

MEMO FROM EMMETT MAYOR GORDON W. PETRIE

SUBJECT: IS IT TIME TO RETURN TO A CLASSIC MODEL FOR EDUCATION?

Part I

“The greater the ignorance, the greater the dogmatism.” William Osler, M.D.

The Gem Community is grateful when it comes to its teachers. Our school district blesses us with excellent, dedicated, loving and effective teachers. They keep their education maps and compasses correctly oriented to produce students capable of thinking and acting as individuals, even when micromanaged by cookbook curricula from New York City or other Progressive harbors of globalism sadly hawking groupthink and going-along-to-get-along.

Our Gem Community teachers consistently produce top scholars while partnering with parents—at least those parents willing. My heart skips a little when I walk into a classroom at Carberry or Shadow Butte, and especially at Ola. I am immediately transported back to 1954 and my first-grade experience! These trips have the same magical smell of paper and books, erasers and sometimes chalk. No Idaho public kindergartens existed in 1954. So, unless you were an elitist and went to a private kindergarten, kids started out in the first grade, ready or not. (It soon became painfully obvious this blue-collar family kid had not attended one.)

Regrettably, outside of the Gem Community and generally Idaho, too many states lack the kind of educators we have and cherish. Most Idahoans still have traditional notions about reading, writing and arithmetic, not to mention patriotism, working hard, family and community. So, what I have to say does not apply to Idaho schools and teachers, at least those schools in smaller communities like ours. This memo and October’s argue how we got into the mess we find ourselves nationally, particularly in the large urban centers. These memos offer a tried and true alternative educational model, the likes of which produced the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States.

According to the 5-11 August edition of THE EPOCH TIMES newspaper, Roger L. Simon, described as an award-winning author, Oscar-nominated screenwriter, co-founder of PJ Media and a graduate of two Ivy League institutions “to which he no longer donates—not that they need the money,” wrote a crisp opinion piece. Simon argues Antifa is the natural byproduct of our educational system. Readers of this column may recall my similar July Memo in the Gazette.

Simon fingers Howard Zinn as the primary culprit. I did the same—nevertheless, I’ve never been nominated for an Oscar.

Simon contends that “[f]or decades, our schools have been self-replicating machines, preaching to college students, directly or indirectly, the left-wing gospel according to Howard Zinn ...and sending them out in turn to preach this junior varsity, critical theory Marxism...as teachers at whatever level...throughout the country.” He opines that teaching students at the youngest levels could be the most dangerous. Youngest students comprise the most impressionable.

Ironically, several recent news articles reveal that many teachers in urban schools currently utilizing hybrid or exclusive on-line teaching now require students to turn on their cameras to show who is in the room as on-line instruction takes place. Apparently, they want to know about observing parents. Why? Maybe because of Simon’s thesis: they teach neo-Marxism.

Have you wondered how everything became “race” after President Trump’s election? Have you heard about Critical Race Theory? Your college students have. Hardly classical, it comes out of Marxist teachings. But it gets even better. Do you know about the 1619 Project?

The 1619 Project constitutes the “brain-washing” child of New York Times reporter Nikole Hannah-Jones and won the Pulitzer! First appearing in the New York Times Magazine late last year, the Magazine’s editor introduced the project this way: “The goal of the 1619 Project is to reframe American history by considering what it would mean to regard 1619 as our nation’s birth year.” Substitute “reframe” with “rewrite” and the gist of Jake Silverstein’s intro becomes clear.

Classically-educated students could immediately point out the US did not become a nation in 1619. The US was born on July 4th, 1776, when colonists declared their independence from Britain. Up to that time, we were thirteen British Colonies. Accordingly, the colonists “fell in” on what Britain had already established for its colonies world-wide: slavery, an institution infecting all cultures for 5000 years or more, though this fact does not justify it. It’s detestable; yet, still exists; just not in the United States. We resolved that issue with our Civil War.

A safe antidote to this nonsense of historical rewriting to fit a neo-Marxist narrative would be school choice for students in the inner city, particularly where a classical education forms the curriculum. K-12 classically-educated students acquire considerable discernment. First, having studied Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, they understand our most essential ethical activities comprise the choices we make. Choices determine character. Classically-trained students learn

the word “character” comes from a Greek word literally meaning “to etch”, as in, leaving a deep mark.

Martin Luther King, Jr., highly intelligent and well-educated, must have known about this concept. King undoubtedly knew Greek for purposes of parsing the New Testament. The Greek concept of “character” may very well have been on King’s mind when he penned these immortal words of his “I Have a Dream” speech: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” Wow! What a topsy-turvy world ours has become.

To be sure, recently deceased Civil Rights icon, John Lewis, also understood this concept. During a 1994 PBS debate with Al Sharpton, Lewis contended the means utilized by minorities in their struggle must be consistent with the end they seek. Lewis, then, advocated for peaceful disobedience as a means to an end, not hate, chaos, destruction and certainly not homicide.

In part II, we examine how classically-educated students learn to spot Big Lies and live happy lives.