

Greatest generation's triumphs, trials are lost to young Americans

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Seventy years ago today, a peaceful Sunday morning at Pearl Harbor turned to carnage and panic as Japanese aircraft roared through the Hawaiian skies and hot ammunition ripped into American ships. Caught by surprise, America lost 2,388 military personnel and civilians. The fuse that would send America into the Second World War had been ignited.

The following day, President Franklin Roosevelt addressed the nation from the Capitol. In a speech which lasted less than seven minutes, the president gravely described the "date which will live in infamy."

A wounded but resolute America was at war. And Roosevelt predicted "always will our whole nation remember the character of the onslaught against us."

I wonder if we're living up to that prediction.

The historical significance of Pearl Harbor, its warnings against geopolitical complacency, and its ongoing implications are not even concepts that the majority of our college students would recognize.

According to a study of college seniors from elite universities around the country, a third could not identify Germany, Italy and Japan as our wartime enemies. Almost two thirds did not even know the Battle of the Bulge occurred during World War II.

The sacrifices of our greatest generation are being lost on our youngest generation.

This is not a matter of simply amassing facts and dates. It's about our obligation to teach our young people about the pivotal moments in the defense of the free world - which still needs defending.

The Roman orator Cicero, who is coincidentally believed to have died on December 7, 43 B.C., observed, "Not to know what happened before you were born is to remain forever a child."

Are our young people developing into the adult citizens that a free society requires?

The survey results are alarming. Only a quarter knew the significance of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Only 23 percent could identify James Madison as the "Father of the Constitution." And only 60 percent knew the Constitution established the division of powers.

Colleges are failing to provide our students with the educational foundation they deserve and our country needs. A nationwide study of more than 1,000 colleges and universities, *What Will They Learn?* (www.whatwilltheylearn.com) found that 80 percent of our colleges don't require students to take a foundational course in American history.

A mere 5 percent require economics. Barely 15 percent expect students to study foreign language. Without a strong foundation, how can the leaders of tomorrow set the course for our future?

Students today are more likely to know the vulgar lyrics of rappers such as Kanye West, T-Pain and Nicki Minaj than the brilliant ideas of Sir Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein or Galileo.

Students can describe Occupy Wall Street in impassioned detail without knowing who occupied Europe in the 1940s, or how and why it happened. Lady Macbeth has receded into near oblivion as Lady Gaga takes center stage.

Seventy years ago today, our nation was plunged into a war that would test her mettle and her character for

four costly years. Our finest generation took to the shorelines, to the factories and to the streets with a dedication that ultimately ripped across the globe and helped free millions from tyranny.

From the blood and bullets grew a new America with a greater consciousness of its role in securing worldwide liberty. The shaken nation that was pushed into war in 1941 was not the same nation that emerged in 1945.

But if we fail to educate our young people on the importance of freedom and the sacrifice of their ancestors, our young people will remain - as Cicero said - children forever.

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