



## No Looking Back: Americans' History Knowledge Lacking

Corey Olson

June 2, 2021

If the famous quote "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" holds true, America may be in trouble. As **debate rages** over critical race theory and teaching history in schools, many adults could apparently stand a history lesson of their own. A **new survey** of 3,000 Americans across all states finds nearly a third (31%) of Texans admit to only learning history through streaming services like Netflix. The survey also finds that nearly half (46%) of all respondents say they never read history books.

The survey is of American adults, but drilling down to actual students reveals even more alarming numbers. "In 2018, 14-percent of public school eighth graders were rated as proficient or above in U.S. history, and only 23-percent were proficient in civics," says **Neal McCluskey**, director of the Center for Educational Freedom at the CATO Institute.

McCluskey believes these numbers are reflective of society in general. "People aren't always all that interested in the past," he tells KTRH. "They're interested in the present, they're interested in what will help them make money, they're interested in sports, in pop culture, in many other things."

As for the reasons behind Americans' poor history and civics knowledge, McCluskey blames the education system for federal mandates that focus only on math and reading scores. "As a school, how you get evaluated is based on how kids do in reading and math standardized tests," he says. "And there's a lot of evidence that that pushed other subjects--like history and civics--to the margins."

"Schools often sidestep history and civics, or they teach kind of a lowest common denominator history and civics, where you just sort of rattle off dates, and it's really kind of boring," McCluskey continues. "And the evidence suggests that students just aren't engaged by it."