

The Benefits of Teaching History at Home

By Samuel L. Blumenfeld

The other day I was having dinner at a friend's house and was chatting with his 12-year-old daughter who attends a local public school. I asked her how she was doing, and she told me that she hated school—not merely disliked school, but hated it. I had hoped that her parents would home-school her. But they just couldn't do it. I told her I thought I knew why she hated school—because it was boring. Yes, she replied. It was boring. And then I said, "And you're probably not learning much also." She wanted to know what I meant by that. So I asked her to name the first three wars that the United States was involved with. She got the first one all right, the Revolutionary War. But the only other war she could think of was the Civil War, and she had no idea when that took place.

The second war, I told her, was the one fought against the Barbary pirates of North Africa who kidnapped Americans for ransom. An American invasion of Tripolitania brought that war to a victorious end. My friend's daughter had never heard of that war. The fact is that most Americans have never heard of it. But the anthem of the U.S. Marine Corps should remind us: "From the halls of Montezuma, to the Shores of Tripoli..."

The third war was the War of 1812. She had never heard of that one either. She had never heard of the Battle of New Orleans, or the burning of Washington by the British, or Andrew Jackson, the hero of that war who later became our seventh President.

"But I know all about the Industrial Revolution," she volunteered. It turned out that her class had been studying the cotton mills of New England and how young girls were being exploited by the mill owners who were rich and mean. So, at the age of 12, she was already being indoctrinated to view factory owners as exploiters of poor young girls.

She had heard of Eli Whitney and the cotton gin. But she had never heard of Robert Fulton and the steamboat. In other words, the public schools were teaching "social studies" not history. Their aim was to indoctrinate children in a pro-socialist view of our history by emphasizing the meanness of capitalism.

But homeschoolers have the freedom to teach history as history and not as propagandistic social studies. History is such a fascinating subject and can be studied in so many different ways: chronologically, by reading biographies and autobiographies, by unit studies, by concentrating on certain eras and events. The Civil War commands great interest for many reasons. Thousands of books have been written about virtually every aspect of that war. There are even organizations that stage mock battles of the Civil War, with uniforms and weapons made to the exact specifications of the real things.

Every American should have a foundational knowledge of American history in order to affirm one's American identity and heritage. Our nation's history is such a remarkable story, so full of great and wonderful people, so vibrant with human endeavor and enterprise, so stirring in its affirmation of freedom and love of country, that it behooves a home schooling parent to learn and teach history to one's children as a means of making sure that a child understands what it means to be an American.

Americans, and homeschoolers in particular, have a responsibility of transferring to future generations the philosophy of our founding fathers, who sacrificed so much so that we could enjoy the fruits of liberty. It is only through knowledge of history that we can make sure that our free society continues to exist in decades ahead.

It is, of course, a tragedy that millions of young Americans will never learn history in their public schools, which have betrayed the trust that parents have, over the years, placed in them. But it is the opinion of this writer that government schools have never been compatible with the principles of a free society in which parents have the responsibility of educating their children in accordance with their own values and beliefs.

Prof. Benjamin Bloom, father of Outcome-Based Education, wrote in his famous Taxonomy: "By educational objectives, we mean explicit formulations of the ways in which students are expected to be changed by the educative process. That is, the ways in which they will change in their thinking, their feelings, and their actions."

Knowing how important it was to start indoctrinating children as early as possible, Bloom wrote: "The evidence points out convincingly to the fact that age is a factor operating against attempts to effect a complete or thorough-going reorganization of attitudes and values. ... The evidence collected thus far suggests that a single hour of classroom activity under certain conditions may bring about a major reorganization in cognitive as well as affective behaviors."

Those are not the words of an educator who respects the values and beliefs of parents whose children he is about to indoctrinate.