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A WARNING LABEL ON THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

Stephen L. Bakke 🇺🇸 October 6, 2019

Mallard Millmore by Bruce Tinsley - from way back in 2016



The last few years have provided us with new terms and different ways of evaluating our world. Many of these are often confusing to those of us with old-fashioned ears. Rather than just having occasional usage, these new terms are found often in conversations about politics, political opponents, social justice, and just about every discussion dealing with rules for political correctness. Here are some examples of these terms: safe spaces, gender fluid, cultural appropriation, micro-aggression, and trigger warnings.

In this discussion I'm going to just deal with "trigger warnings," which have been popping up frequently during most of the last decade. A "trigger warning" is commonly known as a statement preceding written material, videos, etc. They are intended to alert the reader or viewer to the fact that it contains potentially distressing material. I bet if you think about it, you've witnessed these many times.

While researching trigger warnings, I came across a reference to a textbook which presented our founding documents – The United States Constitution, etc. What captured my attention was the charge that the book's publisher introduced these historical documents using a disclaimer as to the current relevance of these important documents. At first, I was skeptical about whether this really was something I should be concerned with.

As part of my decade-long project of researching and writing about our form of government, I wanted to find out what this was all about. Was this one of those "trigger warnings?" Did the publisher feel youthful readers could find this material distressing? It wasn't hard to locate the relevant information and I soon found the book for sale at Amazon. I won't name the publisher here, but you can still find the book for sale on the internet.

Here's the warning I found on page 3 – the copyright page:

This book is a product of its time and does not reflect the same values as it would if it were written today. Parents might wish to discuss with their children how views on race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and interpersonal relations have changed since this book was written before allowing them to read this classic work.

That warning is about our Constitution, folks. And it's my understanding that this warning also appears on a textbook dealing with the Federalist Papers. This publisher is in the business of publishing "print-on-demand books (mostly self-help and public domain reprints)."

What could possibly be the concern giving rise to this warning? One possible explanation is that anything originating prior to a certain date is automatically preceded by this "warning label." If that's the reason, it's not a very good one. If the publisher gave even superficial consideration as to what was being expressed in that warning, how could it justify describing our founding documents as potentially distressing? The content of the book, and the disclaimer, are so unambiguous that I believe this "trigger warning" reflects a subtle political motivation.

How absurd is that! The implication is that our youth should be cautious about taking our founding documents literally, or too seriously. This is expressed in the all too common language of apology and relativism.

I'm surprised and disappointed that this is actually happening in the United States. Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised considering all the ways we are losing our sense of national pride, and American exceptionalism. Too often we ignore the extraordinarily successful experiment we know as the United States. I guess we shouldn't be surprised because it fits comfortably with a former President's penchant for apologies, and his qualified praise of our Founders. He had no problem conveying the message that he finds some of our Founders' ideas shortsighted or incomplete.

This is wrong. How did the United States end up in this place?

Mallard Millmore by Bruce Tinsley

