



Promoting
Academic
Freedom and
Excellence

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Preserving America's Legacy: Gordon Wood Receives Merrill Award



As America grapples with the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic that has threatened our culture and way of life, it is an important moment to heed the wisdom of those who are committed to the preservation of our history and can teach us how to apply the lessons from our past to current crises. We are privileged to announce that **Gordon S. Wood**, Alva O. Way University Professor of History and Professor of History Emeritus at Princeton University, who has been a powerful voice safeguarding America's memory, is the winner of our 16th annual **Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education**.

Gordon Wood is widely recognized as the nation's leading historian of the American Revolution. At a time when the serious study

of American history is disappearing from college campuses, Professor Wood's scholarship brings to life the turbulence of the Revolutionary Era and the radically innovative political system created by early Americans. He is the author or editor of 18 works spanning five decades, from *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787*, winner of the 1970 Bancroft Prize, to his Pulitzer-Prize-winning *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* in 1993. His 2009 volume in the Oxford History of the United States, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789–1815*, earned the Association of American Publishers Award for History and Biography in 2009, the American History Book Prize from the New-York Historical Society in 2010, and the Society of the Cincinnati

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Register for ACTA's 25TH Anniversary Events!

On November 12–13, 2020, we will hold a **25TH Anniversary Celebration** with a roster of exciting events culminating at the storied **Library of Congress**. Please join us as we review a quarter century of work and look ahead to the frontiers before us. Visit the anniversary page at GoACTA.org/anniversary for further details. 25TH Anniversary Celebration **sponsorships**, which include a range of benefits, are available. If interested, please contact us at swilson@GoACTA.org.

Allen Guelzo, Director, Initiative on Politics and Statesmanship, James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions, Princeton University

“The copies of ‘10 Things’ arrived, and they look sensational. I am pleased, and may I say also deeply flattered, at the honor done me by publishing this.”

Note: ACTA recently published an essay by Dr. Guelzo entitled 10 Things Everyone Should Know About American History.

Luke Yang, Former Intern, ACTA Student, New York University

“Time flies so fast and it is already half a year after I moved on from ACTA. I really miss the time I spent there as an intern. I hope everything is fine . . . with the ACTA family. I still remember the blog I wrote last year, in which I used statistics from HowCollegesSpendMoney.com and talked about how important it is that colleges dwindle the administrative costs and increase academic-related expenditures at universities.”

The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim State Senator, Hawaii

“Thank you so much for sending me a copy of *Governance for a New Era*. I found it to be very helpful and timely. I appreciate your offer of assistance and would like to request more copies so I can share it with the University of Hawaii Board of Regents.”

Colleen Sheehan, Director, Matthew J. Ryan Center for the Study of Free Institutions and the Public Good Villanova University

“One of the best notes regarding our current woes I have seen. Realistic but also a good hint of Poliakoff resilience, if not defiance. Love it.”

Note: At the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, ACTA released a statement of encouragement to our friends and supporters outlining our continued commitment to higher education in this time of crisis.

Gordon Wood, continued from 1

History Prize in 2010.

Throughout his distinguished teaching career at his alma mater, Harvard University, as well as at the University of Michigan, Brown University, the College of William & Mary, and Cambridge University, Professor Wood has emphasized that the study of our nation’s past must not be an exercise in ideology, but a comprehensive and balanced entry into complex historical realities. His teaching techniques and coursework are a paradigm of quality, and his classes have inspired countless college students, helping them to cultivate habits of critical thinking and the pursuit of truth.

One of the most important contributions of Professor Wood’s powerful public commentary and scholarship is his consistent clarion call to guard the historian’s craft. He firmly asserts that knowledge of how our country’s political institutions were formed informs current public debates and affects our ability to

relate to one another. He has vigorously urged the professoriate to be at the forefront of preserving America’s historical memory through rigorous scholarship, rather than abandoning their responsibility to illuminate the past with uncompromising objectivity.

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Professor Wood has worked to expose serious inaccuracies in popular perspectives on history that reflect current political views rather than historical facts, including the *New York Times’* (NYT) controversial “1619 Project,” which is set to be deployed in public schools across

the United States. The project, launched in 2019, aims to reshape the teaching of American history around the incorrect premise that the American colonists fought the war for independence from Britain in order to perpetuate the institution of slavery. Professor Wood was one of five signatories to a letter to the editor of the NYT calling for the correction of “factual errors” in the 1619 Project. In a widely read interview, he remarked, “Demonstrating the importance of slavery in the history of our country is essential and commendable. But that necessary and worthy goal will be seriously harmed if the facts in the project turn

out to be wrong and the interpretations of events are deemed to be perverse and distorted. In the long run the Project will lose its credibility, standing, and persuasiveness with the nation as a whole. I fear that it will eventually hurt the cause rather than help it. We all want justice,

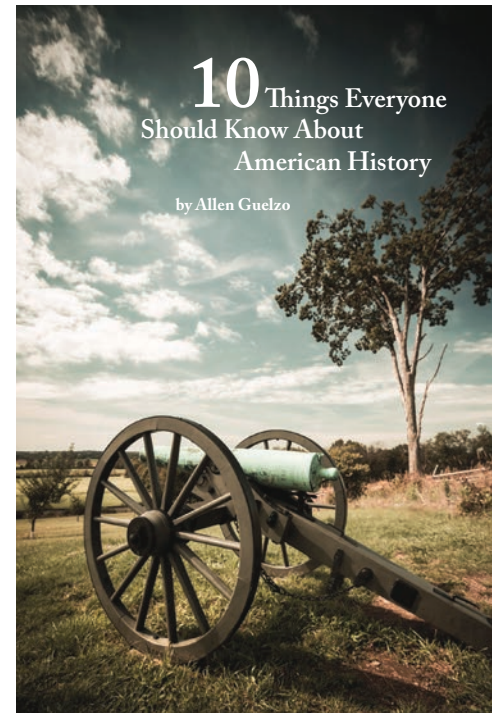
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ACTA Publishes the Inspiring Remarks of Professor Allen Guelzo

ACTA has published a remarkable essay by Dr. Allen Guelzo entitled *10 Things Everyone Should Know About American History*. The essay is adapted from remarks given by Professor Guelzo at a 2019 trustee seminar hosted by ACTA at Eastern University and has been sent out to well over 25,000 college presidents, trustees, and both state and federal legislative education committees. Professor Guelzo, senior research scholar in the Council of the Humanities and director of the Initiative on Politics and Statesmanship in the James Madison Program at Princeton University, is a highly esteemed American historian and best-selling author whose scholarship has won many awards, including the Lincoln Prize.

His essay, featuring a foreword by historian Wilfred M. McClay, explores 10 moments spanning three centuries of U.S. history that have shaped both our nation and the world. From the entirely new political order created in America's Founding, to Abraham Lincoln's monumental achievement of abolishing slavery, to America's game-changing entrance into World War I, Professor Guelzo's essay stresses the importance of remembering our history as we seek to understand our nation and its future.

At many colleges and universities, the teaching of American history has all but vanished, and in many history departments, the serious study of history is not even a requirement for the major. College and university trustees who seek to renew the



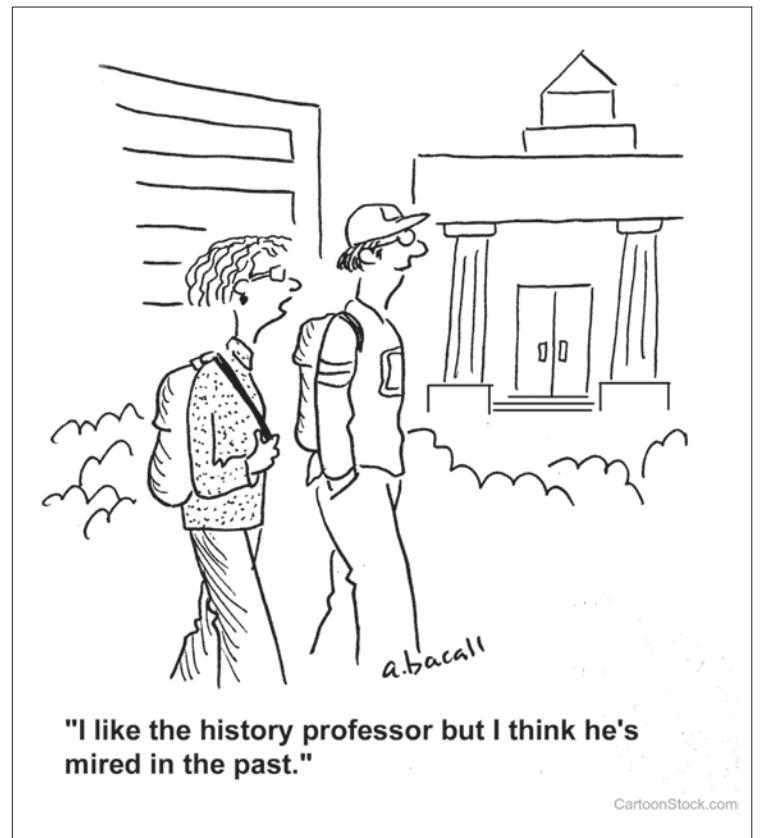
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Gordon Wood, *continued from 2*

but not at the expense of truth.”

Professor Wood reminds us that the future of our republic hinges not merely on increasing civic understanding, but on building a deep and intellectually rigorous understanding of our history. For this great public service to the advancement of civic education and to enhancing public engagement with American history, he was awarded a National Humanities Medal by President Obama in 2012, the Churchill Bell by Colonial Williamsburg, and the Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. Prize from the Society of American Historians. Among numerous other honors, he received the John F. Kennedy Medal from the Massachusetts Historical Society in 2012 and the Centennial Medal from Harvard Graduate School in 2015. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Philosophical Society.

The Merrill Award, established to recognize those who advance the rigorous study of the liberal arts and the inheritance of Western Civilization, has found the worthiest recipient in Gordon Wood. Please join us at ACTA's 25TH Anniversary on November 13, 2020, where we will celebrate this eminent historian whose scholarship and commitment to understanding our nation's story has invigorated the appreciation of the unique American experiment in self-government. ●





ASU Regent Karrin Taylor Robson to Receive ACTA's Martin Prize



Karrin Taylor Robson, who was appointed to Arizona State University's (ASU) Board of Regents in 2017 and currently serves as secretary, is the winner of ACTA's 2020 **Jerry L. Martin Prize for Excellence in College Trusteeship**. Ms. Taylor Robson jumped headfirst into leadership on the ASU board to increase civic education and promote debate on campus. She is the architect of Arizona State University's groundbreaking Regents' Cup, an annual debate competition between ASU's three campuses. The event fosters vibrant democratic engagement that teaches students how to communicate respectfully, exchange thought-provoking ideas, and increase their critical thinking skills. The Oxford-style debates are judged by leaders in government, industry, and higher education, with student debaters earning course credit and \$100,000 in scholarship awards.

The Regents' Cup grew out of Ms. Taylor Robson's commitment to upholding free expression as the lifeblood of the university. As a trustee, she has spoken out publicly against the proliferation of restrictive speech zones on campuses, as well as the widespread culture of shoutdowns and disinvitations.

The Martin Prize, which will be presented to Ms. Taylor Robson at ACTA's 25TH Anniversary Celebration, is named after ACTA's first president and recognizes exemplary and innovative leadership by college and university trustees on behalf of students and the public. Past winners of the award include former University System of Maryland regent Tom McMillen; former University of Pennsylvania trustee Paul Levy; and former University of Texas regent Wallace Hall. ●

ACTA Interviews Brandon Busted on COVID-19 Impact

ACTA President Michael Poliakoff recently sat down with **Brandon Busted, president of Kaplan University Partners**, to discuss the major changes that the COVID-19 pandemic is making within our system of higher education, and how colleges and universities can embrace these changes to emerge from the crisis stronger than before.

Rather than propping up a broken status quo, colleges must recognize in the disruptions created by the pandemic the need for long overdue restructuring and refocusing of higher education. Mr. Busted identified two headwinds that higher education has been facing long before the current disruption, namely, the rising price of tuition and growing skepticism about the work readiness of college graduates. As Americans make tough decisions about where they can afford to invest their mon-

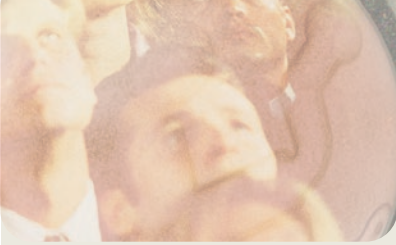
ey, "they're going to be looking at the work relevance of what they're studying and the degree to which they feel they're being well prepared for success in the workplace. . . . If I was a college president, I wouldn't let anybody graduate without having had an internship or a co-op that was meaningfully connected to the academic work they were doing, that would be a requirement of graduation. . . . that sounds simple, but people are going to be demanding an ROI based on work readiness."

Another important area that colleges and universities must reconsider is the value of a traditional 120-credit hour degree, which at many schools is in large part devoted to a jumble of electives, rather than to a comprehensive liberal arts curriculum. In the future, Mr. Busted commented, "We will see more streamlined options that show students that they can

get through their degree quicker, and at less cost" as well as more university partnerships and curriculum sharing ideas.

"The net effect though, is definitely going to be that we are going to have more comfort among students and faculty with the idea of doing things online. They're going to say, 'Do we have to be in person for this particular session? Can we use this time better off where you watch a video I recorded last week and then we use this time, instead of me lecturing, for a discussion?'"

Only the institutions that embrace ACTA's recommendations for cost-effectiveness, restructuring, and academic excellence are likely to weather this storm and continue to thrive. To listen to the full interview, please visit ACTA's podcast, **Higher Ed Now**. ●



H E A R D C A M P U S ON

Liberty Trustees Must Act Like Fiduciaries

Long after many colleges had shut down their campuses and moved to remote learning in response to the coronavirus pandemic, Liberty University kept its doors open.

When students were welcomed back to campus after their spring break, a student tested positive for coronavirus. It was only after Virginia's governor issued a statewide stay-at-home order that the university ended the last of its in-person instruction. As of April 16, the surrounding area saw 78 confirmed cases. In his March 31, 2020, Forbes.com column, "Liberty University Demonstrates What Not To Do During a Pandemic," ACTA President

Michael Poliakoff writes, "Whether or not a university is nominally public or private, the institution needs to be *publicly dedicated*. . . . What message does it send, what values are inculcated, when university leadership ignores its responsibility to public health?"

It is extremely troubling that Liberty's board of trustees failed to exercise proper oversight of President Falwell's decision to put lives at risk by continuing with business as usual, especially as university faculty called for the campus to be closed in order to preserve the safety of students and the surrounding community. ACTA urges Liberty trustees to perform their duty to the public by exercising their final legal authority over the operations of the university. ●

ACTA Hosts Student Debate at ASU



On March 3, ACTA facilitated another excellent student debate, this time at Arizona State University (ASU). The event, hosted in partnership with **Braver Angels** (formerly known as Better Angels) and the university's **BridgeUSA** chapter, drew a capacity audience of enthusiastic students and community members.

ACTA President Michael Poliakoff delivered opening remarks, reminding students of our country's rich history of spirited dialogue and the importance of civil exchange for the proper functioning of our democracy. Doug Sprei, ACTA's director of multimedia & campus partnerships, moderated the parliamentary-style debate which centered on a topic selected by student participants, "Resolved: The United States Should Build the Southern Border Wall." The speeches delivered by students were passionate but respectful and featured a range of diverse viewpoints, including a Native American perspective concerning the impact of the border wall on tribal lands.

Following the event, many participants stayed late into the night to continue the discussion, demonstrating the hunger of our nation's college students for unfettered, uncensored exchange with their peers. Debates like this one and others have been held by ACTA at American University and the University of California–Berkeley. ●

ACTA's Newest Hero of Intellectual Freedom

Abigail Thompson, chair of the mathematics department at the University of California–Davis, will be honored at ACTA's 25TH Anniversary Celebration as our newest **Hero of Intellectual Freedom**. While others remained silent, Professor Thompson brought to light the dangerous implications of the University of California (UC) System's diversity screening requirement for new faculty hires and promotion decisions.

Her essay, "The University's New Loyalty Oath," published in the *Wall Street Journal* in December 2019, brought much-needed attention to the UC System's expansion of the use of "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion" statements in the hiring process. Last year, a diversity initiative piloted at UC–Berkeley issued a scoring system, called a "rubric," to evaluate applicants' level of commitment to diversity. Those who describe "only activities that are already the expectation of Berkeley faculty (mentoring, treating all students the same regardless of background, etc.," score poorly on the rubric and are likely to be eliminated from the hiring pool, without consideration of essential factors like academic record, scholarship, and teaching ability.

For expressing her concerns, Professor Thompson faced online attacks. A letter misrepresenting her position gained hundreds of signatures, while mathematicians were urged to tell their students to steer clear of UC–Davis, and some questioned her position as chair of the university's math department.

The most powerful line of defense standing between the preservation of academic freedom and the proliferation of ideological homogeneity and groupthink on campus are faculty members who bravely offer diverging views and defend the right to free expression for all campus members. We applaud Professor Thompson's courageous defense of intellectual diversity and encourage our readers to attend our 25TH Anniversary event to hear her deliver what are sure to be inspiring remarks. ●



Intelligent College Giving in the Age of COVID-19

Even before the global pandemic and market freefall, colleges faced an uncertain financial future. Six in 10 universities did not meet their enrollment goals for the fall of 2019. An entire industry has developed to advise colleges on how to merge with other institutions or shut down entirely. The pandemic will accelerate the inevitable, forcing the hand of institutions that were already vulnerable to market forces.

Targeted philanthropy can—and should—play a central role in spurring dramatic reform and innovation in higher education. By supporting the best that our colleges have to offer, and refusing to perpetuate a dysfunctional status quo, college donors have an opportunity to be a major part of the solution. During this time, the Fund for Academic Renewal (FAR) recommends thinking beyond your alma mater when planning a gift.

Elite schools with sizable endowments will face less hardship than most institutions. A leveraged gift to a small liberal arts college or regional university will have a far greater impact than a gift of the same size to an elite institution. In our **Intelligent College Giving video series**, we have featured a Q&A with Sandy and Ginny MacNeil. On the recommendation of friends, they built a partnership with faculty at Furman University, a liberal arts college near their home, to develop the Tocqueville Program. Neither MacNeil attended Furman, but their giving has helped build a transformative program on campus.

In the wake of COVID-19, intelligent giving is needed more than ever. By investing wisely, donors can help secure a brighter future for American higher education. ●

Student Group Interviews ACTA on Pass/Fail Grading



Dr. Jonathan Pidluzny, ACTA's vice president of academic affairs, was interviewed in March by **Campus Reform**, a student-led news site covering the latest in higher education. The interview, which has garnered thousands of views on YouTube, draws on Dr. Pidluzny's previous experience as a professor at Morehead State University, where he served as a faculty regent and won many awards for teaching excellence.

In the interview, Dr. Pidluzny discusses how universities can best navigate the uncharted territory of online course grading. Many schools are implementing a pass/fail grading system across the board, while others are continuing to enter in grades as they normally would, and still others are offering students the option of a letter grade or a pass/fail.

For students looking ahead to graduate school who have maintained "A" grades, a pass/fail system may harm their GPAs and affect their chances of admission. For other students who rely on critical campus resources like writing centers, the pass/fail system has allowed them to continue their studies when otherwise they may have fallen behind or even had to drop courses, which would have lasting implications for their financial aid. On the faculty side, some professors may be less demanding if they know that every student will pass no matter what, leading to an "erosion

of content." Dr. Pidluzny remarked, "[The traditional grading system] is not grading for the sake of putting anxiety on the students, it is grading for the sake of creating an incentive that will lead students to work harder, because the important thing is that the work pays off. What I always told my students was that preparing for class is like going to the gym. It's not enough to show up, you actually have to do the work, and it's the work that translates into things like cognitive gain and mastery of content . . . which is the real purpose of that collegiate education."

Maintaining high academic standards while meeting student needs must be a priority for faculty and academic departments as they build online programs. ACTA will continue providing best practices to help colleges with this transition. View Dr. Pidluzny's full interview with Campus Reform at YouTube.com. ●

In Memoriam: Kenneth Kolson



We remember the life of Kenneth Kolson, a former staff member at ACTA and an esteemed academic. Below are excerpts from a tribute written by ACTA President Michael Poliakoff, honoring his great friendship.

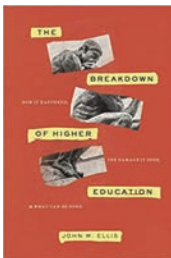
“With the deepest sadness ACTA mourns the untimely death of our former colleague Dr. Kenneth Kolson on March 23, 2020. In 2016–17, he quite graciously came out of retirement after a long and distinguished career to serve as ACTA’s Vice President of Policy, a task he performed with his characteristic wisdom, kindness, and unfailing cheerfulness. He greatly helped us during an important transitional period in the growth of our agency. His was a remarkable life, full of achievement and service to his community and country.

“Dr. Kolson was the deputy director of research at the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) from 1985 to 2007 and was detailed as a foreign affairs officer in the U.S. Department of State for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 2007. . . . He was a teacher and a scholar, whose interests and work spanned a wide array of areas, including urban planning, American history, and political science. . . . He served for 15 years on the faculty of Hiram College and subsequently as a lecturer in the University Honors Program from 1991 to 1999 at the University of Maryland. He also taught urban planning in Finland in 2006 and in Lithuania in 2014 as a Fulbright Scholar.

“Among Dr. Kolson’s honors are a John Adams Fellowship at the University of London and an Eccles Fellowship at the British Library. He was also named a fellow in 1992 by the Council for Excellence in Government. . . .

“These are monuments of a life well-lived, cut short by a tragic fall from which he never fully recovered. He is survived by a devoted family: his wife Jane Kolson, daughter Amanda Kolson Hurley, his son Ted, and grandson Nick. And there are many, many friends who cherish his memory.

“It was my good fortune and privilege to know him, beginning in 1991, when I arrived at the National Endowment for the Humanities as a program officer. Like my colleagues, we could always count on him for steady good sense and a reassuring gentleness, even in situations when it was his role to make sure that deadlines were met and workplace rules closely observed. . . . Virgil had a special place in the Elysian Fields for those whose work had furthered civilization and human flourishing. I know you are there, my dear friend. Thank you for being who you were to all of us.” ●



The Breakdown of Higher Education: How it Happened, The Damage it Does, & What Can Be Done by John M. Ellis

John M. Ellis, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of German Literature at the University of California–Santa Cruz, draws from decades of experience in the academy to examine the erosion of free expression, intense politicization, and degradation of academic thought on campus. Rather than placing blame on student mobs that shout down visiting speakers, Dr. Ellis sees the faculty as the heart of the problem. As he analyzes multiple incidents in which faculty have entirely condemned the ideas of their colleagues and called for them to be censured, rather than examining their arguments and proposing alternative views, Dr. Ellis explains that academic thinking, in which individuals weigh the pros and cons of ideas, has been replaced with political activism.

For Dr. Ellis, this damaging trend began following the baby boom, when the college bound population increased dramatically and with it, the professoriate. When he joined the University of California–Santa Cruz faculty in 1966, Dr. Ellis observed firsthand how the new class of professors abandoned the old-world values of their predecessors, changing the university from an incubator for thought and deliberation to a place focused on activism and societal transformation. Since then, the erosion of reasoned discourse has only accelerated. His book is essential reading for those who seek to understand the current campus climate, the history of how we got here, and the remedies available to us. ●

Guelzo, continued from 3

study of American history on their campuses should pay special attention to this essay which makes clear the vital importance of learning the lessons of our past. As *Washington Post* columnist George Will remarked in his endorsement of the essay, “When history departments in colleges and universities notice [the importance of studying American history], and adjust accordingly, we can expect a surge of interest among students. They might not realize it, but they hunger for a patriotic engagement with the sort of large subjects that Allen Guelzo identifies as mind-opening chapters in a luminous national story that is still being written.”

Please contact ACTA to request a copy of Professor Guelzo’s masterful essay. ●



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INSIDE ACADEME

published by ACTA, Washington, DC

Publisher: Michael B. Poliakoff
 Editor: Greta Wagley
 Production & Design: Lauri Kempson

ACTA's Honors Society Opens Doors

We are pleased to announce the launch of the **National Society of ACTA Scholars**, which recognizes high-achieving college students who have gone above and beyond to take courses in six of the seven areas identified by our **What Will They Learn?**[®] project to complete a rigorous liberal arts education, even when their schools do not require these subjects for graduation. These areas are Composition, Literature, (intermediate-level) Foreign Language, U.S. Government or History, Economics, Mathematics, and Natural Science.

Our inaugural class of ACTA Scholars includes over 250 students graduating this year from pilot campuses Baylor University and Hampden-Sydney College. Qualifying students are inducted into the ACTA Honors Society and receive a certificate indicating they

have completed the ACTA "A" curriculum, a letter of commendation, and honor cords. This unique credential distinguishes their transcripts and resumes for application to graduate schools and for employment.

We are expanding the program to more colleges and universities across the country in order to acknowledge students who, by their own initiative, have gained a broad academic foundation that sets them apart from their peers and shows they are better prepared for their future careers. As other students take note of those who have earned this special honor, more colleges will feel pressure to institute a challenging and comprehensive core

curriculum. We are excited by the potential of this new project and congratulate the outstanding efforts of our first class of ACTA Honors Society scholars. ●

