

AMERICAN HISTORY AS A
POLITICAL TOOL

THE APUSH CURRICULUM OUTLINE

The Problems and the Remedies

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

The “Advanced Placement United States History,” or “APUSH” program is a system for teaching the history of the United States to high achievement high school students. It is a product of the College Board, an organization founded a hundred years ago, presently headquartered in New York city. The core service provided by the College Board has been academic testing for high school students to demonstrate their qualifications for admission to colleges and universities. The College Board testing hurdle has been such a good indicator for which students will succeed in college that it has become unthinkable for any student wanting to go to college to skip the testing ritual. And the College Board has a virtual, if not actual, monopoly on this gateway to higher education.

Recent expansion of the College Board product line has reached beyond the creation of the subject matter tests, to curriculum design to prepare students for those tests. In the subject of history, the College Board has created the “Advanced Placement United States History” (APUSH) curriculum. This is designed to provide a college-level course in U.S. history, so that graduates can be placed in advanced, rather than beginning-level, classes in history upon their entry to college.

This booklet presents my understanding of the APUSH program.

The College Board has worked to shut access to the field of testing and preparing students for college, guarding even the term “Advanced Placement” with legal measures such as copyright. They then license the high schools to use the term to describe classes; but require them to only use the College Board Advanced Placement program. This program presents explanatory “Skills” and “Themes” which the program then works to provide in a curriculum outline. Schools are ostensibly allowed full freedom to set up the details of the exact curriculum they will follow, but the fact that only the College Board Advanced Placement test will allow the students to emerge successfully from the program means that there is no

point in deviating, adding, or subtracting any material from the curriculum outline.

Many high schools across the nation have bought the right to use the APUSH program. As the program has spread, more and more parents and other citizens have looked at what this program has been presenting to their children – and more and more have become alarmed.

What follows is a study of the APUSH program, based simply on reading the “College Board AP® United States History, Course and Exam Description, Including the Curriculum Framework, Effective Fall 2014,” and comparing it with things I know about United States history and related topics.

Why would I think myself qualified to judge this program? Academically, I am a graduate of the University of California with a degree in Economics; of the University of Memphis with a degree in Law. Other background experiences include a career in transportation, military service, and I am a member of the Bar of the Supreme Court of Tennessee and the Supreme Court of the United States. I have spent several years presenting the United States Constitution to audiences from coast to coast, and have been published in several journals on topics related to United States history and the Constitution.

The question is not, however, whether I have some magic combination of qualifications to present what follows. The question is whether the things I point out are accurate.