

The Seamless Web: Minnesota's New Education System

8 The American History Package

Do we expect the American history performance package to illustrate "high academic standards"? If so, we will be disappointed. Once again, let us consider what this set of assignments is intended to accomplish.

Under the heading "What students should do" on the second page, we read:

"2. Illustrate the influence of diverse ideas or beliefs (e.g., religions, sovereignty, ethnicity, class, gender, cultures) on a theme or development of the United States."

This is an explicit statement, once again, not of genuine history but of education's new core curriculum, diversity training, a theme which is obvious throughout this package.

Under "Task Description," students are first told to read the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, and Handout 1. Students are then asked to "Discuss the ideals of unity and equality in these documents." This is a perfunctory exercise that will not take much time or attention. It is the typical approach the revolution in education takes to our basic national documents—they are first glossed over with little attempt made to study their real meaning and significance; then they are undermined.

The real focus of the package begins in task #2 where students, in teams of three, are required to "select three groups from American Society who would not fit into the description of the American people as defined in the following quotation:" The required quotation is a statement from Michael Lind which says:

Almost without exception, when the framers of the federal Constitution and their successors in the first half of the nineteenth century spoke of the American people, they meant white American of English descent, or immigrants from the British Isles and the Germanic countries who had lost their cultures and assimilated to the Anglo-American norm.

What is the real purpose of this package? Is to provide a balanced analysis of our nation's founding? Or does it set the stage for a highly critical perspective? Most of us would agree that our original Constitution did not go as far as we would have liked. The Constitution specifically allowed slavery, for example. Allowing slavery, however, was probably the only way a national government could have been constructed at that point in time.

The founders of our country could not end slavery, but they did put the basic principles of freedom and equality into the Declaration of Independence and our Constitution, so that in time slavery would be eliminated. These same basic principles led to women's suffrage and to the civil rights movement. Does this mean that our Constitution was defective? Not at all. It means that realizing our ideals often takes time. There is a big difference between the two attitudes.

In addition, our national Constitution was constructed so that it could be improved and updated by an orderly amendment process. Doing so, however, requires the approval of elected officials at both the state and federal levels. The patriots who founded our nation were far from perfect, but they did well in constructing our country. They certainly do not deserve the anti-American bias that is built into this performance package. First and foremost, the founders of our nation believed in freedom. Many of them put everything they had—their lives, their families, their fortunes and their own personal freedom—on the line for that cause. The education bureaucrats would do well to learn from these brave Americans.

The question, however, is this: what should be the primary focus of a performance package on American history? Should it be a serious study of the founding of our nation based on the historic documents and on the people who wrote these documents? Or should it be a diversity-oriented criticism of our nation's founding based on the opinion of Michael Lind?

Also important, once again, are the missed opportunities with this package. For example, students could be doing an in-depth study of how the founders of our nation saw constitutional law. The students could study how the patriots saw constitutional law as being a primary method for preserving the freedom of the citizenry. They viewed our Constitution as meaning what its words said, as meaning what the writers intended it to mean. This position, when followed by courts, is referred to as "judicial restraint."

A more modern competing view, however, takes an evolutionary view of constitutional law. This viewpoint of "judicial activism" doesn't much care what the Constitution says because its adherents believe that the courts should reinterpret the Constitution to suit the times—which really means suiting the political agendas of the judges. In this latter view, the Constitution becomes an "Alice in Wonderland" document that means whatever the judges say it means.

A prime example of judicial activism is the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling of the United States Supreme Court which mandated abortion on-demand in every state of the Union. There is no right to abortion in our Constitution, but there is a right to life. In *Roe v. Wade*, tyrannical judges put themselves above the highest law in the land (the Constitution) and replaced the Constitution with their own radical agenda.

In the Gomez decision of the Minnesota Supreme Court, which mandated taxpayer funding of abortion, the judges did exactly the same thing. It is an absurdity to hold that Minnesota's state Constitution requires abortion funding. The Minnesota judges were rewriting the Constitution, not interpreting it.

The issue here, however, is not abortion. The issue is constitutional law. The issue is freedom. When judges, not the Constitution, become the highest law in the land, we have lost our freedom.

This raw abuse of power is not a result of liberalism. It's the result of radicalism. As Robert Bork has emphasized, the agendas of raw judicial activism, abortion-on-demand, gay rights and multiculturalism are the tenets of radicalism, not liberalism.⁴⁷ The Profile of Learning requires by law that our children be thoroughly indoctrinated in this radical agenda.

On the matter of missed opportunities, what would our children learn if they were taught accurate history? If they were taught genuine history? A contemporary college-level textbook on American government asks the question: "Where did our ideas of government come from?" In answering this question, the writers make the following statements:

Thomas Aquinas argued that...governments were ordained by natural law—basic and God-given rules that do not have to be written down so much as discovered. Individual rights to life and liberty were a part of this natural law created by God.

Equally important was the growth of the Protestant faith...[which] encouraged people to seek alternatives to absolute monarchy and ponder new methods of governing.

In carrying out their beliefs and establishing self-governing congregations, the separatists were responsible for the first appearance of self-government.

The Mayflower Compact reflects this tradition. Although it addresses itself to secular government, its form is akin to the "covenants"... that separatist congregations wrote and agreed to when they formed themselves.⁴⁸

These statements come from a textbook that is both secular and liberal in its overall orientation, but its description of our nation's founding is also reasonably accurate. The text provides genuine history. The fundamental principles it describes, however, have all been omitted from the Profile of Learning. In fact, every one of these principles is aggressively undermined by the Profile.

For example, the new rules for the Profile of Learning, which force this new system upon all Minnesota public schools, are silent about the principle of natural law. They are silent about the inherent human rights such as the rights of life and freedom. They are silent about the influence that self-governing congregations had on the establishment of our nation. Instead, these rules mandate that: "A student shall evaluate events and actions from diverse United States and world perspectives by identifying: A. how race, culture, gender and disability may influence beliefs, actions...and how cultural diversity affects conflict and cohesion within and across groups and institutions...."⁴⁹

The Profile of Learning replaces the genuine precepts of our free nation with the required process of diversity training. The Profile is not about high standards. It's not even about education in the true sense. It's all about legislating a state-approved belief-system. It's all about indoctrinating our children, by force of law, with the ideology of the radical left.

When it comes to classroom instruction, the Profile of Learning takes the form of the performance packages. Not surprisingly, most teachers are opposed to the mandated performance packages. For example, on November 4, 1998, the Executive Board of the St. Paul Federation of Teachers (SPFT) passed the following motion:

1. The one-size-fits-all performance packages do not meet the academic needs of many of our students. A large percentage of our students need extensive remedial assistance in reading, writing, and mathematics while others need more challenging, gifted and talented programs and courses. The performance packages are assigned to grade levels regardless of student ability or need.
2. The time needed to mark performance packages, complete grading forms and compile results from year-to-year for every student (in addition to the current reporting system) will take valuable time away from direct instruction and pedagogy.
3. The performance packages are not standards. They are a teaching unit with specific tasks, skills, and concepts to be learned, and tools for assessment. The State Department of Children, Families and Learning is essentially dictating not only what should be taught and how it should be assessed, but how teachers should teach. We do not believe the state should be dictating how teachers should teach their students.
4. The performance packages will not be a useful district or school accountability tool because the grading system is inherently subjective just like our current report card system. A student in one class or school may receive a three for a performance package while that same student in another school or class could receive a higher or lower mark. State developed grading rubrics would help standardize this assessment system, but as long as individual teachers are marking their own students' performance packages, reliability and consistency will be compromised.

5. The performance package assessment system may actually lower academic standards because a student can pass a performance package but fail a course and graduate from high school. Students may focus primarily on the performance packages rather than on their other course work.

As a professional organization that supports excellence in education, SPFT's Executive Board does not believe that the Performance Package requirements meet the needs of our students.⁵⁰

In January 1999, a petition was circulated among the 7-12 grade teachers in Mahanomen, Minnesota, asking Senate Majority Leader, Roger Moe, to support elimination of the Profile of Learning. Ninety-three percent of the teachers signed the petition. Similar petitions have been signed by large majorities of teachers in many of the school districts across the state. The teachers know what good education is all about. They also know what is detrimental to good academic education. Maybe it's time our lawmakers started listening to what the teachers have to say.

(Because of extensive criticism, CFL no longer includes the following performance package among its list of state packages. The package is included in this manual, however, because it is still being widely used in our schools with CFL's approval.)

Notes:

47. Robert H. Bork, *The Tempting of America* (New York, New York: The Free Press, 1990), p. 10.

48. Karen O'Connor and Larry J. Sabato, *American Government: Roots and Reform*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993), p. 6.

49. Section 3501.0447 of the new rules, "Learning area seven: People and Cultures," Subparts 4 and 6.

50. Focus, Newsletter of the St. Paul Federation of Teachers, December 7, 1998.

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING
Performance Package
Minnesota Profile of Learning

Content Standard: Inquiry: Themes of U.S. History

Level: High School

Title of Package/Activity: Themes of U.S. History: "We The People"

Summary Statement of Content Standard:

Trace significant themes in the development of the United States.

Description of Student Performances:

Task 1: Compare, and contrast events in three U.S. time periods in note file and data analysis sheets.

Task 2: Explain findings in oral presentation.

See Special Notes on page 14 for information about the testing that accompanies the tasks in this package.

FINAL ACHIEVEMENT: Use the following scoring criteria when evaluating student performance.

Scoring Criteria:

- 4 - Performance on this standard achieves and exceeds expectations of high standard work.
 - 3 - Performance on this standard meets the expectations of high standard work.
 - 2 - Work on this standard has been completed, but all or part of the students performance is below high standard level.
 - 1 - Work on this standard has been completed, but performance is substantially below high standard level.
- No package score is recorded until ALL parts of the package have been completed.

PERFORMANCE PACKAGE TASK 1
Themes of U.S. History: "We The People"

Content Standard: Inquiry: Themes of U.S. History

Level: High School

Specific Statement(s) from the Standard:

What students should know:

1. Understand the importance of key events, concepts and people in the historical development of the United States

What students should do:

1. Illustrate at least one theme in relation to the historical development of the United States:
 - a. gathering and interaction of the nation's people
 - b. development of United States democracy
 - c. economic, technological and environmental changes
 - d. changing role and interaction of the United States in the world
2. Illustrate the influence of diverse ideas or beliefs (e.g., religions, sovereignty, ethnicity, class, gender, cultures) on a theme or an event in the historical development of the United States
3. Compare and contrast the relationship between historical and contemporary themes or events

Product(s):

- Note file
- Analysis sheets

Task Description:

Overview: In this assignment, you will examine the tension between the ideal of equality in the United States and the reality of this ideal as it has been experienced by citizens. You will answer the inquiry question "How and why has citizen participation in the culture broadened in this country?"

Steps:

1. Read the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, and Handout 1, "Introductory Essay" (page 9). Discuss the ideals of unity and equality in these documents.
2. Working in a team of three students, select three groups from American society who would not fit into the description of the American people as defined in the following quotation:

"Almost without exception, when the framers of the federal Constitution and their successors in the first half of the nineteenth century spoke of the American people, they meant white American of English descent, or immigrants from the British Isles and the Germanic countries who had lost their cultures and assimilated to the Anglo-American norm." (Lind, Michael. *The Next American Nation*. New York: The Free Press, 1996. page 27)

Your teacher will help establish criteria to determine the groups from which to select.

PERFORMANCE PACKAGE TASK 1
Themes of U.S. History: "We The People"

Task Description, continued

3. Examine each selected group at three different periods in time, one of which is the present. The other two times will be determined by your team and your teacher.
4. Together with your study team, decide what information you will need in order to gain a multidimensional picture of the three groups you each will study individually. You will be exploring both the dimensions of each group's identity and their efforts to become full participants in the American democratic society.

Identity of the Group

- What features make the group culturally distinct (such as cultural universals including family life, work patterns, religion, leisure pursuits, language, and art)?
- What were the beliefs and values of the group?
- How did members of this group view themselves? How did others view them?
- What was this group's degree of acculturation at each time period?

Interaction of Group with Society

- What does it mean to participate in a democracy?
- What barriers or difficulties have kept individuals/groups from full participation in the democracy/culture?
- What was the group's interaction or involvement in community and government, both local and national?

Other Factors

- National or regional events that have had an impact on the group you are studying.
- Important figures in your group or movements or organizations that involved your group.

5. Together with your study team, create a list of the dimensions you will need to study.

You will be researching the same dimensions (topics) in each time period for each group. Using similar dimensions will aid you in comparing and contrasting different time periods. Examining a group using a variety of dimensions will give you a multidimensional portrait of the group.

Your study of each group should be confined to a particular state or region of the country. This will allow for some consistency and continuity in your study of each group in three different time periods.