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Whose History?: The Struggle for National Standards in American Classrooms

Linda Symcox

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In the 1990s the debate over what history - and more importantly whose history - should be taught in American schools resonated through the halls of Congress, the national press, and the nation's schools. Politicians such as Lynne Cheney, Newt Gingrich, and Senator Slade Gorton, and pundits such as Rush Limbaugh, John Leo, and Charles Krauthammer fiercely denounced the findings of the National Standards for History which, subsequently, became a major battleground in the nation's ongoing struggle to define its historical identity. To help us understand what happened, Linda Symcox traces the genealogy of the National History Standards Project from its origins as a neo-conservative reform movement, through the 18 months of controversy and debate that ensued, and the aftermath - a fascinating account of a crucial moment in U.S. history. Broad in scope, this case study includes debates on social history, world history, multiculturalism, established canons, national identity, cultural history, and "liberal education." This is ultimately the story of how a debate about our children's education became a struggle between competing political forces.

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