

Stealing the Past

Those ignorant of history have no future.

By Don Feder

The world lost a great historian and America lost a great friend when Paul Johnson died Jan. 12, 2023, at age 94. Johnson wrote more than 50 books, covering everything from the history of the 20th century to ancient Egypt, the Renaissance and seminal figures such as Socrates, President George Washington, Napoleon Bonaparte and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. A Brit, he wrote the best one-volume history of America. A Catholic, he wrote a most perceptive and sympathetic history of the Jews.

Johnson's career highlights the importance of learning history and the perils of its neglect. It's hard to imagine a people who know less—and care less—about their history than Americans, an ignorance carefully cultivated by the left. This lack of knowledge makes it easier for them to manipulate us.

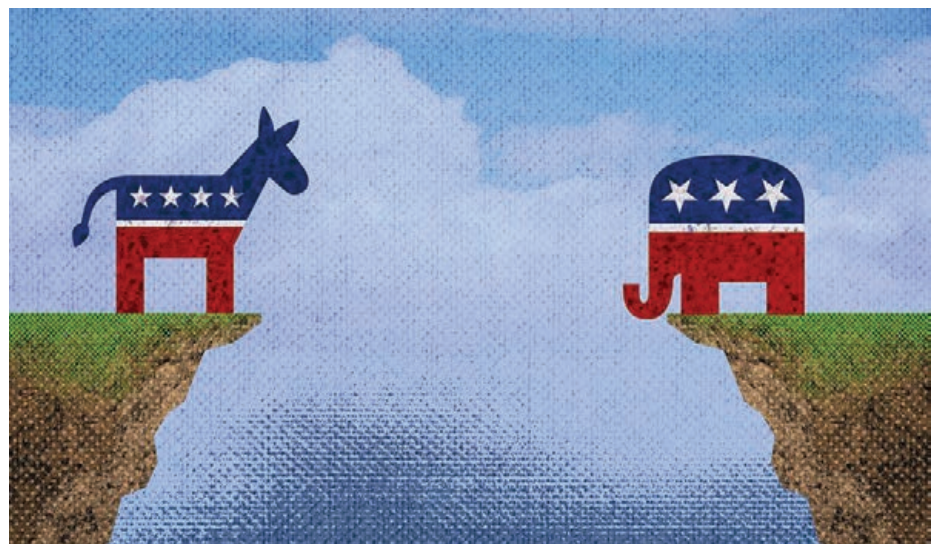
How can you know where you are or where you're going if you don't know where you've been? A 2018 survey by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation showed that only one in three Americans could pass a citizenship test. On a multiple-choice exam, only 24 percent knew the causes of the American Revolution, while 69 percent didn't know which countries we fought in World War II.

Each generation knows less than the last. Those 65 and older did best, with 74 percent answering six out of 10 questions correctly. Those under 45 did worst, with a pathetic 19 percent passing. The beneficiaries of this entrenched ignorance are those with a vested interest in voters being clueless about how their nation was founded, what it stands for and how it grew to greatness—citizens in such a fog that they believe the left's agenda represents progress.

Lack of historical consciousness accounts for the widespread belief that America is a democracy and not a republic, that the Social Security system is based on sound economic principles, that President Franklin Roosevelt brought us out of the Great Depression, which was caused by capitalist greed, that inflation has nothing to do with government spending, that the First Amendment prohibits laws based on the Judeo-Christian ethic, and that the Founding Fathers were rich white



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men interested primarily in maintaining their status instead of idealists who launched a noble experiment in self-government.

Over the course of a century, progressives have steadily pushed history out of public education. Although 21 states require teaching American history at the high school level, the curriculum is pap. History has been largely replaced by something called social studies,

which focuses primarily on vague theory rather than concrete facts.

The history that students encounter most often is victim history. There's Black History Month, Hispanic History Month, Asian American History Month and LGBTQ History Month, but no American History Month.

Our schools have been infiltrated by ideologues pushing pseudo-history like the 1619

Project, which teaches that America is a uniquely racist country—that we were founded on racism, that America’s accumulated wealth is based on slavery, and that we remain a nation of institutional racism.

From this perspective, reparations for slavery seem like a matter of fairness. A 2022 Pew Research poll found that a depressing 30 percent of Americans favor this racial plunder. From grade school through college, Americans are taught to hate themselves. Far too many believe that the American saga is about slavery, genocide, exploitation and oppression: from the antebellum South to the Indian Wars, Japanese internment during World War II, and voter ID laws, which sup-



Historian/journalist Paul Johnson received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in the East Room of the White House from President George W. Bush on Dec. 15, 2006.

posedly disenfranchise minorities.

Paul Johnson began his “History of the American People” with these stirring words: “The creation of the United States of America is the greatest of all human adventures. No other national story has such tremendous lessons for the American people and for the rest of mankind.”

While Johnson is popular with conservatives, educators much prefer Marxist Howard Zinn’s “People’s History of the United States.” Instead of what he calls “nationalist history,” Zinn offers a diatribe on how the masses have been duped and manipulated by capitalists.

Zinn was my faculty adviser when I was an undergraduate at Boston University in the 1960s. Campus conservatives called him Ho Chi Zinn.

When faced with a daunting array of enemies, foreign and domestic, Americans’ ignorance of history leaves them easy targets for any hucksters who happen along. History must be rescued from the left. A nation of people ignorant of its past has no future. ■

Don Feder is a columnist with the Washington Times. This story is reprinted with permission from its Jan. 23, 2023, edition.