

BACKGROUND

THE WORLD HISTORY CURRICULUM OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA



NORTH AMERICAN VALUES INSTITUTE

Executive Summary

The School District of Philadelphia’s 11th grade World History curriculum replaces historical instruction with political ideology. Major events such as the French Revolution, World War II, and the Holocaust are minimized or omitted, while themes of oppression, resistance, colonialism, and anti-capitalism dominate. Students are taught to view history primarily through the lens of identity and activism, rather than through a broad and factual study of civilizations, democratic movements, and global conflicts.

Introduction

Philadelphia’s World History course – developed under the leadership of [Ismael Jimenez](#), the Director of Social Studies Curriculum known for [promoting](#) extreme views on global affairs – is structured around ideological frameworks. It emphasizes concepts like intersectionality, resistance, and cultural oppression, rather than offering students a broad, chronological study of world events. As a result, the curriculum deprives students of a coherent and meaningful understanding of global history at a time when academic outcomes in Philadelphia remain alarmingly low.



EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES IN PHILADELPHIA

- 35% of students scored Proficient or Advanced in English Language Arts.
- 20% of students scored Proficient or Advanced in math.
- 66% of students attended 90% or more of enrolled days.

– [The School District of Philadelphia, School Profiles 2023-2024](#)

Missing Foundations in World History

A comprehensive World History course should provide students with a foundational understanding of how civilizations emerged, how major conflicts reshaped societies, and how global ideas developed over time. This should include a study of ancient civilizations, major conflicts such as world wars, and key cultural and social movements.

The Philadelphia curriculum, however, omits or minimizes countless important historical events, including the foundations of democracy. Ancient Greece and Rome are given brief mention with a four minute video and a nod to “Greek Concepts of Peace.” France is discussed primarily through a lens of imperialism and colonialism, with no reference to the French Revolution. The Second World War goes largely missing, with only a couple of sources cited. The Holocaust warrants a single mention in a link to a 4-page “aligned resource.” There is only one resource on Hitler and one mention of him alongside Mussolini.

Instead of focusing on these historical global foundations, the course centers broad themes such as resistance, identity, and liberation, often presented within a rigid moral framework of oppressor and oppressed. This shift reflects the district’s [embrace](#) of critical theory and [intersectionality](#) as teaching frameworks, as publicly endorsed by its curriculum director, Ismael Jimenez:



Jimenez openly uses social media to express his willingness to teach these ideological frameworks, dismissing alternative perspectives.

Intersectionality as a Historical Lens

From the outset, Philadelphia’s World History curriculum directs students to view historical events primarily through the lens of identity and oppression. The first unit, titled “Intersectionality in Life Narratives,” sets forth the framework of understanding history through an identity lens. Students are assigned an exercise called the “[River of Life](#),” in which they draw their life as a river, using rocks as “obstacles” and relating turns in the river to their personal experiences. Students are meant to recognize and evaluate their own intersectional identities from which to view the entire course. The stated goal is for students to “challenge the idea of history as progress and look at alternate understandings and conceptualizations of world history.” Students are then evaluated based on their understanding of the concept:

Labeling Intersectional Identities on River of Life:

- Purpose: Assess the application of intersectionality concepts to personal experiences.
- Key Elements: Evaluate the accuracy of labeling intersectional identities on the drawn river. Encourage students to consider the impact of different aspects of their identity on depicted experiences.

— From the SDP World History Curriculum

The curriculum builds on this framework by introducing the “history of intersectionality” and the “Impact of Intersectional Identity on Historical Narratives.” Students are taught to prioritize identity as a central lens for understanding history, learning that “[i]ntersecting identities contribute to diverse interpretations and understandings of historical events.” Even complex issues like war are reframed through this approach: “Intersectional analysis of war allows us to consider the effects of war on various people based on race, class, gender, age and can help us consider the human and environmental cost of war.”



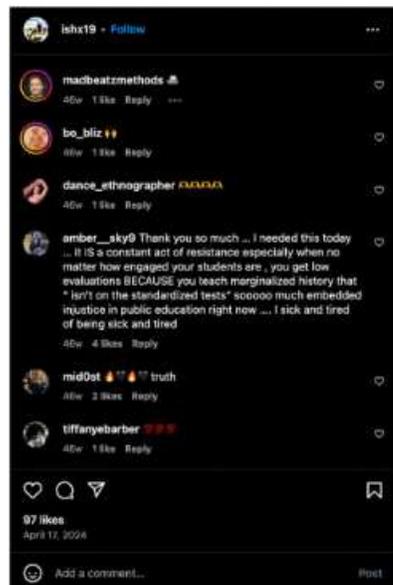
Ismael Jimenez

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Any educators unwilling to use their position on behalf of those who have been marginalized, oppressed, and dispossessed is not worthy of their position. Any educator more concerned with job security than with the lives of the students, families, and our collective humanity is a self-serving educator. Any educator who prioritizes temporary compliance rather than challenging the oppression embedded in schools and school system is merely reproducing our inequitable, unjust society.

-Dr. Camika Royal

[#message](#) [#TeachTruth](#)



A later unit, addressing refugee movements, asks students to write a poem that “reflects the complex, intersectional identities of refugees,” emphasizing their personal experiences over historical causality.

By centering intersectionality from the beginning, the curriculum embeds a worldview rooted in the oppressor/oppressed framework. Rather than guiding students to understand history through primary source documents and critical analysis, the course steers them to arrive at the ideology’s predetermined conclusions.

Economic Systems through an Ideological Lens

The curriculum frames economic history through a consistently anti-capitalist perspective. Rather than presenting a balanced analysis of economic systems, the curriculum equates capitalism with imperialism, oppression, and environmental degradation. Students are asked to consider questions such as, “In what ways did capitalism reinforce or challenge existing power dynamics and social inequalities, including those related to gender and class?” They are taught:

“[T]he rise of capitalism has been closely intertwined with imperialism, where powerful nations extend their influence and control over other regions through colonization, economic dominance, and cultural imposition. Imperialism, often justified through notions of superiority and a civilizing mission, led to the subjugation of peoples and the extraction of resources from colonized lands.”

Complex historical and economic developments are reduced to a simple equation: capitalism equals imperialism, which equals the subjugation of colonized peoples. While imperialism and exploitation are important and complex parts of world history, these topics require a far more comprehensive examination to help students understand the full range of historical forces at play.

The curriculum offers no serious exploration of capitalism’s contributions to innovation, economic growth, or poverty reduction. Instead, it frames resistance to capitalism as a central theme of world history, encouraging students to view economic systems primarily through narratives of oppression. It states:

“Resistance against capitalist exploitation and imperial domination has taken many forms throughout history. People and communities have engaged in struggles for liberation, seeking to reclaim autonomy, resources, and cultural identities... An intersectional analysis of capitalism and imperialism reveals how race, class, gender, and other social categories shape experiences of exploitation and resistance. It allows us to examine how different groups have been disproportionately affected and how their struggles intersect and diverge. In the modern era, the globalized economy continues to perpetuate and challenge the dynamics of capitalism and imperialism.”

This ideological framing extends to related topics such as environmental history. In a section titled “Addressing Environmental Inequality,” students learn about “Negative Human-Earth Relationships, Colonization, Extractivism, and Capitalism.” This section asserts that “[e]conomic inequality continues to grow... This disparity highlights the need for systemic changes and equitable economic policies.” The material encourages “fighting back against the forces which separate people from land and nature” and promises students they “will learn about the ways in which colonialism, white supremacy, extractivism, and greed have separated people from their land, from animals, and from The Earth.” No alternative perspective is included; students are told only that “[e]xamining the intersections of climate justice, economic justice, anti-fascism, and human rights provides a comprehensive framework for tackling these global challenges.” The course omits any discussion of the [worldwide decrease](#) in extreme poverty and the role that capitalism has played in that progress.

Globalization is presented primarily as a source of exploitation and injustice in furtherance of its anti-capitalist agenda:

“Globalization, while connecting the world, also leads to cultural homogenization, labor exploitation, and weakened local economies. Human rights and social movements are vital in addressing these issues. They advocate for justice, equality, and fundamental rights, mobilizing communities and influencing policy. Examining the intersections of climate justice, economic justice, anti-fascism, and human rights provides a comprehensive framework for tackling these global challenges.”

This approach is a massive oversimplification of “economic inequality” in order to lead students to arrive at predetermined conclusions about capitalism. It fails to educate students about the complexities of economic

systems, an essential part of understanding world history.

No serious examination of alternative economic systems or their failures is offered. There is no reference to Marx or Mao, and the only mention of socialism comes from a [piece](#) from [socialistalternative.org](#) on how the Zapatista movement “promised more rights for women, and paved the way for the creation of community-run schools, [and] health clinics.” The same piece calls for a global revolution: “The struggle to end the violence and secure a better standard of living...will require mobilizing the power of the entire Mexican working class, connected with similar movements internationally, in the struggle for a new world organized in the interests of ordinary people, not the billionaires.” The curriculum promotes this ideological view without addressing the complexities, failures, and human costs of socialist systems throughout history. It simply leaves out historical issues that are critical to an accurate understanding of world history.

The curriculum also overlooks how elements of socialism have been incorporated into capitalist systems to address inequality and economic hardship. By ignoring the complexities of real-world economies, it deprives students of a realistic understanding of how modern economies function and adapt.

Intersectional View of International Conflict

The curriculum’s treatment of international conflict continues the course’s broader trend of filtering historical events through the lens of identity and activism. Units such as “Perspectives on Peace and Conflict” and “Conceptualizing Peace and Conflict” focus heavily on war’s impact on women, framing conflict primarily as a function of gender oppression. One included [resource](#) claims that war is more devastating for women than for men, overlooking the fact that the vast majority of war deaths historically have been male. While it is important to recognize how war affects populations differently, the curriculum reduces complex historical realities to identity-based narratives.

The “Conceptualizing Peace and Conflict” unit asks, “How do societal expectations of gender influence perceptions of warfare and conflict?” which seems to imply that men are pro-war because they are socially conditioned to tolerate violence. A section called “Militarism and Gender” states explicitly: “Gender norms intersect with militarism to perpetuate stereotypes and influence societal attitudes towards war.”

The “Perspectives on Peace and Conflict” unit “seeks to present the concept of peace as perceived throughout different periods of history, how peace was envisioned and enacted, philosophies of pacifism as an alternative to war, feminist analyses of peace and war and, finally, the question of how ‘inner peace’ (peace within yourself) may be related to external peace in some cultures.” It also informs students that “[g]ender inequalities and violence against women are interconnected with militarism and armed conflict.”

Class activities reinforce this framing. In “Conceptualizing Peace and Conflict,” students are asked to “interrogate notions of gender and militarism through critical analysis of media representations like Disney’s *Mulan*, illuminating the intersection of gender norms with warfare and prompting reflection on the impact of societal expectations.” Other assignments prioritize personal reflection; for example, the activity “Mindfulness Reflection Journal” describes how “[a]fter a guided mindfulness exercise, students journal about the experience and its potential impact on fostering compassion and inner peace.” In another activity called “Peace Symbol Design,” students “design a personal peace symbol that incorporates elements from Akan, Chinese, and Gandhian philosophies, explaining its significance.” These activities fail to present serious engagement with the causes, consequences, and geopolitical realities of war.

Discussions of contemporary conflict are similarly framed through an intersectional lens:

“Intersectional analysis of war allows us to consider the effects of war on various people based on race, class, gender, age and can help us consider the human and environmental cost of war. Militarized intervention across the globe is not always defined legally as “war” even as they involve armed conflict. Terms such as “urban warfare” and the “war on terror” thinly mask racist justification for armed intervention, increasing surveillance and control.”

This oversimplified framework for understanding national security and international relations risks misinforming students about the serious global threats faced by all societies. Reducing the complex issue of terrorism to racism not only distorts the nature of these threats; it also fails to teach students about the difficult balance between civil liberties and national defense.

The framing of international conflict continues with its introduction of colonialism. In a segment on the “Historical Development of Conflict,” the curriculum presents the ideological concept of “cultural genocide,” along with the following topics:

Cultural Genocide

- Definition and Debate Around the Concept of Cultural Genocide
- Historical Examples: Government Policies and Cultural Erasure
- The Role of Settler Colonialism in Cultural Suppression
- Indigenous Responses to Cultural Genocide

— From the SDP World History Curriculum

Settler Colonialism, mentioned in the third bullet, describes the systematic and deliberate erasure of a people and their culture by newcomers. In contemporary activist discourse, this term is frequently applied to Israel in an attempt to delegitimize its existence, as well as to Western democracies like the United States. The inclusion of this concept – particularly under the leadership of an openly anti-Israel curriculum director – raises concerns about the introduction of highly politicized and dangerous narratives into the classroom. While it is unclear exactly how this topic is presented in practice, it is reasonable to assume that teachers will address the Israel/Palestine conflict through this lens.

Settler Colonialism is also commonly used in anti-Western critiques of the United States in which the country is referred to as “Turtle Island” in reference to an Indigenous creation story. Protesters and activists use the term to argue that Americans live on stolen land that must be returned to the Indigenous population. In the words of a University of Minnesota professor, “The goal is to dismantle the settler project that is the United States.” The anti-settler colonialist struggle of Native American populations is often linked to the Palestinian cause in an effort to build solidarity between anti-colonial movements.

The curriculum also instructs students that “[c]olonialism profoundly dehumanized colonized peoples and disrupted their cultural identities” and “[u]nderstanding the history of resistance movements is essential for recognizing the ongoing struggles for liberation and social justice in the world.” The inclusion of this ideology reflects Jimenez’s public activism which frames Israel as an illegitimate, colonizer state.



This framing continues with the curriculum’s emphasis on “cultural genocide”—a concept closely tied to modern settler colonial narratives. The term genocide appears 11 times in this curriculum, 9 of which are “cultural genocide.” Meanwhile, actual genocides, including the Holocaust and others throughout history, are largely ignored. Instead, one unit directs students to ask the following “Essential Questions”:

- How is culture and the denial of culture used as a tool for conquest?
- How are culture and language used as acts of resistance?
- Are culture and language human rights?
- How are language, culture and identity related?
- How has government action impacted the cultural identity and human rights of Indigenous populations?
- What is the role of cultural genocide in historical and contemporary contexts, and how does it relate to forced assimilation policies?
- In what ways do migration, displacement, and forced assimilation impact human rights, cultural identity, and justice?

— From the SDP World History Curriculum

The curriculum also includes a unit on migration through an oppression lens, called “How has migration shaped the development of belief systems in history?”, in which students learn the following:

- Cultural communities exhibit resilience and resistance strategies to navigate oppressive forces.

- Power structures exert a profound influence on individuals and communities, shaping cultural narratives and determining life trajectories.
- Migration is a complex phenomenon driven by diverse reasons, and understanding its intricacies is crucial for grasping the profound implications on cultural identity, human rights, and societal structures.
- Cultural identity is an intrinsic human right, and communities face historical and contemporary challenges in maintaining their cultural heritage amidst pressures for assimilation.
- The world is interconnected, emphasizing the far-reaching consequences of actions on culture, migration patterns, and human rights.
- Artistic expression serves as a powerful tool for fostering social change, enabling creative avenues for cultural preservation, resistance, and communication across diverse communities.

— From the SDP World History Curriculum

To further reinforce the degree to which the complexities of war and their effect are ignored in favor of “culture,” one assignment instructs students to “write a collaborative poem” that “should reflect the complex, intersectional identities of refugees, addressing categories such as demographics, occupations, hobbies, personal experiences, and cultural backgrounds. Through structured brainstorming and writing exercises, students will create a poem that responds to stereotypes, highlights common experiences, and conveys the refugees’ desires and struggles.”

Indigenous Thought

Indigenous peoples are an important part of world history, representing a wide range of geographically, racially, and culturally distinct civilizations. This diversity is not evident in the first unit of the World History Curriculum, which refers indigenous people as a single, unified category:

Conceptions of Time and History

- Understanding Time and History through Indigenous Perspectives
- Mapping Indigenous Territories
- Analyzing Indigenous Perceptions of Time and History
- Critique of Eurocentric Narratives in World History

— From the SDP World History Curriculum

Student resources include [“A guide to Indigenous land acknowledgment”](#) and an article on [“Indigenous Perceptions of Time.”](#) The curriculum claims “that many Indigenous people saw time and history based upon a spiritual objective that defines humanity’s goals differently: to live in peace with other humans and in balance with nature.” Such statements present an overly simplistic and romanticized view of Indigenous civilizations, ignoring the historical reality that, like all human societies, Indigenous groups engaged in warfare, territorial disputes, and power struggles. By portraying Indigenous peoples as uniformly peaceful or spiritually superior, the curriculum deprives students of a more honest and complex understanding of world history.

Conclusion

The School District of Philadelphia's World History curriculum fails to provide students with a balanced understanding of world history. Foundational events and complex global developments are replaced with lessons centered on identity, oppression, and anti-capitalism. Students are not taught to think critically about the past but are instead guided toward predetermined conclusions that serve a political agenda.