

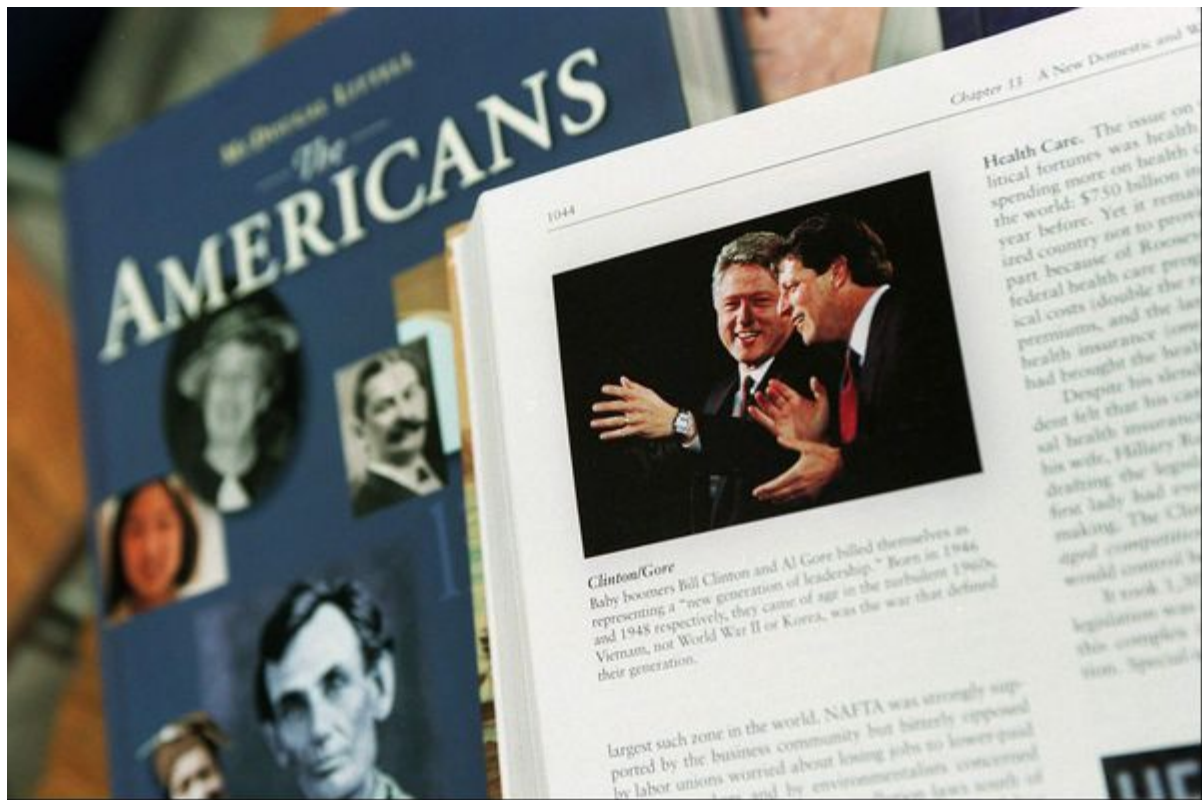
Teaching history by political checklist



May 15, 2019

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What role did lesbians play in Oregon's history? What is a Papua New Guinean perspective on our fair state? What is the best culinary history of the United States written by a refugee? If you don't know the answers to these questions, you may be about to find out.

House Bill 2023, passed in April and now before a Senate committee, is the latest in a series of ill-considered legislative acts by our state government to restructure education around identity politics. Under the bill, public schools would be mandated to include "sufficient instruction on histories, contributions and perspectives of certain

classifications of individuals” in the teaching of history, geography, economics and civics.

The “certain classifications of individuals” who will be part of our history are not defined as the brave, the courageous, the public-spirited, the kind and generous, the innovative, the powerful and influential, the lucky, and the fascinating. Those stale old categories would be replaced by a new list of politically approved groups: “individuals who are Native American; are of African, Asian, Pacific Islander, Chicano, Latino or Middle Eastern descent; are women; have disabilities; are immigrants or refugees; or are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.”

This means that an already small and shrinking amount of classroom time that students have to learn basic facts such as how Oregon was brought into the Union and how its industries and cities developed needs now to be reallocated according to an ideological entitlement program. Not satisfied with wanting to distribute income, housing, jobs and street names according to the imperatives of the new identity politics in Oregon, legislators now want to redistribute history as well.

Rewriting history according to contemporary political imperatives is, of course, bogus. The historical “contributions” of different individuals depend largely on things that have nothing to do with their sexual orientation, for instance, but with specific historical circumstances in which they found themselves. Some groups, such as Native Americans, are already widely represented in our history teaching, and for good reason.

But when your children come home without the faintest idea of the process by which Oregon became a state, do not be surprised. French-Canadians, for instance, do not make it onto the list of approved identity groups in Salem these days despite their outsized role in our state’s history. Perhaps the public errs in assuming that our Legislature is concerned with education when it legislates on education. During House work meetings, the movers of HB 2023 made it clear that their aim was for history education to reflect the “current population of Oregon,” as if history changes every time the census updates. They cite a similar bill in California as their guiding star, which should make anyone concerned with legislative quality nervous.

Why would Oregon students of the future ever take seriously the history they are being taught if they know it was driven by a checklist brewed in Salem? A reasonable takeaway for inquiring minds will be that the groups and perspectives they learn about are not actually important to Oregon history. This underscores a common finding by psychologists that refutes the arguments by proponents that a “diverse” retelling of

history will lessen discrimination. Instead, the social priming of identities and the use of “affirmative action” in history teaching will make stereotyping and discrimination more, not less, likely.

As usual these days in Salem, everyone is happy. In the rest of the state, parents and the educated public will, yet again, need to protect their children from political abuse in the classroom, and wonder why they support any funding for public education.

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