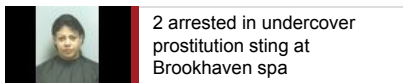
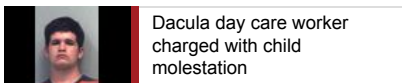
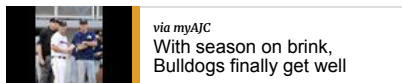


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Opinion: If AP U.S. History is wrong, it shouldn't go right

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May 11, 2015 | Filed in: [ajc-opinion](#), [College](#), [College and Career Readiness](#), [Common Core](#), [Culture and schools](#), [Curriculum](#), [Diversity](#), [Students](#), [Teachers](#), [testing](#)

Donald Earl Collins is a history associate professor at **University of Maryland University College** and a freelance writer. He worked with college access initiatives at **FHI 360 in New York** from 2004 to 2008.

In this essay, he takes on the [controversy over revisions to AP U.S. History](#) by the College Board. Earlier this year, the controversy erupted in Georgia. There was an unsuccessful attempt in the Georgia Legislature to outlaw the course if the College Board did not revamp it to reflect a more positive view of America's past.

By Donald Earl Collins

What is the Advanced Placement United States History course and exam really? It's a College Board course designed for high school students, a facsimile of what it would be like to take U.S. history as a college freshman or sophomore in an introductory course.

Coupled with the AP U.S History exam, the 500,000 or so students who take this course in 10th or 11th grade can obtain credits for their future college transcripts while still in high school by doing well on the multiple choice and essay portions of the exam. That's it.

It's not a course in American civics or patriotism or even American mythology. Nor is it a course on the struggles of the American left, oppression studies or diversity. It is a middle-of-the-road course, academically and politically, so much so that we should see any perceived controversy among American conservatives as ludicrous.

The real problem with the framework isn't that it's too liberal. Nor is the issue about it not talking about the Founding Fathers or Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. enough. If anything, the problem is it remains too centrist, it takes too few risks and challenges too few assumptions about the making of the United States at all.

For nearly a year, the College Board's revision of its AP US History curriculum framework and exam has faced attacks from American conservatives. Lynne Cheney, the wife of former Vice President Dick Cheney, has described the framework as something designed by "those on the left" and devoid of American "exceptionalism."

The Oklahoma Legislature and 2016 presidential candidate Dr. Ben Carson have essentially said the same things. There was a failed effort in the Georgia Legislature to compel the College Board to sanitize the framework.



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The new framework will likely face more attacks even as hundreds of thousands of students take the AP test under this curriculum framework this month.

I doubt, though, that anyone who finds a specific question or an omission of a single individual from the curriculum framework offensive has actually read the 131-page document. Take the main framework statement for "Period 2: 1607-1754," on page 36 of the AP US History Curriculum Framework. The statement reads, "Europeans and American Indians maneuvered and fought for dominance, control, and security in North America, and distinctive colonial and native societies emerged."

This statement is insulting to American Indians on every level. They weren't maneuvering and fighting for "dominance and control." They were fighting to stay alive, to preserve some semblance of the ways in which they had lived prior to contact with the English and other Europeans.

And "distinctive colonial and native societies emerged?" Native societies were already distinctive. They found themselves in a consistently defensive posture, as their numbers dwindled from exposure to European diseases and constant warfare. But God forbid, we actually learn more about how every square mile of the US became the US.

One other quick example comes under "Period 4: 1800-1848." Under "Key Concept 4.1" (p. 49), it reads, the "United States developed the world's first modern mass democracy and celebrated a new national culture, while Americans sought to define the nation's democratic ideals and to reform its institutions to match them."

Despite the introduction of universal white male suffrage by the 1830s — meaning that white males over the age of 21 didn't have to own property to vote — I would think white women, free blacks outside the South, enslaved Africans, and American Indians who had chosen to assimilate didn't feel this "modern mass democracy" love. This key concept within the curriculum framework is so benign it's as if politeness was more important than accuracy or truth in developing it.

The AP U.S History curriculum framework is riddled with this kind of language, as middle of the road as Times Square in Midtown Manhattan. To say any part of this framework is "liberal" says more about American conservatism and narcissism than it does about AP U.S History. It's a rather weak curriculum framework revision, the kind of centrist work that's about as controversial as water being wet.

I'm sure conservatives who've attacked the new framework like Lynne Cheney and Ben Carson didn't read Key Concept 9.1 (p. 78), about "Period 9: 1980-Present." It says, a "new conservatism grew to prominence in U.S. culture and politics, defending traditional social values and rejecting liberal views about the role of government."

Apparently, this "key concept" should be extended to include the phrase "in order to win elections and keep ordinary Americans in the dark about their country's history."

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