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ABSTRACT

This article examines the history textbooks available in 1998 for adoption in the United States at both the high school and elementary levels. New books have appeared on the scene since the last textbook adoption series. California begins its textbook considerations in August. The California adoption will rekindle national interest in the content of history textbooks and indicate in what ways the textbooks and social studies content have changed after a decade of exposure to multiculturalism. The document examines the predominant role of the large textbook consumers, California and Texas, as well as the emerging themes and "watered-down" text in many of the books. The shrinking numbers of publishers and the increasing costs of production for books and ancillary materials raises some basic questions of quality, content, and purpose of textbooks. The article lists the major textbooks considered for adoption and analyzes some of the shortcomings of the texts. (EH)

A NEW GENERATION OF HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

A REPORT OF THE AMERICAN TEXTBOOK COUNCIL

SPRING 1998

1998 will be an important year for history textbooks. New books have appeared on the scene. North Carolina and Florida have finished state adoptions. California will begin one in August. The California adoption is likely to rekindle national interest in the content of history textbooks and indicate in what ways the textbooks and social studies content have changed after a decade of exposure to multiculturalism.

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THE NATION IS AT THE END OF A SEVEN-YEAR CYCLE in social studies publishing and at the threshold of a new one. A new generation of history books, produced since the release of the controversial national history standards in late 1994, is now getting a lookover by key states. Florida's department of education recently made recommendations to the state commissioner for United States and world history textbooks. California will start selecting textbooks in August.

The new textbooks appear at a time when educational publishing is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few huge media corporations. Fewer publishers mean fewer choices for teachers. In November 1997, Scott Foresman (recently purchased by Addison Wesley) announced its complete withdrawal from social studies publishing. With Viacom's May sale of the Simon & Schuster educational division to Pearson/Addison Wesley, the number of major social studies textbook producers has dropped from nine in 1988 to four today. (West Educational Publishing's puzzling move into the field is limited and uncertain.) To make matters worse, editorial confusion reigns in history. Content is thinner and thinner, and what there is, increasingly deformed by identity politics and group pieties.

Three states -- California, Texas, and Florida -- are extremely powerful on account of their size and their state-level textbook adoption practices. The American Association of Publishers keeps lobbyists in their state capitals. Together these three control 25 percent of the nation's school market. (North Carolina is number four in size.) They influence not only what textbooks their own students read but also what textbooks are read across the country. The long-term trend, most experts believe, is away from state-level adoptions and toward local choice. Still, all who know textbook publishing agree that publishers must continue to respond to what the big states want. Texas -- with almost 300,000 students per grade -- was scheduled in 1998 to adopt new high school U.S. history textbooks, the largest cut of the social studies market. After years of preparation, the big social studies publishers -- McGraw-Hill, Harcourt General, Simon & Schuster, and Houghton Mifflin -- introduced several new U.S. history books. Then, in late 1997, the Texas Education Agency postponed the long planned adoption until 2002, only in part because of sharp differences between its new state standards and the available textbooks.

Publishers are annoyed about the abruptness of the change. It is this kind of unpredictable state action that makes educational publishing a nerve-wracking business. They expected a Texas beauty contest to decide which particular U.S. histories would obtain a unique boost by being listed in the nation's second most populous state. The winners in Texas would have almost certainly made a lot of money and have gone on to become the nation's bestsellers. Deprived of Texas, publishers have no equivalent place to test drive their high school history books, and they face increased costs selling books state by state and locality by locality.

This year, in grades kindergarten through eight, California -- with about 450,000 students per grade -- will choose textbooks in U.S. and world history. Ethnic- and race-based pressure groups, gender activists, and assorted religious minorities will undoubtedly complain to state officials about history textbook content, clamoring for expanded, favorable coverage. No matter that the ten- and twelve-year-old children who will read the textbooks care nothing about identity politics. (And it's doubtful that most of their teachers care much either.) There's every reason to think that publishers will fall all over themselves as in the past to cater to what one calls the "squeaky wheels."

Publishers are no longer confident about how to represent the nation, its civic ideals, or the world. They are not interested in deciding how -- they'll leave that up to standards committees and focus groups -- but they are deeply interested in selling instructional materials, and after the history wars of the 1990s, they are warier than ever of content disputes. When it comes to social studies themes today, "multiculturalism" and "world cultures" appeal to textbook buyers. Inclusion has become a watchword, and for many curriculum specialists who advise publishers and buy textbooks, it is a be-all-and-end-all.

It was to be expected that social studies editors would embrace the 1994 proposed national standards as they try to keep up to date and appease multicultural pressures. The standards affirmed historical content, themes and interpretations that social studies editors had been incorporating into textbooks since the 1980s. But these changes had occurred unbeknownst to most people except textbook publishers, curriculum specialists, and political activists (which is one reason they were greeted with such public alarm and condemnation in the Senate in 1995). The national standards in essence ratified content that had already crept into textbooks. Last year, independent reviewers noticed a distinct correspondence between the national standards and West's first U.S. history venture, *In the Course of Human Events*, now approved by Florida and North Carolina. (An inaccurate analysis of U.S. history textbooks also claimed the national history standards had influenced books developed and adopted before 1992.)

One book introduced in 1994, Paul Boyer's *Todd and Curti's The American Nation* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston), predated the publication of the national standards. Yet it was as politically correct and dumbed down as any major book on the market today. *Todd and Curti's The American Nation* was a pioneer, not only taking a sharp left turn in its interpretation of American history, radically cutting the text and tarting up the package, destroying a once proud textbook. It is unfortunate that the book has found a national audience. In a burst of honesty, Boyer has at least put his own name on the cover of the latest edition, signaling that the content of the book bears no common authorship with the real Todd and Curti books, from *The Rise of the American Nation* (1961) to *Triumph of the American Nation* (1990).

Earlier this year, Florida approved several new histories, including Boyer, all of them reflecting to some degree the multicultural conventions now embodied in state and national history standards. Only one "traditional" textbook remains listed in the state: Daniel Boorstin's *History of the United States* (Prentice Hall), now in its sixth edition. In California, before eighth grade, Houghton Mifflin has a unique presence in social studies publishing, and has since 1990. What kind of future it has remains to be seen. It has many other social studies textbooks on its list that are sold nationally as well as others in development. But no Houghton Mifflin textbook has blockbuster status in social studies.

Before 1990, Houghton Mifflin developed a set of social studies/history textbooks for the first eight grades, keyed to California's 1987 standards and adopted by the state with great fanfare in 1990. The program has had limited national appeal on account of California's atypical curriculum sequence. In the last decade McGraw-Hill/Macmillan's easy-to-use elementary program, designed expressly with the Texas market in mind, has obtained the lion's share of the nation's elementary-level social studies textbook market. Silver Burdett held an estimated 60 percent of the national market and much more in some states before McGraw-Hill/Macmillan swept the nation. Some analysts think McGraw-Hill has a similar presence in elementary social studies today. The future of Silver Burdett and Harcourt Brace in elementary social studies remains uncertain.

The Business of Textbooks

Educational publishing is a business, and it is a business increasingly linked to global communications corporations. These media giants see school textbooks as one product among many other media that must make money or else. It is not a business that rewards risk-taking, experimentation or uniqueness. It is one that can provide rich revenue streams over long periods of time. New textbooks tend to mimic volumes that have already succeeded. Publishers seek to "differentiate" their products, but these features may have little or nothing to do with actual content. They are looking for a "sales hook." Textbook publishers prefer the more sanitary phrase "sales feature" or "sales handle," but the effect is the same. What publishers call "design values" -- the look, the feel, the format of the text -- count for much more than actual content.

Textbook publishers are creatures of the moment, willing to abide any qualitative compromise in order to sell to the market. They are also strapped for margins in the 1990s, and in order to cut costs, they are shrinking their editorial and production staffs, and moving toward a writing-for-hire production system, abandoning the royalty-based author system that in the past helped give textbooks an authorial voice. (For years now, the stated authors of textbooks have served increasingly as editorial advisors for anonymous "packagers.") It's obvious that such financial

efficiencies are not likely to lead to improved textbook writing, increased factual accuracy, or sterling content. During the last ten years, analysts have repeatedly warned about these production changes. The publishers moan, "you just don't understand."

But when it comes to quality, many discerning educators and parents *do* understand. Which is why the 1990s have seen a trend in better schools toward using history books that read more like trade books, indeed, that often *are* trade books. But the standard mass-market text remains the chief instrument of instruction in most classrooms because of its efficiency and scope. So far, publishers do not find it economic to customize their products, which would allow schools and districts more leeway in tailoring their own educational materials. The truth is: most textbook purchasers desire an instructional program delivered to them as a whole. They do not want to take the time (or feel that they do not have the expertise) to build a course of study and history program from scratch.

The Association of American Publishers, a New York-based trade association, makes much of the small amount of the school budget that goes for instructional materials. This is a claim that should be treated with due skepticism: at $45 or $55 for a student edition, the textbooks are much more expensive than trade and many other reference books. Some textbook industry representatives state that these books are bargains, given the size and complexity of production. While the AAP choir laments that only 5 percent of annual educational expenditures goes toward instructional materials, it forgets to mention that what drives up costs are the vast number of bells-and-whistles -- colorful pictures, glossy drawings, drop-dead graphics, and varied typography -- that are intended to stimulate student interest. Also expensive are the innumerable program-related add-ons, from prefab tests and classroom exercises and annotated editions designed for teachers on autopilot to multimedia backups, including CD-ROMs, audiocassettes, and videodiscs. Larger districts have an advantage in obtaining these ancillaries at a discount or for free. Customers sometimes pit educational publishers against one another in order to get as many "freebies" as they can. And many district decisions are made solely on the criterion of "freebies." Schools could be buying much cheaper history textbooks: clear, well-organized reference books -- ideally written with some flair -- heavy on text, light on expensive graphics, a basic source accompanied by maps, data, and excerpts of historical documents.

The new history books making their debut have less text and more illustrations than in the past. Publishers are adjusting to short attention spans and non-readers, producing new textbooks with truncated texts and plenty of pictures. They are also pushing a doubtful theory of learning. "Text is a slow medium of gaining information; a picture is a very quick way," said John Sargent, the past president of DK (Dorling Kindersley), the revolutionary designer of children's books. "By

spending more time with the picture and less with the text, which we place right next to the image, kids absorb a lot more information quickly." (*Publishers Weekly*, April 26, 1996). "Text heavy," "information loaded," "fact based," and "non visual" are all negatives in the educational publishing business.

Since 1990, the trend in social studies publishing has been away from the core text, also called the running text, and toward something snappier, or at least more eye-catching. Capsules and sidebars break textual material into small units, removing the seam of narrative. What used to be episodic storytelling in schoolbooks is now closer to caption writing. "Bright, four-color photos on plain white backgrounds allow kids to get more information from the illustration with minimal distraction," Sargent asserted. The compression of text introduces serious questions about general literacy and reading comprehension and undoubtedly reflects a trend toward educational materials meant to amuse and entertain.

Many history textbooks -- including those in the new generation under consideration -- have downsized, diced, and dumbed down the core text. With all the content controversies in social studies, it is all too easy to lose sight of basic changes in the text: less of it, with more "inclusion" and less storytelling, divided into short takes and boxes, a bright book with plenty of illustrations and other "visuals." For educators serious about literacy, the new history textbook design values should be cause for distress.

Abridging narrative and chopping up core text into bite-sized "units" probably make learning to read harder. Moreover, publishers are putting a great deal of development money into multimedia systems in which the textbook is one "medium" only, and not necessarily even a system's centerpiece, especially in instructional programs targeted at less able and "non-verbal" students. For those educators who are bedazzled by electronic learning, the "stand-alone" textbook is an anachronism. Texas's state school board chairman recently touted the use of laptop computers in place of textbooks.

"World cultures"

Some of the most disturbing social studies content trends are not in United States history but in world history, a subject area of growing popularity, now often relabeled "world studies" or "world cultures." An example of this endeavor, Houghton Mifflin's *To See a World*, is likely to get a push from multiculturalists in the coming California adoption. Gary B. Nash, the author of *American Odyssey*, is behind *To See a World*. The busy UCLA history professor, chief architect of the proposed national history standards, helped to oversee the production of *To See a World*, assisted by a radical Hispanic anthropologist and a trendy historian of Africa.

Four years ago, Houghton Mifflin, trying to add multicultural cachet to its social studies series for kindergarten through eighth grade, added *To See a World*, a pastiche based on the books adopted by California in 1990. Designed for sixth or seventh-grade use, the book has become popular with teachers nationally. (It was not submitted for adoption in California off-cycle.) Will California now adopt this book, pushing world history in a new direction? This book takes "world cultures" to new extremes and in a direction that California did not have in mind in 1987 when it crafted its well-regarded state history framework.

In *To See a World*, coverage of European history has been radically cut, supplanted by African, Caribbean, and Latin American studies. The 700-page book wraps up the period from the so-called Columbian Exchange to the Industrial Revolution in six pages. Ancient Rome, Greece, and Early Christianity together merit a mere 30 pages. Twentieth-century Europe, including Russia and the Soviet Union to the end of the Cold War, is given a total of 20 pages.

To See a World's excellent lesson on the Reformation reflects recent efforts to expand and improve coverage of religion in history textbooks. The treatment of the Renaissance, sadly, is more typical of the book's quality. It is important to remember that in *To See a World*, the Renaissance is dispensed with in six pages: in the spirit of cultural equivalency, the study of Europe has been demoted to about one-seventh of the book. The following passage reflects its flawed historiography and a radical change in subject priorities in such an abbreviated treatment:

> Unlike the Renaissance man, the Renaissance woman was not encouraged to develop her abilities. One male writer gave Renaissance women this advice:
>
> > It does not befit [suit] women to handle weapons, to ride, to play tennis, to wrestle, and to do many other things that befit men . . . .
> >
> > -- Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 1528
>
> Some Renaissance women ignored this advice. Some became writers or artists. Others became skilled workers or shop owners. A few held political power.

This is not serious women's history but feminist propaganda. In the same lesson children meet Isabella D'Este and Christine de Pizan, who together merit about the same amount of space as Nicolaus Copernicus. As inclusion takes place, of course, editors must renounce older historical figures and subjects. The history of science in general does not fare well in the makeover. Galileo, for example, is simply absent from the book. Of the Polish astronomer, the textbook says only that:

> Copernicus read ancient scientific works. He also observed the planets, stars, and moon. Finally, he used math to conclude that the sun was the center of the solar system. For centuries, the Catholic church had claimed that the sun revolved around the earth. Although the Pope approved of his findings, others did not. Copernicus did not publish his work until just before his death in 1543.

In *To See a World* the Enlightenment is missing entirely. So what, you might say. Sixth and seventh graders may not be ready for Voltaire or Rousseau. But there is no mention of the French Revolution, the U.S. Constitution, or the liberal tradition of the 19th century either. The U.S. is reinvented as a "land of diversity," and "a nation of many peoples." What remains solely of America's civic being is the immigrant experience, and in keeping with its view of the American past, the book stresses hardships late 19th and early 20th century migrants faced in a hard-hearted land.

While ample, the unit on African history is a particular minus. Mali gets 20 pages; Ghana, another 20; and South Africa, yet another 24. The book dwells on medieval African centers of learning and "universities," ignoring and thus misrepresenting the contributions of Paris, Bologna and Oxford at the same time. Until Europeans come on the African scene, offering guns for slaves, *To See a World* fails to bring up the subject of slavery. It does not mention the African trade in human flesh (with Arabia from the 10th century) or the enthusiastic role of West African empires in the business until the 19th century. It suppresses the role Great Britain played in abolishing African slavery, in part to glorify the virtues of the Ashanti tribe.

In *To See a World*'s round-up chapter on North America, entitled "For the Good of All," the American vision is vested in the African American "freedom struggles" that "helped open the door for all minorities and women." The chapter includes a tract-like special section on identifying gender stereotypes (ridiculous or evil, take your pick) and education's value, presumably in breaking these stereotypes.

Unanswered Questions

The five U.S. history textbooks that Texas adopts for eighth- and eleventh-grade use historically become the national bestsellers for the subsequent seven-year cycle, the average classroom life of a textbook. Listed in 1992, they have been perforce nationally prominent through the 1990s: Carol Berkin, *American Voices* (Scott Foresman); Thomas V. DiBacco, *History of the United States* (Houghton Mifflin); Robert A. Divine, *The People and the Dream* (Scott Foresman); John A. Garraty, *The Story of America* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston); and Gary B. Nash, *American Odyssey* (Glencoe). These textbooks remain listed on account of Texas's unexpected textbook adoption postponement. But what will be their futures, especially in light of Scott Foresman's withdrawal from social studies?

What will California do with the Houghton Mifflin series developed for the first eight grades and approved in 1990? In what ways is the publisher making revisions and adjustments to suit Nash and his associates' ongoing revisionist crusades? Will the series retain its geographic monopoly in California in grades kindergarten through seven?

A year ago, Houghton Mifflin and Silver Burdett gave preliminary indications to California's state textbook manager that they intended to submit materials at the elementary level. Likewise, Glencoe, Prentice Hall, and Holt, Rinehart and Winston -- all of them secondary-level imprints -- made overtures, signaling their intention to submit at the seventh- or eighth-grade level. World history textbooks will compete for seventh-grade adoption. For U.S. history in eighth grade, Glencoe will probably push its new *American Journey*, a joint venture with the National Geographic Society, authored by Joyce Appleby, Alan Brinkley and James M. McPherson. (Given its mundane prose, it's hard to believe these three able historians actually had much to do with the basic writing.) Prentice Hall may submit James West Davidson's latest version of *The American Nation*. What will be the fate of John Garraty's *The Story of America*, a 1990 textbook preceded by Garraty's *American History*, introduced in 1982? *The Story of America* had great success in the early part of the decade, adopted first in California and then in Texas. It remains one of the best U.S. histories available. Is *The Story of America* to be resubmitted in California? Or is it to be backlisted, another U.S. history textbook undone by the pressures of brighter formats and more simplified exposition?

Three U.S. histories for high schools introduced before 1994 that lean heavily on diversity -- Carol Berkin's *American Voices*, Paul Boyer's *Todd and Curti's The American Nation* and Gary B. Nash's *American Odyssey* -- have obtained a powerful presence in the nation's high schools. Will their popularity remain undiminished? To what degree does the new generation of textbooks keep pace in rewriting American history to meet the thematic demands of multicultural educators? What textbooks are least deformed by these biases, and can educators expect these alternatives to remain commercially viable during the coming cycle?

The history textbooks that succeed in the market during the next two to four years will have a vast influence on social studies beyond the textbook cycle itself. They will reflect how the nation intends to represent itself and its ideals to the youth of the early twenty-first century. They will thus be important indicators of "who we are" and "what we are" as a nation and people after a decade of exposure to multiculturalism. During the 1990s, publishers and editors decided that we are all multiculturalists now and acted accordingly. They must be expecting California to endorse new histories and welcome new "world cultures" textbooks to the fold. Because of its size and money, the Golden State has the chance to demand something different. Will it rise to the challenge?

1998 LEADING MASS-MARKET HISTORY TEXTBOOKS (GRADES 6-12)

G	McGraw-Hill/Macmillan/Glencoe
HM	Houghton Mifflin/McDougal Littell
HRW	Harcourt Brace/Holt, Rinehart and Winston
PH	Simon & Schuster/Silver Burdett/Prentice Hall/Globe (sold to Addison Wesley 5/98)
SF	Addison Wesley Longman/Scott Foresman (social studies discontinued 12/97)
W	West

NEW	introduced since 1994, currently bearing a 1997 or later copyright
REVISED	updated versions of books introduced before 1994 bearing recent copyrights
OLDER	books introduced before 1994 and not recently revised or updated
F, NC	texts adopted in Florida or North Carolina in 1997-98

American History

(publisher, first author, title)

New (High School)

HRW	Boyer	Boyer's The American Nation (F, NC)
PH	Cayton	America: Pathways to the Present (F, NC)
HM	Danzer	The Americans (F, NC)
W	Downey	United States History: In the Course of Human Events (F, NC)
G	Ritchie	American History: The Modern Era Since 1865 (F, NC)
PH	Schwartz	Exploring United States History (NC)

New (Middle Level)

G	Appleby	American Journey (F, NC)
PH	Davidson	The American Nation (F, NC)
HM	Mason	America's Past and Promise (F, NC)
G	Ritchie	American History: The Early Years to 1877 (F)
SF	Viola	Why We Remember (NC)
HRW	na	Exploring America's Past (F, NC)

Revised

PH	Boorstin	A History of the United States (F)
G	Bragdon	History of a Free Nation (NC)
HM	DiBacco	History of the United States
G	Nash	American Odyssey (F, NC)

Older

SF	Berkin	American Voices
SF	Divine	America: The People and the Dream
G	Drewry	America Is
HRW	Garraty	The Story of America

World History

New

PH	Ahmad	World Cultures: A Global Mosaic
PH	Ellis	World History: Connections to Today (F, NC)
W	Spielvogel	World History: The Human Odyssey (F)

Revised

G	Farah	World History: The Human Experience (F, NC)
G	Greenblatt	Human Heritage (F)
HRW	Hanes	World History: Continuity and Change (F, NC)
HM	Krieger	World History: Perspectives on the Past (F, NC)
HM	Nash	To See a World

Older

PH	Beers	World History: Patterns of Civilization
G	Farah	Global Insights: People and Cultures (NC)
PH	Leinwand	The Pageant of World History
HRW	Mazour	World History: People and Nations
SF	Wallbank	History and Life

"A New Generation of History Textbooks" was written by Gilbert T. Sewall and Stapley W. Emberling. This is the preliminary report of an American Textbook Council history review to result in revision of *History Textbooks: A Standard and Guide.*

The American Textbook Council was established in 1988 as a national organization to review social studies textbooks and advance the quality of instructional materials in history and related subjects. The Council endorses the production of textbooks that embody vivid narrative style, stress significant people and events, and promote better understanding of all cultures, including our own, on the principle that improved textbooks will advance the curriculum, stimulate student learning, and encourage educational achievement for children of all backgrounds. The Council acts as a research center and clearinghouse for information about history and social studies textbooks and educational publishing in general. Consulted by educators and policymakers at all levels, it provides detailed information and textbook reviews for individuals and groups interested in improving educational materials.

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