

A Perfect Solution to the Statue-Toppling Problem

Schools ought to teach history, not protest it.

A number of teachers at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill have pledged to withhold more than 2,000 grades in protest over the university's plans to house "Silent Sam" in a separate on-campus building. Silent Sam is a statue of a Confederate soldier that stood in the quad at the university until students illegally toppled it earlier this year.

The controversy at UNC-Chapel Hill is just one of many such protests across the country, including on university campuses, where the interest in protesting history seems to exceed the interest in actually studying it. In fact, there seems to be a direct correlation between the general ignorance of our history and the strength of our opinions about historical events.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 18 percent of eighth grade students are proficient or better in their knowledge of history. And schools are spending an increasing amount of time on test prep and "skills" courses that take away emphasis from actually knowing anything.

But I've got a solution: Any faculty or student protester wanting to participate in the desecration of historical monuments should have to take a history test.

When student or faculty mobs begin to gather on the green of a college or university, and indicate by their mindless chants and sloganeering that they wish to take down a monument, and when college administrators (not the most resolute or principled people) begin to experience anxiety and cowardice

in the face of established rules of behavior, there should be a team of people ready to run out on the green with portable tables, pencils, and test forms.

Aspiring topplers should have to answer a battery of questions about the person whose statue is being protested, the position he occupied, the historical context of his life, and the actions he performed, good and ill. The test would include a long essay section in which the protester would write an argumentative essay identifying the person in question, explaining the issue surrounding the protest, and setting forth his or her argument in valid syllogisms, and taking into account arguments on the other side of the protester's position.

With footnotes.

Instructors with an actual knowledge of history (if any can be found) should be on call to perform the duty of grading these tests and rendering an intelligent opinion of the case the student has set forth in his or her essay.

You can't topple the statue until you pass the test.

Oh, and if the students are brandishing signs bearing protest slogans, they should be checked for spelling and basic grammar.

Yes, many college students are functionally illiterate or incapable of writing a competent argumentative essay. Yes, many students (and faculty) are also culturally illiterate and do not know basic facts about history and cannot tell when major events happened or what they were even about.

But think of the benefits: Maybe it will create incentives for protesters to actually know something. Maybe the chants and slogans would be transformed into intelligent debates about

social and political issues.

Imagine that.

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