

Foreword

Americans in general do not know American history. Because of that, we do not understand what's happening in Washington, DC. Because of that we are easily misled and manipulated by the political movers and shakers there. Because of that, we as a country have drifted perilously away from our Constitution. Because of that, we are in imminent danger of losing the liberty we take for granted.

How do we reverse that trend and get back on track? The first step is education. That's where much of the problem begins. Schools typically don't do a very good job of teaching history (or anything else, for that matter, apparently). History teachers lack, often, the skills or interest to make the study of history exciting, interesting, and fun. Instead, the focus is on passing tests, which requires memorizing names, places, and dates without ever really understanding their significance. So we pass tests and classes, but we don't learn history, and we have no concept of how fascinating it really is, and how important it is in our daily lives. We probably remember *Paul Revere's midnight ride*, for example, but how many of us understand why he was riding his horse in the middle of the night, where he was going, what was going on, what happened, and why it matters?

Worse yet, much of what we are told in textbooks and by teachers is wrong. It's human nature to try to remember the good things and forget the bad. We tend to carry that to extremes in the field of American history. With a selective memory, and a tendency to embellish here and there to make for a more appealing narrative, we have rewritten much of our history. What we are taught in schools is so misleading, inaccurate, incomplete, or blatantly false that even when we think we know American history, we probably don't.

Sure, some people know the truth. But they rarely go to the trouble of trying to set the record straight. Partly because teachers don't necessarily have much discretion in the matter, partly because our textbooks are controlled by people who are more comfortable with fiction than fact, and partly because historians and authors would not be able to advance their careers or sell as many books if they didn't go along with the mainstream. Why subject themselves to

criticism, scorn, and ridicule? It's so much easier to go along to get along. The truth is there. But we have to look for it. We have to do our own independent investigation to find the truth of what happened, why, and what it means for us.

We must learn American history, and we must understand the Constitution. We don't need to be scholars or historians, but we have to learn the basics. But that takes time and a bit of effort. We are all busy these days, barely able to cope with all the responsibilities we already struggle with. When we get home after a hard day's work, the last thing most of us want to do is read about American history or the Constitution.

I understand that. I was that way. I would still be that way if I hadn't retired. Now, fortunately, I have plenty of time to read and study and learn and figure out how it all ties in to what's happening in the world of politics and government and world events. In the past few months I have read at least 50 books, so I now have a much clearer picture of who we are as a country, how we got here, and what has gone right and wrong on the way. I don't claim to be an expert on American history, or the Constitution, or anything else for that matter.

But I do know this much, and you need to know it as well: America is in deep trouble. There have undoubtedly been people in every generation who have said that, and they may have in some sense been right. But never before has it been more true than today.

Why should you believe me? You shouldn't just take my word for it. You should do your own reading, your own study, and draw your own conclusions. But again, we're generally too busy to do that. At least right now. Maybe some day, some year, some distant point in the future if you're lucky enough to find some leisure time during your retirement years you'll get around to reading a book or two on American history. But not now – you don't have time.

By then it will probably be too late. You can't afford to wait that long. The longer we wait to understand what's happening to our country, the harder it will be to take effective corrective action. Frankly, it may already be too late.

When I first started my retirement *American history* project, I was looking for a book or two that gave me the basic facts, spelled it all out for me, without a lot of extraneous details, gratuitous facts, or political biases. Sort of an *American History for Dummies*. I didn't find any such thing. I found plenty of good books, but none of them gave me the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I suppose that's not even possible. So I kept reading, hoping each new book would help answer questions left unanswered by the previous books, fill in the still-existing blanks, help me get a clearer overall picture, a coherent narrative that would tie all the loose ends together for me.

I've made a lot of progress, but, as it turns out, it's a project that will probably end, for me, only in death or Alzheimer's or something like that. There's a lot to learn, and since history is made every day, there is always new information to factor in. But it doesn't need to be quite such an obsession to get the basics nailed down.

And to help busy people such as yourself get the basics without having to devote a lot of time, I've written *Essential Antebellum American History* (EAAH). It gives you the information you need to know about our early history up to the Civil War, condensed as much as possible, while still, hopefully, capturing the fascinating narrative that is the story of America.

Most of EAAH is primarily based on *A Patriot's History of the United States* (PHS), but that does not mean that its authors would agree with what I say or how I say it. (And I often don't agree with their conclusions.)

You may not agree with me either. You might keep in mind that I'm not selling anything; I have no political, religious, ideological, philosophical, or other affiliations to promote; I have no axe to grind, no grudge, no score to settle, and no political aspirations. So, I hope you will at least consider my conclusions.