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Proposed Texas textbooks are inaccurate, biased and politicized, new report finds

By **Valerie Strauss** September 12, 2014

When it comes to controversies about curriculum, textbook content and academic standards, Texas is the state that keeps on giving.

Back in 2010, we had an uproar over proposed changes to social studies standards by religious conservatives on the State Board of Education, which included a bid to calling the United States' hideous slave trade history as the "Atlantic triangular trade." There [were other doozies](#), too, such as one proposal to remove Thomas Jefferson from the Enlightenment curriculum and replace him with John Calvin. Some were changed but the board's approved standards were roundly criticized as distorted history.

There's a new fuss about proposed social studies textbooks for Texas public schools that are based on what are called the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. [Scholarly reviews of 43 proposed history, geography and government textbooks](#) for Grades 6-12 — undertaken by the Education Fund of the Texas Freedom Network, a watchdog and activist group that monitors far-right issues and organizations — found extensive problems in [American Government textbooks](#), [U.S. and World History textbooks](#), [Religion in World History textbooks](#), and [Religion in World Geography textbooks](#). The state board will vote on which books to approve in November.

Ideas promoted in various proposed textbooks include the notion that Moses and Solomon inspired American democracy, that in the era of segregation only "sometimes" were schools for black children "lower in quality" and that Jews view Jesus Christ as an important prophet.

Here are the broad findings of 10 scholars, who wrote four separate reports, taken from an executive summary,

followed by the names of the scholars and a list of publishers who submitted textbooks.

The findings:

- A number of government and world history textbooks exaggerate Judeo-Christian influence on the nation's founding and Western political tradition.
- Two government textbooks include misleading information that undermines the Constitutional concept of the separation of church and state.
- Several world history and world geography textbooks include biased statements that inappropriately portray Islam and Muslims negatively.
- All of the world geography textbooks inaccurately downplay the role that conquest played in the spread of Christianity.
- Several world geography and history textbooks suffer from an incomplete – and often inaccurate – account of religions other than Christianity.
- Coverage of key Christian concepts and historical events are lacking in a few textbooks, often due to the assumption that all students are Christians and already familiar with Christian events and doctrine.
- A few government and U.S. history textbooks suffer from an

uncritical celebration of the free enterprise system, both by ignoring legitimate problems that exist in capitalism and failing to include coverage of government's role in the U.S. economic system.

- One government textbook flirts with contemporary Tea Party ideology, particularly regarding the inclusion of anti-taxation and anti-regulation arguments.
- One world history textbook includes outdated – and possibly offensive – anthropological categories and racial terminology in describing African civilization.
- A number of U.S. history textbooks evidence a general lack of attention to Native American peoples and culture and occasionally include biased or misleading information.
- One government textbook ... includes a biased – verging on offensive – treatment of affirmative action.
- Most U.S. history textbooks do a poor job of covering the history of LGBT citizens in discussions of efforts to achieve civil rights in this country.
- Elements of the Texas curriculum standards give undue legitimacy to neo-Confederate arguments about “states’ rights” and the legacy of slavery in the South. While most publishers avoid problems with these issues, passages in a few U.S. history and government textbooks give a nod to these misleading arguments.

In July, the Texas Freedom Network [released a review](#) of the various panels of people who had been selected by the Texas Board of Education to review the proposed textbooks. It said in part:

Out of more than 140 individuals appointed to the panels, only three are current faculty members at Texas colleges and universities. TFN has identified more than a dozen other Texas academics — including the chair of the History Department at Southern Methodist University as well as faculty at the University of Texas at Austin — who applied to serve but did not get appointments to the panels.

But the TFN analysis found that political activists and individuals without social studies degrees or teaching experience got places on the panels. One reviewer, Mark Keough, a Republican nominee for the Texas House District 15 seat, got an appointment to a U.S. History panel after being nominated by SBOE chair Barbara Cargill. Keough, a pastor with degrees in theology, has no teaching experience listed on his application form. Keough recently retired from a career in car sales to run a ministry in Cargill's hometown of The Woodlands and to run for office.

In an interview conducted prior to this year's primary elections, Keough told the Montgomery County Tea Party that he does not "believe that there is a separation of church and state in the Constitution."

The 10 scholars who conducted the reviews are:

- Dr. Edward Countryman, University Distinguished Professor in the William B. Clements Department of History at SMU
- Dr. David R. Brockman, adjunct instructor in Religious Studies, Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences, at SMU as well as at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth
- Dr. Emile Lester, associate professor in the Department of Political Science and

International Affairs at the University of Mary Washington

- Seven doctoral students in the Department of History at UT-Austin

Here are some specific examples from the executive summary:

A number of government and world history textbooks exaggerate Judeo-Christian influence on the nation’s founding and Western political tradition.

McGraw-Hill School Education – United States Government

Text mentions Moses and claims that the “biblical idea of a covenant, an ancient Jewish term meaning a special kind of agreement between the people and God, influenced the formation of colonial governments and contributed to our constitutional structure.”

What’s Wrong?

The American Founders did believe in a social contract, but their version of that contract was derived primarily from modern British political thought, and John Locke’s thought in particular. Since Locke’s version of the social contract was in many ways a repudiation of the biblical covenant view referenced in this passage, this passage provides the student with almost the opposite of the historical truth.

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Perfection Learning – Basic Principles of American Government

Text has a table entitled “Where did the Founders get their ideas?” The introductory section to the table states: “When the Framers set out to write the Constitution, they drew upon the wisdom of philosophers, historians and economists. Here are a few of the people whose words influenced the content of that remarkable document.” Moses is listed first on this list, followed by John Locke, Charles de Montesquieu, and William Blackstone. The “concept” Moses is alleged to have contributed is that “A nation needs a written code of behavior.” The description of Moses includes the following sentences: “During their years of wandering in the desert of the

Sinai, Moses handed down God’s Ten Commandments to the Hebrews. These commandments now form the bedrock on which the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian codes of behavior are based. The full account of Moses’ life can be found in the Bible’s book of Exodus.”

What’s Wrong?

Unlike the contributions of the three other figures mentioned in the table, the contribution of Moses is highly nebulous and contestable. The passage neglects to mention which types of codified behaviors influenced the Framers, and thus makes it difficult to evaluate this claim. The Framers, for instance, were not influenced by the first four Commandments, which deal with matters of religious belief and practice. In fact, notable framers such as James Madison led the battle against government punishment for unorthodox religious belief. Further, stating that “Moses handed down God’s Ten Commandments” is very close to endorsing a religious claim. Stating, for instance, that “Jews and Christians believe that Moses handed down God’s Ten Commandments” would have been more acceptable. Without this qualification, the text seems to endorse the truth of these biblical claims.

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Houghton Mifflin Harcourt – United States Government: Principles in Practice

Text has a section on “Judeo-Christian Influences” that reads: “The Framers’ political thinking was influenced by a Judeo-Christian religious heritage, which includes traditions common to both Judaism and Christianity. These religions see the law and individual rights as being of divine origin. Moreover, the Framers benefited from the Protestant Reformation, a sixteenth-century Christian reform movement whose leaders developed ideas about individual responsibility, the freedom to worship as one chooses, and self-government.”

What’s Wrong?

This passage gives no example of a law or set of laws in the Bible that influenced the Founders and no example of a Founder or a founding document that was influenced by the “Judeo-Christian” concept of law. The text’s claim that the Reformation was a source of the Founders’ views on individual responsibility omits several important pieces of information. Major figures

in the Protestant Reformation such as Martin Luther and John Calvin may have supported freedom of worship for their own views, but they often did not support freedom of worship for many competing religious views. Similarly, the views of major Reformation figures, including Luther and Calvin, about self-government were far more limited than, and had little in common with, the views of the American Founders about self-government. Finally, the paragraph could leave students with a misleading impression about the Founders' religious views. The passage's claim that Judaism and Christianity stresses that individual rights is of "divine origin" and that these views influenced all of the Founders suggests that all of the Founders believed that this biblical God was the source of natural rights. Many Founders did, of course, believe in the biblical God. Other Founders, though, were influenced by deism, and their conception of God departed in significant ways from the biblical God.

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Pearson Education – Magruder's American Government

Text includes a "Biography of Moses," which states: "Moses was a lawgiver and a great leader. Like the founders of the United States, he helped establish a legal system to govern his people. The Ten Commandments have been a guide and basis for many legal and moral systems throughout the world." The annotation to the biography states: "Moses helped establish a legal system, including the Ten Commandments, to govern his people. Similarly, the founders of the United States wrote the Constitution and established a system of laws to govern Americans. They were also part of a tradition that was familiar with the Ten Commandments as a guide for moral behavior."

What's Wrong?

The passage gives an exaggerated impression to students about the influence of and relationship between Moses and the Founders. The legal system that Moses founded had theocratic elements, which made it very different from the republican system of law the Founders established. Similarly, the text neglects to mention that the Founders were reacting against several of the crucial elements of the moral, legal, and political tradition associated with Moses and the Ten Commandments.

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Pearson Education – Magruder’s American Government

The text states: “The roots of democratic government in today’s world – including government in the United States – lie deep in human history. They reach back most particularly to ancient Greece and Rome, and include elements related to Judeo-Christian philosophy, dating back thousands of years to Old Testament texts and Biblical figures such as Moses and Solomon.”

What’s Wrong?

The forms of government mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) are theocracy and monarchy. Prominent figures in the Hebrew Bible are occasionally critical of monarchy including the prophet Samuel and Gideon, or of the behavior of particular kings as in the case of the prophet Nathan’s criticism of King David. The Israelites also sometimes placed limits on their kings’ sovereignty (see, for instance, 1 Kings 12). Still, those critical of monarchy or monarchs did not advocate democracy as an alternative, and the limited monarchy occasionally practiced in ancient Israel seems to bear little resemblance to American democracy. Even if it is accurate that government in the Hebrew Bible had democratic features, the text never tells us how these democratic features directly influenced the Founders. It is similarly difficult to make sense of the text’s claim that Moses or Solomon governed in a democratic way.

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Houghton Mifflin Harcourt – World History

The text states: “Because one of Jesus’s basic principles was the equality of all people in the eyes of God, equality before the law became a central belief within the Judeo-Christian tradition.”

What’s Wrong?

There are two problems with this claim. The first concerns the presentation: the authors’ wording suggests that belief in equality of all people before God originated with Jesus. In fact, it arguably dates back to Jewish teachings such as the belief that all people have a single

progenitor (Gen. 1-2), and the assertion in Leviticus that there is one law for citizen and stranger alike (Lev. 24:22). Second, the “Because...” language suggests that there is a straightforward chain of causation between, on the one hand, the Jewish and Christian belief in equality before God’s law and, on the other, the belief in equality before human law. If there is such causation, it is by no means straightforward. While the ancient Israelite teaching of equality of all people before God’s law may well have influenced our legal tradition, such influence remains tenuous and far from clear, and this text does not offer the necessary clarification or explanation.

Two government textbooks include misleading information that undermines the Constitutional concept of the separation of church and state.

McGraw-Hill School Education – United States Government

The text states: “Thomas Jefferson once referred to the establishment clause as a ‘wall of separation between church and state.’ That phrase is not used in the Constitution, however.”

What’s Wrong?

The statement is factually correct, but it could give students the inaccurate impression that Jefferson’s view was personal and lacked significant connection to the First Amendment. The text neglects to mention, for instance, the significant support for the separationist position shared by both Jefferson and James Madison, the Founder with the greatest influence on the drafting of the First Amendment’s religion clauses. The text also neglects to mention reference to Jefferson’s “wall” metaphor in important Supreme Court establishment clause cases, such as Justice Hugo Black’s decision in *Everson v. Board of Education*, the first Supreme Court case to apply the establishment clause to the states and local government.

Perfection Learning – Basic Principles of American Government

This product does not mention Thomas Jefferson’s use of the phrase “wall of separation

between church and state” at all. The text also includes an unbalanced discussion of the background to the Supreme Court’s seminal ruling against school prayer in *Engel v. Vitale*. The discussion has four paragraphs that are devoted primarily to examining the logic of the rulings of lower, state courts in favor of school prayer. These paragraphs mention that a state court decision notes that “neither the Constitution nor its writers discussed the use of prayer in public schools” and that the judges in these cases “noted that the prayer did not fall into the same category as Bible readings or religious instruction in public schools.”

What’s Wrong?

The four-paragraph discussion of lower courts’ logic in favor of school prayer is followed by only a single paragraph about the Supreme Court’s majority opinion striking down school prayer, which contains little discussion of the logic of that opinion.

Several world history and world geography textbooks include biased statements that inappropriately portray Islam and Muslims negatively.

Social Studies School Service – Active Classroom: World History

The text states: “Much of the violence you read or hear about in the Middle East is related to a jihad.”

What’s Wrong?

This broad charge effectively blames Islam for a very complex cycle of violence and counter-violence, a cycle driven by a host of factors (e.g., natural resources, population pressures) besides radical Islam.

WorldView Software – World History B: Mid-1800s to the Present

The text states: “The spread of international terrorism is an outgrowth of Islamic fundamentalism which opposes Western political and cultural influences and Western ideology.”

Also, at various points in this product, parts of the Middle East and North Africa are referred to as being “occupied” by “the Muslims” or “in Muslim hands.” The text also adopts the revisionist trope that Islam synthesized, stored, and annotated Classical Greek and Roman learning but did not do much to add to it.

What’s Wrong?

The statement about international terrorism is inaccurate and misleading. Not all international terrorism is an outgrowth of Islamic fundamentalism; for example, ETA in Spain and the Irish Republican Army are unrelated to Islamic fundamentalism. Further, the use of loaded terms like “occupied” makes little sense when discussing the Middle Ages, when the population of those regions were by and large Muslim themselves. While there is a lengthy section on Islamic scholarship in this product, in nearly every instance the “original” scientist whose work inspired the scientist described is identified, which serves to minimize the contribution of Islamic scholarship.

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Cengage Learning – World Cultures and Geography

In a section on the spread of Islam, the text states: “In the centuries after Muhammad’s death, Muslims spread their religion by conquest. Islamic rulers took control of Southwest Asia, Central Asia, North Africa, and parts of India and Spain.”

What’s Wrong?

This is a half-truth. While in this period Islam did spread in part by conquest, it was also taken to many regions (for instance, Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia) by traders and missionaries, *not* by conquest.

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McGraw-Hill School Education – World Geography

An image of Muslim women wearing chadors is accompanied by two discussion questions. The first asks how wearing the chador affects women’s interactions in public. The suggested answer is: “The chador limits women’s interactions in public as it makes them indistinguishable from one another and inhibits any kind of contact.” The second question asks what the chador reveals about the status of women in Muslim society. The suggested answer: “The chador reveals that even in countries that claim there is equality for women, religious law still hinders women’s rights.”

What’s Wrong?

Both suggested answers are incorrect. Unlike the full-body burqa, the chador leaves the face uncovered, and thus does not inhibit facial “contact,” such as eye contact, facial expressions, or touching/kissing the face. Second, the chador is not required by Muslim law; it is a matter of local custom. Furthermore, some Muslim women in the West wear the chador entirely voluntarily, for religious reasons; thus one cannot infer that the chador *per se* hinders women’s rights. This passage offers a highly misleading picture of the status of women in Islam.

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All of the world geography textbooks inaccurately downplay the role that conquest played in the spread of Christianity.

Discovery Education – Social Studies Techbook World Geography and Cultures

The text states: “When Europeans arrived, they brought Christianity with them and spread it among the indigenous people. Over time, Christianity became the main religion in Latin America.”

Pearson Education – Contemporary World Cultures

The text states: “Priests came to Mexico to convert Native Americans to the Roman Catholic religion. The Church became an important part of life in the new colony. Churches were built in the centers of towns and cities, and church officials became leaders in the colony.”

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt – World Geography

The text states: “The Spanish brought their language and Catholic religion, both of which dominate modern Mexico.”

Various

All but two of the world geography textbooks fail to mention the Spaniards’ forced conversions of the indigenous peoples to Christianity (e.g., the Spanish *Requerimiento* of 1513) and their often-systematic destruction of indigenous religious institutions. The two exceptions (Cengage Learning, Inc. – World Cultures and Geography and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt – World Geography) delay this grim news until a chapter on South America, and even there do not give it the prominence it deserves.

What’s Wrong?

The Christianization of the indigenous peoples of the Americas was most decidedly not benign. These descriptions provide a distorted picture of the spread of Christianity. An accurate account must include information about the forced conversion of native peoples and the often-systematic destruction of indigenous religious institutions and practices. (This error of omission is especially problematic when contrasted with the emphasis on conquest – often violent – to describe the spread of Islam in some textbooks.) In addition, though neither English nor French North American colonizers actually forced Christianity upon Native people, it did become United States policy to actively discourage all expressions of traditional Native cultures, including indigenous religion. This was particularly so in the notorious boarding schools to which Native children were sent after being forcibly separated from their parents.

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Several world geography and history textbooks suffer from an incomplete – and often inaccurate – account of religions other than Christianity.

Cengage Learning – World Cultures and Geography

In one discussion of the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths, the authors state: “Selfishness is the cause of suffering.” In another discussion, they describe selfishness as “a cause of suffering.”

What’s Wrong?

The first statement is incorrect, and the second is misleading. According to the Buddha, the cause of suffering is not selfishness but desire; selfishness is only one form of desire.

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Discovery Education – Social Studies Techbook World Geography and Cultures

The text states: “Hindus are strict vegetarians.”

What’s Wrong?

This claim is incorrect and is in fact a stereotype. Many Shaivites are not vegetarian, and some Brahmins eat fish and other meat.

Cengage Learning – World Cultures and Geography

In an exercise comparing views of Jesus in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the Teacher Edition states: “All three religions see Jesus as an important prophet, but only Christians see him as the messiah, or expected leader and savior.”

What’s Wrong?

This is factually incorrect with regard to Judaism. Most Jews do not regard Jesus as a prophet.

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McGraw-Hill School Education – World Cultures & Geography

The lesson on the history of Southwest Asia devotes only six sentences to Judaism's origins and does not include a discussion of the Diaspora. By contrast, the lesson devotes two pages to Islam and its spread.

What's Wrong?

This is not adequate attention to the important events surrounding the history of the Jewish faith tradition and culture.

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Various

Coverage of primal religions varies widely, in both extent and quality, in all of the world geography textbooks. Only the *Discovery Education – World Geography and Cultures* text covers primal religions with anything approaching adequacy.

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Coverage of key Christian concepts and historical events are lacking in a few textbooks, often due to the assumption that all students are Christians and familiar with Christian events and doctrine.

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt – World Geography

While this textbook includes brief definitions of most religions discussed, and while it describes the difference between the Sunni and Shi'ite branches of Islam, it does not offer similar descriptions for Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy. The authors introduce those terms without defining them in either the text or the glossary.

McGraw-Hill School Education – World Geography

In the chapter on the U.S., the authors note that most Americans are Protestant Christians, without defining “Protestant.” Similarly, in the chapter on Mexico, the authors note that most people in Mexico self-identify as Catholics—again, without defining what “Catholic” means. By contrast, the authors are careful to define the major divisions of both Buddhism and Islam in the World Religions Handbook.

McGraw-Hill School Education – World Cultures & Geography

Whereas the lesson on Southwest Asia states: “The teachings of Jesus led to the rise of Christianity,” it does not explain what those teachings were or how Christianity spread. In contrast, the authors devote a full page to the teachings of Muhammad, Muslim practices (the Five Pillars), and the spread of Islam.

What’s Wrong?

Given the increasing number of Texas students who come from outside the Christian tradition, textbooks should not assume that readers are familiar with what Christianity is and how it spread.

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A few government and U.S. history textbooks suffer from an uncritical celebration of the free enterprise system, both by ignoring legitimate problems created by capitalism and failing to include coverage of government’s role in U.S. economic system.

Pearson Education – Magruder’s American Government

The text’s treatment of the free enterprise system is almost uniformly celebratory. A few examples:

“The atmosphere of a free market, as well as a free society that encourages the exchange of ideas, can and often does lead to innovation and scientific and technological discoveries. All these conditions promote growth in the economy and often improve the quality of everyday life.”

“The proper role of government in economic affairs should be restricted to functions intended to promote and protect the free play of competition and the operation of the laws of supply and demand. True laissez-faire capitalism has never in fact operated in this country, yet it has a profound effect on the structure of the nation’s economic system, which can be described as laissez-faire capitalism with limited government involvement.”

What’s Wrong?

Mentioning the advantages of the free enterprise system is entirely appropriate. However, the text’s treatment of the free enterprise system is unbalanced and asymmetrical because the text provides little mention of the possible limits and disadvantages of a free enterprise and laissez-faire system. Students are given little awareness that critics of a laissez-faire system, both in the U.S. today and the past, have argued that an unfettered market can and has occasionally led to economic insecurity and inequality, unfair pay and unsafe labor conditions for many employees.

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Pearson Education – United States History: 1877 to the Present

The first lesson on the Gilded Age opens with the header: “Free Enterprise Improves Life.” It explains Mark Twain’s reasons for coining the term “the Gilded Age,” and then continues to minimize his critique in glowing terms: “Most Americans were not as cynical. The dizzying array of things to do and buy convinced the growing middle class that modern America was in a true golden age.”[...] The application of scientific discoveries and technological innovations by the free enterprise system improved the standard of living in the United States. Driven by entrepreneurs, American businesses were able to create products and services that made daily life easier and more fun for many people. Mass produced materials and products lowered the prices of many goods, enabling ordinary Americans to purchase items that previously had been out of reach.”

What's Wrong?

As stated above, mentioning the advantages of the free enterprise system is entirely appropriate. However, this textbook's unrelenting praise of free enterprise as the progenitor of any and all American successes is problematic for a number of reasons. First, nineteenth-century free-market capitalism went hand in hand with governmental suppression of Native ownership over vast swaths of fertile land, leading to that land's transformation (first) into public property and (second) into private property protected by law. Without governmental action, that transformation would not have happened. Second, nobody during the age of early industrialization disputed the importance of active governmental support for "internal improvements" that were beyond private means. And finally, any comprehensive discussion of the history of free-market capitalism in this country should note that the great driving commodity of the pre-Civil War economy was cotton, produced by slave labor on an enormous scale.

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McGraw-Hill School Education – United States History to 1877

The text states: "The capitalist economic system of the United States helped spur industrial growth. In capitalism, individuals and businesses own property and decide how to use it. The people—not the government—control capital, which includes the buildings, land, machines, money, and other items used to create wealth."

What's Wrong?

This passage ignores a very important dimension of American economic development after the Revolution: the argument, developed by Alexander Hamilton, that government power is needed to foster development in an active way, including projects that are beyond private capital's reach. The declarative statement that "people – not the government – control capital" seems to dismiss even the possibility of this more complicated relationship between individuals, the government and capital. In addition, the debate over public regulation of both individual and corporate enterprise remains an active subject of contention in American economic and legal life to the present day. Students should have a context for understanding that debate.

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One government textbook (Pearson Education, Inc.) flirts with contemporary Tea Party rhetoric, particularly regarding the inclusion of anti-taxation and anti-regulation ideology.

Pearson Education – Magruder’s American Government

The first paragraph of the textbook’s section devoted to taxes states: “In the words of [Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.](#), taxes are ‘what we pay for civilized society.’ Society does not appear to be much more civilized today than it was when Justice Holmes made that observation in 1927. However, ‘what we pay’ has certainly gone up.”

What’s Wrong?

The text neglects to mention that defenders of increased taxation for an expanded safety net would respond that programs adopted since 1927 such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act have produced such ‘civilized’ benefits as a drastic reduction of poverty and economic insecurity among the elderly, children, and the population at large, and improved and more equal access to health care.

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Pearson Education – Magruder’s American Government

The text also includes an ideologically slanted cartoon.

What’s Wrong?

The text gives students the impression that Americans are very heavily taxed without placing this information in historical or cross-national context. For instance, the text could have mentioned that according to the Congressional Budget Office in 2011, federal taxes as a

percentage of the GDP were at their lowest rate since 1950. The text might also have mentioned that the United States has the lowest corporate tax burden of any member nation of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The use of this cartoon is also unbalanced because the text provides no counterbalancing illustration suggesting that excessively low taxes might lead to economic insecurity and poverty, or critical of the lack of an adequate safety net for low-income Americans.

One world history textbook (by Worldview Software, Inc.) includes outdated – and possibly offensive – anthropological categories and racial terminology in describing African civilization.

WorldView Software – World History A: Early Civilizations to the Mid-1800s

The text states: “South of the Sahara Desert most of the people before the Age of Explorations were black Africans of the Negro race.”

Elsewhere, the text states: “The first known inhabitants of Africa north of the Sahara in prehistory were Caucasoid Hamitic people of uncertain origin.”

What’s Wrong?

First, the term “Negro” is archaic and fraught with ulterior meaning. It should categorically not be used in a modern textbook. Further, the first passage is unforgivably misleading because it suggests that all black native Africans belong to a single “racial” group. This is typological thinking, which disappeared largely from texts after the 1940s. It harkens back to the racialization theory that all people could be classified as one of three “races”: Caucasoid, Mongoloid, or Negroid. Better to say: “...were natives of African origin.” Similarly, in the second passage, it is more accurate to simply omit reference to “Caucasoid.”

A number of U.S. history textbooks evidence a general lack of attention to Native

American peoples and culture and occasionally include biased or misleading information.

WorldView Software – Basic American History I: Pre-Columbian Years to Reconstruction

The text states: “The early 1600s were an uncertain time for the colony of Virginia. It was a land of starvation and high death rates, one in which the Native Americans regularly launched merciless attacks against the colonists.”

What’s Wrong?

While early Virginians did indeed endure attacks from Native Americans, this passage provides no context for understanding the complicated relationship between the two groups. For instance, the Native Americans offered food in the time of starvation that followed the initial settlement. They tried to establish diplomatic relations on their own terms. Nonetheless, the English made their intentions plain by constructing a triangular fort, from which they could fire in all directions. They set out to just take whatever they wanted including food supplies, followed by land. From the start, they used violence, including such instances as kidnapping the Queen of one group known as the Pamunkeys, killing her children during the voyage back to Jamestown by throwing them into the water and shooting them. These events, plus the simple fact that the English were invaders, provide an essential context for the “massacre” of 1622.

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Social Studies School Service – Active Classroom: U.S. History (Grade 8)

The materials include a video from Ambrose Videos entitled “1876 – The Battle of Little Bighorn.” The video claims: “for over 200 years, the Plains Indians were a major force in North America.” It goes on to say “but a new Native American culture arose around the horse and buffalo and a formidable warrior class grew up with it.”

What’s Wrong?

The interpretive position of this video is dangerously skewed. The claim of “200 years” trivializes the millennia of Native American heritage and frames their existence from a Eurocentric point of view. And by emphasizing that the horse/buffalo/warrior culture “was a way of life that successfully controlled the Great Plains up until the middle of the 19th century,” the video misleads the student into believing that the Plains Indians appeared with the Europeans and then suddenly became dangerous warriors who controlled land that was up for grabs.

Pearson Education – Magruder’s American Government

The text also makes the unsubstantiated prediction that “[i]t seems clear that the days of affirmative action programs are drawing to a close.”

What’s Wrong?

The text makes an inaccurate and unbalanced attempt to convince students that affirmative action programs are outdated on the basis of lopsided factual information. The text rests its claim in part on a Supreme Court case striking down an affirmative action policy (Ricci v. DeStefano) that was decided by a 5-4 margin. This means, of course, that the replacement of just a single Supreme Court justice could lead to very different outcomes in future cases regarding affirmative action. That the federal government and state governments continue to maintain and even expand various types of affirmative action programs is ignored. The text also neglects to mention that defenders of affirmative action would argue that widespread discrimination against women and minorities today as well as the legacy of historical injustices justify the continued use of affirmative action programs in appropriate circumstances.

Most U.S. history textbooks do a poor job of covering the history of LGBT citizens in discussions of efforts to achieve civil rights in this country.

Among the textbook packages for high school U.S. History since 1877, *Discovery Education* and *Social Studies School Service* offer a variety of sources that provide substantial coverage of the

movement for civil and equal rights for LGBT people since the 1960s. Most of the remaining publishers offer glaringly inadequate coverage of this important contemporary civil rights issue, and bias and errors sometimes creep into those very limited discussions.

WorldView Software: American History II: Post-Civil War America to the Present

The text states: “Harvey Milk was the first openly gay elected official in the United States.”

What’s Wrong?

Milk was certainly among the first openly gay elected officials, but he was preceded by other openly gay or lesbian officeholders, including Kathy Kozachenko, who won election to the Ann Arbor city council in 1974, and Elaine Noble, who took her seat in the Massachusetts Legislature in 1974.

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Elements of the Texas curriculum standards give undue legitimacy to neo-Confederate arguments about “states’ rights” and the legacy of slavery in the South. While most publishers avoid problems with these issues, passages in a few U.S. history and government textbooks give a nod to these misleading arguments.

McGraw-Hill School Education – United States Government

The text’s case study of *Brown v. Board of Education* includes the following passage: “Under segregation, all-white and all-African American schools sometimes had similar buildings, buses, and teachers. Sometimes, however, the buildings, buses, and teachers for the all-black schools were lower in quality. Often, African American children had to travel far to get to their school.”

What’s Wrong?

The unfortunate wording of this case study severely understates the tremendous and widespread disadvantages of African-American schools compared to white schools, as well as

the limitations placed on educational opportunities for blacks in general during the Jim Crow period.

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McGraw-Hill School Education – United States History to 1877

The text states: “Southerners used states’ rights to justify secession. Each state, they argued, had voluntarily chosen to enter the Union. They defined the Constitution as a contract among the independent states. They believed the national government had broken the contract by refusing to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act and by denying Southern states equal rights in the territories. As a result, Southerners argued, the states had a right to leave the Union.”

Pearson Education – U.S. History: Colonization – Reconstruction

In a section titled “Causes Leading to War,” the text states: “Now a new issue emerged: whether southern states were allowed to secede under the Constitution. Most southerners believed that they had every right to secede. After all, the Declaration of Independence said that ‘it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish’ a government that denies the rights of its citizens. Lincoln, they believed, would deny white southerners the right to own African Americans as slaves.

For many southerners, secession was an issue of states’ rights and sovereignty, or independent control of an area. Many in the southern states believed that states had the sovereign right to secede. According to this view, states had the authority to make decisions without interference from the federal government, and the Constitution created a Union made up of states that could decide to leave the Union at any point. Those states also had the sovereign right to join together to form a new government, such as the Confederacy.”

Discovery Education – United States History (Prehistory-Reconstruction)

Materials include a two-minute video that argues that the states’ rights concept originated in the tariff disputes of 1828-1832. The video goes on to present the nullification controversy as strictly a matter of states’ rights and interests, and gives a sympathetic account of John C. Calhoun’s developing political position on the matter without any mention that he culminated that

development in 1837 when he announced that slavery was a “positive good” for all involved, including slaves. The video closes with a song from the period endorsing the southern position.

What’s wrong?

First, a clarification: all three of these publishers provide thorough and accurate coverage of slavery in their products. There is no attempt to hide the issue in the run up to the Civil War. However, the requirement in the curriculum standards that compels coverage of “sectionalism, states’ rights, and slavery” (in that order) as causes of the war leads publishers to these sort of misleading – and even inaccurate – passages.

They are inaccurate for a simple reason: the concept of “states’ rights” in an abstract sense as a defense of secession did not appear until after the conclusion of the Civil War.

Contemporaneous documents and statements by southerners make it plain that slavery was the underlying reason for their action. In their secession ordinances, South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi and Texas all stated their understanding that slavery had been placed in danger by Lincoln’s election and made that their major theme. Moreover, high officials, such as Confederate President Jefferson Davis and Vice President Alexander H. Stephens, made plain the absolute centrality of protecting slavery as the reason for secession. That point is important for two reasons. One is that both Davis and Stephens revised their positions *after the war was over* to argue that slavery had not been the issue at all, maintaining instead that it had been about abstract constitutionalism. The other is that these passages, which appear designed to fit the TEKS requirement of considering “states’ rights” as a separate issue, does dovetail with current neo-Confederate ideology, which is deeply false to the historical record.

The publishers who submitted textbooks:

Full reviews of textbook packages for eighth-grade U.S. History to 1877 from seven publishers:

- Discover Education

- Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
- McGraw-Hill School Education
- Pearson Education
- Social Studies School Service
- WorldView Software
- Sunburst Digital/Ignite! (withdrawn by publisher)

Full reviews of textbook packages for high school U.S. History since 1877 from seven publishers:

- Edmentum
- Discovery Education
- Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
- McGraw-Hill School Education
- Pearson Education
- Social Studies School Service
- WorldView Software

Full reviews of textbook packages for high school World History submitted by six publishers:

- Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
- McGraw-Hill School Education

- Pearson Education
- Social Studies School Service
- WorldView Software
- Edmentum (withdrawn by publisher)

Reviews of selected topics from textbook packages for seventh-grade Texas History submitted by four publishers:

- Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
- McGraw-Hill School Education
- Pearson Education
- Sunburst Digital/Ignite! (withdrawn by publisher)

Reviews of selected topics from textbook packages for high school U.S. Government from seven publishers:

- Edmentum
- Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
- McGraw-Hill School Education
- Pearson Education
- Perfection Learning
- Social Studies School Service
- WorldView Software

Reviews of how 18 textbook packages for Grade 6 World Cultures/Geography, high school World Geography and high school World History examined issues related to religion. The World History publishers are listed above.

Seven publishers submitted textbook packages for Grade 6 World Cultures/Geography:

- Cengage Learning
- Discover Education
- Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
- McGraw-Hill School Education
- Pearson Education
- Social Studies School Service
- Sunburst Digital/Ignite! (withdrawn by publisher)

Five publishers submitted textbook packages for High school World Geography:

- Edmentum
- Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
- McGraw-Hill School Education
- Social Studies School Service
- WorldView Software

Valerie Strauss covers education and runs The Answer Sheet blog.

Two major national publishers have drafted new social studies textbooks for K-12 students in Texas that are filled with inaccurate and misleading information about climate change. Since Texas is the nation's second largest buyer of textbooks, books produced for the state are often sold nationwide. Publishers McGraw-Hill and Pearson are working on final textbook drafts in advance of a Texas Board of Education public hearing on Tuesday, November 18. The board will vote on which books to approve on Friday, November 21. If these national publishers know that parents and other education supporters