

The Citizen

Action Brief

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September, 2013

Ideology of the Common Core

by Ivan Larson

For a long time, Americans have perceived that student achievement levels have been falling behind those of other nations and that we need to do something about this. One effort to bring about improvement, led by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, resulted in the creation of the Common Core Standards in 2009. Wyoming has joined 44 other states in adopting the standards, which are set to be implemented by 2014.

While it remains questionable whether or not the Common Core will actually achieve the goal of improving education performance, and whether or not it's part of an effort to nationalize education, there is another aspect to consider: Beneath the debated aspects over federalism and effectiveness, the Common Core is a weapon of ideology. The writers of the Common Core have an opportunity to shape the way of thinking of a generation of Americans. An analysis of the English standards show the framers have chosen to use this chance to indoctrinate students with a very leftist ideology.

The Common Core is not meant to produce individuals willing to take initiative and innovate in the model of our successes over more than 200 years. Instead, it is designed to produce a graduate who is more willing to fit into a collectivist model. It teaches a heavily revisionist history in which America's past consists of almost nothing but slavery, segregation, and other forms of racial oppression. These distortions impede the maintenance of a free and democratic America.

One feature of the Common Core is that students are to read history and science texts in English class. The idea behind this is that while learning their literary

skills, the students will also gain knowledge relevant in other subject areas. Consequently, students will be reading about these subjects with teachers who don't necessarily know about the content at hand. A middle or high school English teacher may not be proficient as a science teacher or a history teacher. Therefore, they will be less likely to provide another view of the topic, or explain the accuracy or context of the reading. The students are thereby left at the mercy of what the reading wants them to think.

In doing an analysis about ideological bias, it is worth noting how the idea of bias itself is presented. In the Wyoming high school standards, students learn how to find the bias in a piece of writing. That skill is not taught to Common Core students¹. In the Common Core, the student must still evaluate whether the evidence supports the claim, but never what the work's bias is. Bias has a negative connotation; evaluating a claim does not. The absence of teaching about bias, combined with learning history from an English teacher, means students will be more accepting of the message being taught.

“... the Common Core is a weapon of ideology.”

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To uncover the bias in the Common Core, the first place to look is the suggested reading list. While these readings are only suggestions, they remain relevant for three reasons: first, they provide insight into the ideas of those who wrote the curriculum, second, they are likely to be adopted by schools that find it more convenient than creating their own reading list to align with the requirements of Common Core, and third, the Common Core Initiative aims to eventually create standards for other subjects, so the reading list gives a preview of what would be studied there.²

Ignorance of Our Nation's Origin

So if we're going to teach history with this reading list, it might make sense to start at our country's beginning. Maybe there would be something about who George Washington was, since he was the most prominent founder? Not quite. George Washington, our first president, was left off the list for K-1 readings, but George Washington Carver³, an African-American inventor and botanist whose work improved agriculture in the post-Civil War South, was included. It is reasonable to include George Washington Carver as he is historically significant. What is perplexing, however, is that his life was chosen for the only history-related reading in the K-1 category.

As we move into the category for grades 2-3, there is still no sign of the founding fathers. In the grades 4-5 category, students are assigned an 11-volume textbook named *A History of US by Joy Hakim*⁴. This series at last addresses the founding of our country; it will form the basis for the Common Core student's first impression of who the founders were. Hakim uses the first book to describe Amerindian history, discussing what the New World was like before Columbus. This, the students of Common Core will learn, is where the history of the United States begins. In fact, Hakim informs us that it was from the Amerindians that we gained the notion

of a Republic, and that it is to them that we should credit the creation of this country. Given that there are as of yet no other texts recommended that relate to the country's founding, an impressionable young Common Core student will grow to believe that this revisionist, ludicrous notion, unsupported by primary documents like the Federalist Papers, is historical fact.⁵

In grades 6-8, we find three writings devoted solely to the Constitution and the Founding Fathers. The first is a description of Thomas Jefferson by John Adams⁶, the second consists of the Preamble and the First Amendment of the United States Constitution⁷, and the third is *The Words We Live By*⁸, which is a thorough guide to the Constitution that appears to present a relatively fair and balanced discussion of both sides of interpreting each contested point in this founding document. Let us see if this approach can continue.

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In the entire Common Core reading list, there is only one work by George Washington, namely his Farewell Address, found in grades 9-10. In his message, Washington warned against “entangling alliances” with foreign powers⁹. At the time, the US was a relatively weak country, especially next to the global powers Britain and France. Washington saw the dangers of getting involved in the ongoing conflict between these two powers that were simply out of our league. This situation no longer exists, and with America being a global superpower today, we don't have to worry about being a more powerful nation's pawn. Nevertheless, it is this particular work of Washington's that Common Core wants students to be familiar with. Given the existing pattern, it is clearly more than a coincidence that this view could easily be construed to support the modern left's foreign policy views.

Aside from the Farewell Address, there is only one document pertaining to our country's founding in grades 9 and 10. Patrick Henry's 1775 speech to the Second Virginia Convention¹⁰ discusses how the British

had responded with troops to the peaceful efforts of the colonies to resolve their dispute with Parliament. That is the full extent of Patrick Henry's speech: he does not discuss what the dispute is or the ideas behind them, but only the current events from almost a quarter millennium ago. This serves as a token document to represent the era, yet provides nothing relevant outside its own time to merit its discussion today in place of documents such as the Federalist Papers, Washington's First Inaugural Address, or Jefferson's First Inaugural Address.

The most advanced level of Common Core's reading list also has Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*¹¹, the Declaration of Independence¹², and the Bill of Rights.¹³ Like the 6-8 category, these are all fine documents that help our students learn about the ideas of the American founding. If this had been consistent throughout the grade levels, the students would have gained a fair picture of this country's origins.

Racial Conflict: The Main Motif of History

While nothing about our founders is included in the grades 2-3 category, we do get a story about Martin Luther King and the March on Washington, a biography of Lincoln, and *The Story of Ruby Bridges*¹⁴, which is about one of the black girls attending a white school as part of the federally enforced desegregation of New Orleans. Here we have two texts about the civil rights movement and one on the President who led us through the Civil War. There is only one history reading that discusses a different topic, which is about Apollo 11¹⁵. It is peculiar to focus so much on one dimension of our nation's history.

In the grades 4-5 category, there are three US history texts. Two are about the Underground Railroad and Negro League Baseball¹⁶. Again, we see a great deal of attention being paid to the history of discrimination in this country. At this point, a student might see US history as being nothing more than a tale of how the

evil white man oppressed black people through slavery and segregation. Our country is painted in an even more negative light when there is no mention of how even at our country's founding, there was great conflict over how to deal with these issues.

The third is the previously discussed *A History of Us* by Joy Hakim. At one point, Hakim's series discusses European history prior to America's founding. Hakim paints an idealistic view of Spain under the rule of the Muslim Moors, claiming everyone could read and that their agriculture was better than what we have in modern times. Hakim points to the crusaders as pillaging and plundering for the sake of religion, while her discussion of the early expansions of Islam fails to mention that these too were accomplished by brute force.¹⁷

In grades 6-8, students read four more texts pertaining to America's history of racial oppression, namely : Langston Hughes' "I, Too, Sing America,"¹⁸ Russell Freedman's *Freedom Walkers: The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott*¹⁹, Ann Petry's *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad*²⁰, and Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave, Written by Himself*.²¹ Even as the Common Core students finally begin learning about our country's founders, these readings serve to ensure they still remember the lesson from lower grades, that our country was built on racism.

Grades 9 and 10 are no different. Undoubtedly, Martin Luther King's letter *Why We Can't Wait*²² and his "I have a dream" speech²³, along with Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural Address, are worth reading. Athol Fugard is a great writer, and his *Master Harold... and the Boys*²⁴, which concerns South African apartheid, is a very good play. However, there is still a clear pattern of making racial struggle the defining element of history when in grade level after grade level it has the lion's share of historical readings.

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Most interesting, however, is the choice of Jim Haskins' *Black, Blue and Gray: African Americans in the Civil War*, which contains this nugget of insight:

The southern states... believed that any rights not granted to the federal government by the United States Constitution belonged to the states. The northern states... believed that a strong federal government, with the ability to legislate behavior in areas not specifically set forth in the Constitution, was key to the growth and strength of the American republic.²⁵

Haskins wants the reader to associate limiting the federal government with the Confederacy while the Union represented the idea of a powerful federal government. The implication is that believing in a federal government limited by the Constitution means supporting the Confederacy and slavery. What is especially startling is that the supposed "Southern ideology" is a paraphrase of the 10th amendment of the US Constitution, which reads, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."²⁶ The earlier objectivity on this topic provided by *The Words We Live By* has been lost.

Along the same road of painting a portrait of the evil white man through slavery now come three texts that add the same perception with regards to Amerindians. The only description of a battle found anywhere in the Common Core reading list is found here: an account of the Battle of Little Bighorn²⁷, where General Custer was defeated by Sitting Bull. There's also Charles Mann's *Before Columbus: The Americans of 1491*²⁸. The most notable is Dee Brown's *Indian History of the American West*, which, as the name suggests, describes American westward expansion from the natives' perspective. To someone who has studied American expansion from a perspective of it being the grand fulfillment of Manifest Destiny, or as the growth of prosperity in a young

nation, such a book could provide an interesting new perspective, and show an angle previously hidden.

However, when that is not the case, and given the previous readings of the Common Core it certainly isn't the case here, Dee Brown's book will simply add to the existing view of American history as a tale of the evils of the white man. For example, he writes, "The white men of the United States—who talked so much of peace but rarely seemed to practice it—were marching to war with the white men who had conquered the Indians of Mexico."²⁹ Talking about peace but not practicing it is the description of "the white men of the United States." This is a clear articulation of the idea

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that Common Core has been building from the beginning that the white man is inherently evil, and throughout history he has done nothing but steal ideas from smarter peoples while conquering and oppressing everyone in his way. This is the focus of history under the Common Core, and the main lesson it seeks to teach.

In the last two years before graduation, students read Declaration of Sentiments³⁰, a key document in the women's rights movement, and also three documents reminding the student of slavery and segregation, namely Richard Wright's *Black Boy*³¹, the account of an African-American Communist³² growing up in early 20th century America, Horace Porter's "Lee Surrenders to Grant, April 9th, 1865,"³³ and "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" by Frederick Douglass³⁴. With regards to the last one, we must ask, what to the Common Core Student is the Fourth of July? With years of learning little but the shameful aspects of American history, of learning to look upon our history as a story of oppression and upon our nation as one whose success was built on luck and theft, what would it mean to have a holiday for American independence?

The lessons of division by classifications and racial history as opposed to valuing individuals are continued in the standards themselves. The Common

Core pretends to teach open-mindedness, but creates only an illusion of such. In the Wyoming standards, the goal for discussions in middle school is to create a consensus.³⁵ Everyone is to present their arguments and come to accept the best conclusion. Students learn that being objective means agreeing upon best-argued position. In the Common Core, however, the goal is for a diversity of opinions to be heard. It does not matter if everyone walks away frustrated with no agreement reached, but only that all sides were heard. By focusing on letting all sides be heard instead of on coming together to find common ground, the Common Core seeks to divide, not unify.

Green Collectivism

The K-1 readings include “Wind Power,”³⁶ an article from National Geographic Young Explorers that talks about how great the wind is. The article ends with how we can get electricity from wind. This is the only energy source discussed in the entire K-12 curriculum, representing a bias in favor of green energy sources. One source does not make a pattern, however, and more would be needed to identify a clear agenda.

The topic is abandoned, but later resurfaces in 9th and 10th grade, where we find exactly that. In this category, there is an overwhelming leftist bias in the list of documents and readings. First, there’s FDR’s 1941 State of the Union Address, in which we find the following:

In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.... The third is freedom from want—which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants everywhere in the world.³⁷

FDR is asking Americans to help insure the welfare of every person in the world. He is establishing a

universal human right to a certain standard of living, which would necessitate a global welfare program.

The list then gives us Learned Hand’s 1944 I am an American Day Address, which includes the following:

“... what to the Common Core Student is the Fourth of July?”

And what is this liberty which must lie in the hearts of men and women? It is not the ruthless, the unbridled will; it is not freedom to do as one likes. That is the denial of liberty, and leads straight to its overthrow. A society in which men recognize no check upon their freedom soon becomes a society where freedom is the possession of only a savage few; as we have learned to our sorrow. What then is the spirit of liberty? I cannot define it; I can only tell you my own faith. The spirit of liberty is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which seeks to understand the mind of other men and women; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which weighs their interests alongside its own without bias.³⁸

Learned Hand dismisses the conventional definition of liberty, which is generally equated with freedom, as the definitions from the Merriam-Webster³⁹ and Oxford Online⁴⁰ Dictionaries demonstrate. It is indeed “freedom to do as one likes.” However, Learned Hand would have us believe that liberty is instead synonymous with altruism as it means weighing other interests as equal to one’s own, denying the existence of any self-interest. Suddenly, ideas like our right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness in the Declaration of Independence take on

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entirely new meaning, foreign to Thomas Jefferson’s intent. If liberty means altruism and there is an unalienable right to liberty, then the conclusion would be that liberty is a responsibility that must be enforced upon the people, that is, we have a right to others’ liberty of supporting us. The importance of altruism is a valuable discussion, one worth exposing students to, but to misinterpret liberty circumvents that discussion to instill a specific ideology.

To be fair, there is one case of the opposing viewpoint being heard. The list does include Ronald Reagan's address to students at Moscow State University, where he briefly discusses the virtues of capitalism.⁴¹ Even so, the focus of the speech is on the ideas of democracy, not the free market. It is far from sufficient to balance out the constant barrage of leftist authors that the Common Core student reads.

By 11th grade, the reading list holds only one last surprise in its playbook. One of the supposed "Informational Texts" for this grade level is "The Fallacy of Success" by G.K. Chesterton⁴². This essay claims that only through talent or cheating can one become successful. In fact, it states, "In our society, temperance will not help a poor man to enrich himself, but it may help him to respect himself. Good work will not make him a rich man, but good work may make him a good work-man."⁴³ The author claims that there's nothing we can do, in effect, to obtain success through hard work, and that we're born with the necessary talent, we cheat, or we can't become rich.

This reading achieves three purposes from the left's agenda. First, it creates resentment of the rich as they either were born with something the rest of us lack or cheated to get their money. According to this article, there's no one who achieved wealth through honest hard work, but some did cheat to get their money, so we should either be indifferent or hateful to the rich, but never have any positive view of them.

Second, the article will discourage students from working hard to make something of themselves. They either have the talent, so they don't need hard work, or they lack the talent, so hard work won't help. If trying to create higher-achieving students who are competitive globally, is this a message we want to send? Third, it reinforces the suggestions of redistribution found earlier in FDR's

State of the Union Address and the I am an American Day Address. If the rich didn't deserve their wealth, why should they get to keep it? FDR's suggestion of a global welfare state simply takes the notion from "The Fallacy of Success" to its logical conclusion, that America doesn't deserve to be a rich country, so we have to support everyone else who isn't. Given no opposing view, no tales of the heroic success of any who achieved the American dream, the Common Core aims to create a society of lazy cynics who believe the American Dream is a lie.

Third, a group approach is more emphasized in the Common Core. Not only is discussion started earlier, there is more emphasis on discussing ideas in groups overall, with more standards devoted to this in Common Core.⁴⁴ Students are considered a part of a whole instead of being unique individuals in and of themselves. Increased focus on groups builds a collectivist mentality that supports the ideas found in the final years of the reading standards concerning altruism and liberty.

Though considered less important, Wyoming does have discussions, and by high school, Wyoming introduces an element not seen at all in Common Core, namely roles such as moderator and discussion leader. In Common Core, there is no such differentiation between students⁴⁵. All are essentially supposed to be uniform in a discussion model that has more in common with the chaos of Occupy Wall Street than the orderly presentation of ideas intended to be found in parliamentary procedure.

The Common Core English Standards use reading levels, in which students is expected to be able to read texts at their own grade level proficiently. This makes sense. However, instead of just setting a lower end for where students should be reading, the standards also limit how much more advanced the

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students' readings can be. For example, the following standard is applied to third graders:

Read literature independently, proficiently, and fluently within the grades 2–3 text complexity band; read “stretch” texts in the grades 4–5 text complexity band with scaffolding as needed.⁴⁶

If students want to challenge themselves, they are to read at only one level above the one assigned to them. But what if a student is already ahead of the curve, and still wants to take on a challenge? There is no room for such a scenario in the Common Core. Students are dehumanized into cogs, expected to fit perfectly into their assigned spot in the machine of Common Core.

Reading levels are not the only dehumanizing aspect of the Common Core. The Common Core also undervalues motivations, the reasons people take action. In Wyoming, a fourth grader is supposed to identify motivation by analyzing setting, events, and characters in the reading. In the Common Core, motivation is discussed a year earlier, but only as another factor to be analyzed instead of as a conclusion of analysis⁴⁷. Motivations cause people to perform a specific action. By finding motivation as the conclusion, Wyoming students learn to observe the importance of characters in driving the plot, while Common Core considers the characters an indifferent or passive element. This contributes to the same problem of dehumanization.

Through the process of dehumanization, the students will place less value on themselves as individuals. If their task, regardless of what personally motivates them, what their talents are, is to fit an assigned slot, then that is what they will learn to do. Through this, the dehumanization will reinforce the collectivist agenda by having students learn to value the group rather than the individuals in it, and identify by

group, leading to superficial labels like “wise Latinas”.

Closing Thoughts

Aside from what is present in the curriculum, what is absent is just as important. In the early years, there are no documents about the true origins of this country, of the American Revolution. Such content starts to appear in sixth grade, but that it is not included earlier reeks of someone thinking that such stories are not appropriate for younger students who are not yet fully indoctrinated in leftist revisionism. This bears a stark resemblance to how in June a principal at a school in New York City refused to let Kindergartners sing “God Bless the USA” because it was not age-appropriate for 5-year olds to have pride in their country⁴⁸. It is clear this apologist line of thinking, namely that we should be ashamed of America, has infected the Common Core.

The Common Core is filled with leftist ideas. The reading list will teach a revisionist history of the United States that focuses on the evils of racial oppression as the main aspect of our country's past. Socialist indoctrination pervades in the high school years, with students reading about a universal human right to a healthy peacetime life and the spirit of liberty being altruism, and how the rich don't deserve their wealth. The standards themselves make the students more susceptible to these ideas by reinforcing group work, dehumanizing the individual, and not teaching students to uncover inherent biases. Armed with the Common Core, the left can indoctrinate the coming generations to ensure the dominance of their ideas at the expense of democracy. Without students educated to objectively decide for themselves, our system of representative government cannot function. ■

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Endnotes:

1. The following document shows what in the Wyoming high school English standards is left out by Common Core: http://edu.wyoming.gov/sf-docs/standards/ELA_11_Gap_Analysis_WY_to_CCSS.pdf?sfvrsn=0. See page 6.
2. <http://www.corestandards.org/frequently-asked-questions>
3. The Common Core Reading List is available here: http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf. The Reading on George Washington Carver is listed on page 5.
4. Common Core Reading List, Page 72
5. <http://www.textbookleague.org/121hakm.htm>
6. Common Core Reading List, Page 90
7. Common Core Reading List, Page 93. Common Core groups these as one document to be studied as such.
8. Common Core Reading List, Page 95
9. Common Core Reading List, Page 123
10. Common Core Reading List, Pages 122-123
11. Common Core Reading List, Page 164
12. Common Core Reading List, Page 164
13. Common Core Reading List, Pages 166-167
14. Common Core Reading List, Page 57-58
15. Common Core Reading List, Page 56
16. Common Core Reading List, Page 74
17. <http://www.textbookleague.org/121hakm.htm>
18. Common Core Reading List, Page 88
19. Common Core Reading List, Pages 95-96
20. Common Core Reading List, Page 92
21. Common Core Reading List, Page 91
22. Common Core Reading List, Page 127
23. Common Core Reading List, Pages 127-128
24. Common Core Reading List, Page 115
25. Common Core Reading List, Pages 131-132
26. http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill_of_rights_transcript.html

About Ivan Larson

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Ivan Larson

27. Common Core Reading List, Page 130
28. Common Core Reading List, Page 133
29. Common Core Reading List, Page 130
30. Common Core Reading List, Page 172
31. Common Core Reading List, Page 170
32. "In 1932, he became involved in the John Reed Club, an intellectual arm of the Communist party, which he joined the next March." - http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/s_z/r_wright/wright_life.htm
33. Common Core Reading List, Page 168
34. Common Core Reading List, Pages 173-175
35. The following document compares Common Core K-8 English to Wyoming's: http://edu.wyoming.gov/sfdocs/standards/ELA_K-8_Gap_Analysis_CC_to_WY. See page 89.
36. Common Core Reading List, Page 31
37. Common Core Reading List, Pages 124-125
38. Common Core Reading List, Page 125
39. Merriam-Webster defines Liberty as the quality or state of being free: a: the power to do as one pleases b: freedom from physical restraint c: freedom from arbitrary or despotic control d: the positive enjoyment of various social, political, or economic rights and privileges e: the power of choice.
40. Oxford defines Liberty as the state of being free within society from oppressive restrictions imposed by authority on one's behaviour or political views.
41. Common Core Reading List, Pages 128-129
42. Common Core Reading List, Page 169
43. Gilbert Magazine Volume 15, Number 6-7, May/June 2012, Page 7
44. The following document compares Common Core K-8 English to Wyoming's: http://edu.wyoming.gov/sfdocs/standards/ELA_K-8_Gap_Analysis_CC_to_WY. See pages 7, 16, 27, 38, 51-52, 63-64, 76, 89, and 102-103.
45. The following document shows what in the Wyoming high school English standards is left out by Common Core: http://edu.wyoming.gov/sf-docs/standards/ELA_11_Gap_Analysis_WY_to_CCSS.pdf?sfvrsn=0. See page 26
46. The following document compares Common Core K-8 English to Wyoming's: http://edu.wyoming.gov/sfdocs/standards/ELA_K-8_Gap_Analysis_CC_to_WY. See pages 33-34.
47. The following document compares Common Core K-8 English to Wyoming's: http://edu.wyoming.gov/sfdocs/standards/ELA_K-8_Gap_Analysis_CC_to_WY. See pages 31 and 42.
48. See the following article: <http://www.theblaze.com/stories/update-principal-pulls-bieber-song-from-graduationline-up-still-doesnt-reinstate-god-bless-the-usa/>

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