

again: “The body, lady, is like a house; it don’t go anywhere; but the spirit, lady is like an automobile: always on the move, always...” (Aristotle, who considered metaphor the highest figure of speech, would have been impressed by O’Connor’s metaphoric use of the automobile to signify modern man’s ludicrously inflated sense of his own autonomy, his capacity for outward control as well as for self-mastery and self-direction.)

Flannery O’Connor believed that her characters were either damned by the end of a story or else they were saved: no one, she felt, could be left somewhere in between. One way or the other, their fate was determined by the manner in which they responded to the action of grace extended to them at the crucial moment. Consequently, when the Divine Mercy strikes in an O’Connor story, it typically visits itself upon just such a smug, self-directed, radically autonomous figure who, if humility and grace are sufficient, is blasted like St. Paul on the road to Damascus and has the scales struck from his eyes. This is the “positive” aspect of O’Connor’s work when it manifests itself, as it certainly does not in all of the stories.

Yet the positive for O’Connor is a cold rather than an affective quality, recalling Aquinas’s definition, which she liked to quote, of art as “Reason in making.” O’Connor herself opined that Hazel Motes, at the end of *Wise Blood*, is “probably saved by the skin of his teeth”—which is not the same thing as saying that the novel has a happy ending. In her imaginative world, happy endings, even when implied, are off the page—and, quite literally, out of this world. To the extent that O’Connor was a pessimist, she was pessimistic in the only sense that befits, and indeed describes, a Christian. “You can’t be any poorer than dead,” the stranger’s voice whispers insinuatingly to Tarwater as he prepares to bury his grandfather. Flannery O’Connor, of course, believed

otherwise. She understood that the world as we know it is passing away and that justice and mercy and joy and the Beatific Vision all belong to the world to come. That was enough for her—and a good thing too for a woman who, as she once wrote, had “never been anywhere but sick,” never married, and died of what she

cheerfully described as “a dread disease”—lupus erythematosus—aged 39. ■

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## Written by the Losers

Political correctness plays with the past.

By Selwyn Duke

WHILE BEING INTERVIEWED by “60 Minutes” correspondent Mike Wallace recently, movie star Morgan Freeman dismissed Black History Month as “ridiculous” and went on to say, “You’re going to relegate my history to a month? I don’t want a Black History Month. Black history is American history.” He pointed out that there are no white or Jewish history months, and the conviction with which he espoused these views seemed to leave Wallace tongue-tied.

Freeman is correct in his intimation that the proponents of this group history lunacy are treating blacks as a nation unto themselves. We may study Egyptian, Greek, or Chinese history, but we recognize these as separate and discrete civilizations. Likewise, when we shift the focus from American history to black, white, yellow, brown, and red history, the implication is that these groups constitute elements that cannot truly be viewed as part of the fabric of a whole. It is to believe that they are nascent nations within a nation or merely competing factions in a loose federation.

The danger this poses should be obvious. Language, culture, and history bind a nation together and distinguish nations

from each other. We share a continent with Mexico, but we are not one nation with them, chiefly if not solely because of those three factors. Teaching group history sends the message that we are not one people, one nation, but many peoples, currently coexisting within the same borders but always in an uneasy, tenuous union and ever gravitating toward autonomy. The balkanization of history presages the balkanization of America.

As if that weren’t bad enough, there’s another, equally troubling problem with Black History Month, one that’s shared by every other special-interest, group-history scheme. (For example, the National Education Association once voted by a two-to-one margin to make October National Gay and Lesbian History Month.) To wit, it constitutes nothing less than the compiling of history based on quota.

This is the mentality that places obscure figures such as Ida B. Wells and Zitkala-Sa on a list of American heroes, while omitting icons such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. It’s why New York City libraries have a youth-oriented biography of Al Sharpton that lauds the hustler as a man who hails from “long tradition of activist ministers like Martin

Luther King Jr.” And it’s what visits upon us politically correct interpretations of history, like the one cited by Terry Graves in *History As She is Wrote*. About the perspective presented in a textbook, Graves says, “All of the American Indians are lumped into one homogeneous culture, all of the Europeans into another, and all Africans into a third, and [the book claims] each of them contributed equally to the present American culture.”

Yes, it’s Chinese-menu history: one from Group A and one from Group B. Check, please.

What is history? Very simply, what happened. It’s not what some academic, media snob, or social activist wishes had happened. It isn’t meant to conform to such people’s sense of fairness or righteousness, and it certainly isn’t there to buttress their cherished agendas. History is to be the teacher of the wise, not the servant of the ambitious.

Moreover, history is neither equitable nor egalitarian, neither palliative nor proportionately representative. It involves great victories and ignominious defeats, astounding accomplishments and indelible failures, and its pages favor the ascendancy of hegemony over the stagnancy of backwaters. Similarly, the color and sex of its prominent faces are determined not by bureaucratic mandate, cultural fashion, or social imperative but by forces that are beyond the grasp of those who see humanity in only two dimensions. It is God’s place to exalt the meek; it is history’s to find the exalted.

And this is precisely why leftists dislike it. Our history is replete with “dead white males” who figure prominently for committing the unpardonable sin of erecting Western civilization. Every signatory to the Declaration of Independence, every drafter of the Constitution, and 99 percent of Renaissance painters were these unfashionable creatures. Furthermore, the bulk of the history that is most relevant to our particular time and place has

been authored, like it or not, by white men. How do you present history without revealing these facts? You can’t. So, if you’re a leftist, you don’t present history.

Instead, shackled with provincial minds infused with radical egalitarianism, leftists cast historicity and meritocracy to the winds as they endeavor to build their brave new world on a brave new past. Whereas historians seek to assign positions in history books based on qualifications, these revisionists exercise a retroactive affirmative action. Non-contenders are given a place in the starting line-up and minor players are placed front-and-center. It’s funhouse-mirror history: the large are made to look smaller, the small are made to look larger, and one often appears a tad misshapen.

The Left responds that everyone has a perspective. They decry the historians of yore as people whose work was colored by irredeemable unconscious biases. And they forge on creating a view of the past born of both unconscious and conscious biases. To them ideology trumps historicity, not the other way around. Moreover, their emphasis on not giving offense to politically favored groups has so overshadowed fact-checking that the bloated tomes they disgorge are as rife with doltish errors as they are with fabrications. This is why modern textbooks can define *jihad* as doing one’s best “to resist temptation and overcome evil” but also inform students that “Napoleon won the battle of Waterloo,” the “Crusades were in progress” in the 7th century, and there are, hold your hat, 53 states in our country. But this is what happens when feelings supersede facts. Feelings, though, mean little. My father was infinitely more important to me than Attila the Hun, but that doesn’t mean he deserves a place in a history text.

Given this sad state of affairs, is it any wonder that in John Stossel’s report “Stupid in America” he affirmed what every other credible study in recent

times has concluded: American students lag well behind their counterparts in a large number of other countries, ranking behind such places as Poland and Korea? Emblematic of the problem was a student in New Jersey who didn’t know what the Bill of Rights was.

How could it be otherwise? Only so much can be taught by teachers and absorbed by students, especially in the undisciplined environment that prevails in modern American schools. Think of what can be taught as a pie; there is room for only so many pieces. Every time schools teach about a counterfeit hero, an authentic one is being supplanted. Each time a modest accomplishment is magnified, a magnificent one must fall by the wayside. Students don’t know about the Bill of Rights because social engineers have been selling them a bill of goods.

And don’t hold your breath waiting for the educational establishment to render this diagnosis. They are the problem, and these physicians will not heal themselves. Thus we will hear them prattle on, offering the same platitudinous prescriptions we have heard for decades. There will be talk of how they need the billions more dollars, the better technology and smaller class sizes they didn’t have when education was far superior. Such are the desperate attempts at justification by people stuck in an ideological straightjacket of their own design.

As long as we allow social engineers to be the custodians of the past, they will persist in placing history in the service of ideology, thereby doing history a disservice. We must purge them from positions from which they can write history, or history will continue to be purged and rewritten. Until and unless we do that, one conclusion about cultural integrity and quality education in America is inescapable: it’s history. ■

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# Missing the Target

Deterrence, not nonproliferation, is the way to deal with would-be nuclear Iran.

By Charles V. Peña

ACCORDING TO President Bush, “the nations of the world must not permit the Iranian regime to gain nuclear weapons.” Testifying before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte said, “Iranian conventional military power constitutes the greatest threat to Persian Gulf states and a challenge to U.S. interests,” “Iran continues to support a number of terrorist groups,” has “conducted a clandestine uranium enrichment program for nearly two decades,” and “seeks nuclear weapons.” And according to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Iran is “the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism” and “the world does not want, and must work together to prevent, a nuclear Iran.”

If it all sounds eerily like the rhetoric leading up to the war in Iraq, it’s because the logic is exactly the same and demonstrates the problem with current nonproliferation thinking. If a nonproliferation regime is failing, the use of force may be necessary; otherwise it is a hollow threat. But if there is no consensus on or an aversion to the use of force, for whatever reasons, then the only recourse is to redouble nonproliferation efforts. But if the previous efforts have already failed, why would simply trying harder be any more effective? Furthermore, if renewed efforts fail, then the only option left is military action, which was previously unacceptable; and so on, *ad infinitum*.

In the case of Iraq, the Bush administration argued that United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) efforts had failed to prevent Saddam Hussein from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, including the possibility of a nuclear weapon—the now infamous nonexistent smoking gun in the form of a mushroom cloud. The allegation was not based on any discovery of WMD but on the presumption that the Iraqi regime was engaged in an elaborate deception to prevent UN weapons inspectors from finding WMD. The administration’s argument rested on not being able to prove a negative: just because WMD could not be found does not mean they did not exist. Unable to accept the risk of failed nonproliferation, the Bush administration decided that the only alternative was military action.

Much of the arms-control and nonproliferation community, on the other hand, strongly disagreed. Most felt that the inability to find any WMD meant that inspections were indeed working, and if there were any problems, they could be remedied by strengthening the inspection regime. But if the nonproliferation regime was, in fact, failing, this is akin to a definition for insanity: continuing to do the same thing but expecting different results. Moreover, the arms-control and nonproliferation community could not disagree with the Bush administration’s assertion that Iraq’s possession of WMD was a threat that required a response because to disagree would

have meant admitting proliferation was an acceptable outcome. Instead, they were left to disagree about the evidence that Iraq was in violation of UN Security Council resolutions and the appropriate response.

Unlike Iraq, however, the case against Iran is much stronger—especially with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) concluding that Iran obtained documents on the nuclear black market that serve no other purpose than to build a nuclear weapon. And unlike Iraq, there is more consensus about the need to take action against Iran. The United States has more international consensus—including agreement from all five permanent members, as well as 27 other nations, on the 35-nation IAEA board—as well as domestic consensus. A *Los Angeles Times* poll showed that 57 percent of Americans favor military intervention against Iran to stop its nuclear program. But is the use of military force—even limited strikes against Iran’s suspected nuclear facilities—the only answer?

In a word: no. Just as the question never should have been whether Iraq had WMD, a contention that presumed that if Iraq did then it was a threat, the fundamental issue is whether a nuclear-armed Iran, however undesirable, represents a threat to the United States that cannot be deterred. In other words, the imperative is national security not nonproliferation.

Some would argue that a rogue regime like Iran is irrational and unpre-