

Comments to Texas Education Association
in Austin on Jan. 13, 2010
by Judge Edward F. Butler

Creation stories – the stories of how things began – are fundamental. Every child asks himself or his parents, “Where did I come from?”

Throughout our primary and secondary education, we may study religion and science to explore the origins of our universe and ourselves.

We also study history, and the study of American history in our primary and secondary schools must include an adequate introduction to our children of where we came from as a Nation. This means our students must be taught about the American Revolution – the events that led up to it, the events that followed from it, and especially the principles that are espoused by it.

You may ask, what are these principles? Let me briefly list just a few of them for you:

- Representative government;
- The right of free speech;
- The right to worship God – or to refrain from such worship – as you may be so inclined;
- The right to a fair and speedy trial by a jury of your peers;
- The right to assemble freely, and to protest the government;
- The freedom of the press.

Throughout American life today, we see in the news and on TV shows such as *Law & Order* and *Judge Judy*, examples of Americans defending their civil rights. Where did our concepts of American civil rights start? The American Revolution, and this must be taught to our children.

I am aware that many people eschew the study of the American Revolution. I have heard and read that the American Revolution does not speak to modern classrooms because it was fought by and for white people. I categorically reject this notion, and would like to offer a counter-vision of the American Revolution.

In 1961, Benjamin Quarles estimated that the total number of black men who fought for the American cause in our Revolution was about 5,000. More recent research conducted by the W.E.B. DuBois Institute, and underwritten in part by the Sons of the American Revolution, suggests that the number of black patriots could be as high as 20,000. Perhaps ten per cent of the total number of soldiers who fought in the Continental Army, and in the various state militias, were black.

How many Americans know that so many black Americans fought in our Revolution? Very few. This is sad. Americans of all colors don't know their own history.

Most Americans who know anything about our Revolution know that France offered invaluable help. But considerably fewer Americans appreciate the fact that Spain also rendered indispensable aid to the cause of American independence and liberty.

The King of Spain levied taxes against his subjects in America – as far as California – to help us in our Revolution. The King directed General Galvez to engage the British along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico and elsewhere so as to force the British to spend some of their time and treasure in the Gulf, and not in the thirteen colonies.

From right here in Texas, herds of cattle were driven to the Gulf to feed Galvez's army, and some Texas cattle may even have been driven as far as Valley Forge to feed Washington's army. I hasten to add that scholarship on Spain's and Texas's role in the American Revolution is in its infancy, but can you imagine how important it would be for Texan school children – white, black and Hispanic – to learn about the role of Texas in the American Revolution?

The American Revolution speaks to all Americans – men and women; Protestant, Catholic and Jew; white, black and Hispanic. It speaks to our collective and individual struggles to be free, to have a government that protects our rights, and not one that oppresses them. The American Revolution is part of the creation story of Texas, and of who we are today.

I urge you to ensure that the American Revolution is taught in Texas primary and secondary schools.