

CivicsAlliance

from NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of SCHOLARS

HISTORY OF COMMUNISM

Model State Academic Standards
for Social Studies, 2024

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History of Communism

Model State Academic Standards
for Social Studies: Grades 9 through 12

CivicsAlliance

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About Us

The Civics Alliance

The Civics Alliance is a national coalition of organizations and citizens dedicated to preserving and improving America's civics education and preventing the subordination of civics education to political recruitment tools.

We believe American students should comprehend aspects of American government such as the rule of law, the Bill of Rights, elections, elected office, checks and balances, equality under the law, trial by jury, grand juries, civil rights, and military service. American students should learn from these lessons the founding principles of the United States, the structure of our self-governing republic, the functions of government at all levels, and how our key institutions work.

The Civics Alliance works at whatever level of government offers the opportunity for constructive civics education reform. We provide model legislation and social studies standards for policymakers and informative materials to help grassroots activists and citizens push for civics education reform. We inform the public about why civics education needs to be reformed and how it should be done.

Learn more by visiting civicsalliance.org.

Credits

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Contents

1 — Analyze the conditions of the working classes during the Industrial Revolution.....	6
2 — Analyze the socio-economic ideas of Marx and Engels as outlined in their 1848 treatise <i>The Communist Manifesto</i>	7
3 — Analyze the intellectual background of Communism.	8
4 — Analyze the nature of and the responses to Communist and socialist political parties until 1914.	9
5 — Analyze the effect of World War I on Communist and socialist movements.	10
6 — Analyze the key events, policies, and experiences of life in the USSR from 1922 to 1945.....	11
7 — Analyze the key events, policies, and experiences of the Cold War.	12
8 — Analyze the rise of Communism and conflict in Southeast Asia.....	13
9 — Analyze the role of American Communism between 1917 and 1956.	14
10 — Analyze how Marxism evolved after the West’s intellectual disillusionment with Soviet Communism.	15
11 — Analyze the decay of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.....	16
12 — Analyze the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.....	17
13 — Analyze the history of Communist China since 1989.....	18
14 — Analyze key developments in neo-Marxist philosophies and movements in contemporary America.	19

1 — Analyze the conditions of the working classes during the Industrial Revolution.

1.1 — Discuss the effects of the Industrial Revolution on Europe’s economy and society.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to explain ideas including, but not limited to:

- (1) the great shift of employment from agricultural jobs in the countryside to industrial jobs in cities and mines, particularly in England and the German-speaking countries;
- (2) the growth of prosperity for much of the middle classes and a portion of the working classes;
- (3) the simultaneous growth of poverty for a large number of the remainder of the working classes;
- (4) the conditions of the working classes, including both increased numbers and increased life expectancy; and, for large portions, large-scale employment of women and children in factories, poor housing, too little food, disease, and a polluted environment;
- (5) the replacement of guilds uniting masters, journeymen, and apprentices with a system of employers and employees pursuing their own interests; and
- (6) the semi-isolation of the industrial working classes from the rest of society in factories, mines, and tenement neighborhoods.

1.2 — Discuss the political culture of the nineteenth-century European working classes.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to explain ideas including, but not limited to:

- (1) the growth of mass working class culture, including self-improvement, music halls, half-holidays, sports, and newspapers;
- (2) the growth of the conception of a common working-class identity, and of common political and economic interests;
- (3) the growth of reformist working class political movements, including trade unionism and suffrage reform; and
- (4) the growth of radical and revolutionary working class political movements, including anarchism, socialism, and Communism.

2 — Analyze the socio-economic ideas of Marx and Engels as outlined in their 1848 treatise *The Communist Manifesto*.

2.1 — Discuss the economic and political theories of Marx and Engels.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to explain ideas including, but not limited to:

- (1) the belief known as “dialectical materialism,” that all history must be viewed through the lens of “class struggles” between “oppressor and oppressed”;
- (2) the belief that industrialization and free trade had “alienated” workers from the fruits of their labors, reducing them to wage slaves;
- (3) the belief that private enterprise is exploitative and inequality the fault of capitalism;
- (4) the belief that private property, likewise exploitative, is based on selfishness and causes inequality;
- (5) the belief that law and morality were mere “bourgeois prejudices” and religion an “opiate of the masses”;
- (6) the belief that the nuclear family must be abolished because it is based upon and fosters selfish, particularist sentiments in the place of “species-feelings” of universal brotherhood; and
- (7) the belief that violent revolution is needed to overthrow the oppressive classes and abolish all “exploitative” institutions.

2.2 — Discuss criticisms of the theories of Marx and Engels.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to explain criticisms of the ideas of Marx and Engels including, but not limited to:

- (1) that human beings are not really divided simply into the oppressor and the oppressed;
- (2) that free markets discourage exploitative enterprises by making them less profitable;
- (3) that all human societies have inequality, so it cannot be the product of capitalism;
- (4) that violent revolution tends to undermine the rule of law and only brings to power those more capable of oppression;
- (5) that the Marxist program of state ownership of “means of production,” along with centralized economic planning, leads inexorably to an all-powerful state which crowds out civil society and individual freedoms;
- (6) that abolition of religion fosters ideologies which become pseudo-religions;
- (7) that abolition of the nuclear family ultimately destabilizes society; and
- (8) that Marx imported traditional anti-Judaism into mid-nineteenth century socialism, with consequences including the ideology of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP), the Doctors’ Plot; and anti-Israeli Soviet propaganda.

3 — Analyze the intellectual background of Communism.

3.1 — Discuss the relationship of the Judeo-Christian tradition to Communism.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to describe topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the Biblical idea of a fall from grace in the Garden of Eden, and the possibility of redemption or vindication in a “final judgment”;
- (2) the Biblical condemnations of envy, exemplified in the story of Cain and Abel in the book of Genesis;
- (3) the Christian idea of the equality of souls and virtuous poverty;
- (4) the Christian ideal of charity and the renunciation of worldly wealth, as epitomized by the example of Saint Martin of Tours (316-397 AD);
- (5) the Christian ideal of the community of goods, including Waldensians, Diggers, and Shakers;
- (6) anticlericalist movements, including the French Revolution; and
- (7) quasi-millenarian desires to bring about heaven on earth, including the Anabaptist kingdom of Münster.

3.2 — Discuss the relationship of Western political theory to Communism.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to describe topics including but not limited to:

- (1) Communist elements in works and movements including Plato’s *Republic*, Thomas More’s *Utopia*, and Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Discourse on Inequality*;
- (2) James Madison’s critique in “Federalist #10” of Rousseau’s coercive egalitarianism, which provides the human anthropology that underpins the Constitution’s architecture of liberty and republican self-government;
- (3) Alexis de Tocqueville’s analysis in *Democracy in America* of the characteristically American conflict between liberty and equality;
- (4) Communist elements in the French Revolution, including Gracchus Babeuf’s Conspiracy of the Equals;
- (5) the theories, practices, and failures of early nineteenth-century socialists, including Charles Fourier, Henri de Saint Simon, Robert Owen’s New Harmony, Brook Farm, and Nashoba Community; and
- (6) the anarchist critique of coercive “statist” communism, levied at Marx by Proudhon and Bakunin.

4 — Analyze the nature of and the responses to Communist and socialist political parties until 1914.

4.1 — Discuss the rise and political responses to Communist and socialist parties.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to describe topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the rise of the Social Democratic Party in Germany and Germany's Anti-Socialist laws;
- (2) the Paris Commune and the rise of the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière in France;
- (3) the rise of the Labour Party in the United Kingdom;
- (4) the Second International and its efforts to impose orthodox Marxist theory on the socialist parties of Europe, the United States, and Japan;
- (5) the rise and limited appeal of the Industrial Workers of the World and the Socialist Party in the United States; and
- (6) the rise of the Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, and Socialist Revolutionaries in Tsarist Russia, the 1905 Revolution, and revolutionary terrorism.

4.2 — Discuss how social reforms responded to the intellectual and political challenge of Communist and socialist parties.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to describe topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the establishment of child labor laws;
- (2) the establishment of accident insurance and pensions for retirees, especially in Germany under Bismarck;
- (3) the establishment of health insurance;
- (4) the establishment of unions in industrial sectors;
- (5) the expansion of voting rights (i.e., suffrage);
- (6) the rise of Christian social movements, including *Rerum Novarum*; and
- (7) the emancipation of the serfs and the Stolypin reforms in Tsarist Russia.

5 — Analyze the effect of World War I on Communist and socialist movements.

5.1 — Discuss the response to World War I of Communist and socialist leaders and parties in Europe and the United States.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the prewar socialist ideal of “internationalism,” or repudiation of nationalism;
- (2) the failure of European socialists to coordinate opposition to the war in summer 1914, and the decision of Socialist Parties to vote in favor of war, despite vows not to do so;
- (3) support and opposition to the war, as well as pacifist movements;
- (4) Espionage and Sedition Acts in the U.S., and the prosecution of Eugene V. Debs; and
- (5) the role of wartime politics and experiences in the formation of post-World War I national socialism, including Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.

5.2 — Discuss the effects of World War I on Russia.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) inflation and food and fuel shortages in the capital of Petrograd;
- (2) the casualties and retreat of the Russian imperial forces; and
- (3) the weakening of the Romanov dynasty and the influence of Rasputin.

5.3 — Discuss the Russian Revolution.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the February Revolution, the Provisional (Kerensky) government, the Petrograd Soviet (Ispolkom), Order No. 1, and the Kerensky offensive;
- (2) the October Revolution, the Bolshevik seizure of power, and the establishment of one-party dictatorship;
- (3) the Civil War, the Red Terror, and the Kronstadt Rebellion;
- (4) War Communism, including brutal repression of political opposition, expropriating private industry, banning private enterprise, requisitioning and rationing food, mass famine, suppression of strikes, expropriation of the Church, and mass murder of priests;
- (5) the beliefs and policies of Vladimir Lenin; and
- (6) the formal establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1922.

6 — Analyze the key events, policies, and experiences of life in the USSR from 1922 to 1945.

6.1 — Discuss the political history of interwar Soviet Russia.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the New Economic Policy;
- (2) the rise of Josef Stalin, the removal from political power of Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Bukharin, and their subsequent murders;
- (3) collectivization and the First Five Year Plan; and
- (4) the Great Terror, including murder of foreign Communists living in the USSR.

6.2 — Discuss the domestic policies of interwar Soviet Russia.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the destruction of individual rights;
- (2) the government seizure of most privately owned industry and commerce;
- (3) the introduction of internal passports to control people's movements;
- (4) state-mandated atheism and the persecution of priests and religious believers;
- (5) the “cult of personality” that glorified Stalin;
- (6) the development of the Cheka, NKVD, and KGB “counterintelligence state”;
- (7) the GULAG forced labor network and the experiences of the prisoners;
- (8) purges of the military officer corps and terror against the citizenry; and
- (9) mass murder of peasants (“dekulakization”), genocidal starvation of Ukrainians (Holodomor), Kazakh famine, and democide (ca. 10% of Soviet population murdered).

6.3 — Discuss interwar Soviet foreign policy and the effect of World War II.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the support for foreign Communist parties and popular fronts, including CPUSA;
- (2) the opposition to reform socialists that catalyzed the rise of fascist governments;
- (3) foreign policy in Asia, including support for Chinese Communists;
- (4) Soviet cooperation with Nazi Germany, including the Nazi-Soviet pact, Soviet annexations and population deportations, the Winter War, and the Katyn massacre;
- (5) German invasion, including the Holocaust and the Siege of Leningrad; and
- (6) war policy, including terror, ethnic cleansing, looting operations in conquered countries, the Yalta Conference, and the occupation of Eastern Europe.

7 — Analyze the key events, policies, and experiences of the Cold War.

7.1 — Discuss the USSR’s occupation of Eastern Europe after World War II.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the Soviet Communization of Eastern Europe, including the 1948 coup d’état in Czechoslovakia, the Stalin-Tito split, and the Show Trials;
- (2) the chronic rebellions in the Eastern Bloc, including the East German Uprising (1953), the Hungarian Uprising (1956), the “Prague Spring” in Czechoslovakia (1968); and “Solidarity” in Poland (1980-1989); and
- (3) the neutralization of Finland and Austria.

7.2 — Discuss the West’s response to Communism in the early Cold War.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the policy of containment;
- (2) the Truman Doctrine;
- (3) the Marshall Plan;
- (4) the Berlin Airlift;
- (5) the formation of NATO and the Warsaw Pact;
- (6) the introduction of atomic weapons and disarmament movements; and
- (7) the construction of the Berlin Wall and tank standoff at Checkpoint Charlie.

7.3 — Discuss the rise of Communism in Cuba, China, and North Korea.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) Communist leaders Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Mao Zedong, and Kim Il Sung;
- (2) the Korean War and the establishment of the North Korean dictatorship;
- (3) the Cuban Missile Crisis (1963);
- (4) the Chinese Revolution (1949-58), including one-party dictatorship, collectivization, the *laogai* prisons, the Hundred Flowers Campaign, and the Anti-Rightist Campaign.
- (5) China’s genocidal conquest of Tibet, Great Leap Forward (1958-1962), and Cultural Revolution (1966-76); and
- (6) Deng Xiaoping’s political and economic reforms.

8 — Analyze the rise of Communism and conflict in Southeast Asia.

8.1 — Discuss the rise of Communism in Vietnam and America’s response.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the successful Communist revolt against French colonial rule (1946-1954);
- (2) North Vietnamese Land Reform Terror (1953-1956);
- (3) “Domino Theory” and the American rationale for the Vietnam war;
- (4) American and North Vietnamese military policies during the Vietnam War;
- (5) Soviet and Chinese support for the North Vietnamese Communist forces;
- (6) domestic American opposition to the Vietnam war;
- (7) the American withdrawal from Vietnam; and
- (8) the fall of South Vietnam to the Communists.

8.2 — Discuss what occurred in Southeast Asia after the United States withdrew from Vietnam.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the Boat People;
- (2) the fall of Laos and Cambodia to Communist regimes; and
- (3) the establishment of Cambodia’s genocidal dictatorship under Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge.

9 — Analyze the role of American Communism between 1917 and 1956.

9.1 — Discuss Soviet coordination of Western Communist party tactics.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the roles of the Comintern and Cominform in promoting Western Communist parties, revolution, and Soviet espionage;
- (2) the imperative for Western Communist parties to serve the foreign policy needs of the USSR;
- (3) Communist party tactics of terrorism, entryism, popular fronts, fellow travelers, and manipulation of “useful idiots”;
- (4) extenuations of Communist atrocities by Western intellectuals such as George Bernard Shaw, Jean Paul Sartre, and Susan Sontag; and
- (5) Communist “front” movements, and attempts to infiltrate and co-opt organized labor and the disarmament, “peace,” anti-nuclear, and civil rights movements.

9.2 — Discuss American Communism between 1917 and 1956.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) Soviet espionage, including Alger Hiss, Harry Dexter White, Whittaker Chambers, Klaus Fuchs, and the Venona transcripts;
- (2) *causes célèbres*, including Sacco and Vanzetti, Angelo Herndon, the Scottsboro Boys, and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg;
- (3) the effects of the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact, including Communist anti-war propaganda and mass defections from the American Communist Party;
- (4) the role of the Communist Party in Henry Wallace’s 1948 campaign for president;
- (5) organized labor’s purge of Communists, including the roles of Walter Reuther, Mike Quill, Joseph Curran, and Ronald Reagan;
- (6) the role of defectors from Communism in the anti-Communist movement, including James Burnham, Whittaker Chambers, Sidney Hook, Frank Meyer, and Richard Wright;
- (7) the roles of anti-Communist politicians, including Harry Truman, Richard Nixon, the House Un-American Activities Committee, and Joseph McCarthy;
- (8) Popular front culture, including the Hollywood Ten, the Weavers, and Lillian Hellman; and
- (9) the disillusioning effects of Nikita Khrushchev’s 1956 Secret Speech.

10 — Analyze how Marxism evolved after the West’s intellectual disillusionment with Soviet Communism.

10.1 — Discuss prominent Soviet dissidents and their works.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*;
- (2) Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and *Gulag Archipelago*;
and
- (3) Vladimir Bukovsky and the revelation of Soviet abuse of psychiatry.

10.2 — Discuss the transformation of Marxism into Critical Theory.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (4). the central ideas of philosophers Antonio Gramsci and Herbert Marcuse;
- (1) the rise and nature of Cultural Marxism;
- (2) the rise and nature of Critical Theory; and
- (3) the similarities and differences between classical Marxism and neo-Marxist Critical Theory.

11 — Analyze the decay of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

11.1 — Discuss the effect of Ronald Reagan’s foreign policy.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) Military rearmament, including the Strategic Defense Initiative;
- (2) the Reagan Doctrine, including support for anti-Communists in Afghanistan and Nicaragua; and
- (3) Diplomacy, including the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty).

11.2 — Discuss the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the reasons for and conduct of the USSR’s invasion of Afghanistan;
- (2) the United States’ armament of the Mujahadeen; and
- (3) the experiences of Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan.

11.3 — Discuss politicized science in the USSR and the Chernobyl Disaster.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the ideas of Trofim Lysenko, and the consequences of his ideology;
- (2) the Chernobyl meltdown, including its causes, political and environmental consequences, and international responses; and
- (3) the professional work and political critiques of Soviet dissident and nuclear physicist Andrei Sakharov.

11.4 — Discuss Gorbachev’s attempt to reform the Soviet Union.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the role of Mikhail Gorbachev;
- (2) the concepts and the effects of perestroika and glasnost; and
- (3) the 1989 Soviet legislative election and its consequences.

12 — Analyze the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

12.1 — Discuss the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) President Reagan’s “Tear Down This Wall” speech in 1987;
- (2) protests in Poland and Hungary that inspired protests in East Germany;
- (3) the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989;
- (4) the reunification of Germany in 1990.

12.2 — Discuss the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia and the Christmas Revolution in Romania.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the causes and outcomes of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia;
- (2) the causes and outcomes of the Christmas Revolution in Romania;
- (3) the trial and execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu.

12.3 — Discuss the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the August Coup.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the rise of Boris Yeltsin and the pluralist movement;
- (2) uprisings in Lithuania and Latvia, and the Soviet response;
- (3) the unsuccessful August Coup against Gorbachev, and Gorbachev’s resignation;
- (4) the dissolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union;
- (5) the declarations of independence of the now-former Soviet republics; and
- (6) the lowering of the Kremlin’s Soviet flag for the last time on 25 December 1991.

13 — Analyze the history of Communist China since 1989.

13.1 — Discuss the Tiananmen Square Massacre on 4 June 1989.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the causes and events of the Tiananmen Square protests;
- (2) their suppression by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); and
- (3) the CCP’s continuing denial of and censorship about the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

13.2 — Discuss the rise of China to peer competitor with the United States.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the retirement of Deng Xiaoping after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989;
- (2) the rise of Jiang Zemin and the introduction of the concept of “Socialist Market Economy”;
- (3) the rapid economic growth of the Chinese economy, including weak banks, government debt, dependence on exports, and the Belt and Road Initiative;
- (4) continuing internal repression, including Christians, Falun Gong, Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang (genocide); and
- (5) the emergence of a “social credit” system to monitor and control the population, through denial of access to schools, travel, banks, and other state institutions.

13.3 — Discuss China’s establishment of influence in America.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) exploitation of Western investment in China;
- (1) industrial espionage;
- (2) the Thousand Talents Program; and
- (3) Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms.

14 — Analyze key developments in neo-Marxist philosophies and movements in contemporary America.

14.1 — Discuss the philosophy of Critical Race Theory and its consequences.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the origins of Critical Race Theory in Communist Party influence operations;
- (2) the key ideas of Critical Race Theory and their social effects;
- (3) the key ideas of Intersectionality and its neo-Marxist framing in “oppression”; and
- (4) the key ideas of Paulo Freire’s “pedagogy of the oppressed” and its neo-Marxist framing in “oppression.”

14.2 — Discuss “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” and so-called “Anti-Racist” initiatives, and their consequences.

Benchmark Clarifications:

Clarification 1: Students will be able to discuss topics including but not limited to:

- (1) the ideology and neo-Marxist roots of “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” (DEI) and so-called “Anti-Racist” initiatives;
- (2) the “Great Awakening” in the United States and the consequences of DEI initiatives;
- (3) rival conceptions of human flourishing promoted by intellectuals such as Daryl Davis, John McWhorter, and Tabia Lee; and
- (4) the effects of identity politics on traditional American ideals of liberty, republican self-government, civic virtue, and individual merit.