

Strange Bedfellows: Censorship and History Textbooks

Melissa N. Matusevich
East Carolina University



Abstract

In spite of required state curriculum objectives, American history textbooks often become the de facto curriculum defining history. Self-imposed censorship by textbook publishers defines how individuals, groups, and events are portrayed. A 2004 Thomas B. Fordham Institute report concluded that today's history textbooks are bland with no voice or storyline and have been sanitized and filled with history rewritten to meet the demands of special interest groups. The report also concluded that while American history textbooks now contain more pages, they include less content. Paradoxically, when a well-crafted textbook is created, students may never have access to it. Efforts by special interest groups to censor such books are not uncommon. A case study of one author's efforts to have her award-winning history textbook adopted for classroom use and the ensuing censorship efforts by special interest groups are described.

In a land where we pride ourselves on our First Amendment rights, censorship is alive and well. Its impact, both subtle and obvious, has a pernicious effect on the history textbooks that are put into the hands of students across America. Often the censorship is overt and at times makes a brief splash in the news. As an example, a special interest group might petition a school board not to adopt a particular book or to remove it from an already adopted list. Generally overlooked is a more subtle and insidious form of censorship that has a much greater consequence; it directly impacts what students learn and do not learn about history. It is self-censorship by textbook publishers, a practice with a long and checkered history. Two unfortunate results of the textbook publishing world's self-censorship are the continuing poor quality of most history textbooks and the suppression of good ones. The roots of the majority of attempts to censor textbooks are related to the desires of special interest groups, whether their efforts are played out in public forums or are the behind-the-scenes demands they make of publishers.

Censorship

Censorship—the proscription, restriction, or removal of literary or artistic works—also occurs with educational materials, most notably textbooks. Certainly, censorship is not new. The term derives from the Roman censor and originally contained no negative connotations. Over time, though, censorship has evolved to refer to the suppression of ideas or images by the government or authority figures. Throughout history, societies practiced various forms of censorship in the belief that the community was responsible for molding the individual. In America today, the most common form of censorship is book banning with schools as the prime target. No book is sacrosanct; even the Bible has been banned from student access because it includes stories of murder and incest (McCann & Horvath, n.d.).

When highlighted in the national news, Americans become aware, for a time, of efforts to restrict access to a particular literary work. As an example, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* topped the American Library Association's list of most challenged books for four years in a row and was widely reported (American Library Association, 2003). Less reported, but far more common are efforts to restrict the content of history textbooks or to keep specific texts out of the hands of the students for whom they were written.

Since 1970, censorship efforts related to textbooks have increased dramatically. Leading the parade and notable in the fight to limit or change the content in textbooks were Norma and Mel Gabler who began to analyze textbooks in the early 1960s. They quickly became vocal critics who monitored textbook adoptions in Texas. The end goal of this husband-and-wife team effort was to keep students from using textbooks that the Gablers deemed to be un-American or Godless. Eventually, the Gablers influenced the national scene through their organization, Educational Research Analysts. To date, the Gabler's censorship efforts have been widely felt across the United States. It is likely that their work influenced the formation of similar organizations such as the Texas-based Focus on the Family and the Eagle Forum. These groups have led the backlash against books with a multicultural focus in efforts to have them removed from adoption lists (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2004).

The Creation of History Textbooks and the Self-Censorship of the Publishing Industry

History textbooks have long been under fire. Concerns abound. Instances of poor writing, efforts by interest groups to effect text changes, publishers' textbook writing processes, and demands of state textbook adoptions have all been cited. In reality, all of the issues are interwoven and contribute to the poor quality of most history textbooks. According to an in-depth analysis of history textbooks by noted historians, a few history textbooks are mediocre; many are atrocious (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2004).

Poor Writing

James Tracy (2003) sums it up thusly: "It is also worth noting that turgid expression of chronological data with a weak narrative coherence has been typical of textbook writing...." Armbruster and Anderson (1988) described social studies textbooks as being inconsiderate of their readers because authors use stilted expository prose rather than lively narrative. Also advocating the use of narrative story in social studies textbooks is Wilson (2002) who argued that in order to understand the world around them, people need stories. Gilbert Sewall—author of

a 2000 report by the American Textbook Council (ATC) criticizing history textbooks—stated, “Without episodic narrative and concrete examples, textbook history remains remote and meaningless to students and teacher alike...sharp writing is an exception to the rule.”

Self-censorship

What should be the focus of a history textbook? Should it present the world as it is or was or ought to be or should have been? The question is a big one. Who decides the answer? Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is those with the loudest voices. The textbook publishing industry’s self-censorship of books is little known by educators, yet it has a dramatic impact on the history textbooks teachers and students use. It seems oxymoronic in a country whose constitution guarantees freedom of the press that publishers would choose to be an active partner in censorship due to pressures from outside groups. However, cash talks. In order to sell books, publishers cave in to the demands of every vocal interest group giving those with the loudest voices great power over determining what history is included and how it is written. As an example, the Hindu Education Foundation was unhappy with a history textbook that stated in ancient India “...men had many more rights than women.” They wanted the text changed to read: “Men had different duties...” According to Gilbert Sewall of ATC, the Council on Islamic Education (CIE) is so powerful that publishers have ceded control to this group who *dictate* content, resulting in books that “lack factual fidelity.” Sewall also charges that the CIE has been working energetically for 15 years to scrub the past in instructional materials” (Golden, 2006).

The result is that textbook creation is now controlled by extremists on both the left and the right, who have more in common than one might first suspect. While the particular issues they lobby for or against differ—the left is more concerned with how individuals and groups are presented while the right’s issues relate to religion and morality—looking beneath the surface one can readily determine that the basis of their concerns is related to two main points: 1) the belief that textbooks have great power to impact children’s minds, and 2) the further belief that children are gullible, so their thinking can be easily influenced. Oddly, this makes these powerful extremist factions as alike as they are different. These groups carry big sticks and publishers kowtow to them. No longer are textbooks under consideration for adoption judged solely on content, style, or effectiveness as a teaching tool, but rather they are judged primarily by sensitivity guidelines. As an example, if a book portrays a woman as a nurse rather than a mechanic or shows an illustration of a man as a mechanic rather than a nurse, the book quickly will be rejected. Even after a book has been published and adopted for classroom use, it is not safe from scrutiny or demand for removal. In 2003, concerns from Hindu parents led the large Fairfax, Virginia school district to remove a book from the locally adopted list of approved textbooks (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2004).

Textbook Writing Process

Major publishing houses have strict guidelines for authors based on all of the concerns expressed by the special interest groups they are trying to appease. Some of the guidelines are more than 100 pages in length. Included are lists of words, topics, and phrases writers should not use lest any group be offended. As example, one publisher’s bias guidelines explain the criteria for illustrations in textbooks. Included must be people who are short and tall, heavy and thin, and people with disabilities. Illustrations of families must include those headed by two parents, one

parent, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and other adults. Elderly persons must be shown as vibrant and active participants in pursuits such as mountain climbing. No matter how old, an individual cannot be portrayed as infirm. A writer is cautioned not to focus any attention on Asian American students' scholastic achievement because it is stereotypical and might lead the reader to conclude that Asian students are role models in this realm. Another publisher has bias guidelines that preclude use of the word *America* ostensibly because no place called America exists (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2004). Noted educational critic Diane Ravitch has studied and written extensively about the textbook publishing process. "Now that the rules of censorship have been codified, editors, writers, and illustrators know well in advance what is not acceptable. No one speaks of 'censoring or banning' words or topics; they 'avoid' them. The effect is the same" (Ravitch, 2003).

Another egregious practice of the publishing industry is one with which most educators are unfamiliar: The person credited with authoring a history textbook may not have written a single word, yet his or her name is boldly emblazoned on the cover. Sadly, names can be purchased. In truth, textbooks are cobbled together by teams of writers from *chop shops* (development houses). Well-crafted prose and historical scholarship are not encouraged, nor do they result. The resulting textbooks are fraught with problems. These bland products created by the consensus writing process have no voice and no storyline (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2004). Worse, because of the pressure from interest groups, history becomes watered down to the point that textbooks paint a rosy picture about most topics, leaving the reader with a distorted view of historical events. When the negative aspects of history are rewritten or glossed over, there is no opportunity for students to learn about past mistakes or to critically consider what could have been done differently.

State Textbook Adoptions

Of particular importance to publishers is the winning of contracts from the largest adoption states—those that adopt a textbook across the board for use by all students in a grade level or course throughout the state. Most adoption states are in the South or West as a result of post-Civil War concerns about how Civil War history would be portrayed. In order to capture Southern markets, textbook publishers agreed to print separate editions with a pro-Confederacy slant including the elimination of the phrase *Civil War* in favor of the Southern preferred wording of *War Between the States*. Rather than lose the market, publishers headed down the slippery slope of self-censorship. Of the 21 adoption states, the big three are Texas, California, and Florida. They have enormous clout with publishers because an adoption in one of these populous states richly rewards the publisher. It is interesting to note that in spite of the successes of adoption states to determine the content of history textbooks, the students in these states perform poorly on national tests (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2004).

Today's U.S. History Textbooks

Skim through a current history textbook and you will find poorly written, dull, flat prose that hops from topic to topic. However, you also will find a colorful layout that many critics call distracting because in a two-page spread, you are likely find a dizzying array of information. Too much material is covered far too quickly, leaving students with no depth of understanding (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2004). Somewhere lost in the textbook creation process is the

rich narrative prose that lights the fires of interest in history. Oddly, while today's books contain more pages, less content is included and what content there is has been described as dumb, oversimplified, and thin (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2004). With schools expecting students to meet the goals of rigorous state standards, the prospect of that happening is grim if poor textbooks are the basis of their history instruction.

In February 2004, *The Consumer's Guide to High School History Textbooks*, published by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, illustrated the sad state of today's history texts. A panel of scholars evaluated six widely used U.S. history textbooks. The reviewers represented a range of political perspectives, professional experience, and ideological viewpoints. Their task was to evaluate the textbooks based on the following criteria: accuracy, context, organization, supporting materials selections, lack of bias, historical logic, literary quality, primary source usage, historical soundness, democratic ideas, interest level, and graphics. The books fared poorly. Two were deemed complete failures. In fact, the highest score any textbook received was a meager 78. In addition, all of the textbooks were long, each averaging 1,000 pages in length and quite heavy, some weighing more than five pounds (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2004). These heavy tomes were crammed with eye-catching illustrations, color photographs, and graphics. Is all that is found between the covers necessary? When one considers that many of these books have been sanitized and dumbed-down as well as filled with history rewritten to meet the demands of special interest groups, it becomes easy to see why students score so poorly in history on state and national tests. The bottom line is that most history textbooks contain more but teach less (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2004). Clearly, substance is lacking, causing one to cry, "Where's the beef?" Is it any wonder that our students do not know history, nor do they like it?

A Case Study in Text Development and Resulting Censorship Efforts

Viewing censorship efforts through the lens of a specific case affords the reader the opportunity to consider history textbook censorship efforts concretely. A plethora of cases to cite exists, and I originally planned to include three. However, I quickly discovered that doing justice to three separate cases would be too difficult. Following such a path would have resulted in this article becoming unmanageable. As a result, I opted for quality over quantity and for an in-depth look at one interesting and unusual case rather than provide a cursory look at three. Thus, one case study is highlighted; it is so unique that it stands alone. Many factors make this case unusual, not the least of which is the novel way the textbook author approached the task of writing a high quality American history textbook for fifth and sixth grade students. Her resulting efforts were rejected again and again, yet her work went on to win many awards while becoming the first textbook to serve as the basis for a PBS special. Efforts to keep this award-winning account of American history from students' hands continue.

Good history texts are engaging, replete with vivid narratives that grab the reader's attention and quickly engross the reader in lively accounts of the past. Good history books enlighten and enthrall the reader about significant events that changed the course of human affairs. By focusing on notable persons who made a difference, well-written history textbooks provide the reader with multiple examples illustrating how one person can dramatically impact others. Well-crafted history books also deal openly with controversial topics and do not shy away from portraying events as they happened. They provide opportunities for readers to think critically about the past and how it relates to present-day events. Unfortunately, good history

textbooks are scarce. Of even greater concern is that on the rare occasion when a good history text is created, censorship efforts can thwart it ever reaching the students for whom it was written.

In the early 1980s, newspaper reporter Joy Hakim's assignment was to cover a controversial state school board meeting in Richmond, Virginia. The focus of the meeting was the quality of textbooks. Hakim thumbed through several and quickly realized that the writing was dreadful. Appalled, she concluded that had they tried, the authors could not have created more boring reading. Knowing that she could write well-researched stories, Hakim set out to create a better history book. She believed that "the best histories unfold as the best stories do" (Hakim, 1994).

Hakim set aside a year to create a one-volume book about the history of the United States. Finding the task impossible, she settled on many years of work; ten volumes resulted. Because she was not creating a history textbook for a major publisher, Hakim neither had to bend to pedagogical or political pressures, nor did she follow bias guidelines as textbook authors must do. She chose to pen the books in an engaging narrative format with the author's voice evident throughout. Hakim researched carefully to ensure that the books were accurate:

All newspaper reporters (well, anyone good at all) look for several sources. So I did a lot of reading, trying to find the best historians. Then I searched out university historians and asked them to read copy. When you're writing for kids, the very best people are happy to help you. That was wonderful. I had a "kissing cousin," Robert Rutland, who was a distinguished scholar and editor of the James Madison papers at the University of Virginia; he was very helpful. Virginius Dabney cheered me on. James McPherson read books six and seven in manuscript [form] and found some errors, and I corrected them. In addition to the historians I turned to, Oxford [Oxford University Press, the eventual publisher] sent each volume out for "peer review." That means it was read by a historian of the appropriate period before publication. Besides all that, I've been lucky to have great editors. All my books have been produced by Byron Hollinshead, chief of American Historical Publications. [Hollinshead is also vice chair of the National Council of History Educators.] He has hired the editors, designers, picture researchers etc.—and has done the books for Oxford University Press and *Smithsonian*. They have been labors of love. (B. Hollinshead, personal communication, March 26, 2006)

Once the history had been checked for accuracy, what Hakim did next was ingenious. She began testing the manuscripts in classrooms and asked the students to give their honest opinions about what they had read. Was the text clear? Was it boring? Did it make sense? Not wishing to offend the author, the students gave polite responses that were not helpful. So, Hakim hired the students to be editorial critics at \$5 per manuscript. Using a code, the students made notes in the margins—B for boring and NC for not clear. Hakim also had students underline any words they did not understand. She quickly learned that it was not the big words that confused students, rather the common words used in ways students did not comprehend. As an example, one student questioned why General Grant would send a piece of wire to President Lincoln. This is understandable when you consider that most children are unfamiliar with the common term for telegram (Stainburn, 2003).

Another of Hakim's wise decisions made her books more appealing to students. Divided into ten volumes, each book is small. It does not weigh down a backpack and is easy to manipulate when reading. Small books do not overwhelm readers, something large tomes tend to do. With history textbooks often weighing over five pounds, Hakim reasoned that students would be more inclined to take smaller volumes home for further reading. She was right (Strauss, 2004).

Her mantra, "You should never have a book for children that wouldn't be good enough to be sold in a bookstore" kept Hakim's focus on writing engaging narrative prose. As a result, she sincerely believed that publishers would welcome her well-written texts. She had already done the work of having historians check her work for accuracy, field-testing the books in classrooms, and using student and teacher feedback to make revisions. "I thought, 'If I do a good job, the publishing world will fall at my feet...I was an idiot'" (Deam, 2006). Hakim quickly discovered that not everyone was ready for such interesting writing. The big textbook publishing companies rejected her work again and again. Fifteen textbook publishers including Scholastic, Houghton-Mifflin, and Addison-Wesley renounced and turned down *A History of US* as too interesting, too informative, and too innovative (Adato & Blonska, 2003; Lord 2003). Further, they complained, the books were not structured like textbooks.

But Hakim did not give up. After initially rejecting them, Oxford University Press eventually agreed to publish the books jointly with a textbook publisher who quickly delivered directives to Hakim instructing her to make changes based on their bias guidelines. Hakim refused. The books were published, and by 1993, Oxford University Press was the sole publisher of *A History of US* (Strauss, 2000).

After publication, *A History of US* made an enormous splash. Accolades poured forth from many sources. Notably, historians praised Hakim's work:

A big breath of fresh air and the best possible news for the youngsters who get to read them...an important event in the progress of education.

—David McCullough, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Truman* and *John Adams*

The best American history written for young people that I have ever seen.

—David Herbert Donald, Harvard University, two-time Pulitzer-prize winning author of *Lincoln*

Joy Hakim seems to have accomplished a miracle—interesting kids in history.

—James McPherson, Pulitzer-prize winning author of *Battle Cry of Freedom*

Joy Hakim has shown that writing... for young people can itself be an art form. These beautifully written, graphically sophisticated volumes set new standards for clear and engaging prose. Of equal importance, they beautifully convey through text and imagery complex levels and interactions of information and meaning.

—Dr. Kevin Starr, State Librarian of California and author of *Americans and the California Dream* series

It is a fine piece of work... It really respects children, as the best children's literature does... I am convinced that the response to these particularly warm, entertaining, yet challenging books will be large, and what is more, will have important national results.

—Bernard A. Weisberger, author of *The Impact of Our Past: A History of the United States* and *The American Heritage History of the American People* (Oxford University Press, n.d.)

Since they were published, Hakim's books have won multiple awards: In 1997, *A History of US* received the first James A. Michener Award in Writing from the National Council for the Social Studies. The books also have won gold and silver awards from Parents' Choice as well as awards from several libraries, including the New York Public Library. In his report, *History Textbooks at the New Century: A Report of the American Textbook Council*, Gilbert Sewall highlights *A History of US* as "an exception to the rule" because "the story has energy and brings history to life, capturing the reader's interest, in contrast to the dead style of standard textbooks." Sewall goes on to say:

...the volumes have a strong voice and episodic richness that set them apart from conventional textbook fare. Whether dealing with Thomas Jefferson or Jim Crow, the books tell the tale of the nation's past in a manner different from standard textbooks, one with so many teaching advantages that the series points history textbook reform in the right direction. (Sewall, 2000)

PBS aired a series based on *A History of US*, the one and only television program or series distributed by PBS based on a textbook series according to Jon Cecil, vice president for Enterprises at WTVP television. Cecil explains:

At the time of the initiation of the production of the video programs Joy Hakim's textbook series was just beginning to be sold into the schools. The producer of the series, Phillip Kunhardt of Kunhardt Productions, brought the series' concept to PBS as a fully underwritten project, complete with an exceptional website and all coordinated directly with the textbook series. It was a superb, comprehensive educational package, and we were excited to be able to broadcast the programs and distribute the entire package in both VHS and DVD formats. (J. Cecil, personal communication, February 24, 2006)

In spite of the awards and endorsements, Hakim and *A History of US* have not been positively received in many arenas, most all related to public education. Criticism has been harsh. Extremists on both the right and the left have quibbled over everything from Hakim's depiction of communism to her religious *preachings*. Florida's Chiefland Middle School in Levy County banned *A History of US* as too opinionated after one parent complained (Adato & Blonska, 2003). The books have met with strong resistance in Texas where some educators called Hakim a communist (Strauss, 2000). According to Neal Frey, senior textbook analyst for the Gablers' Educational Research Analysts:

Texas rejected *A History of US* when submitted for state approval in 2002, partly due to its bizarre format (ten separate mini-volumes) and relative paucity of teaching aids, which to some made it an incomplete instructional system and therefore not strictly a textbook. Others objected to its editorial slant. We did not review it then, but have in our files a number of brief printed critiques of varying quality from other sources. (N. Frey, personal communication, March 15, 2006)

The Textbook League, another Texas-based organization, attacked Hakim on many fronts, claiming "disinformation and bias," "promoting her personal religious beliefs," subjecting students to "religious indoctrination," writing "a vicious fiction," offering "multi-culti rubbish" and "multi-culti hokum" (Bennetta, 2000; Textbook League, n.d.; Hautala, 2000). Attacks also have been based on material taken out of context. According to another Texas group, the Denton

Eagle Forum, Hakim's books should not be adopted. The Denton Eagle Forum selectively quoted from *A History of US* seriously distorting the author's intent (Francis, 1996):

The most disturbing textbook was Oxford University Press, A History of the United States, a ten-volume, Grade 5 social studies series...some of the following statements taken from the text submitted for adoption in Texas Public Schools:

Communism is an economic system, and as such it is not evil. (p. 109, War Peace and All That Jazz)

Those Native American men and women, who had lived freely on the land, now faced machine guns, cannons, army troops... (p. 82, Reconstruction and Reform) Machine guns???

They (women of the 50's) were expected to stay in the kitchen and the nursery, perhaps get involved with community volunteer work, or maybe just putter around, look pretty and be frustrated. (p. 136, All The People)

...like it or not, we need big government. (p.184, All The People)

All of the above quotes were taken out of context. In her response to Kay Francis, Texas Eagle Forum president and author of the above excerpt from the organization's publication, *The Torch*, Hakim addressed to each charge:

She [Francis] cites page 109 in *War, Peace and All that Jazz* as an example to deride. From that page, she selectively quotes the following sentence: "Communism is an economic system, and as such it is not evil." The quote in context: "Communism is an economic system, and as such it is not evil. It just doesn't seem to work efficiently. When combined with a harsh political system, as it was in Soviet Russia, it was evil."

As to machine guns, from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*: under "Small Arms, Military; machine guns": "The middle years of the 19th century brought dozens of inventions involving larger military weapons that would fire several projectiles either together or serially. A number of volley field pieces were designed and made, especially in the United States."

Hakim then addressed Francis' concern about how women are portrayed:

In yet another citation, Ms. Francis pulls an out-of-context quote from a chapter on the women's movement. This is a subject of particular importance to my young readers. Women's role in home and society has changed dramatically in our times—and that impacts directly on children. This is something they can understand and discuss. What opportunities and responsibilities lie ahead for today's girls? Who will care for our children in the future? Who can do it best? History gives us information that can lead to reasoned thinking.

Finally, Hakim chides Ms. Francis for another out-of-context quote about the need for big government:

The actual quote: "...like it or not, we need big government. *We are a big nation.* But we need big government that is efficient and considerate of our needs. In the

second half of the 20th century, our government became costly and inefficient, and it didn't consider the needs of ordinary Americans." This paragraph comes as part of a discussion of our current tendency to denigrate government and government service—which I find pernicious, especially with children. Our Founders saw government service as a high calling and a responsibility of each citizen. George Washington made it clear that he would have preferred to be a gentleman farmer, but his sense of national duty led him to the presidency. Today the word *politician* has become a pejorative. Is that really what we want our children to believe? (J. Hakim, personal correspondence, February 24, 2006)

Even though *A History of US* has received multiple awards and plaudits from a host of noted historians and has been the basis of a PBS series, Hakim continues to struggle getting books into classrooms and into the hands of students (Strauss 2000). In several states, the censorship efforts of extremist groups have been quite effective. When *A History of US* is adopted, often it is relegated to supplemental status. Most school divisions cannot afford to purchase both a main text and a supplemental text for each child, so even though *A History of US* is sometimes included on adoption lists, it in no way indicates that the books will be purchased.

Recommendations

As Joy Hakim, author of *A History of US*, has demonstrated, it is possible to create well-crafted history books: ones that students want to read and from which they learn an accurate account of our country's history. The Hakim case also demonstrates that quality and accuracy of text is no guarantee that the books will land in the hands of students. In order to begin addressing the problem of textbook censorship, proactive steps must be taken. The recommendations that follow address two important issues. First, textbook publishers should put American students' and our country's best interests as their number one priority by providing well-crafted materials of the highest quality. Second, when self-imposed censorship via bias guidelines interferes with an accurate portrayal of people and events that shaped and molded who we are today, textbook publishers should scrap them. Hakim's process for the creation of *A History of US* can serve as a model for textbook authors and publishers:

1. To ensure historical accuracy, conduct thorough research and have resulting manuscripts scrutinized by credible historians. Carefully consider historians' suggestions for revisions, and emend the text as needed.
2. Halt the practice of creating history textbooks in "chop shops." Instead, hire an excellent writer who can create text in narrative form that is both interesting and informative. Allow the author's voice to be heard through his or her writing. Give the author due credit by putting the real author's name on the cover and title page. Halt the practice of paying a "big name" to serve as the bogus author who has had little or nothing to do with the actual creation of the textbook.
3. Demonstrate high moral principles by creating honest and defensible accounts of history rather than succumbing to the demands of special interest groups who seek to sugarcoat and distort events.
4. Ensure that the text engages the reader's mind by anchoring new information to what students already know. Activating student's prior knowledge is vital in order for them to comprehend and remember what they have read. A good author considers the reader and the reader's needs as a learner at each step of the book creation process.

5. Put more emphasis on the substance. Glitzy pictures, graphs, sidebars, and the like cannot compensate for a poorly written book filled with dull, lifeless prose.
6. Smaller volumes are not as daunting to readers, nor are they wieldy to transport home. Consider creating several smaller volumes. Most adults would find a 1,000-page textbook overwhelming; imagine how students must feel when they receive a 1000-page textbook that weighs over five pounds.
7. Hire teachers and students to review manuscripts for content, clarity, and literary value. If students tell you a passage is boring or confusing, heed their advice.
8. Finally, let your goal be to provide history textbooks that inspire students to want to learn history. Students have much to learn from those who went before. While it is important to make a profit on your product, do not let the almighty dollar be your only focus. Consider the impact on the future of your country and the students of today who are tomorrow's leaders.

Teachers also share the responsibility for ensuring that the textbooks their students use are of the highest possible quality. Teachers need to become informed about the textbook writing process. In addition, they should take ownership of the adoption process by actively participating. Evaluate textbooks under consideration for adoption carefully and with a critical eye. Reject books that are poorly written while championing those that are well crafted. Apathetic teachers allow poor textbooks to be the norm, and publishers have little incentive to provide better books as long as teachers' voices are not heard. Your voice is important; let it be heard. Take a strong stand against textbook censorship as described in this article. The words of Martin Luther King, Jr. are apropos to this discussion: "History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period...was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people."

Concluding Remarks

It is incumbent upon educators to stay informed about the many issues related to textbook creation and adoption. Teachers' voices are vital if they expect to have high quality history texts to use as teaching tools. Until educators become informed and concerned, poorly written history textbooks will continue to exist, and well-written books may never reach the hands of American students. In both cases, censorship most often is the culprit, whether it is the open efforts of extremist groups who actively lobby state and local governments or the self-censorship of publishers who cede to the demands of extremist groups. United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart summed up the situation this way: "Censorship reflects a society's lack of confidence in itself. It is a hallmark of an authoritarian regime." Is this really what Americans want for their children—an authoritarian regime that controls the history that our children do and do not learn? If so, this bodes ill for the future of our nation.

Further Reading

Many articles and books address the topic that is the focus of this article. Two that are particularly interesting discuss the problem of historical accuracy in textbooks and related censorship issues: 1) James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (Touchstone, 1996) and 2) *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict what Students Learn* by Diane Ravitch (Knopf, 2003).

A Timeline of Selected Censorship Efforts

- After WWI, complaints began to arise from immigrant groups who wanted their stories included in the history of America. However, the American Federation of Labor wanted unions portrayed more favorably (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2004).
- From 1919-1928, the National Electric Light Association, the American Gas Association, and the American Railway Association quietly influenced textbooks through lobbying efforts at state agencies. Their goal was to remove any bias against public utilities (Stay Free! n.d.).
- 1938 Harold Rugg authored a popular textbook series, *Man and His Changing World*, used by nearly half of all students in the United States. By the end of the decade, Rugg's books had come under fire by the Advertising Federation of America and the New York Economic Council for undermining beliefs in private enterprise. As a result, six years later use of the series declined by 90% (Schugurensky, n.d.).
- Founded in 1949, the goal of Minute Women of the U.S.A., Incorporated was to fight against communism in government and education. The group clamored for the teaching of American heritage in schools. The most renowned chapter of the Minute Women was based in Houston where it was well known for its fight against communism. The Texas homemakers stirred up trouble in Houston's school system, causing resignations and firings of teachers and school officials, including the deputy superintendent of the Houston public schools (Benowitz, 2001).
- In the 1950s, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) published a list of 170 "subversive" books, while the American Legion wanted more patriotic fervor included in history textbooks (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2004).
- In its 1987 Resolution on Textbook Censorship, the Southern Baptist Convention asserted, "Be it further RESOLVED, That we urge all Southern Baptists to oppose censorship of the Judeo-Christian heritage as a historical fact from our public school textbooks; and

Be it finally RESOLVED, That we urge all Southern Baptists to encourage textbook selection committees working with city, county, and state boards of education not to accept textbooks that have censored the Judeo-Christian heritage" (Southern Baptist Convention, 1987).

- One recent California textbook adoption engendered outrage from various interest groups all who wanted to censor the texts or revise the history:
 - Native tribes complained that the books misinterpreted Indian religions.
 - Latinos griped about under-representation.
 - Aggrieved Chinese Americans accused the books of marginalizing the Chinese.
 - Demands for the adoption of Afro-centric textbooks came from Black educators whose goal was to demonstrate that the source of all civilization's greatest advances arose in Egypt, a black African nation.

- Japanese Americans called for revisions—World War II internment camps should be renamed “concentration camps.”
- One African American argued that the books were written from the perspectives of Pilgrims, immigrants, and slave masters.
- Homosexuals’ concerns centered on their claims that the books failed to cite homosexual historical figures.
- The Traditional Values Coalition asserted that the books were anti-Christian.
- Atheists objected that the books focused too much on religion in history.
- Jewish groups said the books expressed a Christian point of view, showing Judaism as a way station toward Christianity.
- Muslim groups stated that not only did the books misrepresent Islam, but also that only a Muslim could accurately retell Muslim history (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2004).

A Comparison of the Same Topic in Two History Texts

Hakim’s narrative style differs greatly from the prose of traditional textbooks. The excerpts about Senator Joseph McCarthy that follow provide one example:

Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin fanned Americans’ fear of communism to gain fame and power...Aware of McCarthy’s power to destroy careers, few people were brave enough to oppose him and his scare tactics. (*Why We Remember*, Herman Viola)

He was a liar. Not your ordinary small-time fibber. No, Senator Joseph McCarthy was an enormous, outrageous, beyond-belief liar. Trouble was, some people believed him. After all, no one thought a United States senator would lie. (*A History of US*, Joy Hakim)

References

- Abbott, K. (1994, April 26). Former teacher rewriting history. *Rocky Mountain News*.
- Adato, A. & Blonska, J. (2003). Lady Liberty. *People*, 59, 147.
- Armbruster, B.B., & Anderson, T.H. (1988). On selecting considerate content textbooks. *Remedial and Special Education*, 9(1), 47-52.
- Bennetta, W.J. (2000, July-August). More Hokum from Hakim. *The Textbook Letter*, 11(3). Retrieved February 27, 2006, from <http://www.textbookleague.org/113hak.htm#two>
- Benowitz, J.M. (2001). Minute women of the U.S.A. *The Handbook of Texas Online*. Retrieved February 27, 2006, from <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/MM/pwm1.html>
- Deam, J. (2006, January). A textbook case journalist raised the bar on student's reading. *The Denver Post*.
- Fitzgerald, M. (2000, February 25). Special report: History books thrill youngsters innovative series contrasts with usual boring content. *The Denver Post*.
- Francis, K. (1996, September). Fighting for truth, justice, and the American way: Eagles testify at textbook hearing. *Torch*, 6. Retrieved February 27, 2006, from <http://texaseagle.org/torch/09-96.html>
- Golden, D. (n.d.). New battleground in textbook wars: Religion in history: Hindu, Islamic, Jewish groups fault portrayals of events and often win: The untouchables weigh in. Retrieved February 27, 2006, from http://philbio.typepad.com/philosophy_of_biology/2006/01/new_battlegroun.html
- Hakim, J. (1994, May). The history connection: It's the real thing. *School Library Journal* 40(33).
- Harry Potter series tops list of most challenged books for four years in a row. (2003). *American Library Association*. Retrieved February 24, 2006, from <http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=pressreleases&template=/contentmanagement/contentdisplay.cfm&ContentID=9404>
- Hautala, E. (2000, March-April). Examining the treatment of religion in school books: Textbook-writers promote religious tales as History. *The Textbook Letter*, 11(1). Retrieved February 28, 2006, from <http://www.textbookleague.org/111hakm.htm>.
- Hautala, E. (2000, March-April). It's about time. *The Textbook Letter*, 11(1). Retrieved February 28, 2006, from <http://www.textbookleague.org/111time.htm#r1>
- Lord, M. (2003, January 20). Smelling the past. *U.S. News & World Report*, 26.
- McCann, M., & Horvath, M. (n.d.). *Issues of censorship in print media, notably book banning*. Retrieved February 28, 2006, from <http://www.sru.edu/depts/cisba/comm/banks/censorship/print/htm>
- Oxford University Press Reviews. (n.d.). Retrieved March 16, 2006, from <http://www.us.oup.com/us/collections/historyofus/reviews/?view=usa>
- Resolution on textbook censorship. (1987, June). St. Louis, Missouri. Southern Baptist Convention Resolutions.
- Schugurensky, D. (n.d.). 1983 textbooks, business pressures, and censorship: Harold Robey and the Rugg investigation. *The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto*. Retrieved February 24, 2006, from <http://fcis.oise.utoronto.ca/~dschugurensky/assignment1/1938rugg.html>

- Segall, S. [Review of: *The language police: How pressure groups restrict what students learn*, by Diane Ravitch], *Policy Review*.
- Sewall, G. T. (2000) *History textbooks at the new century: A report of the American Textbook Council*. New York: American Textbook Council.
- Stainburn, S. (2003, January). Must-see history: Joy Hakim hopes an upcoming PBS series based on her scene-filled books will make the past palatable to students of all ages. *Teacher Magazine*, 14(10).
- Stay Free! Top ten most embarrassing moments in the history of the textbook (in no particular order). Retrieved February 27, 2006, from www.stayfreemagazine.org/archives/18/topten.html
- Strauss, V. (2000, March 7). History in a new voice; Writer's vivid, opinionated style praised, but most schools choose traditional textbook. *The Washington Post*, 11. Strauss, V. (2004, April 21). Not just the facts, ma'am; Hakim's textbooks are filled with stories. *The Washington Post*, 15.
- The Textbook League, *A History of US Subjects Students to Religious Indoctrination*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 27, 2006, from <http://www.textbookleague.org/spjoyh.htm>
- The Mad, Mad World of Textbook Adoption* (2004). Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Washington, D.C.
- Tracy, J. (2003). Racing through history. *Journal of Education*, 184(2), 63-69.
- Wilson, E.O. (2002). The power of story. *American Educator*, 26, 8-11.

The Australian Sex Party's Fiona Patten. Who would have thought the government's proposed Internet filtering scheme would bring together so many disparate groups all united in their opposition to mandatory censorship? The newly-formed Australian Sex Party, for example, has come out and blasted the idea of Internet filtering, putting itself on the same side as the entire tech industry — from networking vendors to ISPs. Sex Party leader Fiona Patten believes the government is already backing down on its original promises and is shifting the focus of what type of content will be filtered.