



The Evidence

THE TEXAS PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

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1. Texas Education Agency Mission and Responsibilities.

Mission

The mission of the Texas Education Agency is to provide leadership, guidance, and resources to help schools meet the educational needs of all students.

Composition

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) is comprised of the commissioner of education and agency staff. The TEA and the State Board of Education (SBOE) guide and monitor activities and programs related to public education in Texas. The SBOE consists of 15 elected members representing different regions of the state. One member is appointed chair by the governor.

Roles & Responsibilities

Located in Austin, Texas, at 1701 N. Congress Ave., the TEA is the administrative unit for primary and secondary public education. Under the leadership of the commissioner of education, the TEA:

- manages the textbook adoption process;
- oversees development of the statewide curriculum;
- administers the statewide assessment program;
- administers a data collection system on public school students, staff, and finances;
- rates school districts under the statewide accountability system;
- operates research and information programs;
- monitors for compliance with federal guidelines; and
- serves as a fiscal agent for the distribution of state and federal funds.

The TEA operational costs are supported by both state and federal funds.

Source 2 accessed at <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.31.htm>.

2. Excerpts from the Texas State Education Code.

Sec. 31.001. FREE TEXTBOOKS. Textbooks selected for use in the public schools shall be furnished without cost to the students attending those schools.

Sec. 31.022. TEXTBOOK REVIEW AND ADOPTION.

- (a) The State Board of Education shall adopt a review and adoption cycle for textbooks for elementary grade levels, including pre-kindergarten, and secondary grade levels, for each subject in the required curriculum under Section 28.002.
- (b) The board shall organize the cycle for subjects in the foundation curriculum so that not more than one-sixth of the textbooks for subjects in the foundation curriculum are reviewed each year. The board shall adopt rules to provide for a full and complete investigation of textbooks for each subject in the foundation curriculum at least every six years. The adoption of textbooks for a subject in the foundation curriculum may be extended beyond the six-year period only if the content of textbooks for a subject is sufficiently current.
- (c) The board shall adopt rules to provide for a full and complete investigation of textbooks for each subject in the enrichment curriculum on a cycle the board considers appropriate.
- (d) At least 24 months before the beginning of the school year for which textbooks for a particular subject and grade level will be purchased under the review and adoption cycle adopted by the board, the board shall publish notice of the review and adoption cycle for those textbooks.
- (e) The board shall designate a request for production of textbooks in a subject area and grade level by the school year in which the textbooks are intended to be made available in classrooms and not by the school year in which the board makes the request for production.
- (f) The board shall amend any request for production issued for the purchase of textbooks to conform to the textbook funding levels provided by the General Appropriations Act for the year of implementation.

Sec. 31.023. TEXTBOOK LISTS.

- (a) For each subject and grade level, the State Board of Education shall adopt two lists of textbooks. The conforming list includes each textbook submitted for the subject and grade level that meets applicable physical specifications adopted by the State Board of Education and contains material covering each element of the essential knowledge and skills of the subject and grade level in the student version of the textbook, as well as in the teacher version of the textbook, as determined by the State Board of Education under

Section 28.002 and adopted under Section 31.024. The nonconforming list includes each textbook submitted for the subject and grade level that:

- (1) meets applicable physical specifications adopted by the State Board of Education;
 - (2) contains material covering at least half, but not all, of the elements of the essential knowledge and skills of the subject and grade level in the student version of the textbook, as well as in the teacher version of the textbook; and
 - (3) is adopted under Section 31.024.
- (b) Each textbook on a conforming or nonconforming list must be free from factual errors.

Sec. 31.024. ADOPTION BY STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

- (a) By majority vote, the State Board of Education shall:
- (1) place each submitted textbook on a conforming or nonconforming list; or
 - (2) reject a textbook submitted for placement on a conforming or nonconforming list.
- (b) Not later than December 1 of the year preceding the school year for which the textbooks for a particular subject and grade level will be purchased under the cycle adopted by the board under Section 31.022, the board shall provide the lists of adopted textbooks to each school district. Each nonconforming list must include the reasons an adopted textbook is not eligible for the conforming list.

ASSESSING THE STANDARDS

Source 3 from Peter Marshall, President, Peter Marshall Ministries, *Review of Current Social Studies TEKS*, Copyright © 2010 by Peter Marshall. Reproduced by permission from the author.

3. An Evangelical Minister Evaluates TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills).

[In 2009, the Texas Board of Education sought outside evaluations of their existing social studies curriculum standards. Their website posts the evaluations of the six individuals consulted: two evangelical ministers and four scholars, the latter group representing the fields of history, government, and education. Reverend Peter Marshall's evaluation is excerpted below. Transcriptions of his entire assessment and those of the other evaluators are publicly available through the TEA Website.]

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Feedback on the current K -12 Social Studies TEKS

To: Monica Martinez

Division of Curriculum

Dear Ms. Martinez et al:

I have divided my comments into two sections, the first dealing with general concerns, and the second listing individual entries that seem deficient.

Section A

As I began my review of the current K-12 social studies TEKS I expected to find that the format of the TEKS was acceptable, and that I would only be recommending relatively minor changes in the content of the eight strands for the various grade levels. Unfortunately, that has not proven to be the case. . . .

Additionally, the trend in American education has been to study American culture in comparison to other cultures around the world, which leads to the rejection of the idea that there is anything unique or exceptional about American civilization. Yet, various Texas state laws concerning education correctly call for a teaching emphasis on patriotism, citizenship, and the free-enterprise system. Fulfilling these educational mandates in the State of Texas will require the students to learn why America is the greatest country in the world, and why they should be proud to be an American. . . .

Finally, the social studies skills strand affords no direction whatsoever for the textbook publishers or the teachers. Take, for example, the entries in Chapter I 13. 24.

Grade 8, (31). It says that "the student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms." [No kidding?]. "The student is expected to: (A) use social studies terminology correctly." [And just exactly, pray tell, what is "social studies terminology"?] (B) "use standard grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and punctuation." [That is usually covered under something called "English"]. (C) "transfer information from one medium to another . . . using computer software as appropriate" [these Jr. High students learned to do that 5 or 6 grades ago!]. (D) "create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information." [This is so vague as to be completely useless]. . . .

Besides the formatting of the TEKS there are other important general concerns. Nowhere to be found throughout the document is there any mention of the motivations of the discoverers, settlers, and founders of America. Reading through the TEKS as they are currently constituted could give the impression that history just "happens," that random impersonal forces control events. That is, of course, the false teaching of Marxism—i.e. that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" is inevitable. However, history is actually the results of decisions made by individual human beings—people make history. And their decisions and actions are a product of their belief systems, their worldview. Ideas shape history. There is always a context, a reason for the decisions made and the actions taken.

Studying history this way—telling the stories of real people and what motivated the decisions they made, and then what happened as a result of those decisions—gives the present-day student the exciting idea that he or she can influence the course of history. And that is one of the main things we are aiming at in the education of our children. We want them to reach young adulthood with the vision that they can be world changers!

Therefore, it is imperative that the textbooks and the teachers handle the teaching of history by considering the motivations of those who made American history. In our American situation it is indisputable that the motivational role of the Bible and the Christian faith was paramount in the settling of most of the original 13 colonies, notably Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. The settling of America was not “accidental” but purposeful. For example, the Pilgrims were motivated to risk their lives in coming to America because of their Christian faith, and their desire to propagate that faith in the American wilderness. Even small children need to understand that the Pilgrims were not just “people who liked to take long journeys in ships” (as one elementary history text puts it), but rather a group of people who believed in God and tried to live by the teachings of the Bible. Pilgrim Governor William Bradford made it clear that “they had a great hope and an inward zeal . . . of laying some good foundation . . . for the propagating and advancing of the Gospel of the Kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world.” They were not refugees thrown up on the rocky shores of New England, but missionaries with a strong sense of call and purpose. They knew exactly what they were about.

When the New England Confederation was formed in 1643 between the Puritan colonies of New Haven, Connecticut, Plymouth, and Massachusetts Bay, they said “we all came into these parts with one and the same end and aim, namely, to advance the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Additionally, William Penn noted that “The acquisition and government of the Colony (that bears his name today) was so to serve the truth and the people of the Lord, that an example may be set to the nations.”

Similarly, the Founding Fathers were men who believed that government must be based on the God-given inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that belong to all people. Without understanding their motivations, it is impossible to understand why they resisted the tyranny of Great Britain.

Countless other examples from colonial America may be adduced, but the point is that the discovery, settling, and founding of the colonies happened because of the Biblical worldviews of those involved. Only when this is taken into account can America’s founding be properly understood. And, if the cause and effect relationship between people’s worldview and their actions is made an integral element of the teaching of history, then the study of American history can become *inspirational* for our students in regard to the formation of their own lives, rather than simply *informational*. . . .

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History should never be taught as a continuous progression of names, dates, and places, and events, but rather as a narrative. What students at all grade levels will remember best is stories, so the facts of history should be interwoven with narratives. For the lower grade levels, the story would be the main element of the history lesson. In the upper grade levels, history would be examined more analytically, but the stories would still play an important role in the teaching. At any grade level, a good history teacher is a good storyteller.

Second, it is a matter of great concern that there is no mention here of the foundational documents of American history —particularly the Mayflower Compact, the Massachusetts Body of Liberties, the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Constitution, and the Northwest Ordinance. And there are others that should be included. While the TEKS (2) quoted above may not have been intended to be an exhaustive list of supplementary materials, and while some of the founding documents are mentioned briefly elsewhere, the centrality of these foundational documents in our history should be taught to all students, even those in elementary school. Further, since study of these documents is mandated by Texas State law during Freedom Week, the introduction to each major section of the TEKS should explicitly name them and underscore the importance of their use in the classroom. In this way, even young students will learn that Americans believe in a government of laws, and not one dictated by the whims and passions of men. This will, of course, begin to lay a proper foundation for their understanding of citizenship. . . .

At all levels of education, K-12, attention must be paid to the basic concepts that underlie the American tradition of constitutional law government. Further, it is impossible for students to understand American civilization if they do not learn the sources of those concepts. For example, the separation of powers in our Federal government is rooted in the Founding Fathers' clear understanding of the sinfulness of man. . . . many other Founding Fathers believed that because of man's sinfulness, no one is to be entrusted with the absolute power of government. Hence, they rejected monarchy and gave us the separation of powers in our form of government.

Another foundational concept that reflects the Biblical influence on American government is the consent of the governed. To the last man, the Founding Fathers believed that no one has the right to govern another human being without that person's consent. As Lincoln said, that is "the sheet anchor of American government." Government by the consent of the governed found its earliest expression in our history in the Mayflower Compact of 1620, when the Pilgrim elders signed a one-page document that stated that they "freely covenanted together to form a civil body politic." But the roots of government by the consent of the governed can be traced all the way back to the Israelites in the Sinai wilderness under Moses. When he had read the laws of God to the people, they gave their consent to be governed by these laws (Exodus 24:3, 7).

In point of fact, American history cannot be understood without appreciating the importance of the word "covenant." From the earliest days of New England,

the settlers were concerned to live up to the tenets of their Christian faith, which required them to “love their neighbors as themselves.” Herein lay the only hope for a just society, for if we are not concerned for the welfare of our neighbors, justice is not possible. In fact, we make a mockery of the word justice if there is no civic concern, no commitment to care for others. Our second President, John Adams, in an address to the Massachusetts militia in 1798, said “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” In order for the Constitution to “work,” then, we must be civic-minded—we must care for the rights and welfare of others. The Founding Fathers’ Biblical worldview taught them that human beings were by nature self-centered, so they believed that the supernatural influence of the Spirit of God was needed to free us from ourselves so that we can care for our neighbors. That is what Adams means when he says that the Constitution can only work for a moral and religious people.

In light of the overwhelming historical evidence of the influence of the Christian faith in the founding of America, it is simply not up to acceptable academic standards that throughout the social studies TEKS I could find only one reference to the role of religion in America’s past. . . .

Section B

I would also like to call attention to specific TEKS entries that seem deficient and should be rewritten. Unfortunately, many of the ones concerning history seem to be compiled by someone more concerned to be “politically correct” than to accurately portray American history. Out of many that could be listed, here is a sampling:

- 113.2 Kindergarten. (11) Culture. The student is expected to (B) “identify differences among people.” This is precisely the kind of thing that can be better covered under geography.
- 113.3 Grade 1. (4) History. The student is expected to (A) “identify contributions of historical figures such as Henrietta King and Thurgood Marshall who have influenced,” etc. These two selections are not strong enough examples in light of the multiplicity of persons who have impacted American history. Harriet Tubman and Sam Houston would be better choices, and there are hundreds of others.
- 113.3 Grade 2. (4) History. Again, in regard to (B) Amelia Earhart was an aviator, and not particularly an example of “inventiveness.” People like Cyrus McCormick and Alexander Graham Bell would be better choices.
- 113.3 Grade 2. (11) Government. The student is expected to: “identify some governmental services in the community such as libraries, schools, and parks,” etc., etc. These examples are not as good as: the fire and rescue department, the police, and school buses.
- 113.3 Grade 2. (14) Citizenship. (C) “Explain how selected customs, symbols, and celebrations reflect an American love of individualism, inventiveness, and freedom.” It would be far better to have this read: “Explain how

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selected customs, symbols, and celebrations reflect American beliefs and values such as freedom, love of country, and respect for the law.”

- 113.3 Grade 3. (2) History. (A). “Identify reasons people have formed communities, including a need for security, law, and material well-being.” This is not history—this is sociology, and should not be in a history unit.
- 113.7 Grade 5. (b) (1) History. (B) “describe the accomplishments of significant colonial leaders such as Anne Hutchinson, William Penn, John Smith, and Roger Williams.” Anne Hutchinson does not belong in the company of these eminent gentlemen. She was certainly not a significant colonial leader, and didn’t accomplish anything except getting herself exiled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for making trouble.
- 113.7 Grade 5 (19) Citizenship (C). “Identify significant individuals such as Cesar Chavez and Benjamin Franklin who modeled active participation in the democratic process.” To have Cesar Chavez listed next to Ben Franklin is ludicrous. Chavez is hardly the kind of role model that ought to be held up to our children as someone worthy of emulation.
- 113.7 Grade 5 (24) Science and technology and society. (A) Describe the contributions of famous inventors and scientists such as Neil Armstrong, John J. Audubon; Benjamin Banneker, Clarence Birdseye, George Washington Carver, Thomas Edison, and Carl Sagan.” This is a rather pathetic list. The only ones worthy of inclusion are George Washington Carver and Thomas Edison. What about Thomas Watson, the Wright brothers, Henry Ford, Alexander Graham Bell?
- 113.24. Grade 8 (13) Economics. (A) “Identify economic differences among different regions of the United States.” This belongs in geography. (B) “Explain reasons for the development of the plantation system, the growth of the slave trade, and the spread of slavery.” This belongs in history. (C) “Analyze the causes and effects of economic differences among different regions of the United States at selected times in U.S. history.” This belongs in geography. These are further examples of why a separate strand for economics is not really justified.
- 113.35. United States Government. (14) Citizenship. (C) “Analyze issues addressed in selected cases such as *Engel v. Vitale*, *Miranda v. Arizona*,” etc., etc. A glaring omission here is *Roe v. Wade*, which has arguably more impacted American life than any other Supreme Court decision in the twentieth century.

[In early 2010, the SBOE revealed the proposed changes to the social studies curriculum. A flurry of debate ensued. A full rendering of the curriculum draft, with its extensive revisions, is too long to include here, but it can be viewed on the TEA Website (www.tea.state.tx.us).]

Source 4 from Ron Briley, "The Texas State Board of Education and History Standards: A Teacher's Perspective," in History News Network, March 29, 2010. Copyright © 2010 History News Network. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.

4. A Texas Teacher Weighs in on the Curriculum Revision.

"The Texas State Board of Education and History Standards: A Teacher's Perspective"

By Ron Briley

Mr. Briley is Assistant Headmaster, Sandia Preparatory School.

As a young boy growing up in the Texas Panhandle in the 1950s and 1960s, I was indoctrinated into the myths of the Alamo and Texas exceptionalism, although I do not recall learning much about the right of Texas to secede from the Union.⁵ Despite learning more about Texas high school football than the contributions of blacks and Hispanics to the making of the state, the conservative orientation of the curriculum did not prevent me from questioning the Vietnam War and embracing the Civil Rights Movement as a first generation college student. And I have confidence that the teachers and students of the Texas public school system will be able to rise above and see through the narrow and partisan history standards adopted by the Texas State Board of Education which have drawn the ire of many historians throughout the nation.

Unfortunately, this debate over standards often rages with little input from history teachers who are expected to implement mandated curriculum. This attitude derives from a fundamental lack of respect in our culture for teachers. Thus, it is assumed that dentists and real estate agents are better equipped to make curricular decisions than are history educators.

Of course, I must confess that I was not too impressed with my high school history teachers, who were primarily football coaches. Class activities were limited to outlining the textbook and preparing reports from *Encyclopedia Britannica*. One could either take a test on Friday or choose the Southwest Conference trivia option. But in defense of these coaches, it should be pointed out that their employment was dependent not upon their history knowledge, but rather their won/loss record on the football field. Fortunately, even Texas has moved somewhat beyond the stereotypical high school football coach as history teacher.

There are also some credential issues with history educators as often a teacher with a social studies degree may be teaching American history with as few as six college hours of history. Nevertheless, there is a strong movement to enhance history education around the nation, led by organizations such as the National Council for History Education, Society for History Education, World History Association, American Historical Association, and Organization of American Historians. The federally-financed Teaching American History grants provide excellent models of

5. This is a reference to Texas Governor Rick Perry's 2009 suggestion that his state might leave the United States.

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collaboration between university professors and teachers in the schools. Opportunities for summer history education are also available through the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Gilder Lehrman Institute.

Perhaps the biggest problem for organizations such as the Texas State Board of Education, however, is a fundamental lack of understanding regarding history as an academic discipline. There is a popular assumption that history must be easy to teach, as it is an unchanging body of knowledge which does not require the analytical rigor of science and mathematics. Yet history is an exercise in interpretation in which we filter the past through the lens of the evolving present. Thus, the Civil Rights Movement and feminism have encouraged a more inclusive history that considers the contribution of women, Latino/as, Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Muslim Americans to the building of America. The question is not simply which facts, but whose facts. It is a matter of perspective. The history of Western settlement may differ depending upon whether the story is told from the point of view of a pioneer or Native American. In fact, it seems to be the concept of multiple perspectives that most frightens those seeking to impose absolute standards upon the schools.

For example, it is not unreasonable that consideration be given to the role played by groups such as the National Rifle Association and "moral majority" in the 1980s resurgence of conservatism, but it would be difficult to tell the whole story of American politics in the late twentieth century without also including Ted Kennedy. Likewise, it would be a serious omission to discuss the rise of industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries without taking into account the countervailing power of Eugene Debs and the Socialist Party, which enjoyed strong support in Texas and Oklahoma before the First World War. The discipline offers an excellent opportunity for teachers to instill critical thinking by encouraging students to reach their own conclusions based upon research and analysis of primary documents and sources.

It is the fostering of critical thinking to which the Texas State Board seems most opposed. Rather than encouraging students to investigate the role of religion in the forging of the American nation, students are instructed to accept that the founders envisioned a Christian nation. According to the Texas standards, the Second Amendment is to be treated as an absolute, rather than presenting alternative interpretations and letting students reach their own conclusions. After all, the First Amendment freedom of speech is not recognized by the courts as absolute. It is important to examine the role of Ronald Reagan in ending the Cold War, but it is equally essential to appreciate the emergence of Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, for American history must be placed within the global context in which students will be living during the twenty-first century.

Perhaps the issue boils down to the traditional nostrum that the purpose of history is to instill patriotism in the youth. Yet to assume their duties as citizens in a democracy, our students must learn to think critically and question the conventional wisdom. It is this type of engaged citizenry, rather than rote patriotism, which will propel the United States forward in the next century.

And this is the type of teaching which I attempt to offer my students. I tend to align myself more with the Howard Zinn⁶ school of historiography and an emphasis upon history from the bottom up. It is, however, a perspective which I share with my students, urging them to challenge me with differing points of analysis. I view it as my charge to present students with multiple perspectives. Thus, when we study the New Deal, it is crucial for them to understand the concept of a social safety net program such as Social Security. It is equally important to recognize that the liberalism of the New Deal was questioned by conservatives who believed that the welfare state was undermining American individualism, while critics on the left insist that Roosevelt missed an opportunity to fundamentally alter the face of American capitalism.

If a teacher is going to foster multiple perspectives, one must be tolerant of opposing interpretations. One young man in my class took exception to the caricature of John D. Rockefeller as a robber baron. He wrote an outstanding research paper of approximately twenty-five pages defending the oil tycoon. I composed a five page rebuttal of my own, but he certainly deserved an A for his scholarship. In fact, some of my most memorable teaching moments arise from classroom debate in which students, with whom I disagree, raise challenging questions. This dialogue keeps me on my toes and makes me a better teacher. I hope that my classroom models a civil discourse which is all too often missing in the halls of Congress.

Yet, it is this type of vibrant democracy which the Texas State Board of Education seeks to stifle. For over thirty years, I have taught American history in an independent school, and I recognize that many of my public school colleagues are under greater pressure than I to adhere to state standards. Nevertheless, I have faith that dedicated teachers and inquiring young minds will find ways to subvert the antidemocratic directives of the Texas board. After all, the real teaching and learning begins when the classroom door closes.

NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE TEXAS CURRICULUM DEBATE

Source 5 from the *Austin American-Statesman*, March 11, 2010, "Politics, sex, religion are all fair game at education board meeting," by Kate Alexander. Copyright © 2010 *The Austin American-Statesman*. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.

5. The *Austin American-Statesman* Reports on SBOE Deliberations.

Sex, money, religion and race.

State Board of Education members discussed it all Thursday, delivering a riveting drama as they trudged through another day of debate about social studies curriculum standards.

6. Zinn was a distinguished historian and committed civil rights activist who authored *A People's History of the United States*, an extraordinarily popular book that looked at history from the bottom up, emphasizing the experiences of Indians, slaves, laboring classes, and women.

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The ideological divide on the 15-member [board] broke into a wide chasm by early evening, prompting board member Mary Helen Berlanga, D-Corpus Christi, to storm out of the meeting.

"I've had it. This is it. I'm leaving for the evening," Berlanga said. The board, she said, is pretending this is "white America, Hispanics don't exist."

Berlanga has focused almost exclusively on adding the names of minority historical figures to the standards. Not all of her suggestions have been embraced, and she said the board was preparing to undo many of her efforts.

"I've never seen a rewrite like this," said Berlanga, a board member since 1982. "This is a step backwards."

Board member David Bradley, R-Beaumont, characterized Berlanga's outburst as "poor boardmanship."

"Losing is hell," Bradley said.

The standards under consideration will serve as the framework for history, government and economics textbooks and lessons for the 4.7 million Texas public school students. And there are controversies on seemingly every page.

Board member Barbara Cargill, R-The Woodlands, objected to a standard for a high school sociology course that addressed the difference between sex and gender. It was eliminated in a 9-to-6 vote.

She worried that a discussion of that issue would lead students into the world of "transvestites, transsexuals and who knows what else."

"This is very, very inappropriate for high school students," Cargill said.

But board member Mavis Knight, D-Dallas, countered that it was naïve to think high school students would not know that some of their classmates were gay, bisexual or transgender.

"It is no secret to them, so you might as well bring it out into the open and discuss it," Knight said.

In a wide-ranging debate, the board members grappled with the right to bear arms, the gold standard, hip-hop and genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan.

They also polished up references to the American "free enterprise" economic system and removed most mentions of "capitalism," a word that board member Ken Mercer, R-San Antonio, said has a negative connotation.

The ideological tensions on the board came into sharp focus when Knight introduced a proposal that would emphasize the U.S. founders' yearning for a separation between church and state.

"We know that religion was one of the major influences but not the only influence as to the founding of our country," Knight said, defending her proposal to change the standards for a high school U.S. government course.

Board member Cynthia Dunbar, R-Richmond, shot back, saying that she and other conservatives on the board have been unfairly criticized for trying to inject their religious views into the standards.

"No we're not, but nor do we want our religious history to be tainted and to be drawn from a viewpoint that is not historically accurate," said Dunbar, a constitutional law professor at Regent University, which was founded by the Rev. Pat Robertson.

Knight's proposal failed.

Kathy Miller, president of the Texas Freedom Network, said the board's 10 Republicans had voted to "reject the most fundamental constitutional protection for religious freedom in America today: the principle that government may not disfavor or promote any religion over all others."

The Texas Freedom Network bills itself as a watchdog of the religious right.

The vote also drew a heated objection from the Anti-Defamation League, an organization that fights against anti-Semitism.

"The leaders who created our system of government were all too familiar with religious oppression and its consequences, and that influenced the principles on which they founded this nation," said Karen Gross, the Austin community director for the organization. "We believe that's a critical part of American history which Texas school children should learn and understand."

Jonathan Saenz, director of legislative affairs for the conservative Liberty Institute, heralded the victories of the board's conservative bloc.

"Thus far, the liberal efforts to infiltrate, indoctrinate and saturate our social studies with narrow ideology have failed," Saenz said.

A preliminary vote on the standards is scheduled for today, with a final decision in May.

THE NATIONAL MEDIA COVERS THE TEXAS CONTROVERSY

Source 6 From *The New York Times*, March 13, 2010, "Conservatives on Texas Panel Carry the Day on Curriculum Change," by James C. McKinley, Jr., A10, copyright © 3/13/2010 *The New York Times*. All rights served. Used by permission and protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States. The printing, copying, redistribution, or retransmission of the material without express written permission is prohibited.

6. *The New York Times*.

AUSTIN, Tex. — After three days of turbulent meetings, the Texas Board of Education on Friday approved a social studies curriculum that will put a conservative stamp on history and economics textbooks, stressing the superiority of American capitalism, questioning the Founding Fathers' commitment to a purely secular government and presenting Republican political philosophies in a more positive light.

The vote was 10 to 5 along party lines, with all the Republicans on the board voting for it.

The board, whose members are elected, has influence beyond Texas because the state is one of the largest buyers of textbooks. In the digital age, however, that influence has diminished as technological advances have made it possible for publishers to tailor books to individual states.

In recent years, board members have been locked in an ideological battle between a bloc of conservatives who question Darwin's theory of evolution and believe the Founding Fathers were guided by Christian principles, and a handful

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of Democrats and moderate Republicans who have fought to preserve the teaching of Darwinism and the separation of church and state.

Since January, Republicans on the board have passed more than 100 amendments to the 120-page curriculum standards affecting history, sociology and economics courses from elementary to high school. The standards were proposed by a panel of teachers.

"We are adding balance," said Dr. Don McLeroy, the leader of the conservative faction on the board, after the vote. "History has already been skewed. Academia is skewed too far to the left."

Battles over what to put in science and history books have taken place for years in the 20 states where state boards must adopt textbooks, most notably in California and Texas. But rarely in recent history has a group of conservative board members left such a mark on a social studies curriculum.

Efforts by Hispanic board members to include more Latino figures as role models for the state's large Hispanic population were consistently defeated, prompting one member, Mary Helen Berlanga, to storm out of a meeting late Thursday night, saying, "They can just pretend this is a white America and Hispanics don't exist."

"They are going overboard, they are not experts, they are not historians," she said. "They are rewriting history, not only of Texas but of the United States and the world."

The curriculum standards will now be published in a state register, opening them up for 30 days of public comment. A final vote will be taken in May, but given the Republican dominance of the board, it is unlikely that many changes will be made.

The standards, reviewed every decade, serve as a template for textbook publishers, who must come before the board next year with drafts of their books. The board's makeup will have changed by then because Dr. McLeroy lost in a primary this month to a more moderate Republican, and two others—one Democrat and one conservative Republican—announced they were not seeking re-election.

There are seven members of the conservative bloc on the board, but they are often joined by one of the other three Republicans on crucial votes. There were no historians, sociologists or economists consulted at the meetings, though some members of the conservative bloc held themselves out as experts on certain topics.

The conservative members maintain that they are trying to correct what they see as a liberal bias among the teachers who proposed the curriculum. To that end, they made dozens of minor changes aimed at calling into question, among other things, concepts like the separation of church and state and the secular nature of the American Revolution.

"I reject the notion by the left of a constitutional separation of church and state," said David Bradley, a conservative from Beaumont who works in real estate. "I have \$1,000 for the charity of your choice if you can find it in the Constitution."

They also included a plank to ensure that students learn about "the conservative resurgence of the 1980s and 1990s, including Phyllis Schlafly, the Contract With America, the Heritage Foundation, the Moral Majority and the National Rifle Association."

Dr. McLeroy, a dentist by training, pushed through a change to the teaching of the civil rights movement to ensure that students study the violent philosophy of the Black Panthers in addition to the nonviolent approach of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He also made sure that textbooks would mention the votes in Congress on civil rights legislation, which Republicans supported.

"Republicans need a little credit for that," he said. "I think it's going to surprise some students."

Mr. Bradley won approval for an amendment saying students should study "the unintended consequences" of the Great Society legislation, affirmative action and Title IX legislation. He also won approval for an amendment stressing that Germans and Italians as well as Japanese were interned in the United States during World War II, to counter the idea that the internment of Japanese was motivated by racism.

Other changes seem aimed at tamping down criticism of the right. Conservatives passed one amendment, for instance, requiring that the history of McCarthyism include "how the later release of the Venona papers confirmed suspicions of communist infiltration in U.S. government." The Venona papers were transcripts of some 3,000 communications between the Soviet Union and its agents in the United States.

Mavis B. Knight, a Democrat from Dallas, introduced an amendment requiring that students study the reasons "the founding fathers protected religious freedom in America by barring the government from promoting or disfavoring any particular religion above all others."

It was defeated on a party-line vote.

After the vote, Ms. Knight said, "The social conservatives have perverted accurate history to fulfill their own agenda."

In economics, the revisions add Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek, two champions of free-market economic theory, among the usual list of economists to be studied, like Adam Smith, Karl Marx and John Maynard Keynes. They also replaced the word "capitalism" throughout their texts with the "free-enterprise system."

"Let's face it, capitalism does have a negative connotation," said one conservative member, Terri Leo. "You know, 'capitalist pig!' "

In the field of sociology, another conservative member, Barbara Cargill, won passage of an amendment requiring the teaching of "the importance of personal responsibility for life choices" in a section on teenage suicide, dating violence, sexuality, drug use and eating disorders.

"The topic of sociology tends to blame society for everything," Ms. Cargill said.

Even the course on world history did not escape the board's scalpel.

Cynthia Dunbar, a lawyer from Richmond who is a strict constitutionalist and thinks the nation was founded on Christian beliefs, managed to cut Thomas Jefferson from a list of figures whose writings inspired revolutions in the late 18th century and 19th century, replacing him with St. Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin and William Blackstone. (Jefferson is not well liked among conservatives on the board because he coined the term "separation between church and state.")

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“The Enlightenment was not the only philosophy on which these revolutions were based,” Ms. Dunbar said.

Source 7 from *The Washington Post*, March 18, 2010, “Historians speak out against Proposed Texas textbook changes,” by Michael Birnbaum, A3, copyright © 3/18/2010 *The Washington Post*. All rights reserved. Used by permission and protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States. The printing, copying, redistribution, or retransmission of the material without express written permission is prohibited.

7. *The Washington Post.*

Historians on Tuesday criticized proposed revisions to the Texas social studies curriculum, saying that many of the changes are historically inaccurate and that they would affect textbooks and classrooms far beyond the state’s borders.

The changes, which were preliminarily approved last week by the Texas board of education and are expected to be given final approval in May, will reach deeply into Texas history classrooms, defining what textbooks must include and what teachers must cover. The curriculum plays down the role of Thomas Jefferson among the founding fathers, questions the separation of church and state, and claims that the U.S. government was infiltrated by Communists during the Cold War.

Because the Texas textbook market is so large, books assigned to the state’s 4.7 million students often rocket to the top of the market, decreasing costs for other school districts and leading them to buy the same materials.

“The books that are altered to fit the standards become the bestselling books, and therefore within the next two years they’ll end up in other classrooms,” said Fritz Fischer, chairman of the National Council for History Education, a group devoted to history teaching at the pre-college level. “It’s not a partisan issue, it’s a good history issue.”

Each subject in Texas’s curriculum is revised every 10 years, and the basic social studies framework was introduced by a panel of teachers last year. But the elected state board of education, which is comprised of 10 Republicans and five Democrats, has made more than 100 amendments to the curriculum since January.

Discussions ranged from whether President Reagan should get more attention (yes), whether hip-hop should be included as part of lessons on American culture (no), and whether President of the Confederacy Jefferson Davis’s inaugural address should be studied alongside Abraham Lincoln’s (yes).

Of particular contention was the requirement that lessons on McCarthyism note that “the later release of the Venona papers confirmed suspicions of communist infiltration in U.S. government.”

The Venona papers document communication between the Soviet Union and its spies. Historians dispute the extent to which transcripts show Soviet involvement in American government.

Also contentious were changes that asserted Christian faith of the founding fathers. Historians say the founding fathers had a variety of approaches to religion and faith; some, like Jefferson, were quite secular.

Some textbook authors expressed discomfort with the state board's changes, and it is unclear how readily historians will go along with some of the proposals.

"I'm made uncomfortable by mandates of this kind for sure," said Paul S. Boyer, emeritus professor at University of Wisconsin-Madison and the author of several of the most popular U.S. history textbooks, including some that are on the approved list in Texas.

Boyer said he had not fully reviewed the Texas curriculum and did not know how he would respond to it. But he added that in theory, changes in his text could be required that would make him uncomfortable endorsing his own book.

Texas school districts are able to buy books that the state board rejects but designates as containing at least half the required curriculum—but they'll have to use their own money to do so. Almost all currently use state funds to buy textbooks off the approved list, said Suzanne Marchman, a spokeswoman for the Texas Education Agency.

One publisher said Tuesday that changes in technology, including the introduction of online components, make it easier and cheaper to tailor textbooks to specific states and requirements, and downplayed the impact that Texas's decisions would have on the rest of the country.

"We now have the ability to deliver completely customized content" to different states, said Joseph Blumenfeld, spokesman for Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, one of three major publishers that supply Texas with most of its social studies textbooks.

But some historians weren't so certain. Fischer, who is a historian at University of Northern Colorado, noted that first-year teachers fall back on what's most readily available to them — their textbooks.

"Teachers have a lot to do and a lot on their plate, and if there's a nice big textbook that the kids have been taking home, they'll use it," he said.

Source 8 from *The Dallas Morning News*, April 17, 2010, "Bill White derides Texas education board's actions," by Terrence Stutz. Reprinted with permission of *The Dallas Morning News*.

8. *The Dallas Morning News*.

SAN MARCOS, Texas – Democratic gubernatorial nominee Bill White on Friday joined in the criticism of the State Board of Education for its version of new curriculum standards for history and other social studies classes.

Speaking to several hundred teachers, White attacked Gov. Rick Perry and his appointed chair of the education board as he called for a new direction in public education in the state.

Referring to the months of heated debate over the curriculum standards, White said, "Wouldn't it be great to have a governor who appointed a State Board of Education chair who understood that you ought to leave the curriculum to professionals?"

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His reference was to a bloc of social conservative Republicans on the board, including chairwoman Gail Lowe, who have rejected many of the recommendations of teachers and academics who were appointed to write new curriculum standards for Texas schools—subject to board approval. Perry appointed Lowe as chairwoman in July.

The changes made by the board—many reflecting a more conservative and religious view of U.S. history—have aroused opposition from educators and lawmakers in Texas and other states.

Many states will wind up with those standards as publishers often market textbooks geared for Texas across the nation.

“Help me tell the rest of the nation that Texas is better than some of the actions taken by our State Board of Education,” White said in urging teachers to support him at the annual convention of the Texas State Teachers Association. The association has endorsed White in the governor’s race.

“We can’t afford to go backwards in education.”

Social conservatives on the board contend they are representing the majority of Texans in writing the standards.

White also blamed Perry for record college tuition increases during his tenure. Those increases occurred after Republican leaders decided to deregulate tuition to ease a state revenue crunch in 2003.

“We will never be as good as we can be if college tuition goes up by 82 percent as it has under Governor Perry over the last six years,” he said, arguing that tuition rates are now beyond the reach of many families.

The Democrat also repeated his criticism of the Republican governor for not doing more to stem the student dropout rate.

“The way to deal with the dropout problem is not to mislead people about it,” he said, questioning Perry’s assertion that the dropout rate is 10 percent. White says about 30 percent of students are unaccounted for.

“It doesn’t add up,” White said. “The fact is a lot of students slip through the cracks, and they don’t know if about 800,000 young people [in each graduating class] graduate or not.”

The Perry campaign has criticized White for using “misleading” figures.

“One dropout is one too many, but Texas does not have a 30 percent dropout rate as White has suggested,” a spokesman for Perry said.

LETTERS, OPINIONS, AND NEW MEDIA

Source 9 from *The New York Times*, March 16, 2010, “The Battle Over Textbooks in Texas,” to the Editor, by Daniel Czitrom. Reprinted by permission from the author.

9. *New York Times* Letters to the Editor.

[Following the *New York Times* coverage of the Texas curriculum debates, individuals from across the country expressed their reaction. The *Times* chose to print the following letters to the editor on March 16, 2010.]

To the Editor:

Re "Conservatives on Texas Panel Carry the Day on Curriculum Change" (news article, March 13):

As a co-author of an American history textbook that was effectively banned in Texas eight years ago, I had a strong feeling of déjà vu all over again while reading about the state's latest curricular wars.

Back in 2002 the school board, egged on by well-organized conservative groups with deep pockets, excluded *Out of Many: A History of the American People* (Pearson Prentice Hall), allegedly for an offensive passage discussing prostitution on the Western frontier. But the real reason became clear as that controversy played out, and I think that it helps explain what's happening today.

Many conservatives are simply unwilling to accept how much the writing and teaching of American history have changed over the last 40 years. They want an American history that ignores or marginalizes African-Americans, women, Latinos, immigrants and popular culture. They prefer a pseudo-patriotic history that denies the fundamental conflicts that have shaped our past.

Rather than acknowledge that genuine disagreements over interpretation and emphasis are the lifeblood of history, they reduce it all to a cartoonish process of balancing "bias." This sort of right-wing political correctness impoverishes our students and teachers.

Daniel Czitrom

South Hadley, Mass., March 14, 2010

[The writer is a professor of history at Mount Holyoke College.]

To the Editor:

In a country so bitterly divided by fundamental values and beliefs, it is not shocking that a small faction of people would target the most powerful outlet for creating change: our education system.

Attacking educational systems is a proven method of change. Conservative madrasas throughout the Middle East know that. There, young students are receiving deeply disturbing educations based on fundamental misinterpretations of Islamic values and norms. Will this be the path of America's education system?

In the 30 days allotted for public comment, this decision, and all of its permeations, must be fought for the sake of our students and the sake of our country's education future.

Sarah Peck

Somerville, Mass., March 14, 2010

To the Editor:

For years, the historical profession overlooked the role of conservatism and of Latinos in American history, and the scholarly record has been enriched tremendously by the excellent work done in this area in the last 20 years.

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K-12 textbooks stand to benefit from this more expansive perspective, though both groups are mistaken that the solution to the problems of the current curriculum resides in a “correct” history, revised based on their specific political interests. Such important inclusions are not mutually exclusive, nor need they constitute the victory of one infallible narrative.

Rather, teaching how conservatism and liberalism have emerged as powerful social and political phenomena instead of merely adding isolated facts to curriculums would transform how students learn about their past and shed light on the historical processes that have given rise to both the liberal and conservative movements vying for their curriculum.

Natalia Mehlman-Petrzela
New York, March 14, 2010

The writer, an assistant professor of education studies and history at Eugene Lang College, the New School for Liberal Arts, is writing a book about grass-roots activism on the political right and left regarding controversial educational questions in the 1960s and 1970s.

To the Editor:

My wife, who has been a senior social-science textbook editor for a major publisher, long complained about the ideological requirements of the Texas Board of Education, especially since Texas, a major textbook buyer, has influenced the content of books for other states, too. The recent conservative revisions by the board should not surprise.

The worst part of these actions by elected officials is that while scorning academicians as liberals, the board has decided to rewrite standard American history to suit its partisan values, to teach history as it thinks it should have been.

Conservatives who are scorning Big Government might well turn attention to Texas, which is about to require that a Republican fictional history be taught to children throughout the state. This is government mind-control of young students who do not know to contest it.

David Eggenschwiler
Los Angeles, March 13, 2010

The writer is emeritus professor of English, University of Southern California.

To the Editor:

As a former teacher in both elementary and high school, I find the actions of the Texans depressing. It would be just as depressing to slant history to emphasize or omit other points of view. The ultimate solution is to encourage teachers to know more and to present primary sources that reflect a variety of points of view.

The purpose of education is not to indoctrinate but to inform. The citizenry needs to learn how to understand, think critically, ask questions and make judgments.

Any textbook is limited by its very nature. My science texts are now very much outdated, for example. Let's eliminate textbooks and emphasize core topics.

Joan L. Staples
Chicago, March 13, 2010

Source 10 from Gail Lowe, "Poor Reporting by News Media? Thomas Jefferson vs. Texas Social Studies Standards," in *Texas Insider*, March 25, 2010. Copyright © 2010 *Texas Insider*. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.

10. The Texas State Board of Education Chair Defends the Board's Actions.

[Gail Lowe, a Republican from Lampasas, in central Texas, chairs the Texas State Board of Education. In late March, facing spreading national criticism of the SBOE, she responded to the New York Times and leading Texas newspapers. Her essay was posted to the Website texasinsider.org on March 25, 2010.]

It did not take long for reverberations from the Texas State Board of Education's preliminary vote on Social Studies requirements to spread across the country. And predictably, the media coverage was woefully inaccurate and blatantly distorted.

The *New York Times* probably was not the first to report on the board's deliberations, but it joined a host of prominent Texas news outlets that incorrectly claimed Thomas Jefferson had been dropped from the curriculum framework used in Texas public schools.

Apart from Thomas Jefferson, the only historical figure with more emphasis in the Texas Essential Knowledge & Skills standards is George Washington.

The State Board of Education expects students at the elementary-grade level, in middle school and again in high school to study these Founding Fathers and to be well-versed in their contributions to American history and government.

Thomas Jefferson is included along with John Adams, Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Nathan Hale, the Sons of Liberty and George Washington as Founding Fathers and patriot heroes that Texas fifth-graders should study for their notable contributions during the Revolutionary period.

During Grade 8, in which the history of the United States from the early colonial period through Reconstruction is presented, the Social Studies TEKS framework requires students to explain the roles played by the following significant individuals:

- Abigail Adams
- John Adams
- Wentworth Cheswell
- Samuel Adams

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- Mercy Otis Warren
- James Armistead
- Benjamin Franklin
- Crispus Attucks
- King George III
- Haym Salomon
- Patrick Henry
- Thomas Jefferson
- the Marquis de Lafayette
- Thomas Paine and
- George Washington

The U.S. Government course required for high school graduation mandates that students “identify the contributions of the political philosophies of the Founding Fathers, including:

- John Adams
- Alexander Hamilton
- Thomas Jefferson
- John Jay
- James Madison
- George Mason
- Roger Sherman and
- James Wilson on the development of the U.S. government.”

In addition, high school students must “identify significant individuals in the field of government and politics, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Marshall, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan.”

To say the State Board of Education has excluded Thomas Jefferson from the curriculum framework is irresponsible and untruthful.

Jefferson not only penned the words of the Declaration of Independence, served as the third President of the United States and was father of the University of Virginia, but his promotion of the ideals of states’ rights and a limited federal government have permeated our nation for centuries. No study of American history would be complete without his inclusion.

That is why Thomas Jefferson warrants such strong emphasis in the TEKS standards the State Board of Education has approved.

A critical skill Texas students should develop as part of their education is the ability to analyze information from primary source documents.

This should be a requirement for journalists, too. Many seem to have jumped to erroneous conclusions without even examining the actual curriculum standards.

One can disagree ideologically with the State Board of Education, but the TEKS standards themselves should be the point of reference for objective, thorough reporting.

Source 11 Emilio Zamora, Letter To the Texas State Board of Education, April 12, 2010, <http://sensiblehistory.blogspot.com/p/letter.html>, Reprinted by permission of Emilio Zamora.

11. Texas Historians' Open Letter to the SBOE.

[In April 2010, a group of historians working at Texas universities responded to the curriculum proposal by crafting an open letter to the SBOE. The letter, printed below in its entirety, was circulated among historians, who were invited to sign to convey their support.]

April 12, 2010

To the Texas State Board of Education:

Public schools must provide students with a sound elementary and high school education that prepares them to succeed in college and their future careers. Such a sound education must be fair, accurate and balanced and it must be based on rigorous, mainstream scholarship, not on ideological agendas.

Those of us who teach and conduct research in colleges and universities have grown concerned, however, that social studies curriculum standards in Texas do not meet student needs. We also believe that the Texas State Board of Education has been derelict in its duty to revise the public school curriculum. In short, recent proposals by Board members have undermined the study of the social sciences in our public schools by misrepresenting and even distorting the historical record and the functioning of American society.

Some of the problematic revisions that they have proposed include:

- Weakening the study of constitutional protections for religious liberty that keep government out of matters of faith;
- Minimizing the struggle of women and ethnic minorities for equal and civil rights;
- Striking Thomas Jefferson from a world history standard about the influence of Enlightenment thinkers on political changes since the 1700s; and
- Excluding an important historical figure from Latin America because some board members did not recognize him.

The integrity of the curriculum revision process has been compromised and we propose that the Board restore the trust of the public and the academic community by proceeding as follows:

- Delay the final adoption of social studies curriculum standards;
- Allow curriculum teams and a new panel of qualified, credentialed content experts from the state's colleges and universities to review changes that the Board has made and prepare a new draft of the standards that is fair, accurate and balanced;

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- Permit the public to review and comment on the new draft of the standards before final adoption; and
- Make final changes to the draft of the standards only after public consultation with classroom teachers and scholars who are experts in the appropriate fields of study.

Like all members of the Texas State Board of Education, we have a vested interest in giving our schoolchildren the tools that they need to succeed in college and their future careers. For genuine college and work readiness to occur the Board must adhere to a more transparent, fair, and inclusive process of curriculum revisions, and it must make full and effective use of the faculty and researchers from our colleges and universities in Texas who can offer expert assistance and guidance.

Organizing Committee

Emilio Zamora (co-chair), University of Texas at Austin

Jeffrey P. Shepherd, University of Texas at El Paso

Anne M. Martínez, University of Texas at Austin

Laurie B. Green, University of Texas at Austin

Keith A. Erikson (co-chair), University of Texas at El Paso

Ernesto Chavez, University of Texas at El Paso

Sam Brunk, University of Texas at El Paso

Source 12 from Bob Barr, "Texas textbook controversy misses the mark," from *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, © April 19, 2010 Cox Newspapers. All rights reserved. Used by permission and protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States. The printing, copying, redistribution, or retransmission of the Material without express written permission is prohibited.

12. A Libertarian Considers the Texas Debates.

[Between 1995 and 2003, Bob Barr represented the 7th District of Georgia in the U.S. House of Representatives and was a leading figure in the Republican Party. In 2008, he ran for president of the United States on the Libertarian Party ticket. In addition to running a law practice and consulting firm in Atlanta, he writes a blog, "The Barr Code," for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. On April 19, 2010, this Republican-turned-Libertarian weighed in on the Texas debates.]

April 19, 2010, by Bob Barr

In her fascinating 2003 book, *The Language Police*, Diane Ravitch chronicles the dumbing down of our public education system through the pervasive and insidious censorship of textbooks. She lamented the homogenization of education

brought about largely by the incessant quest to remove controversial topics, words and phrases from the educational process. Of particular concern to Ravitch was her conclusion that history texts are among the most profoundly infected with political correctness; leading her to note that “in no other subject do American seniors score as low as they do in U.S. history.”

Oft times heated disputes between conservatives and liberals continue to surface when boards of education—especially in the larger states—consider changes to textbook language.

Most recently, this problem boiled over in Texas, the nation’s second-largest consumer of textbooks for public school students. Last month, the Lone Star state’s elected board of education met and agreed preliminarily to a number of changes to American history texts that will be acceptable for use in its public schools over the next decade. The changes are expected to be finalized when the board meets in May; but the fireworks have already started.

Among the more controversial decisions recommended by the Republican-dominated board:

- Downgrading the role Thomas Jefferson played in our nation’s founding, apparently because his secular views conflicted with the more Christian-oriented views of a majority of the Texas board.
- Softening how textbooks treat former Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy who berated and impugned those with whom he disagreed during the 1950s “Red Scare.”
- Excluding reference to “hip-hop” music as a favorable example of modern American culture.
- Incorporating specific reference to “American exceptionalism.”
- Including mention of recent, conservative-based political activities and personalities, such as 1994’s “Contract With America,” conservative icon Phyllis Schlafly, Jerry Falwell’s “Moral Majority,” and the National Rifle Association.
- Description of our nation’s prevalent economic system as one based on “free enterprise.”
- Changing references of our country’s government structure as “democratic” to “constitutional republic.”

In all, the school board has made more than 100 amendments to the state’s history texts. Some of these, such as declining to elevate “hip-hop” to the status of being a cultural benefit, and properly describing our country as a “republic” rather than a “democracy,” make a great deal of sense. Others, however (downplaying the importance of one of our great Founding Fathers, Thomas Jefferson, because he did not appear to be sufficiently religious), do not.

More troubling than is the process of crafting textbooks to reflect particular views or so as to highlight those individuals, political activities, or institutions one elected official prefers over others, is the fact that advocates on both sides of these

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proceedings appear to misunderstand what is the purpose of a history textbook in the first place.

American history textbooks are not intended to be, and should not be written or amended to serve as, laundry lists of favored cultural events or personalities. They are a tool, and not necessarily the most important tool, in a school system's "toolbox" of instruments with which to ensure that students understand what our nation was and is; and what is was intended to be. Whether we today like Thomas Jefferson or not (I happen to be among those who do), he was one of the most important figures of our formative era; and diminishing his role distorts history. And whether we like or disdain organizations such as the NRA (as a member of its board of directors, I am a strong supporter), its role in the modern political era probably is not among those critical to include in a history text.

Much more important than these fights over inclusion or exclusion, should be concerns over the education, training and teaching methods of those tasked with actually teaching from those textbooks—our teachers.



Questions to Consider

You will likely find the first set of questions—about the specific points of contention—the easiest to address. Those, in turn, will lead you to the larger issues at play. For example, when you see comments insisting on the inclusion of the Moral Majority, on the one hand, or Cesar Chavez, on the other, what is really behind such arguments? Why are the debates about content and process so intense? Why has the Texas case produced so much national interest?

As you turn to investigating the context of public school curricular debates, think broadly about the conflicting values that emerge in this chapter's documents.

- What does the evidence reveal about varying attitudes toward civics and differing definitions of patriotism? How is the Texas textbook controversy connected

to America's ongoing culture wars? What does this case reveal about Americans' attitudes toward history education?

- What are the varying views on the role of religion in American civic life? Is there an appropriate place for political and religious ideology in shaping the themes and interpretations of history textbooks?
- How would you characterize the tone of the debates? Did the exchanges seem professional and thoughtful or personal and ideological?
- How would you characterize the tone, reliability, and effectiveness of the different forms of media you read—journalistic reporting, op-ed essays, and letters to editors?