

A LETTER TO THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH CAROLINA:

Our Social Studies Standards are an Embarrassment

By

Major General James E. Livingston, USMC (Ret.), Medal of Honor

Brett Barry, President of the American Heritage Association

We need new history standards in South Carolina and a better approach to creating them. As our children and grandchildren return to public schools across the Palmetto State, their history instruction will be governed by a new set of Social Studies Standards that do not mention George Washington, Robert E. Lee, Susan B. Anthony, or Martin Luther King Jr. In fact, they do not mention the names of most of America's top historical figures or events. The new standards were not developed by a panel of subject matter experts but primarily by educators.

Aside from being of poor quality, a Marxist inspired historical viewpoint is also utilized. The heroic deeds of American patriots are deemphasized in favor of a narrative which largely reduces the American story to a battle between classes of people: oppressors and the oppressed. This politically motivated approach is evident throughout the new standards which even include a global citizenship theme. The Department of Education has made an uninspiring mess out of history instruction which at best undermines any sense of patriotism in our youth and at worst teaches our children and grandchildren to hate our country. Sadly, oppression is present throughout the history of mankind and it should be covered in the classroom, but our story is not defined by it. The American story is defined by hope, bravery, and the triumph of liberty. We are a country based on a set of principles which must be handed down to each generation through history education.

If the political will exists, we can put real history education back in our schools. There are three policy pillars which are essential:

1. **History should be the primary focus of the standards with other elements of "Social Studies" secondary.** People ask, "why don't they teach history like they used to?" The answer is schools switched from teaching History to teaching Social Studies thereby focusing on societal issues rather than major historical figures, events, battles, etc.
2. **The standards should be written exclusively by subject matter experts appointed by the legislature.** We need accountability and the Department of Education has shown they cannot be trusted to do this correctly. Luckily, South Carolina does not have a shortage of historians.
3. **Once quality standards are established, textbooks which present an inspiring account of the American story need to be required.** If South Carolina merely prescribes the topics to be taught without addressing "how" the topics are taught, we will not have accomplished the task.

Legislative efforts led by State Representative Lin Bennett and Senator Dwight Loftis to restore real history education are encouraging but solving this problem will require the vocal support and engagement of veterans, concerned citizens, and parents from across the Palmetto State. It is a core patriotic duty of our time.