

Other Viewpoints

History misses critical question in today's classroom

When it comes to American history education, No Child Left Behind would appear to be a misnomer.

A recent report shows the vast majority of U.S. students are lagging in their understanding of this subject.

Just 20 percent of fourth-graders, 17 percent of eighth-graders and – brace yourself – 12 percent of high school seniors scored at a proficient level in a history test given to students nationwide last spring, officials reported this week.

Among the low points of test results:

- Few high school students could identify China as the North Korean ally that U.S. troops fought during the Korean War.
- Most fourth-graders didn't know why Abraham Lincoln was an important figure.
- Fewer than a third of the eighth-graders who took the test could name an important advantage American forces had over the British during the Revolutionary War.

How sad.

Why the lousy performance?

History advocates say the subject has been increasingly de-emphasized in favor of teaching math and reading, the only two subjects in which the 2002 No Child Left Behind act required schools to raise students' scores.

The theory makes sense, considering school funding is tied to test scores under the No Child Left Behind mandate. That being the case, schools have an incentive to divert efforts away from history and other subjects.

Results couldn't be found for Kansas students, and here's hoping the state was an exception to the national results.

But however the state fared, education officials and political decision-makers should take note of the situation. Sure, having strong skills in reading and math will help prepare students for the future, but it's also important for them to know about the nation's past.

— The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press

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Disposable culture throws away history

There's been a lot of fuss in recent days about the abysmal showing of U.S. public school students in U.S. history knowledge.

We're in for a few rounds of "Ain't It Awful," sung to the tune of "It's Your Fault."

Meanwhile, the answer is staring us in the face.

The U.S., possibly more than any other modern nation, has deliberately built a throw-away culture. From fast food to planned obsolescence, anything lasting more than a year is an anomaly.

My first computer is a dim memory. My 17-year-old pickup has been out of date for 17 years. The books on my shelves with copyright or printing dates in the 19th century are a real rarity – not because they are particularly noteworthy publications, but because a succession of owners each chose not to consign them to the trash heap.

Organize-your-life gurus generally start their advice with something like "discard anything you haven't used for six months. Heck, my grandmother's angel-food cake pan only gets used every three or four years. I'm not going to get rid of it, because next time I wanted to bake an angel-food cake it would cost me big bucks to buy a pan half as good.

Getting rid of things you don't use does make a certain amount of sense, however. In a culture driven by sales, almost everyone buys



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

more than they need. It's almost our patriotic duty. All those purchases – most sending money overseas to our exported manufacturing jobs, I might add – pile up and need to be discarded.

That's when the law of unintended consequences swings into play, when whole generations of a consumption-obsessed society are left bereft of their history. I've seen a few items over the years labeled "Made in Occupied Japan." These were true throwaways, almost by definition junk. But they are a part of U.S. history, and of value today simply because they wear those four little words.

U.S. history, after all, is just a piece of the picture. Broaden your viewpoint and you see world history. Narrow your viewpoint and you get state history, local history, family history, personal history.

One of my treasures is a metal-bound New Testament my father had in New Guinea 67 years ago. He never told me about it; I'm not

sure I'd ever seen it before he died. To see it, though – the corrosion of the metal cover evident from tropical weather, the printed foreword by the head of the Army Chaplain Corps – tells me something about my father and the world as he experienced it. It's a tangible lesson in family, U.S. and world history all in one. It's out of reach to a generation that throws everything away.

There's a practical side to history, as well. The writer and philosopher George Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Winston Churchill said, "Those that fail to learn from history, are doomed to repeat it."

We tell kids why they need to read. We tell them why they need math. We need to tell them why they need to know history.

If those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it, I would go a step farther to say that those who don't know history are doomed to live trite, throwaway lives, blissfully unaware of the sweep of human life, thought and action. It's hard to contribute your little puzzle piece to completing the big picture when you've never caught a glimpse of the big picture.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

Do your research before the election

To the Editor:

Eeny, meeny mo, who do I choose to run my country now?

It is 17 months until Election Day 2012. The presidential field is jam-packed with newcomers to the national political scene. Many have name recognition. Several are virtually unknown. And that is only the Republican hopefuls. We all know Mr. Obama is going to run for re-election, but I have a suspicion he will be challenged, even by Democrat party members who have a conscience.

Through the next 17 months, do as much research as you can. Most have favorite TV or radio stations, maybe some online news sources. If you vote "R," check out left-leaning sources, if you vote "D," check out right-leaning sources. Don't rely on one source of information. God gave us a brain to think and reason with for a good reason.

Keep in mind, many news sources are controlled by a billionaire who doesn't give a tinker's damn about America. He has power because of his money and has manipulated people and countries for years. This man wants a "new world order;" I've seen him say it. He has manipulated monetary systems and delighted in the chaos that results. He is the reason Greece, Portugal and recently Ireland's monetary systems have collapsed. Look at the countries where money systems are failing, people are rioting, inflation is through the roof, chaos and confusion running rampant.

I believe God has his hand on America. Yes, there are places in America having problems. For the most part, we seem to be doing fairly well despite 9 percent unemployment, a \$14.4 trillion debt, a failing housing market, higher prices and nearly 50 percent of the American population on welfare of some kind.

Folks, I wasn't there, but my parents grew up during the years after the Great Depression.



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

America has been in more dire straits than we are now. I believe we will come through this rough patch as individuals with more compassion and stronger as a united America.

I also believe in climate change, global warming and global cooling. It's called spring, summer, autumn and winter! Weather runs in cycles, sometimes it's an early fall followed by a rough winter with lots of snow and sometimes it's a dry spring and summer with very little rain. Could it be the Lord is upset with us as a nation and is trying to tell us something? Have you noticed the bad storms and other disasters in the last several months? Colby hasn't had the bad weather. Could it be that as a community most Colby-ites believe God is the master of everything on Earth? Is it just a little bit possible the Lord is upset with so much of the nation, He has allowed floods, tornadoes, extreme heat and drought and other calamities, to see if we would react and reach out to others? Remember the Golden Rule? "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." He wants us to pull together as one.

Speaking of pulling together, I cannot believe Obama wants Israel to pull back their borders to the pre-1967 areas. Revelation 20:7-9 speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the center of three religions – Christianity, Judaism and Muslim. Many countries want Israel to fall. As Americans, we must stand with Israel and say "No, leave Israel alone!"

to the rest of the world. The same enemies that surround and hate Israel also hate America and want to annihilate both countries. If we, as a nation, turn our backs on Israel, America is condemned. As Americans, as Christians, as members of the human race, we must not let her stand alone. Pray for Israel, pray for America, pray for both country's survival.

I am not a member of any church, but that does not make me less a Christian than those who are members. I believe in the Lord and all He did for me on the cross, I believe God created this world, and I believe the Holy Spirit speaks to those who will listen to his guidance. I also believe the Founding Fathers were divinely inspired to write the Declaration, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Therefore, I beg of you, before going to the voting booth in 17 months, do your research. Read, listen, look up online sources, check out books from libraries, get your information from as many sources as possible. Ask for God's guidance as you go to cast your ballot. Listen to your "gut instinct," your "conscience," listen to that "still small voice." No matter which name you give it, believers, that IS the Lord speaking to you.

Jari Skiles, Colby

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

