

# No Longer A City On A Hill: Massachusetts Degrades Its K–12 History Standards

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Preface By Paul Reid, co-author with William Manchester,  
*The Last Lion: Defender of The Realm, Winston Spencer Churchill — 1940 – 1965*



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# Executive Summary

Serious history instruction in K–12 U.S. schools has been in decline for decades. Early-20<sup>th</sup>-century progressive educators downplayed history instruction, because “social studies” provided a better education for their desired new pedagogical agenda. The federal government’s growing role in public education accelerated the decline of history education, to be replaced by K–12 instruction oriented toward success on federally mandated tests in English language arts and math. Running parallel to these deleterious forces was the increased politicization of the history curriculum by revisionist historians and education school professors. The result has been generations of students who know little of their heritage.

History education in Massachusetts has, until now, fared somewhat better than in the nation at large. In 1993 the commonwealth enacted the Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA)—a bipartisan “grand bargain” to improve education in the state—which mandated core standards and assessments in history and social science, among other disciplines. The Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework (the 2003 Framework) produced under this mandate contained strong, flexible grade-by-grade standards for core essential knowledge, including the Greco-Roman and British roots of the American colonists’ intellectual and religious heritage.

In February 2009, however, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (the State Board) suspended the 2003 Framework—and it has never gone into effect. In July 2016 DESE instead launched a rewrite of the 2003 Framework, in good measure to realign Massachusetts history education around “service-learning” and “civic engagement”—putatively a nonpartisan education in civics, but practically an exercise in progressive educational propaganda and vocational training for how to be a political activist. In November 2017 the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) formally presented the revisions to the State Board, which approved them to be posted for public comment in January 2018.

The January 2018 Public Comment Draft of the Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework (2018 Revision) eviscerates the 2003 Framework. The 2003 Framework organized its curriculum around coherent sequences of American and European history; the 2018 Revision substitutes incoherent fragments. The 2003 Framework provided crisply written standards; the 2018 Revision lengthens the standards by 50 percent and conveys them in unreadable education-school jargon. The 2003 Framework gave students a history that provided a full account of our country’s European past and its own exceptional history; the 2018 Revision replaces much of that narrative with the history of politically correct protest movements. The 2003 Framework gave students sufficient time to learn European and American history; the 2018 Revision does not. The 2003 Framework integrated sustained instruction in America’s governmental structure with its history curriculum; the 2018 Revision subordinates history instruction to preparation for political activism. Perhaps most importantly, the 2018 Revision eliminates the standards-based and curricular linkage to the already developed Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test for U.S. history, while substituting meaningless “expectations” for each grade.

The Massachusetts State Board should reject the 2018 Revision in its entirety, and immediately put into effect both the 2003 Framework and its accompanying MCAS test.

## Sir Winston Churchill: Defender of the Realm of History

Paul Reid, co-author with William Manchester,

*The Last Lion: Defender Of The Realm, Winston Spencer Churchill — 1940–1965*

There is a scene in the movie *Darkest Hour* that finds British Prime Minister Winston Churchill wandering the halls of No. 10 Downing Street asking aides, “Where is my Cicero?” It is the spring of 1940. Britain is surrounded by German U-boats; the British army is being pushed to the beaches of Dunkirk; France is falling. And here is Churchill (played by Gary Oldman, who won the Best Actor Oscar for his portrayal) turning the house upside down in search of his collected works of Cicero, who has been dead for almost 2,000 years, executed for his defense of the Roman republic as would-be dictators tried to kill it.

The scene is revealing in three ways: It shows Churchill to be absent-minded (he tends to lose things); he depends in an almost childlike manner on his aides and family to put things right (he never cooked a meal in his life, although he claimed to be able to boil an egg because, “I’ve seen it done.”); and his love of Classical history is so great he initiates a search during Britain’s darkest hour for his favorite Cicero.

The movie’s screenwriters could have substituted the Roman senator Seneca for Cicero, or Plato, Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, any number of Classical thinkers, leaders, and orators. Churchill studied them all, and had since his early 20s when he compiled a library and taught himself history.

His library grew over the decades, to include the works of Edmund Burke, Adam Smith, Edward Gibbon, the speeches of Pitt the Elder and Pitt the Younger, and the speeches and biographies of U.S. presidents (Churchill was half American after all). Churchill read *everything*, but the firm foundation upon which all rested was Classical thought and Classical history, especially military history.

In time Churchill made himself into Classical man. It’s not just that he knew Hannibal’s alpine route into Italy, or the history of the Roman conquests of Gaul and Britain, or the dates of sundry ancient wars and battles. He made those events part of who he was. He did not live in the past; the past lived in him. Many who knew Churchill noted this. Harry Hopkins, Franklin Roosevelt’s “fixer,” who met Churchill during the London Blitz, remarked on Churchill’s almost mystical relationship with the past: “He was involved not only in the battles of the current war, but of the whole past, from Cannae to Gallipoli.”

Churchill believed that history spoke, but only to those who choose to listen and know how to listen. An unsettling bit of logic lurks within that belief: history needs an audience in order to *be* history. History, if not passed along from one generation to the next, disappears. The same is true of any discipline; we learn from experience and instruction, but history, unlike math or biology or aerodynamics, forms our collective memory, our identity.

In a republic such as the United States, history must be learned by every citizen participant, not simply the political and academic elites. What happens when it is not taught, when for nefarious reasons it is twisted, distorted, or ignored by the powerful? George Orwell’s *1984* supplies a stark and terrifying answer.

Fortunately, we humans love stories, myths, legends; we love our memories, which are our histories—family, personal, local, and national. A child growing up in a small Massachusetts town, as I did, will get a full dose of family history at home, including tales of family members who participated in events of historic significance. But the narrative arc of our nation’s story, from its pre-history to the present, is best supplied in schools, from elementary school on through to graduation. Why? To prepare citizens, citizens who can think critically, who won’t be gulled by untruths, who know their constitutional rights, and who are prepared to evaluate and judge those who hold political power.

Today’s high school and college graduates can choose to enter any of hundreds of professions, most of which require some form of certification, training, licensing, or peer approval. The one thing the graduates all will have in common is their citizenship, which for native-born Americans does not require any of the above vetting. I make the distinction of native-born status because immigrants to this country who wish to become citizens must take and pass a comprehensive test. The topic? American history.

We all know the old saying, “Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” The other day I did a Twitter search for “Winston Churchill.” I do this regularly because the results are often hilarious, usually involving attributing to Churchill words he never spoke. My recent search yielded a tweet from someone with more than 140,000

Twitter followers. That's a bigger reach than all but the largest American newspapers. This person was attempting to make a controversial political point, and prefaced his message with the "Those who do not learn history . . ." cliché. And he attributed it to "Winston Churchill." Churchill might have wished he came up with the quote, but it was George Santayana who did.

The irony of the tweet was that the pompous pundit who wrote it got his history wrong. More than 100 people replied to the tweet, most in agreement with the author. None noted his error. Social media is the new delivery system for information. When that information is incorrect history, and the audience lacks the thinking skills to unmask the untruths, widespread misinformation will result.

In a democracy, that spells trouble. The first several generations of American leaders understood this. The new American republic was an exceptional and fragile thing. Its intellectual roots went straight back to Classical thinking via Enlightenment thinking. Thomas Jefferson's library—and Madison's and Hamilton's and Adams's—was constituted pretty much the same as Churchill's. So was the library of the Massachusetts-born education reformer Horace Mann, 50 years later, and later still, Woodrow Wilson's library, FDR's, and Jack Kennedy's.

Over the course of decades American public education became truly universal, and for the most part excellent. As the voting franchise expanded beyond white land owners to include working men, blacks, and finally women, public education expanded as well, with American history always at its core.

That history was often vile, often violent, and during the Civil War, catastrophic. It's not always an uplifting story, but it's a story that must be told and *understood* for this republic to survive. At about the time our Constitution was ratified the French experiment in republicanism had collapsed into a bloody terror, and was soon replaced by a military dictatorship which begat 20 years of European war. In 1814, Thomas Jefferson sold his library to reestablish the Library of Congress in order that similar events would never overtake America.

Horace Mann advocated for universal public education for the same reason. The library in your town's high school is his legacy. But only if the books on the shelves are taken off the shelves, and read.

Another scene in *Darkest Hour* has Churchill having to abandon his car to ride the London Underground because the streets are clogged with terrified Londoners. It's a much discussed scene on social media. Churchill is made to seem unsure as to whether to continue the seemingly futile war with the overpowering Nazis, or to seek some sort of peace, which would surely reduce Britain to a vassal of Germany. During his subway trip Churchill learns that common Londoners expect him to fight on; they insist he do so. Thus, his courage restored, Churchill commences to write another inspired speech.

The scene is critical to understanding Churchill, but inaccurate on two counts. The first inaccuracy is minor, harmless, and can be chalked up to artistic license: Churchill rode the subway only once in his life, in 1926 (and got lost). Putting the Churchill character on the subway in 1940 might have worked for the movie but for the second and hugely significant error: Churchill had predicted this war for seven years, had prepared himself for this day, and never once during those years had he uttered one word of doubt regarding the need to fight Hitler to the end. Victory or death was his motto. It was he who inspired Britons, and the free world. The scene is simply bad, revisionist history.

Big deal, some might say. It's just Hollywood being Hollywood. Yet if *Darkest Hour* was the only "historical" record of those terrible days of May, 1940, the world would know a false Churchill, a weak Churchill. History is contingency: some things happen, some do not. The Churchill of this scene never existed. The study of history prepares us to discern fact from fiction.

Returning to Massachusetts, if today's high school students are not tested in history as a requirement for graduation they will go into the future not knowing the extent of their reasoning skills, or lack thereof. Worse, as the following study makes clear, if students are taught watered-down history, and worse still, watered-down history without context, they will take no civic skills whatsoever into the future.

That would be as clear and present a danger to the American republic as any foreign enemy or domestic anti-republican movement. Indeed, an America ignorant of its own history, its own foundation, would no longer rest on any foundation.

# I. Introduction – History Education Nationally and in Massachusetts

## A. History Education Generally in America’s Public Schools

In 1991, Harvard University English professor Alan Heimert commented on the woeful gaps in his students’ knowledge of history: “They are aware that someone oppressed someone else, but they aren’t sure exactly what took place and they have no idea of the order in which it happened.”<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps a bit hyperbolic, but Heimert was one of many university professors and other commentators lamenting students’ ignorance even of their own country’s history. Some background is in order regarding the national setting and Massachusetts in particular.

Heimert attributed the decline in historical knowledge to the “trendy social-studies curriculum” being taught in most high schools. In fact, multiple factors have combined to diminish history study and knowledge to its current dismal level.

The academic discipline of “social studies” identified by Heimert includes history but also extends to other instruction about the individual’s relationship to his society (economics, geography, sociology, and trendier areas such as environmental studies and cultural diversity). The idea is to introduce students to broad themes of human existence and behavior rather than factual knowledge about historical individuals and events.

The movement from teaching history to teaching social studies began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the ascendancy of educational progressives, in the mold of progressive education guru John Dewey. Believing in governance by “experts” rather than by the people, these educators pushed an educational philosophy that emphasized shaping students for living in a collective society, rather than ingraining the knowledge of the nation’s foundational principles necessary for full participation in citizen-directed government.<sup>2</sup>

A related progressive educational principle was the belief that schooling should be utilitarian, designed to give the vast majority of students only what was “relevant” to their working lives, which would inevitably be lived out in a factory or on a farm. Such students, it was argued, didn’t need to learn history; rather, they needed practical social studies that would help them function at the low societal level for which they were destined.<sup>3</sup> As Woodrow Wilson said in a 1909 speech, “We want one class of persons to have a liberal education, and we want another class of persons, a very much larger class . . . to forgo the privileges of a liberal education and fit themselves to perform specific difficult manual tasks.”<sup>4</sup>

Over the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this progressive, largely anti-academic philosophy became dominant in colleges of education. After World War II, as millions of servicemen enrolled in college with assistance from the G.I. Bill, some university educators attempted to swing the pendulum back toward providing the core essential knowledge necessary for all citizens to be self-governing.<sup>5</sup> Despite their efforts, the progressive educational dogma remained—and remains – in place.

More recently, federal policy that results in narrowing the curriculum, reducing time allotted to studying history, has become a major negative influence on K–12 history instruction. Especially since the advent of No Child Left Behind in 2001, schools and teachers are judged largely on how their students perform on tests in reading and mathematics. Predictably, schools have increased focus on those two disciplines, reducing the class time devoted to other subjects such as history.<sup>6</sup>

A survey completed in 2003 found that 79 percent of teachers reported that time spent on the tested subjects had increased either “a great deal or moderately,” with a corresponding reduction in time spent on non-tested subjects (such as history).<sup>7</sup> According to a comprehensive 2013 report, elementary students spend less than 3.5 hours a week on “social studies” as a whole,<sup>8</sup> with presumably much less than that spent on history.

This problem is illustrated by the disappearance of the history term paper. In public schools, at least, students are rarely assigned a history book to read—in its entirety—and a lengthy paper to write about it. As far back as 2002, 62 percent of teachers surveyed reported they never assigned a paper of 3,001–5,000 words, and 81 percent said they never assigned a paper longer than that<sup>9</sup>—and the numbers have almost certainly gotten worse since then. This serious work has been replaced by the five-paragraph essay, sources for which can be chosen, a fact here and a fact there, from the Internet. The multiple reasons for these developments are beyond the scope of this paper, but the result is that students learn neither to think about history nor to write about it.

To make matters worse, the 1960s and 1970s saw the ascendancy of “New Left” historians and history teachers who, to paraphrase Ronald Reagan, made sure that even much of the meager history that students learned wasn’t so.<sup>10</sup> This development was also a continuation of early-20<sup>th</sup>-century progressive

thought. Progressive educators believed that the curriculum should help students “become aware of society’s many flaws and develop a desire to ameliorate those ills, thus making it difficult, if not impossible, for the curriculum to instill a spirit of nationalism or respect for American culture.”<sup>11</sup> Prominent progressive educator George S. Counts advocated that the schools be used as a vehicle to build “a new social order.”<sup>12</sup>

Radical 1960s and 1970s educators eagerly carried that banner. Perhaps the most widely known among these historians was Howard Zinn, author of a cartoonish version of American history titled *A People’s History of the United States*.<sup>13</sup> Zinn’s radically revisionist account, focusing on “class conflict, racial injustice, sexual inequality, and national arrogance,”<sup>14</sup> became so recognizable in popular American culture that Zinn was even mentioned on an episode of the television show, *The Sopranos*.<sup>15</sup>

Progressive pedagogy did particular harm to students from the 1960s onward. By 1983, the famous report entitled *A Nation at Risk* argued that “[t]he educational foundations of our society are being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people.”<sup>16</sup> In response to *A Nation at Risk*, the Bradley Commission on History in the Schools issued a report (1988) detailing the abysmal state of history education in America’s schools, and calling for schools to adopt far more rigorous history curricula.<sup>17</sup> But by and large, history education continued its decline.

Another doleful influence on U.S. history instruction has been the Common Core national standards adopted by most states, including Massachusetts, in 2010. As evidenced by the full title of the standards—English Language Arts [ELA] & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects<sup>18</sup>—the Common Core ELA standards influence instruction in much more than just English. Common Core expects English teachers to “teach” nonfiction “informational” texts from other disciplines, including history/social studies, to promote “literacy” in those disciplines. In fact, various historical documents appear on Common Core’s list of recommended ELA exemplars.<sup>19</sup>

As explained in a previous Pioneer Institute report,<sup>20</sup> the Common Core literacy standards essentially require that English teachers teach history, and history teachers teach English, or at least reading—something that neither group has been educated or trained to do. When history is taught by unqualified English teachers, instruction suffers. The same is true when history teachers are forced to present their material in terms of Common Core’s focus on identifying “claims” and “supporting evidence” rather than content-focused history. They find themselves teaching literacy skills, which is not the same thing as teaching history.

History instruction also suffers from the pedagogical techniques encouraged by the Common Core literacy standards. Common Core “architect” David Coleman is known for

advocating “close reading” of a text—examining and evaluating the text within its four corners, without resort to outside information or context. (Coleman famously urged such an approach in teaching Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.<sup>21</sup>) But as the report’s authors point out, “no history or English teacher before the advent of Common Core would approach the study of a seminal historical document by withholding initial information about its historical context, why it was created at that particular time, by whom, for what purposes so far as the historical record tells us, and clear language archaisms.”<sup>22</sup>

The approach advocated by Coleman and Common Core reduces the study of history to merely the study of language. “The Common Core . . . has promoted the message that History, too, is nothing but a collection of ‘texts,’ and it all should be studied as just language, not as knowledge dependent on the context in which it is embedded.”<sup>23</sup>

The authors of the prior report also point out the inappropriateness of the historical documents listed in Common Core’s Appendix B for teaching a “coherent, sequential and substantive” history curriculum.<sup>24</sup> For example, 11<sup>th</sup>- and 12<sup>th</sup>-grade teachers are encouraged to include such texts as Julian Bell’s *Mirror of the World: A New History of Art and Fedviews*, issued in 2009 by the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco—exemplars that, according to the authors, “are out of place not just in a typical high school history class but in a typical high school curriculum.”<sup>25</sup>

The Common Core literacy standards, then, at least as applied to history education, create a jumbled mess. This situation is now playing out with largely stagnant reading scores between 2011 and 2017 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the “nation’s report card.” The 2010 NAEP results showed that only 17 percent of American 8<sup>th</sup>-graders scored at least “proficient” in the subject.<sup>26</sup> The next (and most recent) round of NAEP testing, in 2014, revealed no significant changes.<sup>27</sup>

Running parallel to the confusion created by these influences is another trend that threatens to damage authentic history instruction as determined by states and localities: the takeover of much of the high school curriculum by the College Board, through its Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The best illustration of the problem is the controversy over the College Board’s revised AP U.S. History (APUSH) framework beginning in 2014. Whereas APUSH had previously laid out broad themes and allowed teachers to fill in the details in alignment with individual state standards, the revised, highly prescriptive framework mandated exactly what teachers were to teach and from what perspective—a left-leaning, revisionist viewpoint that downplayed America’s strengths and achievements and highlighted her failures.<sup>28</sup> A public outcry led to a revision to the revision, but the overly politicized tilt remained.<sup>29</sup> And because more and more students are being pushed into AP classes, regardless of their ability to handle

supposedly college-level work, the history curriculum imposed by the College Board is broadening its grip.<sup>30</sup>

So this is the situation nationally—minimal, shallow, slanted instruction that results in yawning gaps in historical knowledge. NAEP scores can be interpreted in various ways (depending, for example, on how “proficiency” is defined and who’s defining it), but it’s the rare university humanities professor who hasn’t noticed the level of sheer ignorance of incoming students.<sup>31</sup> Professor Heimert has many sympathizers among current scholars,<sup>32</sup> including Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David McCullough: “I don’t think there’s any question whatsoever that the students in our institutions of higher education have less grasp, less understanding, less knowledge of American history than ever before. I think we are raising a generation of young Americans who are, to a very large degree, historically illiterate.”<sup>33</sup>

## B. History Education in Massachusetts Schools

### 1. Horace Mann and the Development of History Education

Massachusetts has a long and proud record of history education in the public schools. Massachusetts education reformer Horace Mann (1796 – 1859) was called the “father of the common school movement,” and he bequeathed to Massachusetts a public school system that was the envy of the nation. Mann created a system that used Normal Schools to provide teachers professional training; welcomed both men and women as teachers; encouraged professional study of pedagogical practice; broadened the curriculum to include sciences, arts, and daily physical education; and shifted away from habitual reliance on corporal punishment. Massachusetts’ public school system gave the state its continuing reputation in the next century for educational excellence, which underpinned its economic achievements.

Horace Mann’s system included history education. Massachusetts followed the political insights of our Founding Fathers, who knew that citizens of a republic needed to know their history if they were to preserve their free form of government. As Thomas Jefferson put it, “[h]istory, by apprizing them [students] of the past, will enable them to judge of the future; it will avail them of the experience of other times and other nations; it will qualify them as judges of the actions and designs of men.”<sup>34</sup> Massachusetts institutionalized this insight for a modern democratic republic: every American student should learn history so every American adult would be an informed citizen. Massachusetts legislation provided for American and General History in its public school curriculum from 1827, and study of Civil Polity from 1857.<sup>35</sup> From these beginnings, history education would become standard in Massachusetts public schools in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### 2. The Reform of History Education in Massachusetts

Or perhaps we should say, the standard became social studies education that included history. As discussed earlier, the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century progressive educational movement diverted the move toward universal, excellent history education and subsumed it within a social studies curriculum more “relevant” to students presumed incapable of the serious study of history.<sup>36</sup> Massachusetts, as the rest of the nation, increasingly subordinated history to social studies, and all education to the increasingly radical and destructive pedagogical theories—multicultural education, education for “liberation,” and so on—emanating from schools of education captured by progressive educators.

But Massachusetts, unlike many states, responded positively to the Bradley Commission’s recommendations to improve history education. In 1993 the commonwealth enacted the Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA)—a bipartisan “grand bargain” to improve education in the state—which mandated core standards and assessments in history and social science, among other disciplines. It specified that the history standards “shall provide for instruction in at least the major principles of the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the *Federalist Papers*.”<sup>37</sup> And it was clear that historical study was to be the backbone of these standards, with “social science” (for example, geography and economics) to be contextualized against that backbone.

The first history and social science standards (the 1997 Curriculum Framework in History and Social Science) produced under this mandate contained strong requirements for core essential knowledge, including the Greco-Roman and British roots of the American colonists’ “intellectual and religious heritage.”<sup>38</sup> But the 1997 framework had faults as well: vagueness, lack of grade-by-grade standards, content gaps, and problems in sequencing.<sup>39</sup> Thus, advocates of a strong U.S. history curriculum were anxious to strengthen it.

Sensitive to the burden on teachers of changing the framework too soon after they had begun implementing it, these advocates (State Board Chairman James Peyser, Commissioner of Education David Driscoll, and various Department of Elementary and Secondary Education personnel) initiated a months-long process of soliciting input from history teachers, university scholars, and the public at large.<sup>40</sup> Many drafts later, a revised framework—the Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework (the 2003 Framework)—was issued in August 2003.<sup>41</sup>

The 2003 Framework largely corrected the flaws of its predecessor. It contained grade-by-grade standards, added the content detail that had been missing from the 1997 version, included an appendix of required and recommended readings,

and provided some flexibility in sequencing for the high school curriculum.<sup>42</sup> According to Drs. Anders Lewis and Sandra Stotsky, both instrumental in creating the 2003 Framework, an especially laudable achievement was resisting the insistence of some ideologically driven “multicultural” critics on, for example, less “Eurocentrism.”<sup>43</sup> With only one substantive change made in response to these critics, the 2003 Framework stood as drafted and approved.

National analysts agreed that the 2003 Framework was outstanding. Sheldon Stern of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, which periodically reviews state standards in various disciplines, found the Massachusetts standards to be of high quality.<sup>44</sup> Although Stern had a few criticisms, he concluded that the Framework’s “balanced consideration of both historical thinking and historical content . . . provides a substantive model that many other states would do well to study.”<sup>45</sup>

Education historian Diane Ravitch ranked the Massachusetts standards with California’s as the best in the nation. She opined that both states’ standards “clearly identify the ideas, events, and individuals that students should learn about, without prescribing interpretations. This builds a solid body of knowledge about history and provides guidance to teachers, students, assessment developers, and textbook writers.”<sup>46</sup>

The Fordham Institute took a second look at the 2003 Framework in 2011. This review ranked the Massachusetts standards second only to South Carolina’s.<sup>47</sup> Fordham described “[m]uch of the framework [as] outstanding, providing historical explanation as well as a robust factual outline.” Particularly praising the Framework’s rejection of “the trendy cultural and historical relativism so often found in American education,” Fordham concluded: “[D]espite its handful of flaws, Massachusetts unquestionably sets a high bar for history education, laying out material with a depth and substance rarely seen in school standards.”

### 3. *Warning Sign — The End of the MCAS History Test*

By 2009 the history component of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) was about to go into effect. This test would demonstrate the commonwealth’s dedication to ensuring its young citizens had the knowledge and understanding of history needed to function effectively in America’s democratic republic.

In February of that year, however, the State Board “voted to suspend for two years all state history and social science tests, as well as the history and social science graduation requirement.”<sup>48</sup> State Commissioner of Education Mitchell Chester claimed the decision was made for financial reasons, although in a Pioneer poll, a large majority of state legislators supported including history in graduation requirements and declared their willingness to find the relatively small amount of funding necessary to administer the test.<sup>49</sup> Chester and State Board also vowed to reinstate the history requirement “as expeditiously as possible.”<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, despite uproar from state citizens and education professionals about the marginalization of history study in Massachusetts schools,<sup>51</sup> no such reinstatement has occurred as of nine years later. The suspension of MCAS history testing means the 2003 Framework is not officially in effect—Massachusetts teachers can use it voluntarily, but the Framework itself is in limbo.<sup>52</sup>

### 4. *Warning Sign — The Civic Engagement Initiative*

Meanwhile, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) began a new initiative. This initiative, not required by the state legislature, was part of a national movement to rework the K–12 system around “service-learning” and “civic engagement”—putatively a nonpartisan education in civics, but practically an exercise in progressive propaganda, vocational training for how to be a progressive activist, and turning students into progressive activists. All this, moreover, transforms education from classroom study into extracurricular activity—usually via the pedagogy of “service-learning”—a deformation of the very purpose of education.<sup>53</sup>

DESE commissioned or issued a series of reports between 2012 and 2017 that progressively reformulated various aspects of the Massachusetts curriculum around civic engagement. These reports included *Renewing the Social Compact: A Report of the Special Commission on Civic Engagement and Learning* (2012), *Preparing Citizens: Report on Civic Learning and Engagement* (2014), *Preparing Citizens: Report on Civic Learning and Engagement* (2015), and *Massachusetts Definition of College and Career Readiness and Civic Preparation* (2016).

In DESE’s documents, these goals are expressed in the anodyne vocabulary of *civic intellectual skills*, *civic participatory skills*, and *plan strategically for civic change*.<sup>54</sup> The content behind the euphemisms is clearest in higher education. At the University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass Amherst), courses that contribute toward the Civic Engagement & Service Learning Certificate include *Grassroots Community Organizing*; *Marxian Economics*; *Embracing Diversity*; *Educating for Social Justice & Diversity through Peer Theater*; *Introduction to Multicultural Education*; *Organizing People, Power, and Change*; and *Race, Gender, Class, & Ethnicity*.<sup>55</sup> A UMass Amherst professor who details his pedagogical practice in the article “Educating for Civic Engagement, Social Activism, and Political Dissent” recounts that he

redesigned a second-semester, required course for the higher education master’s program. . . . More recent course content has focused on . . . global economics (including neoliberalism/free market fundamentalism), global politics (including the U.S. imperialism in the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Iraq), the media, and oppression (including race, social class, the working poor, gender, homophobia). My intention in covering these topics in the course is to provide needed background knowledge

for future student affairs professionals to discuss social change with undergraduates.<sup>56</sup>

Such overt political propagandizing, euphemized as “discussions of social change,” underlies much of the agenda of civic-engagement as that term is used in educational jargon. This is what DESE is embracing in K–12 education. And the other shoe to drop is the rewrite of the Massachusetts history and social science standards.

### ***5. New Standards on the Horizon***

In July 2016 DESE launched a rewrite of the 2003 Framework by collecting input about the Framework via an online survey. Simultaneously, DESE convened a Review Panel made up of teachers, administrators, curriculum coordinators, and professors to hammer out perceived improvements of the 2003 Framework.

Based on input from the survey and the Review Panel, DESE established the following priorities for revision: “1) Provide greater emphasis on civics; and 2) Challenge students to investigate, analyze, evaluate, and deepen their understanding of history, civics, geography, and economics.”<sup>57</sup>

Both of these priorities foreshadowed troubling changes to the 2003 Framework—changes that would work in tandem with the broader reshaping of history education nationally. Many small changes in the Public Comment Draft of the Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework (2018 Revision) reflect this orientation, such as the incorporation of *civic participatory skills* and *civic dispositions* into the 2018 Revision’s standards.<sup>58</sup> The 2018 Revision’s Appendix C explicitly situates the Framework within a series of civic-engagement initiatives between 2011 and 2018.<sup>59</sup>

In November 2017 DESE formally presented the revisions to the State Board,<sup>60</sup> which approved them to be posted for public comment in January 2018.<sup>61</sup> As discussed below, the 2018 Revision fails Massachusetts students and teachers on multiple levels. It should thus be discarded or rewritten to uphold the commonwealth’s track record of excellent history standards.

## II. The 2018 Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework

### A. Executive Summary

The 2018 Revision repeats the errors of recent revisions by DESE of the science, English language arts, and mathematics standards.<sup>62</sup> In each of those cases, the revisions weaken the standards' content and coherence. The 2018 Revision of the History and Social Science Curriculum Framework likewise eviscerates the 2003 Framework, widely praised as one of the country's strongest.

The 2018 Revision degrades the 2003 Framework in five ways:

- The 2003 Framework organized its curriculum around coherent sequences of American and European history; the 2018 Revision substitutes incoherent fragments that obstruct students from learning about historical progression.
- The 2003 Framework provided crisply written standards that were easy for teachers to understand and incorporate into their classrooms; the 2018 Revision lengthens the standards by 50 percent and conveys them in unreadable education-school jargon.
- The 2003 Framework provided a full account of our country's European past and its own exceptional history; the 2018 Revision replaces much of that narrative with the history of politically correct protest movements.
- The 2003 Framework gave students sufficient time to learn European and American history; the 2018 Revision abbreviates these curricular sequences to deficiency.
- Perhaps most importantly, the 2003 Framework ensured that parents and the public could judge how well Massachusetts schools taught history by culminating in a statewide test, the MCAS. The 2018 Revision eliminates the 2009 history MCAS assessment and substitutes meaningless "expectations" for each grade.

The 2018 Revision justifies its revisions as a way to enhance civic knowledge. This rationale is groundless, since the 2003 Framework integrated sustained instruction in America's governmental structure with its history curriculum, and culminated with a United States Government elective in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The 2018 Revision actually serves DESE's "civic engagement" initiative, conducted since 2012, which is part of a national movement that replaces classroom knowledge of civics with skills training for progressive community activism.

The 2018 Revision's anodyne phrase that teachers should use the Framework "to inspire their students to become informed and engaged citizens" euphemizes the subordination of history instruction to preparation for progressive activism.<sup>63</sup>

The 2018 Revision still retains the presumption that history and social studies instruction should consist of classroom study. The subjects of classroom study, however, now promote civic engagement instead of the coherent, chronological study of history. The most egregious example is that study of the Founding era is now subordinated ahistorically to the Civil Rights movement, and, bizarrely narrowing the importance of the Constitution, the Revision now states that the Civil Rights movement "is the reason the foundational documents are relevant to all periods of United States history."<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the 2018 Revision now dedicates an entire year to the ahistorical study of civics—which disorganizes the entire historical sequence of study and gravely restricts students' ability to historicize their civic knowledge.<sup>65</sup> Inserting large amounts of required material on secondary topics beloved by progressive educators compresses the time available to study academic subjects of greater importance, and provides a distorted emphasis of what matters most in history. Most importantly, the new standards would permanently brush aside the MCAS history assessment that was ready to be implemented in 2009.

The 2018 Revision serves the cause of politicized civic engagement by providing history standards distorted by progressive educational obsessions and sliced into anachronistic divisions, and by undermining the means to assess historical knowledge. The 2018 Revision necessarily provides very bad history standards.

DESE should reject the 2018 Revision in its entirety and immediately put into effect both the 2003 Framework and the accompanying MCAS. As a second-best choice, the department should draft an entirely new framework that preserves the 2003 Framework's focus on content knowledge, crisp prose, coherent chronological sequences for the history of Europe and America, integration with MCAS, and chronological integration of civics instruction into European and American history.

## B. The 2003 Framework

To understand just how badly the 2018 Revision serves history education, we must first examine in detail the superior 2003 Framework.

The 2003 Framework provides excellent history standards, organized in a coherent curricular sequence, as the backbone for social studies instruction in fields including geography, economics, and civics. In elementary school, students proceed from an introduction to national symbols to Massachusetts geography to United States geography, and from there to a historically integrated introduction to early American history and our mode of government. In middle school, students proceed from world geography to a study of the ancient and classical roots of our own country. High school includes coherent, chronological study of American and European history, integrated with substantial material throughout on economics and civics, and culminates with two elective choices in economics and civics that highlight economic and political liberty. This curricular structure gave students the historically framed knowledge needed to act as informed citizens.

The 2003 Framework's pedagogical structure is as important, and as excellent, as the substance of its historical expectations. The requirements focus on content, and stress that students are expected to possess large amounts of factual knowledge. The 2003 Framework's standards are crisply written; they convey clearly what teachers must teach and provide them significant flexibility when they teach beyond the standards. The 2003 Framework provides five rationally ordered pathways of suggested course sequences to assist school districts as they convert the state standards into practical course design.<sup>66</sup> The MCAS history test provides an incentive, and assessment, to ensure that students are actually taught this material, and to allow parents to judge the quality of instruction at their children's schools.<sup>67</sup>

The 2003 Framework's virtue derives from its carefully crafted combination of rigorous academic content, coherent curricular organization, and lucid pedagogical framework. The 2018 Revision degrades to deficiency all three of these virtues.

## C. The 2018 Revision

### 1. Content

The 2018 Revision bases itself upon the 2003 Framework's content, but revises it very heavily. Wherever it preserves the 2003 Framework's content, it retains good history. Wherever it revises the content, the changes consistently distort history to fit modern-day progressive educational dogmas.

Changes to the very names given to the early years of instruction nicely capture the 2018 Revision's adoption of progressive jargon. The 2003 Framework called the Grade 1 curriculum "True Stories and Folk Tales from America and

Around the World"; the 2018 Revision calls it "Leadership, Cooperation, Unity, and Diversity." The Grade 2 curriculum similarly changes from "E Pluribus Unum: From Many, One" to "Global Geography: Place and People, Culture, and Resources." Grade 3 changes from "Massachusetts and Its Cities and Towns: Geography and History" to "Massachusetts, Home to Many Different People."<sup>68</sup> The elimination of the phrase "E Pluribus Unum" may be taken as a keynote to the 2018 Revision's changes.

The 2018 Revision's standard vocabulary likewise suffers from progressive distortions. While the 2003 Framework ecumenically provided both "BC/AD" and "BCE/CE," the 2018 Revision eliminates "BC/AD" entirely.<sup>69</sup> The 2018 Revision likewise adopts progressive, politically correct vocabulary when it refers to "Indians" as "Native Peoples," banishing the word "Indians" to a footnote.<sup>70</sup> Many scholars note that American Indians prefer "Indian," or more precisely their tribal names, to the more politically correct "Native Americans" or "Native Peoples." Alvin Josephy's 1994 book *500 Nations: An Illustrated History of North American Indians* and Theda Perdue and Michael Green's 2010 book *North American Indians: A Very Short Introduction* are just two examples of widely regarded academics employing the term "American Indians." The use of "Native Peoples" avoids the clarity of common usage, and (for example) makes teaching the French and Indian War incomprehensible, since students will have no idea whom the war was fought against.<sup>71</sup> In the 2018 draft, "enslaved individuals," a burgeoning euphemism, has partially replaced "slaves."<sup>72</sup> The terms "slaves" and "slavery" have been widely used across high-quality academic scholarship for decades, or longer. For example, all of David Brion Davis's classic, Pulitzer Prize-winning books; noted British historian Hugh Thomas's landmark 1999 book *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440 – 1870*; and David Eltis and David Richardson's 2015 book *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* use the terms "slave" and "slavery," as did 19<sup>th</sup>-century abolitionists and former slaves themselves, including Frederick Douglass. Politically correct vocabulary generally shifts toward the language of educational doublespeak—and the contemporary progressive polemics that animate the choice of words.

Beyond these changes to course titles and standard vocabulary, progressive educational compressions and distortions afflict the 2018 Framework's detailed treatment of history content. A great deal of very important history gets compressed, so students cannot learn it properly. The 2003 Framework assigned the history of early Christianity and the history of Byzantium to two separate subsections, but the 2018 Revision compresses them into one unwieldy subsection.<sup>73</sup> The treatment of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese history likewise shrinks from two points to one—and in the process eliminates crucial

details of the intolerant savagery of Communist rule in China. “Communist Party attempts to eliminate internal opposition” disappears entirely; the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution remain without mentioning the attendant famine, Red Guard terror, and labor camps.<sup>74</sup> These two compressions are representative: on one hand the compression of crucial elements of history (the nature of early Christianity), on the other the elimination of details of leftist atrocity (Communist Chinese terror and mass starvation).

The 2018 Revision compounds the effect of these compressions by adroit use of phrases such as *one of* or *might*, which shrink the amount of historical material students are expected to learn. The 2003 Framework has students learn eight Progressive-era policies; the 2018 Revision says students should “[a]nalyze **one of**” seven Progressive-era policies.<sup>75</sup> The 2003 Framework directs teachers and students to study post-World War I conflicts between tradition and modernity, including all of the Boston police strike in 1919; the Red Scare and Sacco and Vanzetti; racial and ethnic tensions; the Scopes Trial and the debate over Darwin’s *On the Origins of Species*; and Prohibition.<sup>76</sup> The 2018 Revision compresses these facts within a much longer list of topics—but crucially phrases the list as “Trends and events students might research include.”<sup>77</sup> A great mass of factual historical detail from the 2003 Framework appears to remain in the 2018 Revision, but effectively is drastically reduced by locutions such as these, which license teachers to pass over vast amounts of the traditional curriculum.

At the same time that the 2018 Revision drastically reduces the core historical curriculum, it requires students to spend substantial time on material that suits progressive dogma, but is of marginal historical importance. The early-American curriculum inserts mention of Indians, or rather Native Peoples, at every point, even where their impact on American history was trivial.<sup>78</sup> So the study of the foundations of America’s political system now requires students to “[a]nalyze similarities between the principles of the system of government in the United States and governing structures of Native Peoples (e.g., the Iroquois Confederacy)”—an irrelevant distraction from studying the American polity’s English, Enlightenment, and Classical origins.<sup>79</sup> Later American history requires students to spend substantial time on various more contemporary “rights” movements including disability rights, gay rights, and immigrants’ rights.<sup>80</sup> These often amount to undisguised political propagandizing—particularly by failing to question whether such concepts as “disability rights” and “immigrants’ rights” are more the current progressive polemics of *ca.* 2018.

A series of distortions and silences further the 2018 Revision’s overtly progressive skew. The 2018 Revision adds the phrase “the growing inequity in wealth distribution” to its description of the social impact of the Industrial Revolution, a claim that is at worst false and at best to be highly qualified

by the 2018 Revision’s previous phrase, “the emergence of a large middle class.”<sup>81</sup> The 2018 Revision then oddly displaces the Holocaust from European to American history, and adds the Clarification Statement, “*Why do extreme ideologies gain support in a society?*”—as if Americans should seriously worry they too might commit a Holocaust.<sup>82</sup> The 2018 Revision also conflates “the federal government’s response” to “international terrorism” with its response to “mass shootings” and “natural disasters,” and never mentions the word “Islamist” in relation to terror attacks.<sup>83</sup> The overall tenor of these distortions is to accentuate the negative in European and American history, and to euphemize the sins of the enemies of Europe and America.

The 2018 Revision adds imprecision to its other skews. While it makes much of the importance of the development of “complex societies” in human history, it provides no means by which to judge the comparative levels of “societal complexity” in different world civilizations; in fact, it does not even consider that such judgments are an essential component of historical analysis.<sup>84</sup> The Clarification Statement “*Students should be able to compare and contrast fascism, totalitarianism, and liberal democracy and the ideas of Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin*” gives the bizarre impression that Stalin was an exponent of liberal democracy.<sup>85</sup> The decision to shoehorn a section on Spanish history into the section on the Renaissance and Reformation lends the equally peculiar impression that “the decline of Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula” started in the 14<sup>th</sup> century—or, contrariwise, that the Renaissance began in the 11<sup>th</sup>.<sup>86</sup>

At times, imprecision strays over the line to outright inaccuracy. The 2018 Revision ascribes trial by jury to the extremely weak and distant influence of ancient Greece rather than to the direct and overwhelming tradition of England.<sup>87</sup> The section on the conflict between tradition and modernity in modern America speaks of “major societal trends and events in [the] first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,” but then cites numerous incidents from the 1920s, the century’s third decade.<sup>88</sup> Independent of the question of interpretation, such errors of fact and wording weaken confidence in the 2018 Revision as a whole.

Even on its own interdisciplinary terms, much of the new Revision is insufficient. For example, the discussion of archaeology as a means to understand prehistoric peoples fails to include the latest generation of DNA research, which has revolutionized the study of early humanity.<sup>89</sup> Since DNA research would connect the study of history with the study of science, this is an astonishing lost opportunity. Likewise, the catastrophic effects of Old-World diseases on Indians after 1492 represents an opportunity to teach about epidemiology.<sup>90</sup> If history should be taught in an interdisciplinary fashion, it should incorporate the sciences as well as the social sciences.

The proposed Grade 8 civics course epitomizes the different ways the 2018 Revision fails to provide proper content. The course contains basic errors of content that echo progressive polemic, such as the repeated statement that America is a democracy rather than a republic, or the identification of *diversity*—the current progressive euphemism for racial quotas and their carapace of propaganda—as one of the “fundamental principles and values of American political and civic life.”<sup>91</sup> Progressive phrasings also distort the material: to say that the necessary-and-proper clause “enables the Constitution to change over time through Acts of Congress” omits the alternate interpretation that the clause has been abused to allow Congress to make changes unconstitutionally by law, instead of by constitutional amendment.<sup>92</sup> Content omissions likewise reflect progressive educational distortion: the discussion of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment fails to mention the constitutional protections it provides to corporate personhood.<sup>93</sup>

## 2. Curricular Organization

The 2018 Revision compounds its distortion of the 2003 Framework’s curricular content with equally grave disorganization of the Framework’s curricular structure.

The 2018 Revision’s Grade 5 content standard disassembles the 2003 Framework’s coherent chronological introduction to early American history by attaching to it the modern Civil Rights movement. In so doing, it explicitly states that “the reason the foundational documents are relevant to all periods of United States history” is rooted only in the modern Civil Rights movement and in the desire to extend “equality to all.”<sup>94</sup> This both reverses the relative importance of our founding documents and the Civil Rights movement—the Civil Rights movement is only one component of our national pageant of struggles for constitutional liberty—and erases *expanding liberty* from the essential justification for our republic.

The 2018 Revision’s Grade 6 and 7 content standards disassemble the 2003 Framework’s sequence that led from world geography to a coherent history of the roots of Western Civilization from Sumer to Rome. The Revision replaces this sequence with a hodge-podge of world geography and culture that teaches Sumer, Egypt, and Israel in the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and Greece and Rome at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup>, and provides no curricular unity to the two sections of the curriculum—save the sop that students should “explain why some ancient and classical civilizations around the Mediterranean (i.e., Greece, Rome, Mesopotamia, and Israel) are described by some historians as “the roots of Western Civilization.”<sup>95</sup> “Some historians” should read “every competent historian,” since every competent historian recognizes the overwhelming importance of these civilizations’ confluence in the birth of the West, and for the ensuing history of the world.

The Grade 8 civics course detaches students’ study of the Constitution from the coherent United States and World

History sequences that provide its historical framework. Students should first learn about the constitutional founding, and later constitutional history, as an integral component of American history. Specialized instruction in civics properly should come after learning that historical sequence, at the end of high school.

The insertion of the Grade 8 civics course not only renders the United States Government elective an inefficient repetition of the Grade 8 civics material but also reduces by a year, to insufficiency, the time needed for a proper, in-depth study of American and World History. The 2003 Framework expected them to be taught between grades 8 to 12, along with the United States Government and Economics electives; the 2018 Revision compresses these sequences into grades 9 to 12.<sup>96</sup> This compression will encourage schools either to teach the American and World History sequences hastily, or to eliminate large components of them outright. In either case, the reduction of course time by a year is a crippling blow to adequate history instruction.

The 2018 Revision also inserts a quarter to a semester of class time on Personal Financial Literacy.<sup>97</sup> Students should learn Personal Financial Literacy, but not at the expense of class time spent learning history, United States Government, and Economics. Every Massachusetts student will lose essential historical knowledge by this trade-off—and be the loser for the bargain.

Students taught by this incoherent curriculum will remain partially or totally ignorant of the chronological and conceptual links that unite Western Civilization, learn civics shorn of historical context and history shorn of civic import, and learn insufficient amounts of history.

## 3. Pedagogical Structure

The larger pedagogical restructuring of the 2018 Revision vitiates what value remains after the damage done to the 2003 Framework’s curricular content and organization.

Where the 2003 Framework emphasized mastery of content, the 2018 Revision substitutes *research, inquiry, analysis*—but removes any assessment that this process will ever lead to the mastery of substantial content knowledge.<sup>98</sup>

Where the 2003 Framework comprised 131 crisply written pages, the 2018 Revision comprises 193 pages so larded with education-school jargon as to be practically unreadable. The expansion of the heart of the standards is similarly large, from 76 to 126 pages.<sup>99</sup> Neither teachers nor the public can be expected to understand the 2018 Revision as well as they could understand the 2003 Revision—and that loss of clarity by itself is a major degradation to both democratic accountability and pedagogical utility.<sup>100</sup>

The 2018 Revision combines increased detail and length with the characteristic direction to choose one of a variety of subject matters rather than to know them all. The Revision

thereby combines pedagogical rigidity and shallow coverage, by requiring teachers to teach a large number of topics at insufficient depth. The 2018 Revision requires teachers to teach badly.

The 2018 Revision's choice of primary-source documents scarcely ever embodies a debate on issues, and usually presents mostly the heroes of progressive educators. The primary-source selections for the section on more contemporary "rights" movements include documents on Gay Pride, disability rights, and Cesar Chavez—but not (for example) corresponding balanced works by Phyllis Schlafly or Mary Ann Glendon on women's rights or Supreme Court Justices Antonin Scalia or Clarence Thomas on gun rights.<sup>101</sup> It is likewise one-sided, and extremely odd, that the sole suggested primary source for 20<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese history is Mao Tse-Tung, *Quotations from Chairman Mao* (1964), with no space made for the many opponents and tens of millions of victims of Communism.<sup>102</sup> A proper framework ought to provide at least pairs of documents, encompassing opposing points of view.

A history framework should also prompt—and inspire—teachers to go beyond the textbook and the assigned primary sources to read specialized works of history on their own, to deepen the history they convey to their students. The 2003 Framework provided for this need with its Appendix C, "Recommended History and Civics Resources for Teachers." This appendix consisted largely of books and articles—the best of contemporary scholarship—with a leaven of websites.<sup>103</sup> The 2018 Revision, by contrast, recommends only websites in its Appendix G.<sup>104</sup> The 2018 Revision does not encourage history teachers, much less students, to read a single book of history. This absence is the most astonishing confession, and embrace, of historical illiteracy.

Most importantly, the 2018 Revision eliminates a means to assess how well students have learned history. The 2003 Framework culminated with the MCAS history test to assess student knowledge. The 2018 Revision eliminates the MCAS test: its prolix elaboration of expectations, carefully calibrated to each grade, is therefore pedagogically null.<sup>105</sup> An unassessed expectation is meaningless. These pages are so much camouflage of eviscerated teaching standards.

### III. Recommendations

Each of the 2018 Revision’s failings is sufficient to disqualify it as an adequate standard for K–12 history instruction—its overtly progressive distortions and omissions of content, its subservience to the pernicious pedagogy of service-learning-driven civic engagement, its incoherent curricular organization, and its lax pedagogical framework. These flaws combined demonstrate that the 2018 Revision cannot be salvaged even in part. It should be rejected outright.

DESE should reconfirm the 2003 history Framework and implement the 2009 history MCAS test throughout the state. Failing that, DESE should continue the status quo, which at least allows teachers and schools to voluntarily adopt the 2003 standards. If DESE will not reconfirm the 2003 Framework and history MCAS, a new committee should draft an entirely new framework and assessment.

Any new framework should model itself upon the virtues of the 2003 Framework and embody the following principles:<sup>106</sup>

- Draft crisply written history standards.
- Focus on content requirements rather than process concepts such as *analysis* or *inquiry*.
- Preserve coherent chronological sequences for the history of Europe and America.
- Integrate non-ideological civics instruction into the chronological sequences of European and American history.
- Remove service-learning-driven civic engagement entirely from academic history and social studies instruction.
- Align history standards with the rigor and pedagogical rationales of the 2003 Framework rather than with the inferior standards provided by the College Board’s AP History examinations or the Common Core sequence.<sup>107</sup>
- Integrate coverage of economic and political liberty throughout the history sequence.
- Emphasize liberty, religious freedom, the republic, individual rights, and national unity throughout all academic civics instruction.

- Provide suggested primary sources in pairs that include balanced opposing points of view.
- Preserve explicit civics instruction as a content-focused final-year elective.
- Accompany all content standards with a mandatory assessment at least as rigorous as the 2009 MCAS.
- Assess economics with a mandatory content-focused test.

Should DESE seek to add new topics to those provided by the 2003 Framework, the following important content areas should receive priority:

- The role of DNA analysis in expanding our knowledge of human prehistory;
- The historical development of Islamic belief before the emergence of the current version of the Koran *ca.* 800;
- The development of bourgeois virtues in Europe and America as the cultural underpinnings of the free-market economic revolution;
- The history of religious liberty in Europe and America;
- The modern development in Europe and America of the architecture of knowledge, from art history to zoology;
- America’s shared 20<sup>th</sup>-century culture;
- The postwar rise of the American administrative state; and
- The rise of China as a peer competitor to the United States.

If DESE wishes to strengthen civics instruction, it should:

1. Turn the 2003 Framework’s United States Government elective into a required course;
2. Endorse the Civics Education Initiative, already enacted in 15 states, which requires high school students to pass the same test that immigrants applying for U.S. citizenship must pass; and
3. Add a civics component to the MCAS history test, significantly more rigorous than the Civics Education Initiative’s requirements.

## IV. Strategic Principles

These recommendations apply narrowly to the expectations of a curriculum framework. More broadly, however, DESE should improve Massachusetts history instruction in several ways beyond a curriculum framework's remit.

### 1. Integrate Instructional Texts

DESE should provide suggestions for history and government teachers of specific instructional texts that could be assigned in Grades 6–10 to prepare students to read a particular seminal text in Grades 11 or 12. For example, to prepare students to read *Federalist #10* in Grade 11, students could be assigned (among other texts) Barbara Mitchell's *Father of the Constitution: A Story about James Madison* in Grades 6 or 7; Catherine Drinker Bowen's *Miracle at Philadelphia* in Grades 7, 8, or 9; and de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* in Grades 9 or 10.<sup>108</sup>

### 2. Writing Expectations

Both the 2003 Framework and the 2018 Revision focus on the subject matter to be taught. The 2018 Revision greatly expands the Learning Expectations for each grade, but never concisely states writing expectations. Any future framework should state briefly that history writing instruction should be integrated throughout the history curriculum, as a way to further the understanding of history rather than merely as a component of language arts. Students should be writing nine-page history papers—research papers, secondary source analysis, book reviews—in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 10-page history papers in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 11-page history papers in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and 12-page history papers in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. These papers should demonstrate intellectual sophistication, knowledge of the formal apparatus of writing history, and knowledge of how to conduct historical research, and meet high academic standards of spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

### 3. Reading Lists

DESE should provide reading lists of exemplary works of historical scholarship for students as well as for teachers. Students should be introduced to history as a scholarly tradition and conversation, and be aware that it is more than a textbook and a primary-source reader. Students should be assigned at least one complete history book each year in school— such as James McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (1988), David McCullough's *The Wright Brothers* (2015), and Taylor Branch's *The King Years: Historic Moments in the Civil Rights Movement* (2013). They also should read history books on their own, and not just as a school requirement.

### 4. History Teacher-Licensure Requirements

Massachusetts history teachers should be required to possess a history major (eight courses), including a two-semester European history survey course, a two-semester American history survey course, an advanced European history course, and an advanced American history course.<sup>109</sup>

### 5. History Teacher Professional Development

Massachusetts state government should fund professional-development programs for K–12 history teachers that center on teaching rigorous academic content. Funded professional-development programs should include readings and/or lesson plans from established, reputable scholars such as Gordon Wood, Joseph Ellis, James McPherson, and John Lewis Gaddis.<sup>110</sup>

## V. Conclusion

In an address<sup>111</sup> to the National Association of Scholars in early 2018, Professor Wilfred McClay elucidated the purpose of a secondary school education in American history:

It is a rite of civic membership, an act of inculcation and formation, a way in which the young are introduced to the fullness of their political and cultural inheritance as Americans, enabling them to become literate and conversant in its many features, and to appropriate fully all that it has to offer them, both its privileges and its burdens. It is to make its stories theirs, and thereby let them come into possession of the common treasure of its cultural life. In that sense, the study of history is different from any other academic subject. It is not merely a body of knowledge. It also ushers the individual person into membership in a common world, and situates him in space and time. As in Plato’s great allegory of the cave, it ushers him into the light of day, into a public world, into a fuller and more capacious identity.

The Founding Fathers recognized that a democratic republic cannot survive unless young Americans receive this kind of history education. Disjointed and fractured stories, told from the perspective of identity politics and requiring little of students other than politicized dabbling in “civic engagement,” will not bring any student “into possession of the common treasure” of American cultural life. Failure to provide it, then, does an irreparable disservice not only to students but to the nation as a whole.

The 2018 Revision fails to provide effective history education. It must be replaced with a framework that requires much of students but offers them, in return, a share of our common treasure.

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## About Pioneer

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