HERE IS so much more to preparing a citizen than merely running students like lemmings through a three-year succession of history survey courses. We are neglecting most of the social sciences in American high schools today, favoring the sequential and systematic delivery of history, partly because it is easier, partly because we are told to, and partly because we lie to ourselves.

As bad as things are, there are sentiments among the uninformed and among politicians that would make things worse and would return us to an even more antiquated method of teaching history. I recently met a veteran educator who proudly informed me that, when he learned history, even contemporary world history, his teachers taught it all in the context of which particular American President was in office. All social studies, which in those days consisted mostly of history with perhaps a dab of civics, was taught as occurrences, challenges, tragedies, blunders, and triumphs that took place during particular Administrations. Is it any wonder we Americans so often grow to adulthood seeing ourselves as the collective center of the universe? The true tragedy in that view is that we often don’t have the slightest understanding of that universe.

We laugh when someone like Jay Leno walks down the street with a stack of 8 x 10 glossies under one arm and stops people on the sidewalk, asking them to identify the key government leaders in the photos. We cluck our tongues and shake our heads as person after person fails to identify the vice president or the secretary of state. We roll our eyes when the same person then correctly and excitedly identifies the latest heavy-chested, bleached-blond creation of some recording label.

We know how common it is for students to arrive at good universities having never actually seen the simplest of supply-and-demand models. We know people with four- and six-year degrees who don’t know that the U.S. House of Representatives has 435 members or that the Senate has 100. Or who have no idea what a hand Alexander Hamilton had in the formation of institutions we now take for granted, his role in civics and economics having been overrun by the overtaught and frequently exaggerated Jeffersonian history.

Look at something as “today” as terrorism. Our

**ONE OF THE CHIEF COMPLAINTS ABOUT AMERICANS AROUND THE WORLD TODAY IS THAT OUR CITIZENS ARE EUROCENTRIC, OR PERHAPS OCCICENTRIC.**
achieve depth instead of breadth. Pure history, without conclusion or two. I'm thinking that we need to attempt to construction—four years of coursework that every student must take and that is geared unswervingly to meet the standards and to create competent citizens. In addition to having studied history, every student in America must be 'cool,' we are once again thinking more of ourselves than of our students.

All students need comprehensive social studies instruction—four years of coursework that every student must take and that is geared unswervingly to meet the standards and to create competent citizens. In addition to having studied history, every student in America must have a firm grasp of civics, international issues, behavioral sciences, and economics. And this understanding cannot be acquired through feeble and inequitable electives (sometimes taught by conscripted teachers who lit-

Secondary social studies instruction today is also inherently unfair to students. We need an equitable system. We teach history in our schools; in fact, we require students to take it. However, the other social studies, if they are taught at all, are offered almost exclusively as electives. This is exceedingly inequitable.

In the field of education, which has certainly drunk the Kool-Aid on standards-based learning, how can we let such an injustice exist? We create standards we believe every student must meet, and then we offer a huge chunk of the curriculum that would get them to those standards only as electives. And sometimes these courses come with prerequisites, which means that some students are actually prevented from taking them. Many of our students, especially those in vocational programs, simply do not have the time in their schedules to take economics or political science courses.

The electives sometimes get even more specialized, with titles like "The Vietnam War" or "Middle Eastern History," and are not even designed with meeting standards in mind. Often, these courses reflect the pet subjects of the teachers who design them and believe that they meet the "Ah, cool!" test. When we create coursework that is centered not on what standards we are helping students meet, but instead on what we consider to be "cool," we are once again thinking more of ourselves than of our students.

How and why has this happened? Why is it happening today? Is it because these people needed to study more history? If their teachers had spent more time on the historical aspects of the Administration of Franklin Pierce, would they now be able to recognize a picture of Donald Rumsfeld? Better yet, could they explain the significance of the differences between a society that builds vast numbers of luxury automobiles and one that would die for a grove of fruit-bearing trees?

These Americans, who do not know their elbows from their utils, do not need more chronological, systematic wading through facts, figures, and dates. What they need are more Socratic discussion and reading, more analysis, more writing, and more reasons why they should care. Many social studies teachers claim to be using these approaches today, and most are sincerely trying. But in the end, they are teaching — and neglecting — much the same material as always. We sometimes teach something more obscure, thinking we are capturing the forgotten, but instead we are simply wasting more time. Paper after paper is assigned at the secondary level — almost always a biography of someone who has been written about so many times and in so many different ways that no new thinking is occurring.

Papers written not about Hamilton but about the economic, civic, and sociological impact of any one of Hamilton’s contributions to the founding of the nation would force analysis and perhaps even a new conclusion or two. I’m thinking that we need to attempt to achieve depth instead of breadth. Pure history, without any of the other social sciences, is a laundry list, a phone directory, a time line. Ask “why” about any matter of historical fact, and you will end up with either another historical event (a chain of causes and effects) or a deeper answer that delves into international studies, sociology, economics, civics, philosophy, ethics, psychology, anthropology, or another discipline. These disciplines are not history. History is a record, not an analysis. These other disciplines provide the lenses we need for the analysis of history. Any historian who chooses to do truly thorough analysis must leave history behind and march unswervingly into one of the other social sciences. And historians do it daily, so it is hard to imagine why history teachers become so defensive when it comes to sharing some of the podium time with economists, political scientists, and others.

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erally run out and buy the “For Dummies” book on the subject matter) or through the occasional unit sprinkled into a history survey course. Such a clear understanding of social sciences can come only through rigorous and dedicated coursework.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Imagine for a moment that we were going to put together a committee that would issue a report recommending a new menu for nearly every restaurant in the country and that this menu would be used for the next 100 years. The 16 members of this committee would decide what we would eat across the country, well into the lives of our great-grandchildren. Now, imagine that nine of the committee members were vegetarians. Could that fact skew the report? Wouldn’t it be fair for consumers, nearly a century hence, to consider revising the menu, even if most of the chefs were vegetarians and might resist?

In 1916, the National Education Association Committee on the Social Studies wrote a report that became the most influential single factor in the creation of the scope and sequence for the social studies in the United States. Its recommendation for coursework in grades 7-12 can still be plainly seen in most American schools. Of the 16 members of the committee, nine were historians, members of the regional history teachers associations. This is one of the main reasons that the emphasis in modern secondary social studies is on history and that the other social sciences are more or less squeezed out.

Most of the members of the NEA Committee taught at the secondary level, and the representation from universities and colleges was, as Hazel Hertzberg put it, “meager.” However, one of the historians was from a university, and he held sway over the other members. James Harvey Robinson was a major proponent of teaching “The New History.” His influence over the committee and the resultant report is clearly apparent. While the 1916 report defined the social studies as “those whose subject matter relates directly to the organization and development of human society, and to man as a member of social groups,” the actual courses recommended were predominantly history courses. The other social sciences, such as economics and the behavioral sciences, were virtually ignored.

Moreover, the definition itself is so generic, so unusable in a practical way, so meaningless in its abstraction, that by comparison most high school mission statements today sound like clear and specific to-do lists.

In addition to the committee’s composition being lopsided with historians, the report was written at a time when many students left school after the sixth grade, with a second exodus after the eighth grade. In that context, the proposed curricula for secondary social studies were targeted at a very specific and usually college-bound group.

Recently, some have attempted to argue that the Committee on the Social Studies never wanted history courses to dominate. However, the committee report recommended four courses: ancient history, European history, U.S. history, and problems with democracy. History clearly dominated, and those who claim otherwise either are being disingenuous or are unfamiliar with the report.

To its credit, the committee recommended a topical approach and urged that the choice of any topic taught depend not “upon its relative proximity in time” but instead “chiefly upon the degree to which such topic can be related to the present life interests of the pupil.”

While this approach makes sense and was not a new concept, even today we have social studies curricula that are, unfortunately, primarily history; that do not follow the recommendation about “present life interests”; that spend as much as a week on things as lacking in practical utility as the Presidential Administration of Martin Van Buren. And we do this with students too young to
remember or care about the Administration of Jimmy Carter. Indeed, neither of these Presidencies can be related very easily to the students' present lives and interests.

I once heard a gifted teacher, following the curriculum as ordered, try to breathe life into the Van Buren Administration by claiming that Van Buren was so small a man that, when in the saddle, he looked like a monkey on horseback. While amusing — and it got a laugh that almost certainly woke the back row of students from their slumber — was it really the most important thing the students could have been learning?

It is not the teacher's fault, of course. Given such tripe to teach, he did the best he could. But perhaps the material would have been better suited for a college-level elective. We have so little time with our secondary students, some of whom will never go to college, but many of whom will vote. Should we really spend time on the simian appearance of relatively unimportant historical leaders?

A few years ago my work took me to the city of Guangzhou in the People's Republic of China. My Chinese clients were discussing the 3,000th anniversary of the city, and I was staggered. Not by the age of Guangzhou, but by the realization that, even in such ancient lands, they must be finding some way of teaching history. Clearly, ancient societies are not teaching every quasi-significant event in their history. They are doing something with their history that we as Americans seem incapable of doing: they are prioritizing. I maintain that the reason we have insisted on keeping that Martin Van Buren unit is that our country is so young, our history is so short, and everyone is afraid of leaving something out. But we are finally reaching an age when we can no longer attempt to remember everything and, like storytellers, recount the tale in full as we sit around the campfire. We can't simply say to ourselves we'll teach Washington crossing the Delaware five times in 10 years, and then they'll have a firm grasp of it. We simply don't have the time.

What can be easily related to the present lives of students and can be truly useful are many of the social sciences that were badly neglected by the NEA Committee. The anemic effort to create a course dealing with the "problems with democracy" did little to address the gaping hole in the curriculum that the committee had created. The committee believed that none of the other social sciences was "adapted to the requirements of secondary education."5

Even though the committee recommended three history courses, it nonetheless gutted ancient history in favor of European history and U.S. history. One of the chief complaints about Americans around the world today is that our citizens are Eurocentric, or perhaps Occidentric, and we can see why. All of ancient history, including all Asian history up to the end of the 17th century, has been compressed into a single year's study. For example, there seems to be no discussion whatsoever in our schools of African history outside of colonization by Europeans and the slave trade.

American educators soon found themselves on a dangerous and slippery slope. Who knew that by the late 1980s, teachers would be claiming to teach economics, international studies, civics, and behavioral sciences — all pulled into history survey courses with some semantically gymnastic name like "American studies" or "global studies"? And who could have predicted that the so-called ancient history course proposed in 1916 would still be taught today, but with economics and other social sciences supposedly built in, under names like "Western civilization" or "world history"?

It appears that even the NEA was not happy with the report the committee had constructed and in 1918 sought out additional help from the National Board for Historical Service. The new committee, called the Committee on History and Education for Citizenship, became known as the Schafer Committee, after its chairman Joseph Schafer. Schafer was a historian from the University of California, Berkeley, and the Schafer Committee's recommendations did conflict a bit with the NEA Committee's report in a public way. Much of the friction was focused at the elementary level, but at the secondary level the Schafer Committee recommended...
a shift from a Eurocentric history course to a more general world history.

Throughout the history of secondary social studies evaluation, history asserted itself time and again as the main, if not exclusive, element of social studies. Historians had seen that the social studies were seeking new self-definition, and they had fought to keep control of the curricula and to ensure the dominance of the systematic and chronological teaching of history. In the decades following the NEA and Schafer Committee reports, the historians would continue to fight for — and win — dominance for history within the teaching of social studies. To this day, our students often refer to all so-called generic social studies courses as “history” and all social studies educators as “history teachers.” Countless other committees and studies and even a few efforts at more inclusive scopes and sequences have arisen and faded away since 1918, but these have had little effect other than to create a perceived need for social studies electives. But, as I pointed out earlier, electives by their nature breed inequity.

There has been a long-standing argument, dating back to the 1916 NEA Committee report, about whether or not the social studies are a federation of subjects or a fusion of the disciplines. I would say that historians tend to favor the notion of fusion. Even the best-intentioned teachers today claim that what they are teaching is not history, but rather a fusion of history, economics, geography, civics, international studies, and even some behavioral sciences. Ridiculous. The courses they describe in this way are generally history survey courses, which may or may not be taught chronologically, with the other disciplines merely sprinkled in throughout the semester.

Furthermore, even when we claim to be teaching one of the disciplines, such as economics, we are sometimes teaching personal finance. When we teach our students to balance a checkbook, we are not teaching them economics.

If not, our nation will continue down the path of Super Bowl politics: we vote for “our” party as a way of rooting for the home team, not because we have any understanding of the world around us. We will continue to have office buildings filled with college-educated professionals who can’t find Taiwan on a map — and see no reason to. Teaching social studies really can be a life-and-death issue, and popular ignorance of the social sciences can have tragic outcomes for human beings.