

Ensuring Students Learn the Truth About Communism

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THE PROBLEM

- U.S. public schools are not educating students about the truth behind socialism, communism, and collectivism more generally.
- U.S. public schools are indoctrinating millions of young Americans with neo-Marxist ideology.
- Most young Americans cannot accurately define common terms such as “communism” or “socialism,” express strong support for socialism as an ideology, and are eager to vote for socialist and communist political candidates.

THE SOLUTION

- States could ensure public school students are taught about the similarities and differences between political and economic ideologies such as socialism, communism, collectivism, totalitarianism, capitalism, and socialism.
- States could ensure public school students are taught the true history of socialism and the various humanitarian and economic catastrophes that have occurred in each and every instance of this ideology’s imposition.
- States could ensure public school students are taught the history of socialism, communism, and collectivism in the United States, how these ideologies have become so prevalent today, and the threats they pose to our individual liberties, democratic institutions, and economic prosperity.



BACKGROUND

For decades, the public education system in the United States has failed to accurately teach generations of American students about communism. Even worse, a new movement is afoot in middle schools and high schools in which vulnerable children are being indoctrinated with pro-socialist propaganda and neo-Marxist rhetoric.

The infiltration of academia by socialist sympathizers goes back a long way. As has been well documented, the origins of this dates back to the early 20th century, when a group of Western European Marxists founded the Institute for Social Research at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany in 1923.¹ After Nazi officials closed what had become colloquially known as “The Frankfurt School” in 1933, the budding neo-Marxist movement found a new home at Columbia University in New York City, and rapidly gained influence in other top universities across the United States.

Prominent Frankfurt School ideologues such as Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, and Erich Fromm quickly gained national attention for their development of “critical theory.” Unlike classic Marxism, which focused primarily on economics (proletariat vs. bourgeoisie), critical theory applies the Marxist lens of victim and oppressor to practically all elements of society, especially cultural institutions such as the public-school system. Eventually, critical theory spawned a litany of new movements, some of the most notorious of which include “critical race theory” and, more recently, “critical queer theory.”²

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In 1980, socialist historian Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States* was published, which sought to rewrite American history from a Marxist perspective.³ In short time, Zinn’s book became a popular resource among social studies teachers, who used it as a classroom textbook. Not long after, Zinn wrote *A Young People’s History of the United States*, which was specifically geared towards middle schoolers. Eventually, the Zinn Education Project was launched, with the express goal of promoting and supporting “the teaching of people’s history in middle and high school classrooms across the country.”⁴ As of today, Zinn’s books have become so prevalent in public schools that the College Board includes them in its Advanced Placement (AP) teacher-training seminars.⁵



YOUNG AMERICANS’ IGNORANCE OF AND POSITIVE VIEWS TOWARDS SOCIALISM

Neo-Marxists’ deliberate efforts to indoctrinate America’s youth for the past several years has paid dividends. The advent of social media, which most young people use to gather information and “news,”⁶ has also had a major influence on young peoples’ opinions about socialism.

According to several polls conducted over the past few years, most young Americans do not understand socialist philosophy, are ignorant of socialist history, and cannot even accurately define socialism and communism in the most general of terms.

In 2019, Young America’s Foundation conducted a poll of high school and college students, asking them, “How would you best describe the meaning of the word ‘socialism?’” The most-cited answer (27 percent of respondents) was: “Don’t know/unsure.” The other top answers included: “Being social” (10 percent), “Fairness or equality” (9 percent), “Worker or community ownership” (11 percent), and “Government ownership or control, or an oligarchy” (11 percent).⁷ This poll clearly indicates that the overwhelming majority of young Americans cannot accurately define what socialism entails, with less than a quarter even coming close to the mark.

Moreover, several other polls show that despite their ignorance of socialism, a growing number of young Americans support socialism over free-market capitalism—and would vote for a socialist candidate in future elections. A 2019 Gallup poll found nearly half (49 percent) of Millennials and Zoomers have a positive view of socialism, which remained relatively

unchanged from 2010 levels, though positive views towards capitalism dipped precipitously (from 66 to 51 percent).⁸

A 2020 poll commissioned by the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation and conducted by YouGov found that 49 percent of Gen Z and 47 percent of Millennials have a favorable opinion of the term “socialism.”⁹ The same poll found that a higher percentage of Zoomers (31 percent) and Millennials (35 percent) favor the “gradual elimination of the capitalist system in favor of a more socialist system of government” compared to Zoomers (28 percent) and Millennials (30 percent) who oppose such a radical shift.¹⁰

A 2022 poll by the Pew Research Center also corroborates this trend. Forty-four percent of those aged 18-29 said they have a positive view of socialism, compared to 40 percent who had a positive view of capitalism.¹¹ Further, 28 percent of respondents aged 18-29 said they had both a positive view of socialism and a negative view of capitalism, compared to 24 percent who said they had a positive view of capitalism and a negative view of socialism, 16 percent who had a positive view of both, and 27 percent who had a negative view of both.¹²

On top of this, another poll commissioned by the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation and conducted by YouGov found that a massive 70 percent of Millennials and 64 percent of Gen Z would vote for a socialist candidate.¹³



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Fortunately, the solution to this problem is relatively simple: states should enact policies that require public school teachers and administrators to educate students about the real history and ideology of socialism, communism, and collectivism more generally.

In fact, one state has already done so, which provides an excellent model that all other states should emulate if they want to furnish their young constituents with the truth, especially so these students will be well-equipped to withstand fully fledged Marxist indoctrination at whatever universities they attend. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) signed first-of-its-kind legislation in April 2024 that is designed to roll back socialist indoctrination and educate young Floridians about the true history of socialism and the devastation this ideology has wrought.¹⁴

Florida’s SB 1264¹⁵—aptly titled “History of Communism”—makes it mandatory for public school instructors to teach students: “the history of communism in the United States and domestic communist movements, including their histories and tactics,” “atrocities committed in foreign countries under the guidance of communism,” “comparative discussion of political ideologies, such as communism and totalitarianism, which conflict with the principles of freedom and democracy essential to the founding principles of the United States,” “the increasing threat of communism in the United States and our allies through the 20th century, including the events of the Cultural Revolution the People’s Republic of China and other mass killings from communist regimes,” “the economic, industrial, and political

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events that have preceded and anticipated communist revolutions,” and “the communist policies of Cuba and the spread of communist ideologies throughout Latin America, including the roots of the Communist Party of Cuba and guerilla forces throughout Latin America.”¹⁶

Each of these specific stipulations could be replicated by other states and embedded within their K-12 curriculum standards. More generally, states could update their K-12 standards to accomplish three primary objectives that would reverse the tide of Marxist indoctrination among their young constituents:

First, state policymakers can ensure students are taught about the differences between ideologies such as socialism, communism, totalitarianism, collectivism, capitalism, and democracy.

Second, state policymakers can ensure students are taught about the true history of socialism and the various humanitarian and economic catastrophes that have occurred in each and every instance of this

ideology’s imposition, especially by focusing upon countries such as the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, Cuba, Venezuela, and Cambodia, among many others.

Third, state policymakers can ensure students are taught the history of socialism, communism, and collectivism in the United States, how these ideologies have become so prevalent today, and the dangers such ideologies present to individual liberties, democratic institutions, and the macroeconomy.

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Endnotes

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