

History as pro-immigration propaganda

By Chris McGovern

The EU referendum promised for 2017, or sooner according to some reports, will coincide with the teaching of a new topic for GCSE history – migration to Britain. Given that this topic is, also, likely to have considerable prominence in the public debate it is instructive to consider what will be taught about it in the classroom.

Two of the three major exam boards have included ‘immigration’ in the new exam to be taught from 2016. Currently, the specifications are awaiting final approval by the exam regulator, Ofqual. The version to be offered by the OCR Board – “Immigration to Britain c1000 to 2010”- is illustrative.

The board is very clear about its aim for the new history exam:

“We have updated traditional and popular topics at GCSE and combined them with new and innovative options that aim to address comments in the wider historical community regarding the prevalence of white, male dominated history.

“One of the ways that we have are addressing this is by working with BASA [“The Black and Asian Studies Association”] on our new migration options in paper 2 and paper 3 (J410/08 and J410/11).”

The OCR Board then quotes an endorsement from BASA:

“This course will enable students to learn the long history of how the movement of people – European, African, Asian – to and from these islands has shaped the story of this nation for thousands of years. The history of migration is the story of

Britain: in 1984 Peter Fryer wrote: 'There were Africans in Britain before the English came'...We are delighted to be working with OCR to offer a course which will both open up an analysis of Britain's place in the modern world and allow every student a personal connection with our shared history."

A bold BASA 'kitemark' is firmly and prominently attached to the top of the syllabus itself.

As Education Secretary, Michael Gove called on schools to stop the trashing of our past. Disastrously, he lost his battle to require the teaching of the landmark personalities and events of British history as part of the national curriculum. Now, we can see that GCSE history, too, is being subverted to provide a vehicle for a politically correct views on history in general and on immigration, in particular.

This new syllabus will ensure that, at the same time as the EU referendum campaign and debates on border controls, pupils will be given some strong and seductive arguments in favour of seeing current immigration as a natural evolution of a long historical process. According to campaigning think-tank MigrationWatch UK, however, current levels of immigration, resulting from 'free movement' within the EU, are at levels unprecedented in the history of Britain and are far from being a natural evolution:

"There have always been episodes of migration to Britain but...those episodes were small and demographically insignificant until the Second World War... In the late 1990s the pace and scale of migration increased to a level without historical precedent... This massive increase dwarfs the scale of any previous inflow in our history."

This crucial numerical aspect of the immigration narrative is missing from the syllabus. The EU receives a passing 'fag end' reference at the end of the syllabus -"issues raised by EU 'open borders'" - but there is no requirement specifically to

consider the issue of numbers raised by MigrationWatch UK. Pupils will hear a lot about a group of African soldiers stationed on Hadrian's Wall but less, I suspect, about the enslavement of Britons by the African Emperor, Septimus Severus who died in Eboracum (York). The enslavement of Britons by an African, after all, does not fit the desired narrative of immigrants having a monopoly of being subjugated or maltreated.

19th century Irish 'immigration' fits the subjugation idea much better and is specified for teaching. However, these Irish were born UK citizens as fully as those born in the home counties. The new syllabus veers towards equating deprivation with immigration.

For all its importance, immigration is a political minefield these days and not a straight-forward topic to teach. History GCSE should not be a vehicle for promoting particular viewpoints, such as that of the BASA. Equally, it should not be a vehicle for promoting racism or xenophobia. The OCR should not be in the business of boasting a 'kitemark' of political correctness, it should be focusing on a balanced presentation of the past that allows for the input of MigrationWatch UK as much as the Black and Asian Studies Association.

This article first appeared in Conservative Woman. Chris McGovern is Chairman of the Campaign for Real Education. CIB will be organising an event to launch his recent booklet *A Generation Betrayed*, hopefully some time in June. More details to follow.

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