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The peril of history

by Allen C. Guelzo

On the present state of the discipline.

We are not supposed to find much joy in the study of history. At least, that's what Henry Ford believed, and his words on the subject have become legendary: "History," he said, "is more or less bunk." A century later, and that view of history doesn't seem to want for advocates. In January 2021, the San Francisco Unified School District moved to rename forty-four of its schools, including ones named for Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, John Muir, Robert Louis Stevenson, Paul Revere, and Dianne Feinstein. It was objected that the reasons were often absurd—Paul Revere, for instance, was to be obliterated because he was connected to the Penobscot Expedition during the American Revolution, which was supposedly directed at dispossessing the Penobscot Indians from their lands but in fact had nothing to do...

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