

June 2008

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For the Soul of the Nation

You cannot be, I know, nor do I wish to see you, an inactive spectator... We have too many high sounding words, and too few actions that correspond with them. —Abigail Adams

The presumptive Democrat nominee for president has made the idea of “change” the by-word of his campaign to be the world’s most powerful chief executive. His opponent is calling for a reinvigorated economy. However, the extent or specificity of change that Sen. Barack Obama would implement remains unclear as are the details of Sen. John McCain’s plans to stimulate job growth and strengthen the sagging U.S. dollar. But, then, why should voters worry? Isn’t that stuff for politicians to figure out?

A growing number of educators are worried that voters, especially younger voters, lack enough historical knowledge to contextually grasp much less synthesize many foreign and domestic issues. Paul Gagnon, professor emeritus of history at the University of Massachusetts, thinks far too many of us have but a feeble grasp of politics and a vague awareness of history, especially the political history of our own country. He argues that most school textbooks are exposing generations of children to culture and history amnesia that threatens the very basis of American free institutions and liberties.

Gagnon points out that just 11 percent of eighth-graders show proficient knowledge of U.S. history on standardized tests—down from 17 percent in 2001. Less than half know the Supreme Court can decide a law’s constitutionality and most are not sure whom we fought in World War II. ¹

Other experienced educators agree young people are not being taught to understand, much less value the American experience. Lori Yaklin, a former college teacher now with the U.S. Department of Education, says that in addition to not being academically equipped to pursue the American Dream, many students “don’t even understand the underpinnings of America.” Citing Thomas Jefferson, she says those fundamentals are freely-elected government, free enterprise, and moral and spiritual values. “In many textbooks,” notes Yaklin, “all governmental systems are treated equally, therefore communist dictatorships are presented as just an alternative system of government.” ²

Historian David McCullough, who won two Pulitzer Prizes for his biographies of Presidents John Adams and Harry Truman, is astonished at the results of a survey of seniors at 50 top colleges and universities by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni. He reports that more than half didn’t know George Washington was the commanding general of the Continental Army during the American Revolution who accepted Cornwallis’ surrender at Yorktown. Many guessed Ulysses S. Grant or Douglas MacArthur. ³

McCullough says that because history consists of cause and effect, students miss the essential lessons of the past when courses are narrowed to segments on say, women’s issues. He does not like current textbooks “because they fail to instill in students a sense of gratitude for the country’s leaders over the centuries and what the American people endured and accomplished in order to pass on a legacy of freedom and prosperity.”

Wilfred M. McClay, humanities professor at the University of Tennessee, warns that when graduates of Harvard and other major universities “are not learning the basics of American history, it is safe to assume that almost no one is, and that there will be almost no one to pass such knowledge on to the next generation...Historical memory is as much a necessity to the preservation of liberty and American security as is our own armed forces,” he says.⁴

Our mission at the *Christian Coalition* is to equip the Church for effective social, political and spiritual action because we believe, as the saying goes, “that it is better to light a candle than curse the darkness.” One way we bring light to contemporary issues is through our legislative scorecards and *Voter Guides*. Another way to bring perspective to the religious and political issues of our day is to travel...back in time. We will do that aboard the “In God We Trust” tour, October 9-18.

It is a pleasure to invite you to join me for a special nine-day adventure this fall, that will take us from ‘*Plimoth*’ Plantation and the ‘tween’ decks of the *Mayflower*, to the White House, George Washington’s beautiful estate in Mt. Vernon, and perhaps Jefferson’s *Monticello*. We will retrace the footsteps of our forefathers from the Bay Colony to the Commonwealth of Virginia, discovering inspiring stories along the way that testify to the faith and great sacrifice that ignited the mightiest and most beneficent nation the world has ever known. Specific details will be available soon.

But speak about timing! Following is an email received this week:

Hi Rick.....I just returned from my trip to Boston where we visited family. We also took some time to walk the Freedom Trail visiting places like Bunker Hill, the USS Constitution, the site of the Boston massacre, the Old State House and the church where the lanterns were lit that sent Paul Revere on his famous ride. Being a minister, and a retired naval officer who loves history, I found this trip to be great.

As I read the actual documents and saw the plaques posted in various locations, there was one thing driven home to me. That was the incredibly significant role that God played in the founding of this nation. I took pictures of countless historical displays such as Gov. Samuel Adams as he proclaims a day of prayer and fasting (in very bold large print I might add) for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. And John Hancock’s prominent signature proclaiming a day of thanksgiving to the “Supreme Ruler of all human Endeavor,” referencing God as the Creator and with a large quote at the bottom of the document, “God save the United States of America.”

I also noted a plaque commemorating Rev. Increase Mather who was the father of Cotton Mather, minister of the North Church and president of Harvard University, and a plaque in a church indicating that it was the location of the first school in Boston. I could not help but think back to the history I was taught and wonder why the history books have excluded or watered down God’s role in our nation. We have such a rich heritage based upon faith in God and His Word.

You can read my words; you can read history; but the impact of actually being there makes the experience indescribable. **--Rev. Tim Taylor, CDR (USNR-Ret), Watchman Ministries International**

In 1934, a year after Adolph Hitler came to power in Germany, he summoned leading pastors to meet with him at his headquarters in the Reich Chancellery building in Berlin. There had been many political changes in a span of a few months and he knew many religious leaders were becoming anxious.

Hitler told the ecclesiastics not to worry—there were no changes that would impact their churches. But one rather brash pastor, Rev. Martin Niemuller, told Hitler he wasn’t at all worried about the Church—Jesus takes care of HIS Church. His concern was for the soul of the nation!

If we have not learned that elections are for the soul of the nation, God help us all.

Rick Forcier

¹ George Archibald, Textbooks Flunk Test, *The Washington Times*, March 2004

² Website for Lori Yaklin and the Michigan School Board Leaders Association is: www.msbla.org

³ George Archibald, Textbooks Flunk Test

⁴ Ibid