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Censorship in History Textbooks: How Knowledge of the Past is Being Constructed in Schools

Tyler Brunner

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Abstract: Pressure groups organized around political correctness and religious conservatism lead textbook publishers to self-censor. Such self-censorship ultimately results in dry, unenlightening textbooks. Lifeless material draws education away from more developed forms of teaching history. This study demonstrates how textbook publishers' censoring textbooks fosters a teaching of history that degrades knowledge and promotes specific ideologies.

Keywords: *censorship, education, history, textbooks*

The purpose of the following article is to examine how pressure groups organized around political correctness and religious conservatism lead textbook publishers to self-censor. Such self-censorship enacted by publishers ultimately results in dry, unenlightened prose in modern textbooks. Covert forms of censorship, finding leverage in the effects of commodification, adversely affect the teaching of history. Dull text textbooks points to censorship's present infiltration of school curriculum. Lifeless, uninformative material draws education away from conceivably more highly-developed forms of teaching history. This study demonstrates how the censoring of textbooks fosters a teaching of history that degrades knowledge and promotes the ideologies of pressure groups.

High school textbooks offer researchers many benefits in completing an in-depth, analytical investigation into the construction of knowledge as it is employed through means of education. By the time students reach high school they are considered old enough to be able to grasp important moral and ideological concepts while also considered to still be too young to escape being vulnerable to the influence of such concepts. When, in particular, moral and ideological concepts with vast implications are endorsed by those students see as highest in power—those they see as society's great comptrollers of knowledge—the process through which students may become most susceptible to indoctrination is rather clear.

The following study focuses primarily on high school history textbooks. Though the divisions between middle school and high school textbooks are often blurred, as well as the divisions between high school and college textbooks, the main concern in this paper is with high school textbooks due to the fact high school textbooks are more affected by the current construction of educational curriculum than textbooks associated with lower grade levels and also due to the fact that high school is the highest level of education to be reached by a sizeable number of the nation's population. High school textbooks are the last certified material one-half of non-college bound adolescents will encounter that might actually fully articulate for them “the order and meaning of U.S. history, world history, and society” (Perlmutter qt. in Maoz 2). As a result, at the high school level history textbooks account for our society's knowledge base in terms of the past and its functions within the present more so than at any other grade level. And, being that the last time many see history is at a point in their adolescence when they are still rather susceptible to believe whatever it is authority instructs them to believe, the dialogue found within such texts is especially important. Dialogue presented to young people during high school can have a lifelong impact, and so it is imperative that we know what messages are being instilled into our children's minds, messages that may possibly reside in young person's minds for indeterminate lengths.

The goal of working within a discourse framed specifically around high school history

textbooks is to give the best understanding possible of how adolescents today, who are the leaders of tomorrow, have inadequate opportunity to learn the actual functions regarding historical analysis. Such disadvantages in student learning means students today are more likely to find themselves conformists to the status quo than individuals able to think critically for themselves. When students in high school, the place where young people are expected to learn to think for themselves, are taught a “right”-and-“wrong,” black-and-white version of history, their ability to break free from the monotony of a fundamentalist culture becomes bogged down and lost within an abject mind crystallized in uncritical modes of thinking. Therefore, what is covered in high school history textbooks holds great importance in discovering how a constructed hegemony can shape a society at large.

High school history textbooks provide the quintessential example of how economic markets, political pressure groups, and easily-influenced publishers construct America’s education system. It is true that bias will always have some existence in the teaching of history, no matter how miniscule it may be. Gary Tobin, in his work *The Trouble with Textbooks*, claims “bias in textbooks has been around as long as textbooks have existed . . . The role of textbooks as creators of civic values demands that a particular point of view, a specific set of ideals inform the lessons” (Tobin 7). But as this paper discusses, within today’s teaching of history the existence of ever present bias is really a shroud behind which the real operations forming textbooks hide.

The simple fact that biases exist within textbooks should be accepted. But the specific set of ideals and biases to be implemented and, most importantly, how it is they are in fact implemented is what cannot be dismissed as simply just the direction in which education is headed. Today’s high school history textbook has moved away from an actual historical account of what happened and on to an understanding of history as constructed by that which is most appealing in terms of money, power, politics, and personal interests. I believe Michael Apple is

worth quoting in full here as a means of setting up a further look into the concept of constructed knowledge and ideas:

Texts are really messages to and about the future. As part of a curriculum, they participate in no less than the organized knowledge system of society. They participate in creating what a society has recognized as legitimate and truthful. They help set the canons of truthfulness and, as such, also help re-create a major reference point for what knowledge, culture, belief, and morality really are.

Yet such a statement—even with its recognition that texts participate in constructing ideologies and ontologies—is misleading in many important ways. For it is not a ‘society’ that has created such texts, but specific groups of people. ‘We’ haven’t built such curriculum artifacts, if ‘we’ means simply that there is universal agreement among all of us and this is what gets to be official knowledge. In fact, the very use of the pronoun ‘we’ simplifies matters all too much.

As Fred Inglis so cogently argues, the pronoun ‘we’

‘smooths over the deep corrugations and ruptures caused precisely by struggle over how that authoritative and editorial ‘we’ is going to be used. The [text], it is not melodramatic to declare, really is the battleground for an intellectual civil war, and the battle for cultural authority is a wayward, intermittingly fierce, always protracted and fervent one.’ (*The Politics of the Textbook* 4)

“We” is constructed today based on the landscape in which textbook publishing finds itself: a landscape overrun by concern for profitability. In terms of today’s textbook, “we” is not really a concern that has to do with bias, but is instead a concern that revolves around figuring out how particular ideologies can be marketed. There is great danger in this, which I will show by formulating for my reader the current

commodification of constructed ideology functioning in the production of high school history textbooks. I will also examine the way in which a distinct constructed-ideology has come to form the commodified textbook as we know it, and, ultimately, how such a textbook is responsible for bland material which fails to enlighten students' minds beyond a realm of reiterating knowledge.

The current state of textbooks is an important matter due to the sheer blatant inclusion and exclusion of material, essentially caused by means of pressure from liberals and conservatives. Given the fact that scholars point to textbooks as being the *de facto* curriculum defining history, the textbook has become a main point of contention, a point that increases as the obsessive use of textbooks within the classroom becomes more obvious to those seeking to direct discourse in their own favor. A survey taken as part of a periodic appraisal of student achievement in American history by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that 45 percent of eighth graders read from textbooks almost daily ("A Consumer's Guide to High School History Textbooks" 14). In the same survey, "44 percent of twelfth graders reported reading from the textbook 'about every day,' while another 38 percent did so once or twice each week" ("A Consumer's Guide to High School History Textbooks" 14). In other words,

Nearly half of student class time was spent using textbooks. And those numbers . . . most likely *understate* teachers' and students' true dependence on textbooks. Shadow studies, which track teachers' activities during the school day, suggest that 80 to 90 percent of classroom and homework assignments are textbook-driven or textbook-centered. History and social studies teachers, for example, often rely almost exclusively on textbooks, instead of requiring students to review primary sources and read trade books by top historians. ("The Mad, Mad World of Textbook Adoption" 1)

According to Apple, "teachers are being deskilled as more and more of the curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation is standardized or prepackaged . . . and . . . the accompanying ideological tensions that result from these processes have all become increasingly visible" (*Teachers and Texts* 24). The result has been a departure from resourceful classroom curriculum developed with teachers in mind, and, as stated by Diane Ravitch, "To have no curriculum is to leave decisions about what matters to the ubiquitous textbooks" (*The Life and Death of the Great American School System* 273). Due to the fact that textbooks "'are a crucial index of the perspective a school exhibits,' and due to the fact that 'they are common and required . . . they are used for testing . . . [and] they often occur in a series, having a return engagement for as many as five or six years. . . . [textbooks have] a cumulative impact on the learner that no other element of the school environment can muster'" (McCarthy qt. in Glenn 32). The power already granted to textbooks is enlarged by teachers' dependence upon them. The more teachers come to rely upon textbooks, the more the textbook itself becomes the definitive account of knowledge. As a result, both conservatives and liberals, realizing the possibilities of controlling education in this country through the utilization of the textbook, work strenuously to have their discourse championed in texts across the nation.

When the knowledge that is shaping students' minds is based on a manipulative construct of power, meaning a controlling power used intentionally to shape knowledge, then that which students learn is no longer based on fact, but is instead based on the manipulation of power and control and the very perpetuation of such manipulative constructs. Education based on supremacy does not require reality to be understood as objective. Education based on the power to construct the knowledge to be obtained and digested by future generations relies strictly upon the values and ideals of those in control of said power. Today, due to teachers' current overwhelming dependence on textbooks, a fight

for such control has become more clearly visible than ever.

The power of education lies in providing students with knowledge. But such knowledge is narrowly defined when it is based upon the power to justify certain values over others. Susan Lehr delves deep into this matter in her work “Literacy, Literature, and Censorship: The High Cost of No Child Left Behind”:

The goals of censors, combined with the rigid interpretation of NCLB, have blended effectively and have impacted reading materials across the curriculum, thereby supporting a climate that discourages multiple perspectives . . . Standard interpretations of history are so ingrained in school curricula that it is difficult to bring in multiple perspectives that challenge conventional historical myths. Perpetrating the myths becomes synonymous with being patriotic. Approved textbooks provide approved interpretations of history, a practice that can be linked to this narrow worldview. (Lehr 29)

A battle has erupted, one that has been brewing for over the past fifty years, over who shall be in control of the power to be harnessed by dictating our nation’s textbooks: liberals or conservatives. Each side of the political spectrum has been strongly invested in establishing its ideology as most dominant within textbooks over the past five decades. In his reading of Michael Apple, textbook analyst Jason Nicholls comes to rationalize the struggle for power over textbooks in terms of their highly regarded status as tomes which can be used to reinforce certain ideals: “For Apple, the role and function of textbooks in capitalist societies is of central importance. First, because ‘it is the textbook which establishes so much of the material conditions for teaching and learning in classrooms’ and, second, because ‘it is the textbook that often defines what is elite and legitimate culture to pass on’” (“The philosophical underpinnings of school textbook research” 27).

Textbooks can do powerful things. “Textbooks remain the main source of historical information for most students,” and when read each day and reinforced by an authoritative adult who students are taught to trust and to regard as a true source of knowledge, “textbooks and curricula taught in school become means by which to indoctrinate, socialize, and control” (Alridge 680) (Amey, vol. 2, 617). In being able to mold a dominant hegemony, which here “refers to an organized assemblage of meanings and practices, the central, effective and dominant system of meanings, values and actions which are *lived*,” textbooks offer pressure groups the opportunity to “largely determine how a nation votes, what it becomes, and where it goes” (*Ideology and Curriculum* 5) (Gabler qtd. in Lehr 26). In the words of Mel Gabler, “textbooks across the nation are selected by a tiny percentage of the educators and since children become what they are taught, the philosophy selected by this tiny percentage will become the philosophy taught to our children” (Gabler qtd. in Lehr 26).

According to theories posited by post-structuralist Michel Foucault, there exist ‘blocks’ where within “power relations constitute regulated and concerted systems” (Foucault 787). One such block, in Foucault’s mind: an educational institution—“the disposal of its space, the meticulous regulations which govern its internal life, the different activities which are organized there, the diverse persons who live there or meet one another, each with his own function, his well-defined character—all these things constitute a block of capacity-communication-power” (Foucault 787). The pledge to teach and the attainment of proficiencies or forms of conduct is developed in schools through a collaborative of “regulated communications (lessons, questions and answers, orders, exhortations, coded signs of obedience, differentiation marks of the ‘value’ of each person and of the levels of knowledge) and by the means of a whole series of power processes (enclosure, surveillance, reward and punishment, the pyramidal hierarchy)” (Foucault 787).

On a political level the possibilities are endless within a power-relations block such as

schooling. Because teachers depend so much upon textbooks today, what publishers include in textbooks has an overwhelming opportunity to deeply influence students when they participate in a “block” as described by Foucault. The fact that introducing young people to harsh truths of the real world and humanity’s history is a tricky business is something on which everyone can agree. But the answer should not be to whitewash reality in favor of simpleminded idealization.

Unfortunately for students though the fight for the power to perpetuate ideals, the push by any side to get out a white paintbrush, has become the norm—it has become the standard means for publishers wishing to turn a profit in the industry. As Gary Tobin argues, “While it is sensible and logical that interest groups would want to have a say in the way their particular stories are told or their value represented, in many cases these groups have superceded the scholars charged with ensuring the accuracy of the textbooks. Bias may enter the textbooks, therefore, through the most effective lobbying groups wanting the narrative to say what they want” (Tobin 6). The power to be had at the hands of instilling *beliefs* into textbooks now outweighs the importance of fact and scholarly debate. Today’s construction of the U.S. history textbook hinges upon vainglorious material provided to publishers by pressure groups far more than it depends upon on actual, credible historical reporting and analysis.

Synonymous with textbooks is the idea that such products are gifts of knowledge given to children by those whom they entrust as the guardians of all that will one day make them as strong and wise as their predecessors. In other words, our children’s knowledge is quite literally in our hands. In such light, if a political faction wanted to control a nation, its most important task would be to mold coming generations to their specifications. What better way to do this than through the means of education?

“A critical component common to police state rule is the desire to control the information flow to citizens through censorship and propaganda campaigns. The main reason a police state

engages in such tactics is to maintain order and stability within the society. The leadership seeks to create an obedient and docile citizenry by restricting and shaping the mass media to which citizens are exposed” (Amey, vol. 2, 616). Surely, Americans are far from a police state . . . or so one would hope to believe. And yet, “institutions of cultural preservations and distribution like schools create and recreate forms of consciousness that enable social control to be maintained without the necessity of dominant groups having to resort to overt mechanisms of domination” (*Ideology and Curriculum* 3). How would we ever know if a police state was being constructed if such developments were kept in a shroud of darkness—a shroud of darkness such as one that might consist of a commodified form of education and other economic imperatives as its cover?

Liberal and conservative groups attempt to control education and what students learn by means of infiltrating the textbook publishing industry and running amuck censoring that with which they disagree. Because of teachers’ high dependence upon textbooks, these educational materials become the source of much controversy surrounding attempts to conform history to a certain set of ideals. Today, both censors on the left and censors on the right seek to distort history in order to teach a certain set of values as universal truths for all to adhere by. Both camps do so through their influence upon the textbook publishing industry. Liberals and conservatives in America have for years been aware of the possibilities to be had by overwhelming textbooks with their own ideological material: history with which one side does not agree can be erased by that side and replaced with their own version of history based upon that which with they would agree—that which they find just based upon their own values.

A nation removed from actual historical occurrences and the effects of such occurrences becomes reliant upon opinion and the highest ranking ideals instead of on reality and fact. What actually happens in history becomes no longer the real event, but the event as seen through a specific set of eyes, a set of eyes opposed to any other

outlooks besides those upon which they themselves rely. Two definitive ideologies have been a part of the formation of a hidden leverage which allows pressure groups to have their say in the writing of the history students are learning in public schools. Such a hidden leverage has, in its dominance, created an atmosphere of ignorance. We cannot expect students to learn from textbooks which privilege specific ideological beliefs over more substantial content, especially when it comes at the cost of teaching students to analyze critical arguments from multiple perspectives. This result, which has arisen through the manipulation of the textbook's utilization and its inherent capabilities in terms of cultural control, has been the cause of substantial drop off in the proficiency of material found in textbooks. A vast and informative reference book on censorship consisting of 997 essays from a total of 353 scholars sums the situation up:

Liberals have been effective in quietly pressuring textbook publishers to make their products inoffensive to their own views. Consequently, most books published for classroom use offer positive examples of gender equality, racial and ethnic minorities in professional positions, and other images characteristic of the liberal agenda . . . Conservatives have also had success at influencing the publishing process. The result has been a widely lamented trend in textbook publishing in which engaging, detailed, and opinionated books are forced out of classrooms in favor of bland, general, and inoffensive books. (Amey, vol. 1, 238)

A division has opened up between the ideology of the left and the ideology of the right, forming tensions so far removed from the teaching of history as it actually occurred and beyond basic opinion that textbooks today are watered down and filled with overly abundant material. This division is a hegemony of ideals which are responsible for the current ideological constructs found in textbooks. In terms of the construction of today's textbook as it is

formulated entirely around the ideologies of the political left and the political right, and also in terms of how the content of textbooks has been turned into a commodity—a complex economic process reduced to its most simple undertakings—a quote from Diane Ravitch's *The Language Police* is worth quoting at length:

. . . current [bias] guidelines . . . went far beyond the original purpose of eliminating bias and had devolved instead into an elaborate language code that bans many common words and expressions. I am not speaking of epithets, scatological terms, ethnic slurs, or name-calling; their unacceptability is so obvious that they are not even mentioned in the guidelines. The guidelines prohibit controversial topics, even when they are well within the bounds of reasonable political and social discourse. They combine left-wing political correctness and right-wing religious fundamentalism, a strange stew of discordant influences. The guidelines aim to create a new society, one that will be completely inoffensive to all parties; getting there, however, involves a heavy dose of censorship. No one asked the rest of us whether we want to live in a society in which everything objectionable to every contending party has been expunged from our reading materials. (*The Language Police* 32)

How did this form of left-right ideology in textbooks begin? As I stated earlier, the problem erupted a little over five decades ago, at the height of the Cold War. The multivolume reference book on censorship which I have previously mentioned describes "The onset of the Cold War in the 1950's and the subsequent ideological battle between Soviet-sponsored communism and Western democratic capitalism [as having] a profound impact upon American historiography and [helping to usher] in a period of self-censorship in American education" (Amey, vol. 2, 354). During this time of hostility, Americans felt the need to defend the American dream by means of censoring information that was being created

with the hopes of reaching the masses. As a result of the Red Scare, a number of ways of life were deemed threatening to American culture. In order to cut off any un-American activities, certain groups sought to control the knowledge which citizens would be able to receive. Nowhere were such moves more prevalent than in places which concerned the teaching of children. Once again, many viewed the textbook as a critical tool in shaping the minds of the youth. Overwhelming censorship prevailed, with the Red Scare serving as its defense. Opportunities to censor were plentiful, and conservatives, who for years had made timeless attempts at maintaining values dear to them, were the first to jump onboard. The result was a stream of unregulated censorship which adversely affected a number of schools' instructional materials—textbooks in particular.

During the 1950s, censors on the right who alleged material covered in textbooks was latent with communist references overwhelmed American textbook publishers. The move made by conservatives was to pressure textbook publishers to remove any material which *they* considered to be harmful towards American principles or in promotion of communist ideals. Speaking on the results of the early history of forms of censorship in textbooks, which we see the results of today in their most extreme forms, “Jack Nelson and Gene Roberts, Jr., state in their 1963 study of textbook censorship, *The Censors and the Schools*: ‘Since the early days of the Cold War, textbook crises have come in an almost unbroken stream, each controversy providing fuel for another. . . . The charges are essentially the same: the texts are blamed for what a censor dislikes about the world in which he lives’ (Amey, vol. 3, 800).

A number of conservative groups began to spring up during the late 1950s and into the 1960s, each charging textbook publishers with writing un-American texts and promoting secular ideals with which they disagreed. Under unrelenting pressures, and due to the special circumstances of the Cold War, textbook publishers began to seriously buckle. The result was textbook publishers beginning to do something odd: the publishers of textbooks,

especially those who sold to large markets such as Texas and California, began to reference traditional American values as a means of deciding that which they would consider as acceptable in accounting for factual history.

In the end, textbooks would come to mainly serve as mere reflections of only the most positive of American values. If material did not fit the way America *should* be in the eyes of those most bent on tradition, then it was to have no place within the textbook. Slavery might have been viewed differently during the 1950s, but according to the logic being followed by textbooks written during the 1950s, when slavery did occur it was acceptable simply because it was an American way of life, it was merely the tradition then. And so, by this logic, whatever is believed in the present to be just and righteous in our minds is in fact just and righteous regardless of any real world implications such beliefs may actually elicit. Everything is exactly the way it should be and it has always been this way, according to such a mentality. Many scholars echo this analogy:

Cherryholmes (1983) states that ‘social studies education has to do with teaching about our knowledge and understanding of society’ (p. 341). However, if we fail to critically examine the ideological roots of the thoughts, ideas, language, and power present in the U.S., then our understanding of history will be shaped by those ideologies dominant in society—that is, the ideologies which support the present inequities. (Mendiola 4)

Censorship allows for the replacement of past beliefs without the task of having to keep such beliefs around for critical examination. Each generation is thereby allowed a chance to formulate its own value system based solely on subjective opinion while ignoring any lessons from the past which might direct a populous in an alternative direction. After all, there is no reason to be critical of values when they are defined as universal laws. What is right is right.

Such a method of teaching students—the American way is the right way and that is just the

way it is, anything outside of this does not actually contain agency—quickly became the passive majority standard. One would not be hard-pressed to find evidence comparable to the following quote taken from a 2004 report by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and Institute which provides further evidence of the extremely nationalistic fanaticism which infested textbooks during this period:

As Frances FitzGerald documented in her 1979 book, *America Revised*, textbooks from the 1950s and 1960s were overloaded with patriotic pabulum, at the cost of honest examination of where the nation had failed to live up to its creed of equality. Women and immigrants were largely invisible in history textbooks, and the settlers' brutal treatment of Native Americans was minimized. African Americans seemed to appear in history textbooks only as slaves, and the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade were papered over. After Vietnam, the feminist movement, and the race riots of the 1960s, textbooks desperately needed revision and updating to eliminate stereotypes and sexist or racist language. ("The Mad, Mad World of Textbook Adoption" 8)

Textbooks depicted many minority groups negatively, portraying such groups as the "Other": the opposite of all that was just and American. American exceptionalism within textbooks hit its peak during the 1960s, due in major part to specific conservative groups openly seeking to control the thoughts of their children's minds, as well as the minds of others' children. Textbooks had become weighty with information that was documented based solely on the values of one group, conservatives. Women were portrayed as housewives and husbands as breadwinners of the family, despite any real life examples which might lead to the contrary. For example, in the words of Diane Ravitch, "activists complained that women were shown only as housewives and mothers, rather than as scientists, professionals, and business leaders. African Americans complained that they were portrayed only in

subservient roles, rather than as scientists, professionals, and business leaders" (*The Language Police* 25).

Liberals would eventually stand up to challenge the right's censoring, though, and would begin to attempt to fend off such overtly dramatic patriotism in texts. However, the left would challenge right-wing censorship in an unexpected fashion. Triggered by the abundance of patriotic information which made up the bulk of material within textbooks, liberals began a campaign that would later come to function as a less obvious form of censorship.

In the late 1960s, beginning immediately after the right's incredibly effective censorship campaign began to show its effects, the left showed up on the scene. Liberals charged textbook publishers with being prejudiced in their selection processes, thereby marginalizing the voices of those believed to be or who were in fact living in direct contrast with the American way of life. The answer liberals would propose would be to comprise a fusion of voices as a means of providing more fair and accurate portrayals of all people involved in the subjects history textbooks were to cover.

California would serve as a focal point for liberals, becoming the state from which left-wing pressure groups would launch a counter against conservative's annexation of the nation's curriculum. The following lengthy quote serves as a prime example of the intensity with which liberal pressure groups would pursue their own preferred construction of education:

To redress the use of stereotypes, California enacted its well-intentioned 'social content standards' in 1976. These required the state textbook review committee to approve only instructional materials that 'accurately portray the cultural and racial diversity of our society, including the contributions of both men and women in all types of roles . . . [and the] contributions of American Indians, American Negroes, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, European Americans,

and members of other ethnic and cultural groups.’ . . . At first glance, California’s social content standards—at least as applied to minorities and women—appeared to be a common sense and overdue effort to redress the use of stereotypes and prejudicial language. No doubt, in the early years, those guidelines did force publishers to eliminate racist and sexist stereotypes. But the implementation of the social content standards by the California department of education in its ‘legal compliance reviews’ soon outstripped common sense. Since nothing could reflect ‘adversely’ on any group, even, say, a reference to Hell’s Angels would have to cite the motorcycle gang’s positive contributions. The state education department also interpreted the law to mean that ethnicity, gender, and orientation had to be portrayed in an ‘equitable way’ (not just accurately), which led both the state and ethnic and feminist groups to count and categorize every reference to men, women, people with disabilities, members of ethnic groups, and the like. A . . . chapter in a social studies textbook, might lack literary quality or skew history. But if it had the right numerical balance of genders and minorities, the textbook could be approved. If, however, it contained elegant writing and classic stories, yet failed to adhere to the multicultural bean-counting rules, it could be rejected. (“The Mad, Mad World of Textbook Adoption” 8)

Such a shift meant that historically superfluous individuals would be allotted the same amount of book space as all other historical personages. This is inclusion, and it would effectively become a form of censorship in the world of textbook publishing. When every group is allotted uniform esteem based solely on the foundation of some predetermined multicultural calculation, all discourse becomes identical, thereby discouraging hope for truly unique dialogue. Where the most resounding voices in

history had a chance to rise to the occasion and truly make a difference, they were stifled in order to include those of obvious less importance. The new form of censorship imparted by liberals and meant to counter conservative’s censoring of textbooks was run under the title of multiculturalism.

Censored in this instance were some of the more important voices throughout history. For instance, Mediterranean antiquity probably does not have the same resonance for youth today as the study of World War Two does. When studies attempt covering two such subjects equally, neither subject is given the amount of concern it deserves. The study of both Egyptian history and World War Two include extensive informational content, and treating both of them the same means treading over the two subjects without acknowledging their depth. In other words, students who must study every subject “fairly” end up with a basic knowledge of numerous subjects, some being more monotonous than others. Ultimately, knowledge students have an opportunity to harness is censored from them through the textbook, leaving them with small bits of information on the most important subjects in history—small bits of information which are exemplified and promoted within textbooks as a means of covering a vast array of topics.

Multiculturalism began with admirable intentions. But quickly thereafter, multiculturalism turned into another form of expurgation of important information and a whitewashing of facts. The connection between the multiculturalist push for inclusion and the form of censorship such a movement would eventually evolve into is best summed up by the following quotes from the reference book *Censorship*:

Although a goal of multiculturalism in education is to promote ethnic tolerance, its censoring effects via institutionalized public intimidation may cause racial segregation. Furthermore, a curriculum that focuses on atonement for past wrongs also encourages a victim mentality and

collective guilt; this assignment of blame contributes to the idolizing of non-Western cultures and a demonizing of Western cultures. Thus, the current discussions of multiculturalism in the classroom take an either-or structure, forcing students to choose between Eurocentrism or ethnicity. (Amey, vol. 2, 517)

Critics maintain that the multicultural movement minimizes any form of critique in which uncommendable qualities of minority cultures are highlighted. Acts of hostility, racism, sexism, and elitism within minority cultures are ignored or disregarded . . . Critics of multiculturalism in education argue that when students are encouraged to make judgments based on ethnicity alone, they are discouraged from bona fide evaluation and critique, skill necessary for thoughtful and responsible citizenship. (Amey, vol. 2, 517)

Suddenly textbook publishers were being overwhelmed by pressures coming from both the left and the right. The left wanted publishers to begin giving more fair consideration to all of those involved in history, all major perspectives. Publishers already caught up in trying to promote patriotism were now expected to also adhere to the mandates that multiculturalism simultaneously infringed upon them. As a result, textbooks throughout the 1960s and 1970s grew further away from teaching factual history and closer to a plethora of mushed together ideologies. To quote the reference book *Censorship*,

During the 1960's and 1970's, a dramatic shift took place in the censorship wars when new protesters appeared on the scene: the liberals, who before had generally resisted censorship. Many books were charged with being racist and sexist. To counter this, nonwhite faces were added to textbooks, African Americans and women were pictured as professionals rather than slaves and housewives, and the achievements and writings of minorities and women were included, although often

tagged on at the ends of chapters . . . As a result, textbooks were watered down to the extent that they would offend neither a left-wing radical from Berkeley nor a right-wing radical Fundamentalist Christian from Texas; some critics judged such books to be so without anything that might be offensive that they were quite dull. (Amey, vol. 3, 799)

Once multiculturalism began to spread into textbooks, the right countered back. The original complaints conservatives had inserted into the folds of the argument during the Cold War era had never actually left the scene, and now they would come on stronger than ever. What conservatives argued was that liberal multiculturalism was actually an overt form of secularism and that such teachings fostered anti-American and anti-family values, which conservatives held to be absolute truths. A second wave of censorship from the right began as an attempt to reestablish the patriotic narratives that they had worked so hard to instill into textbooks during the 1950s and 60s. A great deal of commentary on this period in textbook publishing exists, assuring a mass of opinions from all the different angles involved.

A report from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation provides the following view:

The liberalization and multicultural additions to textbooks in the 1970s set off a backlash among Christian fundamentalists in the 1980s. Organizations on the religious right, such as Focus on the Family, Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, and Rev. Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority pressured school districts and supported a series of local lawsuits to have 'immoral' textbooks dropped from school curricula. ("The Mad, Mad World of Textbook Adoption" 12)

The reference book on censorship takes a similar stand:

By the late 1970's, many conservative Christians were expressing the belief that

the problems of American society were due to America's straying from Christian truth. American school and the American media, from this perspective, were spreading ideas that were opposed to Christianity and that were undermining the nation's moral character. Therefore, some conservative Christians saw attempting to exercise control over the schools and the media as both a religious and a patriotic duty. (Amey, vol. 3, 674)

The attack orchestrated by conservatives during this period would come on even stronger than the first. All of the objections raised by the right would "share the same roots: dependence on biblical authority as opposed to any form of logic, creativity, self-reliance, or self-definition; and total commitment to one religious and culture group, to the exclusion of globalism and multiculturalism. At bottom, the fundamentalists who launched the textbook challenges of the 1980s opposed the time-honored view that a central purpose of schooling was to teach children to think for themselves" ("The Mad, Mad World of Textbook Adoption" 13).

This second wave of textbook censorship, beginning at the onset of the 1980s, would have an overwhelming impact on what textbook censorship would eventually progress into. Publishers seemed to throw their hands up at this point and begin to act as accomplices in special interest groups' seeking to control the narrative constructions within textbooks. As a result of these years of bipartisan bickering, a period which has evolved in to the current situation we see today, resistance against censorship within textbooks became more and more passive. Ultimately, both sides of the political spectrum would hold enough leverage within the realm of textbook publishing to be able to directly influence every piece of material printed.

At the close of the 1980s, textbook publishers were beginning to take it upon themselves to enact censorship, hedging off any conflict before it could even take place. In the words of Diane Ravitch, "By the end of the 1980s, every

publisher had complied with the demands of the critics, both from the left and right. Publishers had imposed self-censorship to head off the outside censors, as well as to satisfy state adoption reviews" (*The Language Police* 96). Due to self-censorship, the publishing of textbooks has now basically become just an influx of ideological jargon as found acceptable by major pressure groups. The regulation of the material to be implemented in textbooks now rests in the hands of pressure groups as opposed to its being enacted by an objective observer on the outside looking in. The ideologies of the left and the right, through the power dynamics each have seen formed, enjoy sole ownership over material selected for textbooks. It is no wonder then that textbooks today lack substance in their favoring of certain moral outlooks over all others.

Self-censorship is incredibly destructive in the business of textbook publishing. As a result of the unrelenting pressures placed upon textbook publishers beginning in the 1950s, publishers have been left with only one option: to fold to both conservatives and liberals. Such a practice calls for the alteration of voices in order to allow those who have established the most power by cogency control over the knowledge to be harnessed by the youth. In this way agency is lost, or abandoned. The textbook is written by power relations directly associated with political groups. Due to hegemonic institutions becoming solely responsible for the selection of material which enters the textbook, the same material which in the long run our children secrete as knowledge, authorship has become obsolete.

No one person can consider himself to be simultaneously for and against a subject without running into the problem of himself disproving his own points through pure contradiction. In this same way, no one person can write a textbook which thoroughly promotes right ideology while also exhaustively promoting left ideology since, for the most part, the two cancel each other out. It is possible to create such a textbook though by allowing political special interest groups, ideologies, and moral absolutes to construct our textbooks as opposed to authors. Indeed, this is

how it is done in the world of textbook publishing today¹, the result of publishers' voluntary censoring. An author's name on the cover of a textbook has become simply for show, to give the illusion that it has been written rather than developed based upon a construction of the world formed within political binaries.

But it is not only pressure from interest groups on both the left and the right that is cause for publishers today resorting to self-censorship and therefore abolishing genuine authorship. Economic pressures, as they are combined with ideological pressures from conservatives and liberals, play a rather important role as well. The textbook publishing industry functions as a monopoly, a matter exacerbated by the limitations publishers face when pressured by censors to include certain subjects in textbooks. Because textbook publishers are limited in their mission to provide teachers with informative textbooks by realistic necessities (such as profit-margins to meet)—necessities pressure groups work tirelessly to exploit—there is only so much influence today's giants of textbook publishing hold over what is printed. In other words, even if a publisher strongly supports a textbook due to its strong content, organization, and writing style, the market, which for over the last twenty years has remained consistent with those most deeply concerned with their children learning ideological

concepts in school, may still find reason to distrust the knowledge and prose put forth.

In the end, the only textbooks that enable publishers to sustain a legitimate flow of profits are textbooks which attempt to reconstruct the world as seen through the eyes of either liberals or conservatives. As a consumer report from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute claims, the "writing and editing [of textbooks] are done with one eye on the marketplace, the other on sundry interest groups" ("A Consumer's Guide to High School History Textbooks" 8). Publishers must either bend to the two major political ideologies in America by means of self-censoring or cease having a business. The market creates an atmosphere which encourages self-censorship and, thus, the elimination of authorship. In a fascinating article by Sue Jansen entitled "Ambiguities and Imperatives of Market Censorship," Jansen argues that self-censorship, often disregarded as a bogus phenomenon, is actually an extension of market censorship—a far less refuted theory. Regardless of whether or not it has yet been assigned a proper appellation, the market does indeed force textbook publishers to take means of censoring upon themselves. Ultimately, this has resulted in "quality work . . . not being produced, published, and/or distributed because it is not profitable enough, thereby diminishing or 'dumbing down' public discourse" (Jansen 19). Self-censorship becomes very much

¹ "For publishers, the quantity imperative and the tight time deadlines in state adoption processes all but guarantee that quality will be neglected. The image of a distinguished author beaver away for years to write a compelling textbook is largely a thing of the past. Today, publishers often start with a unified checklist of all the names, standards, facts, and subjects that must be covered to win approval in California and Texas. Next, a team of consultants is hired to prepare study aids and draft questions and student exercises. A separate team prepares the illustrations, graphics, maps, tables, and charts. In-house editors and committees review the text for bias, sensitivity, and compliance with state criteria. The actual writing of these tomes, however, is generally farmed out to 'development houses'—where teams of writers who are not subject experts collaborate on the text, which can often run to 1,000+ pages. The tag team approach to constructing these books is one reason they lack a single authorial voice

and coherent 'story.' To make their textbooks look more learned and substantial, some el-hi publishers add the name of a distinguished scholar to the list of textbook authors, though the famous professor may have done nothing more than 'consult' with the publisher at some point during the early stages of preparing of a textbook" ("The Mad, Mad World of Textbook Adoption" 33).

"Notably absent from many of the chop shops are subject matter experts in history, religion, civics, and so on . . . The chop shops cannot substitute for genuine scholarship . . . With such an emphasis on pedagogical expertise and so little on subject knowledge, it is no surprise that the textbook developers in such agencies would be susceptible, for example, to the kind of information supplied by interest groups" (Tobin 10).

responsible for work produced which fails to enlighten thinking.

Jansen further suggests that “market gate keepers systematically bar access to or marginalize the voices of minorities and thereby contribute to and amplify social injustice” (Jansen 19). Hence the tremendous influence exerted by the textbook publishing industry’s “market gate keepers,” Texas and California. Each state reflects one end of the political spectrum, liberals in California and conservatives in Texas, a parallel enhanced by each state’s massive population. As such, publishers find it easy to pull their references on what left and right will accept from these two states.

In Texas, publishers are pushed to include conservative ideals while hushing the voices of those in direct contrast with such beliefs. In California, liberals push publishers to produce fair and balanced reporting on a number of different topics, some of the louder voices being censored down to size in order to make room for a more wide-ranging, all-inclusive coverage of events. If a textbook fails to gain acceptance in either of these adoption states it spells doom for the textbook since “getting one’s volume on such [an adoption] list can mean all the difference in a text’s profitability” (*The Politics of the Textbook* 32). As so, textbook publishers use the two states more or less as product-testing states. Publishers realize that both Texas and California, in making up such a large portion of the nation’s economy as compared to the other forty-eight states, can be used to base generalizations off of as to what ideology *all* Americans will support. Annalisa de Mendiola’s dissertation *Traditionalists versus multiculturalists* sheds further light on the subject of prefabricated textbooks as based on the nation’s largest states:

By virtue of their large purchases, these states hold greater power than smaller states that do not possess the same fiscal ability . . . because textbooks are written to their specified curriculum (Ravitch, 2002). The Texas version of the

U.S. history textbook is of particular importance because other states that do not hold the financial positioning and influence of this state are forced to adopt this book and the curriculum found within . . . Due in part to these financially-based variables, textbooks become commodities influenced not only by ideologies, but by economics as well. (Mendiola 6)

Publishers can therefore base their self-censoring on the two states likes and dislikes without risking wasted efforts.

Textbooks are now written with only the most economically viable regions of the nation in mind. What we have today are textbooks that do not irritate either liberals of California or conservatives of Texas. Due to the large influence both Texas and California exert over economic markets and the majority rule they both inherit as a result, the two states’ choices as to the material they wish to see in textbooks affects the rest of the nation by sheer power in numbers alone. A quote from the American Civil Liberties Union shows just how greatly one state’s economic influence, combined with its personal ideological fervor, can affect our nation’s textbooks:

Because Texas purchases tens of millions of textbooks every year, it has a huge influence on the content of textbooks used all over the country. In fact, between 45 and 47 states use textbooks based on Texas’ curriculum. So these board members’ ideologically narrow view of the world won’t just harm Texas public school kids, it has the potential to harm kids nationwide. (“Fight the Texas Textbook Takeover!”)

Immense factors which affect the publishing of textbooks, such as the states of Texas and California combined with political pressure groups across the nation, are directly responsible for publishers resorting to self-censorship. Since publishers can limit the amount of time and money spent in the production process by means of working directly with liberal’s largest market and conservative’s largest market, the states of

California and Texas become an easy way out for publishers in that the textbooks they write can simply be molded by the opinions of the two states. The process is much easier for publishers when its construction takes place in a centralized manner. Therefore, when publishers begin work on a new textbook they are well enough aware of what to place within the textbook before it is even to reach anyone in the public eye. Publishers now censor themselves because years of working with the same two markets—Texas and California—has made them very knowledgeable of the ideologies found within the two large states. The entire process now works off of centralization. As soon as material reaches the hands of publishers they know immediately rather or not either state will find such material suitable.

The end result, of course, is textbooks which are formulated around two political ideologies from the moment of their inception. In other words, this current process of textbook publishing is only producing guide books based on morality rather than actual historical events. Children now struggle to think critically about subjects due to the fact that from the moment textbooks meet text there is an ideal being formed which proclaims itself as the all-mighty word. Teaching students a liberal world-view while simultaneously teaching them a conservative world-view means that in terms of historical events students are learning only the opinions of either the left or the right. Because of the control Texas and California exert in terms of economic power the rest of the nation is stuck with a small number of textbooks to choose from, the overwhelming majority of which conform directly to Texas and California's ideologies. There is no independent California or Texas textbook, so to speak, but textbooks which are a collage of both sides' ideologies. Textbook publishers are truly caught in a bind which leaves only one option: self-censorship.

Specific groups actively promoting their bias has led to the creation of a system which allows for the construction of textbooks as seen through particular sets of eyes. Beginning with the pressures publishers faced from conservatives during the 1950s, a continuous reformulation of

the textbook industry has been taking place. Once liberals stepped in matters became even more streamlined. Eventually, the pressures liberals and conservatives placed on publishers (the form of leverage they both created, not each group's specific beliefs) forced the industry to revert into submission. Earlier, the idea that bias is not the main issue at hand was mentioned. What was meant by this is that my contention is not with what forms of bias get into the textbook (it could be any form of bias, really, it just happens to be left and right), but the system of infiltration that has been established, *overtly* (though probably not intentionally). Such a system has created the possibility of forming a hegemony through the controlling of info to get into textbooks. It is obvious that a form of control has opened up within the textbook which rides high on either political end. But I argue that it goes much deeper than this. I argue that this system is helping to create a hegemony of stupidity. Beneath the surface of a hegemony of ideals being created by left and right pressure exists the true problem: a hegemony of stupefying. Such a formulated hegemony as actively pursued by those with the most power brings out real possibilities of police-state control.

This is all possible because of specialized centralization in the textbook publishing industry. Control over a system which actively "dumbs-down" the population easily takes place due to centralization. Because publishers of textbooks can construct their textbooks based on consolidated interests, more attention is paid to such interests, and so the more it grows and the more competition to be heard is weeded out in the name of capital gains. When a business industry resorts to appealing to a centralized consumer base which generalizes a multitude of its future users and their beliefs, it is not wrong to believe a chain of unification has been built which ignores rationale and reality in favor of profit. Exactly as is the case today with the industry of textbook publishing. Making profit, supplying schools with material (textbooks), is an impossible goal for publishers unless they are willing to submit to the industry the market and pressure groups produce.

For publishers, it's either work towards centralizing or cease to exist.

And so publishers submit to centralization. This means that all of the nation's textbooks are based on the wants and needs of a few. It is easier, after all, to generalize. It is easy to see why this is a problem in terms of one side or another side being heard within the textbook. But this is to be expected, for there will always be bickering over what side should be heard, as stated before. The problem today is that the process of partitioning for your side to be heard has been commodified and therefore centralized in order to consolidate the process down to its bare bones. Maybe we all should have expected this, but, once again, that is not the ultimate argument in this paper. No one can deny the fact that within the world of textbooks today we have an industry easily infiltrated by those who, most want to and have the most power to, construct narratives of their own making and manipulation. But this is not where the focus should be settled. There will always be a fight for such control, and while it has gotten way out of control, it is still not our main issue in the problems education faces in terms of the textbook.

The main problem is that the fight between conservatives and liberals to have their ideology reign supreme in the textbook has become a unique concert of workings which allows for dominance on what is a level hard to fathom for those living in the land of the free. But it is subtly taking place within the textbook industry. The leverage formed by means of back-and-forth between left and right has resulted in a basis for the molding of a dominant institutionalization of the culture. Whether done so intentionally or not, there is a means by which hegemonic attitudes and/or norms may be instituted, and it is by following the specializations liberals and conservatives have developed, specializations outlined in all that is aforementioned.

So, if it is not the ideology of liberals and conservatives I am arguing is the hegemony being instilled through textbooks, then what is it? I propose that the hegemony created by means of

textbook censorship is one of active stupefying. The following quotes back this notion:

Textbooks pivot on what Roland Barthes called the 'referential illusion,' the notion that the way things are told is simply the way things were (1970: 145-55). To achieve this illusion, textbooks exploit various stylistic conventions. First, textbooks eliminate 'metadiscourse,' or places in the text where the author intrudes to suggest judgment, emphasis, or uncertainty. Metadiscourse is common in the writing historians do for one another, but it is edited out of the writing they do for schoolchildren (Crismore 1984: 279-296; Paxton 1997: 235-250). Second, traces of how the text came to be are hidden or erased: Textbooks rarely cite the documentary record, and—if primary material appears—it is typically set off in 'sidebars' so as not to interfere with the main text. Finally, textbooks speak in the omniscient third person. There is no visible author to confront the reader; instead, a corporate author speaks from a position of transcendence, a position of knowing from on high. (Wineburg 87)

Such processes lead to the following effects as outlined by Stephen Gottlieb:

Textbook censorship has serious intellectual as well as political costs. In order to simplify English and avoid controversy, textbooks routinely omit the word 'because.' Shorter sentences are considered more readable, though a paragraph or book consisting of short, unconnected sentences lacking causal connectives is far from readable. Students must guess whether facts strung together are causally related. Texts present a 'crabgrass' or 'natural disaster' theory of history; problems unaccountably grow until they become serious, at which time they keep on going until they stop. '[H]istory is just one damn thing after another.' (Gottlieb 418)

Textbooks present students with material that is far from informative. This happens because of the process this paper has worked to outline, and the end result is a commodified textbook which lacks substance. Students go to school and are held to low standards in a schooling system that presents them with cheaply produced textbooks. And these low standards along with an inability to think analytically and form clear, fully articulate thoughts extent into our society, hence my speaking of hegemony. Education has become a farce, and it is all as a result of textbook censorship. The censoring of textbooks has molded an education system bent on the lowest common denominator. It no longer matters what the mind of a student can do, it only matters how easily indoctrination can be placed upon a student by means of setting low levels of achievement. Finding the simple way to teach students and admiring them for simple achievements—in other words holding them down—extends even into academia. The bare minimum is consistently accepted in American education and praised as genuine accomplishment. No wonder whenever a mirror is turned upon our culture we cringe: our society has turned into one that appreciates the lower, easier bar to be surpassed. All it takes is a controlling power such as the textbook being infiltrated by those wishing to manipulate the way in which, as well as that which we learn to be able to create a society molded by a hegemony of low standards, dullness, and stupidity.

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