of socioeconomic class struggle. The textbook doesn't mention that in America, the middle-class IS a working class. Without understanding the foundation principles contained within our organic laws, children may never grow to understand the benefits of America's equal protection under the law - regardless of one's station in life.

Even the Soviet economy under Stalin is presented in positive tones. Example: this is a lesson from a typical 6th grade Social Studies textbook: "An economy completely controlled by government is called a command economy. Within just 20 years the Soviet Union became one of the world's strongest industrial nations. Thousands of railroad lines crisscrossed the country, linking towns and cities that had never been connected before. Around 1900 many Russian

farmers had never seen a tractor. By the 1940s Soviet factories were making more tractors than any other factories in the world."**11**

The lesson? A "command economy" must be good! Look at all the tractors! Likewise, this lesson on Cuba states: some people life became better under Castro's communist dictatorship. There is less poverty since Castro gained control**12**

Yet when it comes to the American free-market economy, students are taught: "Understanding Imperialism." This lesson text states: "The chief motivation behind imperialism is usually economic gain. Powerful nations can establish new markets their manufactured goods....Despite the importance of economics, Americans usually cited other reasons to justify their imperialism. Many Americans believed that they had a right and obligation to extend what they considered their superior culture to people less fortunate than themselves....Many imperialists believed that they had a God-given mission to spread Christianity..."**13**

Without an early understanding of the principles contained within our own founding documents, students will not be prepared to defend America's free-market system.

Under our content-poor Profile of Learning the situation is even worse. One of the few things found favorable by the recent Achieve/CBE assessment of our content standards, was a philosophy called "CONSTRUCTIVISM," defined by the state "as the premise that students use their prior knowledge to construct a personally meaningful understanding."**14**

This is the problem. Students are receiving incomplete and inaccurate data with which to construct their understanding of contemporary and political issues. example, High school students are to complete a performance package called "Themes of US History," in order to [quote]: "Understand the importance of key events...in the historical development of the United States."**15** [end quote] The state-model package DOES NOT utilize any foundational documents; instead, students are lead to a 1996 book called "The NEXT American Nation," in which the author accuses America's founders of being racists who demanded that immigrants give up their cultures.

American citizens are portrayed, not as individuals with equal protection under the law regardless of their cultural background, but as members of a racial, gender, or socioeconomic group engaged in class conflict. The recommended resources that help students "construct their personally meaningful understanding of our heritage," include such books as: "The Free and the Unfree: A New History of the United States" written in 1998; "We the Other People" written in 1976; "Multicultural America" 1995; "The Female Experience" 1977; "Freedom's Unfinished Revolution" 1996; and of course, no study of America's founding ideology would be complete without studying, The "Workingman's Declaration of Independence." When this package finally addresses our founding era, it not only gets our form of government wrong, but even suggests that our constitution came from the Iroquois Confederacy!**16**

Minnesota's 250 pages of new rules governing the licensing of teachers reflect these same ideas. Example: ALL TEACHERS - even gym teachers - are required to [quote]"understand the cultural content, world view, and concepts [of] Indian Tribal Government," and the "vital role of the American Indian value system..."**17** [end quote] While there is nothing wrong with studying Native American History; there is no similar requirement even teachers of History to understand America's founding principles, world view, or the vital role of our Founder's value system.

Several third-party evaluators of our education standards have given Minnesota failing marks. Diane Ravich, one, a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institute, said our "history standards lack content and clarity," and she advised us to "toss them out and start over." CBE and Achieve suggested that Minnesota "consider ways to revise and supplement the standards with additional detail and specificity."

Unfortunately, the report suggests we adopt the California standards US history, which include applying the "constructivist" philosophy to our founding documents. Example: the report suggests that students quote]"analyze the changing interpretations of the Constitution [and] the Bill of Rights,"**18** [end quote] There is no requirement to analyze the founders original meaning of these documents. The standards also define America as a "constitutional democracy," rather than a "Constitutional Republic" as guaranteed by Article IV, Section IV of the Federal Constitution. Without studying having the opportunity to study the warnings against pure democracy given in Federalist number 10, our students may never learn the difference between these two forms of government. They may even come to embrace what our founders warned us against.

In conclusion:

America's higher education system has traditionally been about the free exchange of ideas. The American Heritage Act in no way threatens that tradition, but rather guarantees it, by reinforcing and re-establishing America's foundation principles that the rights of all people come from God, and that the duty of government within a free society is simply to secure those rights.

I am not advocating we proselytize children into ANY religion. What I ask is that we do not bar our founder's writings and philosophy of government from the school room merely because they include religious references. To report history accurately is an exercise in open-minded liberalism. To remove our founder's utterances upon a religious test is nothing less than censorship.

The American Heritage Act is a reasonable and necessary action the state to take. It re-affirms our commitment to perpetuate the blessings of civil and religious liberty to future generations, as promised by our state constitution. It also re-establishes a base-line core-knowledge content standard in U. S. History, as recommended by four separate evaluators.

Let this act also send a message to the education bureaucracy and curriculum publishers, that the people of Minnesota wish to instill pride and patriotism in our free-market economy, our limited form of government, and our national and state heritage, once again.

James Russell Lowell said: "How long will the American Republic endure? As long as the ideas of the men who founded it continue dominant."

Thank you considering this important bill meant to pass on the ideas that will secure freedom your children and mine.

Michael J. Chapman

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## Footnotes

**1** Not only did the textbook ignore the Bible, it also skipped over Sir William Blackstone and listed Hume instead. "Blackstone's Commentaries on the Law" served 160 years as America's Law textbook. It was Blackstone that defined the phrase, "The Laws of Nature and of Natures God" mentioned in our Declaration of Independence. In Blackstone's original work, he wrote: "As man depends absolutely on his maker everything, it is necessary that he should conform on all points to his makers will. ...This law of nature dictated by God Himself is of course superior in obligation to any other law. This law of nature is binding over all the globe, in all countries at all times. No human laws are of any validity if they are contrary to this...No human law is to contradict this law of nature and natures God found in the Holy Scripture." [Blackstone, Commentaries on the Law of England, Vol I, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1765, pp. 41-42]

Furthermore, Montesquieu recognized that true liberty in civil government must be based on Christian principle or nations would become despotic. My copy of his 1748, "Spirit of the Laws" explains: "The Christian religion is a stranger to mere despotic power. The mildness so frequently recommended in the Gospel, is incompatible with the despotic rage with which a prince punishes his subjects... The Christian religion...has hindered despotic power from being established... Let us set before our eyes...the continual massacres of kings and generals of the Greeks and Romans [enlightenment-pluralism]...and we shall see that we owe to Christianity, in government...benefits which human nature can never sufficiently acknowledge." [Montesquieu, Spirit of Laws, Vol. II, 4th printing, A. Donaldson, London, 1768, pp. 146-147.]

- 2** A More Perfect Union, Houghton Mifflin 8th grade Social Studies, 1991, p.83. see p. 109 also.
- 3** Living in Communities, teacher's edition, Silver Burdette and Ginn, 1995, p. 176
- 4** America Will Be, teacher's edition, 5th grade Houghton Mifflin Social Studies, p.264
- 5** A More Perfect Union, 8th grade Houghton Mifflin Social Studies, p 173.
- 6** Ibid., p. 72
- 7** Adventures in Time and Place; Macmillan; 7th grade, 1997, p. 252.
- 8** Ibid., p.513-514
- 9** A More Perfect Union, 8th grade Houghton Mifflin Social Studies, p. 57-58.
- 10** Adventures in Time and Place; Macmillan, 1997, p. 505.
- 11** The World Past and Present, Teachers edition Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, 1993, p. 538.
- 12** Ibid., P. 649.
- 13** Ibid, p. 534.
- 14** Achieve, Inc. "Aiming Higher," pre-publication copy, 11-10-2000, p. 10, footnote 5.
- 15** Themes of U.S. History: "We the People," Oct. 1997 draft, see task 1, especially page 2
- 16** Themes of U.S. History: "We the People," see task 1, Handout 1 "Introductory Essay"
- 17** Proposed Rules teacher licensure, p.7, Sec. 8710.2000, Subp. 4G; also p. 165, D.(4)
- 18** Achieve, Inc. pre-publication copy, page 62.