

The Place of World History in South Dakota's Failed 2021 Social Studies Standards Revision Process

An alarming feature of public education in the United States since 2020 has been a highly coordinated and fiercely combative movement from the right seeking to root out and remove Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the schools. CRT is a legal theory developed decades ago that is only rarely a part of publicly funded curricula at the primary or secondary level.¹ In practice, the term CRT is used in a nebulous fashion that bears little resemblance to the theory it purports to oppose. This movement is a reaction to the provocative *1619 Project* published by the *New York Times* specifically, and to movements for racial justice such as Black Lives Matter more broadly.² Responding to the *1619 Project* in September of 2020, the Trump administration created the 1776 Commission to historically justify American exceptionalism, largely by downplaying the centrality of slavery and by highlighting the significance of American founding ideals as expressed in the late 18th century.³ Over the past two years dozens of state legislatures have passed legislation banning CRT or the teaching of 'divisive concepts' in public schools.⁴

Most of the scholarly and public attention surrounding the anti-CRT movement has rightly focused on American history education.⁵ World history, the second-most important history course taught in U.S. public schools, is only rarely considered within this context.⁶ Using the contentious standards revision process of 2021 in South Dakota as a case study, this article will trace how the strident nationalism undergirding the anti-CRT movement can affect world history curricula.

South Dakota is a sparsely populated state in the United States that is dominated by the Republican Party. The state's governor, Kristi Noem, rose to national prominence through her opposition to lockdowns during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, followed by vocal opposition to the Biden administration on a host of political matters. This has led to speculation that she may seek national office in future elections.⁷ Governor Noem frequently wades into the U.S. culture wars through policies related to

public education. By the Spring of 2021, opposing CRT and calling for a strongly nationalist history curriculum became defining elements of Noem's rhetoric. With Ben Carson, she was one of the first notable American politicians to sign the '1776 Pledge to Save Our Schools.' Noem claimed that CRT was "a deliberate means to sow division and cripple our nation from within," and that defeating this "ascendant anti-Americanism" was one of the most pivotal tasks of the current generation.⁸ This was the charged context for the tumultuous 2021 South Dakota standards revision where I served as a Work Group member tasked with updating the state's 2015 standards.

This article will first explore the regular process for creating educational standards in the state that took place in the summer of 2021. This process occurred with a high level of input from educators and experts in the state. Among other changes, the Work Group more fully incorporated content on South Dakota's Indigenous population. But the normal process was subverted first in a moderate fashion as state officials rewrote significant elements of the Work Group's draft behind closed doors. Then, after the state's actions caused considerable controversy locally, and Governor Noem faced withering criticism from national conservative intellectual Stanley Kurtz, the 2021 standards were scrapped altogether. The article will then explore the work of Stanley Kurtz, who stridently opposes the entire discipline of world history. The political maneuvering to reduce coverage of South Dakota's Indigenous peoples stands against not only the best practices in history education, but also does not accord with the available evidence on parent's desires for their children's education.

In the case of South Dakota's 2021 revision process, it proved regrettably easy to dismiss the rigorous and evidence-based work of professional educators and subject-matter experts. Our work was set aside in favor of non-scholarly revisionist narratives prioritizing American exceptionalism. Importantly, as applied to the world history curriculum, an underappreciated objective of anti-CRT culture warriors is to reject world history entirely and replace it with Western civilization as a centerpiece of the American social studies curriculum.

Eight Days to Revise the World

World History Connected readers may be familiar with standards revision processes in large and populous states, which can be quite lengthy and complex.⁹ For a small state like South Dakota, by contrast, standards revisions involve a tiny number of people working for only a small amount of time. In all, there were under fifty members of the 2021 Work Group charged with developing draft recommendations for the entire K-12 social studies curriculum. Members were assigned to tables that focused on specific grade levels. There were four of us at the table for high-school world history, including three experienced teachers from across the state and myself.¹⁰ With only eight working days to make our recommendations, the task of standards revision was challenging.

Before the official sessions in June of 2021, the South Dakota Department of Education (SDDOE) required each Work Group participant to attend a series of webinars on the *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (hereafter referred to simply as the *C3 Framework*), a national set of standards for the social studies designed to emphasize the practice of inquiry. The SDDOE required these webinars after reflecting upon public feedback they solicited in the early months of 2021. In a basic sense, the *C3 Framework* stresses the skills involved in mastering the social studies rather than content memorization. This might involve, for instance, developing research questions or finding and assessing credible sources.¹¹ During the revision process, the facilitator and SDDOE representative encouraged the Work Group to find ways of incorporating *C3 Framework* concepts into our work.¹²

Standards in the state of South Dakota are not a holistic outline of course content like a syllabus.¹³ Instead, there are only a limited number of items included as essentials. There are anchor standards which exist across the K-12 curriculum, and content standards, which are specific to each grade level or course. The 2015 standards contained only five anchor standards and sixteen content standards for high-school world history. And though this number is quite small, public comment (much of it from teachers) called for a reduction in the number of proscriptive standards.¹⁴ The benefit to having fewer standards is the maximization of local control over education, empowering school districts and teachers to design courses that best fit their students' needs. However, for a course as expansive as world history, the intellectual and pedagogical challenges were immense. Since standards were not intended to holistically cover content, what interpretive frameworks or organizing principles should guide standards creation?

The lack of an interpretive framework was one of several weaknesses of the previous set of standards approved in 2015. Some content standards were vague and ill-defined. Take, for instance, a 2015 standard which asked students to “analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives and changes in ideologies of populations.”¹⁵ This is so overly broad that it provides little clarity on what, exactly, is expected. Another issue was that the 2015 standards were entirely focused on Europe. Every named historical event within the standards was primarily associated with Europe, with no direct mention of any non-Western society, event, or movement.¹⁶ Solving these problems required enhanced organization and the incorporation of material from the non-Western world.¹⁷

Our four-member team began tackling these problems in June of 2021. To resolve the lack of an interpretive framework, the group designed an introduction that elaborated on general themes for a high-school world history course and established a suggested system of periodization. The 2015 standards did not include any form of introduction for the subject of high school world history. The Work Group members

purposefully chose to include these themes and periodization in an introduction rather than as mandated content standards. Our thinking was that the introduction could serve as a suggested guide for teachers rather than an absolute requirement that they must follow. This aligned with public input presented by the SDDOE that indicated a desire for fewer required standards.

The introduction focused on the central theme of “connections and exchanges between peoples from many different ways of life and regions of the world by analyzing change over time, and the context in which those changes took place.”¹⁸ This included a suggested periodization of 1450-1750 as an era of “forging connections,” 1750-1900 as an “age of revolutions,” 1900-1950, a period we called “the world in conflict,” and 1950-Present, titled “the problems and possibilities of globalization.”¹⁹ While the group always had local conditions and local public comment in mind, we also utilized nationally recognized sources such as the *Advanced Placement World History: Modern* curriculum, the World History OER Project, *The National Standards for World History*, as well as the *World History for Us All* curriculum.²⁰

The group also went through each of the existing 2015 standards with a fine-tooth comb. The Work Group facilitators, one from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and one from the SDDOE, provided us with a methodology for making these decisions. Group members had to decide whether to “keep,” “adjust,” or “discard” each standard from 2015. The facilitators encouraged each group to build consensus, which slowed the process of standards revision down at some Work Group tables. But the four of us working on world history had little difficulty talking through our differences and finding consensus within our allotted timeframe.²¹ Though the facilitators assisted with structure and methodology, the members of the Work Group crafted all of the revisions.²² As we made changes, the group wrote justifications for each modification, and provided supporting examples and outside sources that could support our work.

In general, the world history Work Group made three types of changes to the 2015 standards. The first was to utilize language adopted from the *C3 Framework*. This happened throughout the K-12 standards, which included an anchor standard on the subject of ‘inquiry.’ For the most part, these changes had to do with historical skills rather than the content knowledge required of students. Students would be asked to design compelling questions, to assess sources, or to utilize primary and secondary sources to find credible information.²³ In other words, the standards asked students to engage in higher-level critical thinking rather than simply memorize a set of facts.

Secondly, and more germane to the specific content of world history, the Work Group revised the standards to better align with accepted scholarship and to allow for the incorporation of multiple global regions. For instance, we changed the language of a 2015 standard that mentioned the French Revolution and Napoleonic Era to use the broader term the Age of Revolutions, which include both the historical example of France as well as other instances of global revolutionary activity.²⁴

The third type of change was to create new standards which included previously unrepresented groups such as Indigenous peoples. South Dakota's Indigenous peoples are known as the Oceti Sakowin Oyate, a term referring to the seven council fires of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota people of the state. In 2018, the SDDOE approved a set of recommendations on Indigenous culture in South Dakota known as the *Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings*, but these are not required, and evidence suggests they are not widely taught throughout the state.²⁵ The world history work group specifically mentioned the Oceti Sakowin Oyate in a revised standard that tasked students with analyzing the effect of global events on South Dakota history.²⁶ Women, who were not mentioned at all in the 2015 standards, were included in their own standard requiring students to “identify and analyze the contributions of women throughout history.”²⁷

When taken together, the revisions developed in June of 2021 provided suggestions for organization and periodization, utilized widely accepted standards for student skills in history, and significantly broadened the content of the world history course to include more non-Western and previously unrepresented peoples. From my perspective, these revisions were by no means perfect, but substantially improved upon the 2015 version. As we left the state capitol at the end of our sessions, the group facilitators informed us that they would be in touch with the Work Group with any substantive changes. On July 26, 2021, a representative from the South Dakota Department of Education sent out a draft version of the completed document to the Work Group members.²⁸ This draft contained no significant revisions to our work from June and was approved by all of the members of the world history Work Group.

The situation changed dramatically over the next ten days, as the SDDOE took unprecedented action to alter the draft standards. On August 6th of 2021, the SDDOE publicly released a heavily altered document containing numerous changes that did not come from the Work Group.²⁹ These changes were made behind closed doors, by persons unknown, and set off a firestorm of controversy in the state.

In a normal South Dakota standards revision process, the state convenes a Work Group to recommend revisions, which are then released to the public and sent to the Board of Education Standards (BOES). The BOES solicits public input and holds a series of public forums before determining any changes to the Work Group recommendations. For the Department of Education to unilaterally make changes before any public input is simply not a recognized part of standards revision, per the SDDOE's own stated process.³⁰ Given the breach of policy and trust that these actions entailed, I asked that my name be removed from the altered document.

Censorship and Resistance: The Fall of 2021

Within a matter of days news outlets published side-by-side comparisons between the draft adopted by the Work Group and those released by the Department of Education.³¹

The SDDOE never provided a detailed rationale for the changes, saying only that they adjusted the standards for “greater clarity and focus.”³² But a reading of the two sets of standards revealed far more than a set of cosmetic revisions. The most controversial change was a significant reduction in mentions of South Dakota’s Indigenous Native American population, the Oceti Sakowin Oyate.³³ Reporting centered on American history, but world history did not go unscathed. The Department of Education version removed all mentions of Indigenous peoples- both the Oceti Sakowin Oyate and global Indigenous communities. In a state with one of the largest Indigenous Native American populations in the United States, the Department of Education’s actions stirred a significant controversy. Candi Brings Plenty, an Indigenous justice organizer for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of South Dakota, said that “removing these crucial conversations about Indigenous people from the state’s social studies standards is a clear step in the wrong direction on our long march for true equality.”³⁴

The SDDOE’s revisions involved other concerning changes as well. One of these was the removal of an anchor standard related to inquiry based upon the *C3 Framework* noted above. Incredibly, the SDDOE required each participant to undergo training on the *C3 Framework*, and then the same department attempted to delete the *C3 Framework* influence entirely!³⁵ The SDDOE also inserted a number of new standards throughout the K-12 curriculum, particularly in grade levels focused on American history.³⁶ What is most curious about each of these changes- the reduction in content about Indigenous peoples, the removal of content related to the *C3 Framework*, and the insertion of new standards- is that they all directly contradicted the public input received by the SDDOE before the standards revision process commenced.³⁷ Not only did this display a high level of dysfunction within the Department of Education (or, perhaps, between the Governor’s Office and the SDDOE), it also demonstrated a willingness to marginalize the input of South Dakota citizens and educators.

The social studies standards controversy quickly became big news in South Dakota in August and September of 2021. Governor Noem initially denied that the changes were politically motivated.³⁸ In testimony to the South Dakota legislature’s Appropriations Committee, Secretary of Education Tiffany Sanderson blamed the media for misrepresenting the entire process. Sanderson said that the SDDOE approved standards were more inclusive of South Dakota’s native peoples than the version produced in 2015.³⁹ But though this statement was true, it misrepresented the issue at hand. No one argued that the SDDOE standards were less inclusive than the 2015 standards. The controversy centered around the SDDOE’s unprecedented action to systematically reduce content related to Indigenous peoples from the version the Work Group created in 2021. The Speaker of the House Steven Haugaard, a Republican rival of Governor Noem, said that “it would be wise to simply re-insert references to Native American culture, since it’s such a significant part of South Dakota, and I think that’s potentially the only way that you can redeem those standards to the public.”⁴⁰

Controversy escalated in late August and September of 2021 as the Board of Education Standards (BOES), the final arbiter in the creation of state standards, prepared for the first of four scheduled public hearings on the proposed social studies standards. Noem supporters such as Tony Venhuizen advocated for the SDDOE's revised version.⁴¹ Venhuizen argued that the Work Group mentioned Indigenous Native American history too many times, "far out of proportion to other topics" such as the U.S. Constitution, the American Revolution, or the American Civil War.⁴² Astute readers will note the apples-to-oranges comparison here, as Venhuizen compared a series of discrete historical events or a specific historical document with an entire people group.

Other groups spoke out against the SDDOE version. The South Dakota State Historical Society, for instance, passed a resolution calling for more references to the Oceti Sakowin Oyate in public education.⁴³ The majority of the nearly 600 public comments submitted to the BOES were similarly opposed to the state's actions.⁴⁴ One parent wrote "I am very concerned about these changes and feel they are being made for political reasons. Our children should learn all aspects of our history and not realize decades in the future that their knowledge is incomplete and crucial groups were not included."⁴⁵

The most extraordinary example of activism came from South Dakota's Indigenous Native American population. On September 13th, the South Dakota Education Equity Coalition organized the "Oceti Sakowin March for our Children" in the state capitol, which demanded not only the restoration of South Dakota's Indigenous peoples within the social studies curriculum, but also the resignation of key officials such as the Secretary of Education and the Governor.⁴⁶ The next day the SDDOE announced that the Board of Education Standards meeting would be delayed by a month.⁴⁷

The unfolding drama of the 2021 South Dakota social studies standards revision took yet another turn one week later with the publication of an article by Stanley Kurtz, a senior fellow at a Washington, D.C. based conservative think tank. The article appeared in *National Review* on September 20th, offering a severe rebuke to Governor Kristi Noem for mishandling the standards revision process.⁴⁸ Kurtz claimed that "hard left activists" had taken control over the standards revision process and undermined Noem's pledge to rid the state's education system of left-wing political bias. Kurtz argued that "the lion's share of the blame falls on openly defiant educators and bureaucrats, and on the appointees at the Department of Education who enabled them." He called on the governor to throw out the "hopelessly compromised" standards, replace members of the Department of Education, and ensure that "thoughtful conservatives" were put in charge of a new revision process.⁴⁹

Within a few hours of the publication of Kurtz' article, Governor Noem took action. On Twitter, Noem wrote that "in every state, radical education activists are scheming in order to impose CRT & Action Civics. I just froze the review of SD's K-12

social studies standards bc I have concerns. Restoring honest & true American & South Dakota history in our schools won't be easy but we must win.”⁵⁰ Initially, the Noem administration said that this was a ‘pause’ in the implementation of the standards process, but by early October they announced that the 2021 standards would be thrown out entirely and a new group would start over in 2022.⁵¹ This was, again, an unprecedented use of executive authority in the state, one that the South Dakota ACLU argued would likely violate federal and constitutional law.⁵² But even this was not enough for Stanley Kurtz, who wrote another article in late October criticizing Noem's handling of the standards revision process.⁵³

By April of 2022, Noem followed Kurtz's advice to ensure that conservatives would dominate in the new standards commission with the creation of a Social Studies Standards Content Standards Revision Commission.⁵⁴ Membership in this Commission revealed a transparently politicized process that minimized the voice of professional educators in favor of politicians and allies of the Governor. The Governor's Chief of Staff, with no background in education, was appointed to Chair the commission. Only three South Dakota certified teachers were selected, representing a paltry 20% of the new Commission (compared to 70% of the 2021 Work Group).⁵⁵ The facilitator for the new Commission was William Morrissey, a professor emeritus from Hillsdale College. The small, conservative, Michigan-based Hillsdale College is most notable recently for the creation of the 1776 curriculum, an effort to translate the work of the 1776 Commission for use at the K-12 level.⁵⁶

The Commission's proposed standards were released in August of 2022, and have been widely criticized by educators in the state and by the American Historical Association.⁵⁷ Criticism centered on a few key features of the new standards. First, the 2022 proposal explicitly refused to include standards on inquiry or on historical skills development. Rather than require students to ask questions and seek out answers through the historical method, standards in the 2022 proposal rely heavily on rote memorization. Indeed, hefty amounts of rote memorization are a requirement even for the earliest grades. The South Dakota Education Association claims that the proposed 2022 standards are age inappropriate as a result.⁵⁸ World history has not featured in the public debate, but it is worth pointing out that the 2022 proposed standards overwhelmingly favor Western Civilization, with only a small number of standards mentioning non-Western peoples. Altogether, the 2022 proposed standards lack basic features of a historical education.⁵⁹

Against World History

The charge of allowing ‘leftist’ politics in education posed a significant threat to Governor Noem's national profile as a prominent culture warrior within the Republican Party. The intervention of Stanley Kurtz in *National Review*, therefore, seems to have

been a significant turning point in the creation of South Dakota's revised social studies standards. The Noem administration appeared to build bridges with Kurtz by early 2022, when he testified to the South Dakota Legislature in support of a 'divisive concepts' bill that his think tank developed as 'model legislation' for other conservative states to follow.⁶⁰ While much of the anti-CRT movement focuses on American history, Kurtz is a prominent conservative voice who views the subject of world history itself as a leftist project to undermine Western Civilization.

Kurtz' work is written for politically conservative audiences, and largely avoids, even derides, the norms of scholarly debate which would weigh the relative pedagogical merits of a Western Civilization versus a world history approach. His opposition to world history can most easily be seen in a December 2021 entitled "Against World History," but are more fully explored in his 2020 report *The Lost History of Western Civilization*.⁶¹ That report was published by the National Association of Scholars, a political activist group advocating for a rightward turn in American higher education.⁶² Kurtz' primary concern is defending and strengthening American exceptionalism, which he sees as vital to the national identity. He claims American exceptionalism "makes no sense without the complementary idea of Western civilization," and so one of his core educational objectives is to strengthen the teaching of Western civilization in American secondary schools.⁶³

But Kurtz takes this a step further. It is not just that Western civilization is more important for American students to know than world history, it is that world history represents an organized political movement in opposition to Western, and therefore American, greatness. Simply put, he claims that "the world-history movement exists to render the West's achievements invisible."⁶⁴ Kurtz supports these ideas by emphasizing civilizational distinctiveness, rejecting the significance of transnational and global forces on human history, and by caricaturing the field of world history as nothing more than a political project designed to deconstruct and undermine American exceptionalism.

The idea that history can be neatly divided into separate and distinct civilizations is central to Kurtz' opposition to world history. Indeed, civilizational distinctiveness is taken as axiomatic, a core assumption from which other conclusions can be reached. *The Lost History of Western Civilization* argues that societies must have a sense of their own distinctiveness to advance, or else "civilization is cast adrift and defenseless."⁶⁵ The specific historical meaning behind this dire sounding statement is entirely unclear. Civilizations are so concrete, and so central to his understanding of history, that Kurtz says:

There is virtually no global history. Human social life plays out at the local, national, and civilizational levels. However desperately the world-history movement works to elevate international trade, shared

*technology, and thin sociological commonalities into the central human story, this approach does not and cannot work.*⁶⁶

Anything that challenges this core assumption of civilizational distinctiveness is nothing more than “fashionable deconstructionism.”⁶⁷

Since it might challenge his notion of civilizational distinctiveness, Kurtz rejects archival historical work focused on transnational forces influencing human history. His treatment of the subfield of Atlantic history is a case in point. He notes the burgeoning research on exchanges of goods, people, and ideas between the Americas, Africa, and Europe, but dismisses all of this research as merely a convenient perspective for ‘leftist historians’ to ignore the true and enduring power of Western civilization. “We used to believe that individual liberty, religious freedom, liberal democracy, free markets, constitutionalism, scientific rationality, and the rule of law were significant enough to justify a focus on the traditions that created them...Deconstructionism is less a way of rebutting this idea than a strategy for ignoring it.”⁶⁸ In other words, his rejection of Atlantic history comes down to a perspectival choice, rather than an evidence-based conclusion.

If civilizational distinctiveness is central to history and to American nationalism, any challenge to grand civilizational narratives is a threat to the national identity. Kurtz acknowledges that studying other cultures may be worthwhile, but only in reference to their essential civilizational characteristics. World history, which highlights connections and exchanges between different people groups, is therefore incoherent and meaningless, according to Kurtz:

*Rather than highlighting the distinctive character of particular civilizations and cultures, world history now focuses on such things as international trade and globally pervasive patterns of social organization. The message is that human societies have always been mutually dependent and are more alike than different. This teaching is offered less to supplement or nuance our understanding of national or cultural differences than to challenge the very idea of civilizational identity. It thereby makes it nearly impossible to grasp the distinctive nature of a given nation or culture. Behind it all lies the desire to replace pride in our Western and American heritage with a commitment to global citizenship.*⁶⁹

World history research, from this perspective, amounts to a political project crafted by professional scholars, rather than a careful consideration of historical evidence.

Kurtz therefore contends that world history is a “political agenda in search of a coherent curriculum.”⁷⁰ He uses politicized language to brand those who disagree with him as leftists or ‘woke’ academics, asserting that historians and educators are very

often so biased that they cannot be trusted at all. The solution, then, is to remove them as much as possible from the education of America's young people. He calls for a grassroots political movement designed to oust academics and educators in favor of parents.

Instead of passively taking their marching orders from politically biased academics and woke-education bureaucrats, governors and state legislatures should seize control of state standards, while local school boards should take charge of curricula, through the democratic process. Once the public savvies up to the world-history movement and its folly, the study of Western civilization can be returned to its proper place in our schools.⁷¹

This is a call for the kind of heavy-handed political intervention that happened with the 2021 South Dakota standards revisions, at least in part to remove or reduce world history from the American curriculum.

Conclusion

As a small state with a Republican super-majority, the South Dakota case study may seem irrelevant to other world historians. But the national culture war is at play across the United States, and similar situations have occurred in other contexts. The state government of Louisiana, for instance, recently conducted a closed-door rewrite of standards made through their normal processes with eerily similar outcomes to South Dakota.⁷² The state of Florida made headlines by using curricula designed by the conservative Hillsdale College, which is also influencing the 2022 South Dakota standards process.⁷³

Given these similarities, I argue that the 2021 South Dakota social studies standards revision controversy illuminates several features of the anti-CRT movement. First, anti-CRT activists imagine left-wing conspiracies everywhere, particularly from educators and academics. Language calling for inclusivity or critical thinking, especially, is often seen as a code for leftist indoctrination. Kurtz claims that there is a “veritable industry of education consultants” who specialize in “language games and clever strategies designed to hijack state K–12 standards and turn them to leftist ends, without state legislators, governors- or parents- catching on.”⁷⁴ During debates within the South Dakota legislature, state representative Sue Peterson sent a document to every member of the legislature entitled “Responding to Social Justice Rhetoric: A Cheat Sheet for Policy Makers,” which purported to reveal the ‘true’ meaning of inclusive sounding terminology.⁷⁵ The widespread belief in the hidden indoctrinating practices of the left leads to a rejection of educational and scholarly expertise in the creation of state standards.

Secondly, the anti-CRT movement is more sensitive to national trends in conservatism than to local conditions or to parents of school-aged children. In the case of South Dakota, there is little evidence that CRT is being taught on a widespread basis at the K-12 level.⁷⁶ Indeed, a study conducted by the South Dakota Department of Education in 2022 revealed very few instances of CRT, Action Civics, or anything related to 'divisive concepts' at any level of the K-12 curriculum.⁷⁷ Although Stanley Kurtz suggests that parents need to take control of education from 'woke' bureaucrats and professors, the available evidence suggests that most parents are satisfied with the education their children receive. An October 2021 poll conducted in South Dakota revealed that a whopping 88% of South Dakotan voters were very or somewhat supportive of teaching Native American history and culture in South Dakota's schools.⁷⁸ This is consistent with national polling that similarly reveals that concern about teaching controversial or 'divisive' subjects is not widely shared amongst parents.⁷⁹ According to an NPR/Ipsos poll conducted in April of 2022, 76% of parents feel well-informed about the curriculum, even on controversial subjects. And fewer than one in five report dissatisfaction with the way schools handle subjects such as the impact of slavery, gender, sexuality, and American history more broadly.⁸⁰

Thirdly, the overwhelming focus of the anti-CRT hysteria is on the subject of American history and a call to reinforce American exceptionalism. But there is a link between the nationalist goal of promoting American exceptionalism and direct opposition to world history as a field of study. Largely suspicious of academics, it is important to note that this is not a scholarly debate weighing the merits of evidence based on the historical method. Rather, it is a politically charged call to reject scholarship and educators in favor of ahistorical exceptionalist narratives.

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Notes

¹ For a general overview of Critical Race Theory, see Stephen Sawchuk, “What is Critical Race Theory, and why is it under attack?” *Education Week*, May 18, 2021, Accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/what-is-critical-race-theory-and-why-is-it-under-attack/2021/05>.

² Nicole Hannah-Jones, Mary Elliott, Jazmine Hughes, Jake Silverstein, “The 1619 Project,” *New York Times Magazine*, August 18, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html>. For an article historicizing CRT legislation, see Gillian Frank and Adam Laats, “This Critical Race Theory Panic is a Chip off the Old Block,” *Slate*, June 18, 2021, accessed July 9, 2022, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2021/06/critical-race-theory-curriculum-panics-history.html>.

³ The President’s Advisory 1776 Commission, “The 1776 Report,” January, 2021, accessed May 19, 2021. <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-Presidents-Advisory-1776-Commission-Final-Report.pdf>. The American Historical Association and 47 scholarly associations condemned this report. See American Historical Association, “AHA Condemns Report of the 1776 Advisory Commission,” January, 2021, accessed May 19, 2021, [https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/aha-advocacy/aha-statement-condemning-report-of-advisory-1776-commission-\(january-2021\)](https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/aha-advocacy/aha-statement-condemning-report-of-advisory-1776-commission-(january-2021)).

⁴ For lists of states who have initiated such legislation, see Rashawn Ray and Alexandra Gibbons, “Why are states banning critical race theory?” Brookings.edu, November 2021, accessed July 9, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2021/07/02/why-are-states-banning-critical-race-theory/>; Sarah Schwartz, “Map: Where critical race theory is under attack,” *Education Week*, Updated June 28, 2022, accessed July 9, 2022, <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06>. The American Historical Association has firmly opposed such legislation. See “Joint Statement on Legislative Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism in American History,” American Historical Association, June 2021, accessed January 13, 2022, <https://www.historians.org/divisive-concepts-statement>.

⁵ The American Historical Association, for instance, has made several statements opposing anti-CRT or divisive concepts bills. Recently, they launched an initiative on their website, focused on teaching an accurate history of the United States. American Historical Association, "Teaching History with Integrity," accessed July 9, 2022, <https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/teaching-history-with-integrity>.

⁶ For data on the prevalence of world history in United States secondary schools, see American Academy of Arts & Sciences, "Credits Earned by Graduating Seniors," accessed June 20, 2022, <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/k-12-education/credits-earned-graduating-high-school-seniors>.

⁷ For an example of this speculation, see David Siders, "Kristi Noem's on a Political Rocket Ship. But Don't Rule Out a Crash," *Politico*, January, 17, 2022, Accessed July 9, 2022, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/01/17/kristi-noem-covid-politician-527080>.

⁸ Ben Carson and Kristi Noem, "Dr. Carson & Gov. Noem: Biggest Cultural Challenge of Our Lifetime: Defeating Anti-American Indoctrination," *Fox News*, May 3, 2021, Accessed May 19, 2021, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/cultural-challenge-defeat-anti-american-indoctrination-dr-ben-carson-gov-kristi-noem>. The 1776 Pledge can be found on the website of the sponsoring group, 1776 Action, Accessed July 9, 2022, <https://www.1776action.org/>.

⁹ See, for example, Ross Dunn's description of a recent California standards revision process in Ross Dunn, "The World History Courses in the New Framework," *Social Studies Review* 56 (2017-2018): 25-30. See also a discussion of Texas' controversial 2010 standards revision process in Keith Erikson ed., *Politics and the History Curriculum: The Struggle Over Standards in Texas and the Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹⁰ The group responsible for the entire K-12 social studies revisions is called the Work Group, but we were divided by table into individual subjects or grade levels. Throughout, I will refer to my table as the world history Work Group.

¹¹ National Council for the Social Studies, *The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History*, 2013, accessed May 19, 2021, <https://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/c3/C3-Framework-for-Social-Studies.pdf>.

¹² South Dakota Department of Education, "Welcome to the Social Studies Standards Revision! All Participant Training," June 14, 2021, Slide 20. Please note that this material was made publicly available on the SDDOE website but has since been removed.

¹³ The conservative Thomas B. Fordham Institute created a report on state standards in U.S. History and Civics in 2021, and based many of their critiques on the incompleteness or lack of standards. Jeremy A. Stern *et al*, *The State of State Standards for Civics and U.S. History in 2021* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2021) <https://fordhaminstitute.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdfs/20210623-state-state-standards-civics-and-us-history-20210.pdf#page=15>.

¹⁴ South Dakota Department of Education, “Welcome to the Social Studies Standards Revision! All Participant Training,” June 14, 2021, Slide 19.

¹⁵ The Social Studies Content Standards Revision Committee, “South Dakota Social Studies Content Standards,” 2015, 40, accessed May 19, 2021, <https://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/documents/SDSocialS.pdf>.

¹⁶ Some of the listed events do include globally connected events, like the Cold War, imperialism, or the World Wars. But traditional world history courses focus largely on the European and North American aspects of these events. For more on the long history of world history in secondary education, see Stephen Jackson, *The Patchwork of World History in Texas High Schools: Unpacking Eurocentrism, Imperialism, and Nationalism in the Curriculum* (Routledge, Forthcoming). I should also note that a series of supplemental resources released in 2020 provide more global content. These ‘unpacked standards,’ however, were not formal requirements but suggestions of best practices for teachers. South Dakota Department of Education, “South Dakota Social Studies Unpacked Documents,” 2020, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/socialstudies-UP.aspx>.

¹⁷ I’d like to thank Bob Bain for his help here. Before the revision process began, he was kind enough to speak with me and offered insightful comments on the 2015 South Dakota standards.

¹⁸ South Dakota Department of Education, “South Dakota Social Studies Content Standards: Preparing Students to be college, career, and life ready citizens,” July 26, 2021, 44, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/documents/Workgroup-Proposed-SS-0921.pdf>. Hereafter this will be referred to as the Work Group Approved 2021 Standards Document.

¹⁹ Work Group Approved 2021 Standards Document, 44.

²⁰ College Board, *World History: Modern*, accessed June, 2021, <https://apstudents.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-world-history-modern>; National Center for History, UCLA, *World History Content Standards*, accessed June, 2021, <https://phi.history.ucla.edu/nchs/world-history-content-standards/>; OER Project, *World History Project: 1200 to the Present*, accessed June 2021, <https://www.oerproject.com/1200-to-the-Present>; National Center for History in the Schools, UCLA, *World History for Us All*, accessed June, 2021, <https://whfua.history.ucla.edu/>.

²¹ The emphasis on total consensus is rightly open to criticism. Why not simply vote on decisions? Stanley Kurtz argues that this effectively silenced conservative voices. Kurtz provided only anecdotal evidence that this disproportionately affected conservatives, but some form of majority vote could have sped up the process. Stanley Kurtz, “Noem Must Fix South Dakota Standards Fiasco,” *National Review*, September 20, 2021, accessed September 20, 2021, <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/noem-must-fix-south-dakota-standards-fiasco/>.

²² Stanley Kurtz claims that it was the facilitators who controlled the entire process, stifling any dissenting voices. Kurtz, “Noem Must Fix South Dakota Standards Fiasco.” I cannot speak for every work group member, but can state with absolute confidence that every suggested revision for World History came directly from a member of the Work Group itself, and was not forced upon us by the SDDOE or AIR. The documents provided to group members also indicate that this was not the case. South Dakota Department of Education, “Welcome to the Social Studies Standards Revision! Day 3,” June 16, 2021.

²³ This would include, for instance, anchor standard “K-12H.5,” Work Group Approved 2021 Standards Document, 46.

²⁴ South Dakota Department of Education, “9-12 H.4.1,” Work Group Approved 2021 Standards Document, 45.

²⁵ South Dakota Department of Education, *Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings & Standards*, 2018, accessed May 19, 2021, <https://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/documents/18-OSEUs.pdf>. Because these are not required, many teachers do not use them. Morgan Matzen, “Less than Half of South Dakota’s Teachers Using *Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings*,” *Argus Leader*, November 11, 2021, accessed November 12, 2021, <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/education/2021/11/11/Indigenous-education-oceti-sakowin-essential-understandings-not-taught/6385470001/>.

²⁶ South Dakota Department of Education, "9-12.H.6.2," Work Group Approved 2021 Standards Document, 46. The group also required a consideration of the perspective of Indigenous peoples in a standard on exploration, imperialism, and expansion. South Dakota Department of Education, "9-12.H.2.3," Work Group Approved 2021 Standards Document, 45.

²⁷ South Dakota Department of Education, "9-12.H.2.3," Work Group Approved 2021 Standards Document, 45.

²⁸ South Dakota Department of Education, Work Group Approved 2021 Standards Document, July 26, 2021, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/documents/Workgroup-Proposed-SS-0921.pdf>.

²⁹ South Dakota Department of Education, "South Dakota Social Studies Content Standards: Preparing Students to be College, Career, and Life Ready Citizens," August 6, 2021, <https://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/documents/SS-StandardsProposed.pdf>. Hereafter this will be referred to as the DOE 2021 Proposed Social Studies Standards.

³⁰ South Dakota Department of Education, "Revising South Dakota Content Standards," accessed August 6, 2021, <https://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/>. Please note that this document has subsequently been removed from the SDDOE website.

³¹ Jenna Kunze, "South Dakota Department of Education contributes to 'Native erasure' in new social studies standards," *Native News Online*, August 12, 2021, accessed August 23, 2021, <https://nativenewsonline.net/education/south-dakota-department-of-education-contributes-to-native-erasure-in-new-social-studies-standards>; Morgan Matzen, "South Dakota DOE removed Indigenous topics from social studies standards before final draft," *Argus Leader*, August 10, 2021, accessed August 10, 2021, <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/education/2021/08/10/departament-education-standards-draft-removes-native-american-topics-lakota-nakota-oceti-sakowin/5540521001/>; Lee Strubinger, "Noem says its 'ridiculous' to view proposed social studies changes as a political move," *South Dakota Public Broadcasting*, August 10, 2021, accessed August 10, 2021, <https://www.sdpb.org/blogs/news-and-information/noem-says-its-ridiculous-to-view-proposed-social-studies-changes-as-a-political-move/>; Michael Woodell, "Public can weigh in on state's removal of Oceti Sakowin Oyate from draft," *Capital Journal*, August 13, 2021, accessed August 23, 2021, https://www.capjournal.com/news/public-can-weigh-in-on-states-removal-of-oceti-sakowin-oyate-from-draft/article_2ec9d1b8-fae0-11eb-aeb6-a3bce156cdf5.html.

³² Morgan Matzen, "South Dakota DOE removed Indigenous topics from social studies standards before final draft," *Argus Leader*, August 10, 2021, accessed August 10, 2021, <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/education/2021/08/10/department-education-standards-draft-removes-native-american-topics-lakota-nakota-oceti-sakowin/5540521001/>.

³³ Oceti Sakowin Oyate refers to the Indigenous peoples of South Dakota. I use the phrase 'Indigenous Native American' to refer to Indigenous peoples across the country. This became the standard language adopted by the Work Group for the 2021 standards process. My thanks to Sherry Johnson from the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, a fellow Work Group member, who suggested this terminology.

³⁴ Morgan Matzen, "South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem 'looking into' social studies changes by way of public input," *Argus Leader*, August 11, 2021, accessed August 23, 2021, <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/education/2021/08/11/south-dakota-governor-kristi-noem-using-public-input-discuss-social-studies-changes-native-americans/8096091002/>.

³⁵ The anchor standard related to inquiry was deleted entirely, but much of the language related to inquiry remained embedded in individual standards across the K-12 curriculum.

³⁶ This also applied to world history. South Dakota Department of Education, DOE 2021 Proposed Social Studies Standards, 40-42.

³⁷ South Dakota Department of Education, "Welcome to the Social Studies Standards Revision! All Participant Training," June 14, 2021, Slide 20.

³⁸ Lee Strubinger, "Noem says its 'ridiculous' to view proposed social studies changes as a political move."

³⁹ Abby Wargo, "Secretary of Education defends revisions to proposed standards for social studies classes," *Rapid City Journal*, August 20, 2021, accessed August 23, 2021, https://rapidcityjournal.com/news/state-and-regional/govt-and-politics/secretary-of-education-defends-revisions-to-proposed-standards-for-social-studies-classes/article_7d5288f3-ofed-5745-8e2e-41b0e42c389d.html.

⁴⁰ Bob Mercer, "Haugaard suggests Native American references should be put back in social studies standards," *Kelo News*, August 18, 2021, Accessed August 23, 2021, <https://www.keloland.com/news/capitol-news-bureau/haugaard-suggests-native-american-references-should-be-put-back-in-social-studies-standards/>.

⁴¹ Tony Venhuizen, "Letter to the Editor: Department of Education fair on social studies curriculum," *Argus Leader*, September 12, 2021, accessed September 23, 2021, <https://www.argusleader.com/story/opinion/readers/2021/09/09/letters-editor-argus-leader-week-september-12/8263242002/>.

⁴² Venhuizen, "Department of Education fair on social studies curriculum."

⁴³ Bob Mercer, "S.D. history board wades into the battle over social studies standards," *Kelo News*, September 10, 2021, accessed September 13, 2021, <https://www.keloland.com/news/capitol-news-bureau/s-d-history-board-wades-into-the-battle-over-social-studies-standards/>.

⁴⁴ Morgan Matzen, "Nearly 600 public comments sent to DOE ahead of public hearing on social studies standards" *Argus Leader*, September 16, 2021, accessed September 16, 2021, <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/education/2021/09/16/nearly-600-public-comments-sent-to-department-of-education-ahead-south-dakota-social-studies-hearing/8351400002/>.

⁴⁵ South Dakota Board of Education Standards, "Proposed South Dakota Social Studies Standards Public Comment," September 10, 2021, accessed July 9, 2022, 3, <https://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/documents/SS-PublicComment-091021.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Morgan Matzen, "Oceti Sakowin March for our Children demands Indigenous history education for all of South Dakota," *Argus Leader*, September, 13 2021, accessed September 13, 2021, <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/education/2021/09/13/south-dakota-oceti-sakowin-march-children-removal-Indigenous-history-culture-public-education/5696863001/>.

⁴⁷ The stated reason was that the venue was not large enough, and any changes to a meeting location necessitated at least one month's notice to the public. Shelly Conlon, "South Dakota DOE moves social studies hearing to larger venue after Indigenous education protest," *Argus Leader*, September 14, 2021, accessed September 15, 2021, <https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/education/2021/09/14/south-dakota-department-education-postpones-standards-hearing-social-studies-protest/8342547002/>.

⁴⁸ Kurtz, "Noem must fix South Dakota standards fiasco." *The National Review* is a prominent conservative publication.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Action Civics refers to an approach emphasizing action in civics education. Students would not only be trained in the principles of civics, but encouraged to actively participate in civic affairs. For more, see: Catherine Gewertz, “Action Civics’ Enlists Students in Hands on Democracy,” *Education Week*, March 20, 2019, accessed October 17, 2022, <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/action-civics-enlists-students-in-hands-on-democracy/2019/03>; Austin Goss, “Facing bipartisan pressure, Noem delays social studies curriculum implementation,” *Kota TV*, September 20, 2021, accessed September 21, 2021, <https://www.kotatv.com/2021/09/21/facing-bipartisan-pressure-noem-delays-social-studies-curriculum-implementation/>.

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⁵² Janna Farley, “Revisions to social studies standards, second working group likely violates federal and constitutional law, ACLU of South Dakota says,” *ACLU of South Dakota*, October 21, 2021, accessed October 21, 2021, <https://www.aclusd.org/en/press-releases/revisions-social-studies-standards-second-working-group-likely-violates-federal-and>.

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⁵⁴ “New Social Studies Standards Commission announced; first meeting set for May 4,” *South Dakota State News*, April 22, 2022, accessed April 22, 2022, <https://news.sd.gov/newsitem.aspx?id=30142>.

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⁵⁷ South Dakota Social Studies Standards Revision Commission, "South Dakota Social Studies Standards," South Dakota Department of Education, August 15, 2022, Accessed August 16, 2022, <https://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/documents/SS-Proposed.pdf>; Jim Grossman, "AHA sends letter to South Dakota Board of Education opposing social studies standards revision process," American Historical Association, September 15, 2022, accessed September 16, 2022. [https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/aha-advocacy/aha-sends-letter-to-south-dakota-board-of-education-opposing-social-studies-standards-revision-process-\(2022\)](https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/aha-advocacy/aha-sends-letter-to-south-dakota-board-of-education-opposing-social-studies-standards-revision-process-(2022))

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⁶⁵ Kurtz, *The Lost History of Western Civilization*, 27.

⁶⁶ Kurtz, "Against World History."

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 136.

⁶⁸ Kurtz, *The Lost History of Western Civilization*, 21.

⁶⁹ Kurtz, "Against World History."

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