

Wilkins' World

Homeschoolers nationwide are learning an unusual version of the American story from neo-Confederate Steve Wilkins

By Mark Potok

You've got to hand it to Steve Wilkins. Tilting bravely against his own personal windmills — feminists, homosexuals, civil rights advocates, evolutionists, rationalists, "Marxist historians," and a whole list of other ungodly enemies — he has told the story of America as he sees it.

Sure, it's an unusual take. It's true that no serious historian would agree. But Wilkins, perhaps the leading theological thinker of the neo-Confederate right, is not afraid to tell it like he thinks it was.

Trouble is, some people might actually believe him.

The pastor of Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church in Monroe, La. — the mother church to a noxious brand of theocratic thinking that has swept the entire neo-Confederate movement — markets his \$80, 12-cassette version of the American saga under the title of "America: The First 350 Years."

The tapes and accompanying teaching guide sold by his Covenant Publications — a set that has been marketed widely to Christian homeschoolers — float a rather remarkable story.

A glance at his notes shows that an array of extremists, from a violently racist Confederate chaplain to a series of far-right religious writers, provides the basis for Wilkins' tale.

And just what is the world according to Wilkins?

All of history is a struggle between "biblical faith" and "non-biblical faith." White colonists made early America a godly nation, agreeing that "all areas of life must be ruled by His law," that democracy was to be "despised and condemned," and that theocracy was

"the only proper role of government."

Wilkins notes in approving tones that the death penalty in early Massachusetts was prescribed for blasphemy, "devilish practice," homosexuality, adultery, and rebellion.

The Salem witch trials really weren't so bad. "Only" 23 people died as a result. Anyhow, "there was a large amount of occultic experimentation at the time." There were also "a number of seemingly inexplicable events" to explain. Yes, there were mistakes, but the Puritan clergy was dead set against these excesses.

The French Revolution *was* bad, the creature of "subversive groups" aiming to sow "chaos and anarchy." The American Revolution was *good*— it never, ever, appealed to "the rights of man" despite propaganda to the contrary from mainstream historians who cite Thomas Paine and his pamphlet *Common Sense*.

Actually, it was King George III who was the revolutionary, "not the colonists." The colonists knew perfectly well that "rebellion" amounted to "a refusal to obey God."

The Declaration of Independence was no product of the Enlightenment, despite what historians say and no matter how many Enlightenment thinkers the Declaration's authors cited. It was no "radical document."

The fact that the writers referred to "reason" and not to God? Well, that's just how folks talked back then.

Although it doesn't say so, the Constitution laid out "the Biblical role of government." The framers only referred to "coin money" — because of their "great fear" of paper money (not coincidentally, a *bête noire* of today's radical right). They obviously intended for the nation to hew to a gold and silver standard.

It's true that the right to vote was limited to property-holding white men. But the purpose of the restriction "was primarily moral and spiritual." Says Wilkins: "To allow non-

property holders to vote would be to allow the slothful and the ungodly to rule."

And anyway, giving non-propertied citizens the vote would surely lead to an aristocracy of those who could buy poor men's votes. The wise leaders of the day "saw that universal suffrage opened the door to an attack on private property."

The Bill of Rights does not delineate "human rights" — those rights come straight from God, and humans have nothing to do with them. Separation of church and state is no part of the Constitution or Bill of Rights.

"Religious neutrality is impossible," says Wilkins. "All law is an establishment of some 'religion'."

The roots of the Civil War lie in a 19th-century religious reawakening in the South that came during the same period that the North was increasingly rejecting "orthodox Christianity" and its leading universities were adopting anti-religious rationalism. The public school movement of the 1830s-1840s, for instance, arose from "the desire to destroy the Christian foundations of the nation."

"Radical humanists" in the North wanted to attack religion. "That meant the destruction of the South." These God-hating revolutionaries needed an excuse to launch their war. "That issue turned out to be slavery." Immigration — by Catholics, although Wilkins doesn't spell it out — also turned the North against the Bible.

The "War Between the States" really had nothing whatsoever to do with slavery.

And slaves, by the way, had it pretty grand — even if "black historians" today insist on ignoring "unequivocal testimonies to the general benevolence of Southern slavery." Slaves actually "lived relatively easygoing lives."

A normal day's tasks took a slave three to four hours, so slaves would often do two or three days' work in one day. Then, Wilkins suggests, the slaves would "take several days off" and travel by horse or boat "to visit friends, family, or lovers on other

plantations."

The anti-slavery movement "had more support in the South than in the North." Two thirds of anti-slavery societies were in the South. But abolitionists used "slanderous propaganda" and "political terrorism" to paint a different picture.

Once the North won its battle to destroy the constitutional system — part of a plot to centralize and aggrandize a "God-like" federal government — it set out "to punish Southern whites" and to entrench the Republican Party in the South.

Southern legislatures passed repressive Black Codes after the war — but only to "govern the employment and work of the free Negroes," Wilkins says.

And anyway, the codes really weren't so bad. After all, they were "identical" to the rules Union Army officials imposed on blacks in the South as the war concluded.

And that is where Steve Wilkins' interest in history comes to an end — the last dates mentioned in "America: The First 350 Years" come shortly after the South surrendered in 1865, apparently the end of all things good in the American drama.

But all is not lost. "The vision of the Puritan fathers is not dead, but in our generation has revived and is beginning to spread through our land again," Wilkins exults in the last scary words of his teaching guide.

"It is now our responsibility by the grace of God to keep this flame burning. We dare not allow it to go out!"