

“What Are Some Examples of Historical Revisionism?”

Dear Kerby,

I have heard you discuss the topic of historical revisionism on radio. I told my son about this, and he doesn't believe it. Do you have some examples of how our history has been revised from the original?

Many historians have wanted to secularize our founders. Take this quote from W.E. Woodward. He wrote that “The name of Jesus Christ is not mentioned even once in the vast collection of Washington’s published letters.” [{1}](#)

Anyone who has read some of Washington’s writing knows he mentions God and divine providence. But it isn’t too difficult to also find times in which he mentions Jesus Christ. For example, when George Washington wrote to the Delaware Indian Chiefs (June 12, 1779) he said: “You do well to wish to learn our arts and ways of life, and above all, the religion of Jesus Christ. These will make you a greater and happier people than you are. Congress will do every thing they can to assist you in this wise intention.” [{2}](#)

Other examples are also available. For example, a well-worn, handwritten prayer book found among Washington’s personal writings after his death had the name “Jesus Christ” used sixteen times. [{3}](#)

Often historical revisionism is done by selective omission. Consider this famous quote from a book on American history by Kenneth Davis. [{4}](#) In 1775, Patrick Henry asked, “Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?” Davis then picks up the quote again with the final statement by Patrick Henry: “I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death.”

Technically the quote is correct, but what is missing is very important. The entire quote should read: “Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God. I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death.”

Davis does the same thing when he cites the Mayflower Compact. “We whose names are under-written . . . do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine our selves together into a civil body politick, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid.”

Some important points are omitted. The section should read: “We whose names are under-written having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith and honor of our king and country, a voyage to the first colonie in the Northern parts of Virginia do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine our selves together into a civil body politick, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid.”

Some of the best documented cases of historical revision were provided by the work of Paul Vitz and funded by the U.S. Department of Education. He notes that “One social studies book has thirty pages on the Pilgrims, including the first Thanksgiving. But there is not one word (or image) that referred

to religion as even a part of the Pilgrims' life." {6}

Another textbook said that "Pilgrims are people who take long trips." They were described entirely without reference to religion. One reference said the Pilgrims "wanted to give thanks for all they had" but never mentioned that it was God to whom they wanted to give thanks.{7}

Historical revisionism is a sad fact of American education today. Students are not getting the whole story, and often references to religion and Christianity are left out.

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Notes

1. W.E. Woodward, *George Washington: The Image and the Man* (New York: Boni and Liverlight, 1926), 142.
2. George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1932), Vol. XV, 55.
3. *Manuscript Prayer-Book Written by George Washington* (Philadelphia, 1891).
4. Kenneth C. Davis, *Don't Know Much About History* (New York: Avon Books, 1990), 61.
5. Davis, 21.
6. Paul Vitz, *Censorship: Evidence of Bias in Our Children's Textbooks* (Michigan: Servant Books, 1986), 3.
7. Vitz, 18-19.

Suggested Reading

David Barton, *Original Intent* (Aledo, TX: WallBuilders Press, 1996), Chapter 16.

Paul Vitz, *Censorship: Evidence of Bias in Our Children's Textbooks* (Michigan: Servant Books, 1986)