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On Teaching American History: Major Problems in Secondary Instruction

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On Teaching American History: Major Problems in Secondary Instruction

by

Grace Sokolow

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

American Studies

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project is to investigate this ambient notion that *something is wrong* with public education in the United States. I look to the language of President Barack Obama, and work within his philosophical pragmatism to imagine my own remedies for a broken establishment. Then, I express my opinion that young American citizens are deeply injured by incomplete and incorrect understandings of their history. Here, I narrow my focus to the discipline of history, and how it is taught in public secondary schools. I find the contemporary textbook of American history particularly pernicious, and so perform a close reading and analysis of a textbook used widely across the United States. Later, my focus shifts to American patriotism, and its place and purpose within the educational establishment. Finally, I move toward a conclusion, and offer humble suggestions for the amelioration of my criticisms.

Preface

In May of 2008, then-Senator Barack Obama spoke to the students and teachers of Mapleton Expeditionary School of the Arts in Thornton, Colorado. “Education is the currency of the Information Age,” he declared, “no longer just a pathway to opportunity but a prerequisite.”ⁱ The following March, the President outlined his plan for education reform, urging states to adopt “world-class standards that will bring our curriculums into the twenty-first century.” “Let there be no doubt: the future belongs to the nation that best educates its citizens,” he declared, continuing,

We have everything we need to be that nation...And yet, despite resources unmatched anywhere in the world, we have let our grades slip, our schools crumble, our teacher quality fall short, and other nations outpace us. The relative decline in American education is untenable for our economy, unsustainable for our democracy, and unacceptable for our children – and we cannot afford to let it continue.ⁱⁱ

“The time for finger pointing is over,” he declared. “The time for holding ourselves accountable is here.”

Two years later, Obama spoke of education again, this time in his 2011 State of the Union Address. “As many as a quarter of our students aren’t even finishing high school. The quality of our math and science education lags behind many other nations. America has fallen to ninth in the proportion of young people with a college degree.” With tacit reference to the relative lack of progress in education reform during his presidency, Obama asked Americans for their help: “And so the question is whether all of us – as citizens, and as parents – are willing to do what’s necessary to give every child a chance to succeed.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Obama argues, “We are the nation that has always understood that our future is inextricably linked to the education of our children.” Within this framework of nation-building, one purpose

of public education is to prepare the American child for his future as an adult citizen – or as John Dewey writes, “to give him command of himself.” To prepare a child for citizenry is “to train him so that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities.” “The school is primarily a social institution,” Dewey continues. “I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.” The teacher, then, is engaged “not simply in the training of individuals, but in the formation of the proper social life.”^{iv}

“Again, what exactly is our job as Americans?” asks sociologist James W. Loewen. “Surely it is *to bring into being the America of the future?*”^v

By appealing not only to the parents of American children but to *all* Americans, Obama suggests that the education of young citizens is a public responsibility. “I believe it’s time to lead a new era of mutual responsibility in education, one where *we all come together* for the sake of our children’s success.” In this era, *each and every American* must “do [his] part” to ensure the success in education, including parents not only parents, teachers, and leaders in Washington, but “*citizens all across America.*”¹

This vision, a descendent of nineteenth-century progressivism and distinctly pragmatist, creates purpose in public education. Learning is the interactive process by which children acquire content knowledge, social skills, and civic capacity. We must “regulate the process of coming to share in the social consensus” precisely because the “adjustment of individual activity on the basis of social consensus is the only sure method of social construction.” Argues Dewey, “What nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life.” Education is

¹ Emphasis my own.

critical precisely because it is the process through which American children become American citizens.

On the night he was elected President of the United States, Barack Obama proclaimed, “Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America. For everywhere we look, there is work to be done.”^{vi}

Introduction

There are multiple purposes to this project. First, I investigate this ambient notion that *something is wrong* with public education in the United States. I look to the language of President Barack Obama, and work within his philosophical pragmatism to imagine my own remedies for a broken establishment. Then, I express my opinion that young American citizens are deeply injured by incomplete and incorrect understandings of their history. Here, I narrow my focus to the discipline of history, and how it is taught in public secondary schools. I find the contemporary textbook of American history particularly pernicious, and so perform a close reading and analysis of a textbook used widely across the United States. Later, my focus shifts to American patriotism, and its place and purpose within the educational establishment. Finally, I move toward a conclusion, and offer humble suggestions for the amelioration of my criticisms.

In some sections, I narrow my focus from the large and diverse fifty states to just one – Colorado. This is for several reasons. First and foremost, I am a native and legal resident of Colorado, and thus invested personally in the welfare of my own community. I am reminded of David Hollinger’s distinction between those affiliations that are prescribed and those that are chosen as I realize my ever-increasing urges to devote my energy to my own community of descent. Also, as a graduate of Colorado’s Douglas County School District, I do believe that my

own experience can contribute productively to this project. Finally, because the systems of public education differ so vastly from state to state, an exhaustive analysis of each state would prove too large an undertaking for this project. My placement of Colorado at the heart of my project reflects my most sincere hope that, after all, some good for my community can come of my work.

I began this research with just one question – what is the purpose of public education? There is no simple response to such a question, of course. But the following statement is my best answer to this question, and is both the capstone – and the keystone – of this project:

I believe that the core purposes of public education are as follows: first, to inform the student of, and prepare him for, his rights and duties as an adult citizen of the United States of America; second, to encourage his potential as a skilled worker in the national economy; third, to teach a basic “cultural literacy,” so that he may understand properly common points of reference in American culture; fourth, to cultivate a critical and analytical mind; and finally, to make him aware of his existence as part of a global economy, society, and body-politic.²

² My list is an adapted from discourse on Sarah Mondale and Sarah Patton’s PBS documentary “School: The Story of American Public Education.” The full text is as follows:

The purpose of public education has been affected by major changes in American society. These include economic transformations and the expansion of civil rights, which have had enormous effects on what goes on in the classroom. Added to these forces are other, including population growth, immigration, inner-city poverty, and school violence. Whenever there has been major social or economic change, the goals that were established for public education have changed. Over time, the following have all been goals of public education:

- To prepare children for citizenship
- To cultivate a skilled workforce
- To teach cultural literacy
- To prepare students for college
- To help students become critical thinkers
- To help students compete in a global marketplace

These purposes are as much a reflection of my research as they are of my Self. I would be foolish, I think, to deny my subject-position within this thesis statement. Accordingly, I have done my very best to identify, understand, confront, and work through my biases. Above all, I attempt to conduct my research and writing as part of a culture of inquiry, rather than within a culture of fixed truths.

Terminology: On Pragmatism

Philosophical pragmatism is central to President Obama's political sensibilities, and is therefore important to understand as the foundation of his comments on education. This pragmatism, also, forms the theoretical marrow of my vision for an improved methodology for the instruction of American history. What follows is a brief discussion of pragmatism as it is used in the rest of this project.

“The pragmatic method is primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable,” offers William James. He adds,

A glance at the history of the idea will show you still better what pragmatism means. The term is derived from the same Greek work *pragma*, meaning action, from which our words “practice” and “practical” come. It was first introduced into philosophy by Mr. Charles Peirce in 1878...Mr. Peirce, after pointing out that our beliefs are really rules for action, said that, to develop a thought's meaning, we need only to determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: that conduct for us is its sole significance.^{vii}

With this, writes historian Louis Menand, “Ideas are not ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered, but are tools – like forms and knives and microchips – that people devise to cope with the world in which they find themselves.” These ideas are produced “not by individuals, but by groups of individuals.” Ideas, therefore, are social. Moreover,

Ideas do not develop according to some inner logic of their own, but are entirely dependent, like germs, on their human carriers and environment. Since ideas are

provisional responses to particular and unreproducible circumstances, their survival depends not on their immutability but on their adaptability.^{viii}

“Pragmatism is an account of the way people think – the way they come up with ideas, form beliefs, and reach decisions,” continues Menand. Adds journalist Patricia Cohen, “Pragmatism maintains that people are constantly devising and updating ideas to navigate the world in which they live; it embraces open minded experimentation and continuing debate.”^{ix} And, returning to James, “Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity *is* in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself.”

Philosophical pragmatism is the school of thought that encompasses these ideas about ideas. It originated in the nineteenth century writings of John Dewey, William James, Charles S. Peirce, and Oliver Wendell Holmes.³ In *Reading Obama*, historian James T. Kloppenberg notes that philosophical pragmatism “challenges the claims of absolutists...and instead embraces uncertainty, provisionality, and the continuous testing of hypotheses through experimentation.” Philosophical pragmatists, as the “descendents of [William] James and [John] Dewey,” believe there is a “tight connection” between the philosophy of pragmatism and the culture of democracy – “both are committed to open-endedness and experimentation.” Kloppenberg explains,

Precisely because consequences matter to pragmatists, one can never say dogmatically, in advance, that one policy or another follows necessarily from the commitment to experimentation. Pragmatism is a philosophy for skeptics, a philosophy for those committed to democratic debate and the critical assessment of the results of political decisions, not for true believers convinced that they know the right course of action in advance of inquiry and experimentation. Pragmatism stands for open-mindedness and ongoing debate.^x

The meaning of pragmatism is well-captured by Oliver Wendell Holmes: “The life of the law has not been logic; it has been experience.” Yes, pragmatism is a method, one that, according to

³ Among many others. I point out these four figures in particular as a nod to historian Louis Menand in his exhaustive study of the intellectual history of pragmatism, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*.

James, “stands for no particular results. It has no dogmas, and no doctrines save its method,” and its “genetic theory of what is meant by truth.”^{xi}

Low Expectations

“I hoped for something else.” It’s a simple dream, but it speaks to us so powerfully because it is our dream – one that exists at the very center of the American experience. One that says, “if you’re willing to work hard, and take responsibility, then you’ll have the chance to reach for something else – for something better.” The ideal of public education has always been at the heart of this bargain.^{xii}

But what happens to children depending upon a system of education with low standards?

Colorado’s Higher Education Admissions Requirements (HEAR) specify the courses each student must complete in order to be considered for admission to a public four-year college or university in the State of Colorado. In addition to courses in mathematics, the natural and physical sciences, and foreign language, students are required to take four years courses in English and three in the social sciences. Students applying to private colleges may be required to take additional courses, while students applying to community college are not subject to HEAR.⁴

In four years, students are expected to complete at least “two units that emphasize writing or composition skills, as well as literature, speech, and debate.” Honors classes and advanced placement classes are “also acceptable,” along with courses in the international baccalaureate program. Additionally, “two units of ESL English may count towards meeting the requirements when combined with two units of successfully completed college preparatory English.”

Each student must complete three years of study in the social sciences, with at least one course in “United States history *and/or* world civilization.” Other acceptable courses include “international history, civics, principles of democracy, geography, economics, psychology,

⁴ HEAR standards were altered in 2008, to take effect beginning with the class of 2010. The mathematics requirement was raised from three years to four, and one year of foreign language was made mandatory.

sociology, and comparable coursework.” Again, also acceptable are “honors, advanced placement, and/or international baccalaureate courses.”^{xiii}

Individual school districts create their graduation requirements around those prescribed by the Colorado Commission of Higher Education (CCHE), the committee within the Colorado Department of Education that sets the admissions standards for the state’s public colleges and universities. The Douglas County School District (DCSD), for example, does not maintain any requirements outside of HEAR. The Cherry Creek School District (CCSD), the state’s largest district, requires four units of English and three in Social Studies, including one in American History and one-half in Civics.

Some districts set more specific terms. The Denver Public School District (DPSD), for example, requires a minimum of four units in “language arts,” including one unit of “Introduction to Literature and Composition,” one unit of “American Literature 1 and 2,” one unit of an “upper division writing academic elective or world literature,” and one unit of “other language arts.” Students must complete three units in “Social Studies,” including one unit in United States History, one-half unit in Civics, and one and one-half units of “other Social Studies.”^{xiv}

The admissions standards established by the CCHE represent the “minimum requirements” Colorado’s public colleges and universities. Applicants who meet the appropriate admission standard at any institution are not guaranteed admission. Each institution is entitled to “make admission decisions based on other criteria resulting in admission standards more rigorous than the Commission’s minimum admission standard.”

Let us consider the unfortunate circumstance of a student who has completed the absolute minimum coursework with a barely passing effort. Student X is set to graduate from high school Y in May of 2011:

Year	Course (English)	Grade	Course (Social Sciences)	Grade
9	English I (1)	D	Geography (0.5)	D
9			Ancient Civilizations (0.5)	D
10	English II (1)	D	U.S. History 1865-1945 (1)	D
11			U.S. Government (0.5)	D
11	American Literature (1)	D	Economics (0.5)	D
12	World Literature (1)	D	-	-

Student X chose not to take any honors or advanced placement courses, though his coursework is not remedial. He opted out of coursework in the social sciences upon completing the basic required courses. His transcript shows his knowledge of English language, American literature, and World literature, along with his understanding of geography, the origins of human society, American history, and American civics to be below average. He received no secondary instruction on either early American history or contemporary world history. Student X will graduate from high school (if just barely) entirely unprepared for his life as an adult American citizen.

We hope for students who will strive beyond minimum requirements. We wish for students who will work hard to excel, not only in required courses, but in advanced and elective courses. We know, however, that each student does not strive toward excellence. These students, however, should not be allowed to graduate from high school without *at least* a basic cultural literacy. It is our responsibility, as educators, to work around obstacles – even obstacles like a lack of motivation, or mediocrity – and, in the end, meet the needs of students. “In this country,” announced President Obama, “it is education that allows our children to hope for ‘something else.’” “And let me be clear,” he continued, “we are failing too many of our children.”

“If we truly believe in our public schools,” Obama reminds us “then we have a moral responsibility to do better.”^{xv}

Back to School, Back to Dewey

On September 14, 2010, President Obama delivered his annual “Back to School” speech to the students of Julia R. Masterman Laboratory and Demonstration School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. “There is nothing more important than what you’re doing right now,” he encouraged. “Nothing is going to have as great an impact on your success in life as your education.” He continued, with the sentiments and in the style that have become his signature:

More and more, the kinds of opportunities that are open to you are going to be determined by how far you go in school. The farther you go in school, the farther you’re going in life. And at a time when other countries are competing with us like never before...your success in school is not just going to determine your success; it’s going to determine America’s success...So you’ve got an obligation to yourselves, and America has an obligation to you, to make sure you’re getting the best education possible. And making sure you get that kind of education is going to take all of us working hard, and all of us working hand-in-hand.

Again, President Obama emphasizes the utmost importance of an education, not only as it benefits the individual child but for the welfare of American society. And again, his approach is distinctly pragmatist. This speech, like so many others of his, implores Americans to consider the quality of public education as an investment in the future of the United States. The education of our children, according to Obama, is one cause that “binds us together.” James T. Kloppenberg notes the similarity of this sentiment with the words of Jane Addams: “the things which make men alike are finer and better than the things that keep them apart, and these basic likenesses, if they are properly accentuated, easily transcend the less essential differences of race, language, creed, and tradition.”

In 1889, Addams and Ellen Gates Starr opened the doors of Hull-House, one of America's earliest social settlements. It was neither a welfare agency nor, in the early years, an organization of reform advocacy. It was a place for education.⁵ "The idea was to provide people with an escape from the conditions in which their poverty," writes Louis Menand. "It was also to inculcate them with American civic and cultural norms in a setting where their particular national heritages were acknowledged and respected." Kloppenberg adds, "Hull-House was soberly opened on the theory that the dependence of classes on each other is reciprocal." The reciprocity of these social relations encouraged an atmosphere where individuals could appreciate those unlike themselves.

It was an educational program that brought John Dewey to Hull-House in 1892. His experience in Chicago had two profound effects: first, it marked the beginning of a long friendship, and professional association, between Addams and Dewey; and second, he began shifting his attention toward educational philosophy. It was – at least in part – regular exposure to Hull-House that inspired Dewey's seminal work *Democracy and Education*. At the turn of the twentieth century, education was as much an American concern as it remains at just after the turn of the twenty-first. So let return, now, to John Dewey.

According to Dewey, the purpose of formal education is to create a "special environment" to "nurture the capacities of the immature." An education "creates a desire for continued growth

⁵ Addams and Starr's inspiration for Hull-House was an 1888 trip to England's Toynbee Hall, the original social settlement – "that is," writes Menand, "a building in an impoverished urban area where college men (the 'settlers') lived and worked for social reform." Toynbee Hall was founded by Samuel A. Barnett, a clergyman. Barnett melded together notions of Christian Samaritanism and the Social Gospel. "Toynbee Hall had a theory," notes Menand, which "had to implications for the practice. The first...was that Toynbee Hall's greatest benefit, since it was the spiritual benefit, was understood to be the one conferred on the settlers: brotherly contact with the poor was improving to the soul. The second...**was the belief that a crucial element of social reform was exposure to literature and art – that the cultural impoverishment of working-class Londoners was at least as significant as their material deprivation.**"

and supplies the means for making the desire effective in fact.” Education is preparation for a future of continuous development; the result of the educative process is nothing less than “capacity for further education.”⁶ Indeed the very goal of Dewey’s theories of education, notes philosopher Hilary Putnam, “is to produce men and women who are capable of learning on their own and thinking critically.”^{xvi}

The subject matter of education consists of “the meanings which supply content to existing social life.” Dewey notes the particular significance of history to this education:

To “learn history” is essentially to gain in power to recognize its human connections...So history as a formulated study is but the body of known facts about the activities and sufferings of the social groups with which our own lives are continuous, and through reference to which our own customs and institutions are illuminated.^{xvii}

“The past just as past is no longer our affair,” he continues. “History deals with the past, but this past is the history of the present.” Moreover,

An intelligent study of the discovery, explorations, colonization of America, or the pioneer movement westward, of immigration, etc., should be a study of the United States as it is to-day: of the country we now live in. Studying it in process of formation makes much that is too complex to be directly grasped open to comprehension...to get insight into any complex product is to trace the process of its making – to follow it through the successive stages of its growth. To apply this method to history as if it meant only the truism that the present social state cannot be separated from its past, is one-sided. It means equally that the past events cannot be separated from the living present and retain meaning. The true starting point of history is always some present situation with its problems.

Dewey understands the discipline of history is a study of man and nature – or, more precisely, of man in nature. Industrial history “presents us with knowledge of the successive inventions by which theoretical science has been applied to the control of nature in the interests of security and social progress.” Economic history “deals with the activities, the career, and the fortunes of the

⁶ Dewey writes, “Development is conceived not as continuous growing, but as the unfolding of latent powers toward a definite goal. The goal is conceived of as completion, perfection. Life at any stage short of attainment of this goal is merely an unfolding toward it.”

common man.” It is “more human, more democratic, and thus more liberalizing than political history,” the rise and fall of “principalities and powers.” Intellectual history, notes Dewey, is “perhaps the most neglected branch of history in general education.”

We are only just beginning to realize that the great heroes who have advanced human destiny are not its politicians, generals, and diplomats, but the scientific discoverers and inventors who have put into man’s hands the instrumentalities of an expanding and controlled experience, and the artists and poets who have celebrated his struggles, triumphs, and defeats in such language, pictorial, plastic, or written, that their meaning is rendered universally accessible to others.

The study of intellectual history, from this perspective, encompasses the study of art, music, and literature. Or rather, the fields are inseparable. And so, it is important to teach history – and to teach history properly – in order to understand our reality. Understanding our present requires an understanding of “how we arrived at this point.”^{xviii}

The Business of Mediocrity

Historian Steven Conn writes,

For the English historian R.C. Collingwood, history was an idea. For Marc Bloch, the French historian who died tragically at the hands of the Nazis, history was a craft. When E.H. Carr used the Trevelyan Lectures at Cambridge in 1961 to muse on the nature of history, the title of the resulting book, now a minor classic, simply left the question hanging as a question. [And] for John Lewis Gaddis...history is a landscape.^{xix}

The historian – the “ecologist of human activity” – is bound by a professional obligation, a sense of integrity, and a belief in the great purpose of their work. But what happens to history when it is ripped from the loving arms of the professional historian and thrust into the machinations of a corporate assembly line?

Gilbert T. Sewall, president of the Center for Education Studies and director of the American Textbook Council, is vociferously critical of what he calls “the business of social studies.” “School publishing is lucrative and profitable,” he notes, “accounting for an estimated \$3.4

billion in sales in 2000, about one-seventh of revenues of all commercial publishing.” In 2004, sales totaled close to \$4 billion. Between 1986 and 2004, textbook prices rose 186 percent – slightly more than six percent per year.^{xx}

For the most part, textbook markets are not regulated by any agency of the United States government. “Thus, textbook prices reflect the relatively free interplay of demand and supply influences,” writes economist James V. Koch. He continues, “Nevertheless, there are unusual, even quirky aspects of textbook markets that differentiate them from most other markets. It is these unusual, uncommon characteristics of textbook markets that make it difficult for policy makers to influence prices there.”

According to Koch, the textbook market is remarkable in that the persons who select the textbooks are not necessarily those who pay for them. Because the price of the product is removed from the decision to purchase the product, the production company can raise the price of the product at will; standard market forces are not entirely applicable. Also, demand for textbooks is “price inelastic” – consumers are not particularly sensitive to changes in the price of the product, especially price increases. “The price elasticity of demand for textbooks has been measured as low as -0.2,” says Koch, “which means that a ten percent increase in textbook prices will cause only a two percent decline in the number of textbooks purchased.”^{xxi}

The school textbook market is an oligopoly; there exist only three major American companies in educational publishing. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, McGraw-Hill, and Pearson Education have mostly swallowed smaller, independent companies, or made them imprints.⁷ “A smaller

⁷ Although Sewall includes Reed Elsevier as a major publishing company in his “Big Four,” the company is no longer particularly active in the “elhi” market, having sold Harcourt, its school publishing division, in early

publishing pool means fewer titles in each subject area,” Sewall notes. The “Big Three” are all members Association of American Publishers (AAP), the national trade association of the publishing industry – and a powerful Washington lobby. “What the AAP does not acknowledge is that better history textbooks could *at once* less expensive *and* more instructionally sound,” laments Sewall.

Alternatives to textbooks produced by these giant companies are few and far between. “Entry barriers to educational publishing are formidable,” Sewall maintains. “At every stage of production, from paper to printing, economies of scale favor mammoth enterprises.” Moreover,

States and many local districts require publishers to post performance bonds, provide free samples, maintain textbook depositories, and field teachers’ consultants...Any company that plans to compete nationally must be capital intensive and “full service,” that is, must offer study guides, workbooks, and technology, along with discounts, premiums, and an array of teacher enticements. In some states...teacher’s editions, binders, and answer keys may determine which books are adopted.^{xxii}

Among these enticements is the “design value” – “the look, the feel, [and] the format” of a textbook. Emphasis on design value raises the cost of textbook printing; color photographs, intricate drawings, multiple typographies, and a glossy finish are expensive to produce. These “coffee table textbooks” are dismissed by Rebecca Jones, a senior editor of the American School Board Journal, as “20-pound packages of glitz.” She writes,

Teachers and publishers – who evidently haven’t noticed the pages of plain type which are to be found in the popular Harry Potter books – say textbooks need razzle-dazzle to capture kids’ interest. So textbook designers make use of splashy illustrations, large type, short sidebars, and funky headlines, all set off by expanses of white space.^{xxiii}

Contrary to keeping students interested these “snappy layouts” and “colorful illustrations” are distracting, argues Harriet Tyson-Bernstein, author of *A Conspiracy of Good Intentions*:

2007. “Elhi” is a term used within the publishing industry to describe the “school market” – grades one through twelve.

America's Textbook Fiasco. Among textbook editors, phrases such as “text-heavy,” “information-loaded,” and “nonvisual” are negatives, insists Sewall. “Bright photographs, broken formats, and seductive colors overwhelm the text and confuse the page.” Thousands of pages seem vast and intimidating – if not overwhelming. Laughs Loewen, “The new books are so huge they may endanger their readers.”

This danger is not only physical; we must be wary of accepting a history “sifted through the fine mesh of fear and self-serving interest.”^{xxiv}

Meanwhile, the “disappearance of a core text” and “ongoing simplification of textbook language” present “fundamental challenges to general learning, the informed mind, and the liberal imagination,” adds Sewall. “[This] complex phenomenon known as ‘dumbing down’ is a rational activity on the part of value-free sellers who seek to capture a larger share of a nationwide market.” He rages on:

Given persuasive research and commentary on what can be done to improve history textbooks, it is disturbing that people who call themselves educational publishers – charged as they are with the public trust – are close-minded and fatalistic about their products. Educational publishers could and should be producing cheaper books that are text-centered, simpler in design, and more honest in content. They are failing to do so, and in this they are shirking their public obligation.

The textbook market is driven by four “key state” – California, Texas, Florida, and North Carolina. The market power of these states is uncontested for two reasons; their relatively large populations, and their allocation of state funds to pay for textbooks approved by state committees. In 1998, these four states accounted for \$971 million of the \$3.3 billion in United States textbook sales.^{xxv} As a result, publishing companies are more willing to accommodate special demands, most often from “textbook watchers” in California and Texas. Even when

conducted carefully, the processes of state-level adoption “actually increase the leverage of pressure groups,” worries Sewall.

Textbooks remain woefully silent on the nature of historical scholarship. “History is a furious debate informed by evidence and reason,” writes Loewen, and yet “textbooks encourage students to believe that history is facts to be learned.”

The Americans

McDougal Littell’s *The Americans: Reconstruction through the Twentieth Century* (California Edition) is used widely in the state of Colorado, and throughout the Douglas County School District. The teacher’s edition is especially informative of the textbook’s methodology; each page is annotated with references, resources, and “teaching options.” McDougal Littell, formerly a division of Harcourt Publishing, is now Holt McDougal, the educational division of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Despite the merger, *The Americans* remains the company’s primary United States history textbook. The subtitle of newer editions was adjusted slightly to fit the times, and now reads *Reconstruction to the Twenty-first Century*.⁸

The “program overview,” included as part of the teacher’s edition and featured prominently on Holt McDougal’s website, reads as follows:

America’s story begins with people.

⁸ Although there are several authors listed on the title page for this textbook, it is unclear how much of the text was actually written by the authors listed. Along with five “authors,” the title page lists one “Constitution consultant,” one “contributing writer,” six members of a “multicultural advisory board,” five “content consultants,” twenty-nine members of a “teacher review panel,” thirty-six “manuscript reviewers,” and twenty-two members of a “student board.” Moreover, Frances FitzGerald writes, “Texts are not ‘written’ anymore; they are, as the people in the industry say, ‘developed,’ and this process involves large numbers of people and many compromises...publishing houses occasionally print manuscripts more or less as they arrive [from authors] – but usually the editing is heavy.”

The Americans explores the story of United States history, weaving the reflections of people who experienced history firsthand throughout the narrative. Thought-provoking lessons make history human and relevant to students' everyday lives, helping them to realize the richness of our nation's history.^{xxvi}

As part of the program, then, each chapter is peppered with excerpts from primary sources, named "A Personal Voice."

A close, critical reading of the text is very revealing. What follows is a thorough analysis of just one section of text. I have chosen to read *The Americans* closely only because it is used so widely in Colorado. My reading of the text should not be taken as an indictment against all textbooks of American history – though it is worth mentioning that numerous scholars have drawn conclusions not very far from my own.^{xxvii}

Five pages are dedicated to the temporal and theoretical era known commonly as second wave feminism. Below the title – "Women Fight for Equality" – are three text boxes, which name the "main idea" of the section to follow, suggest "why it matters now," and list important terms and names. "Through protests and marches, women confronted social and economic barriers in American society." This "matters" because "the rise of the women's movement during the 1960s advanced women's place in the work force and in society."

Like every other chapter, the section starts with "One American's Story." The featured American is Betty Friedan, a classic portrait used often to introduce "the female problem" that arose in the mid-century American suburb.

The section continues with its first definition: "The theory behind the women's movement of the 1960s was **feminism**, the belief that women should have economic, political, and social equality

with men.”⁹ This definition appears alongside a button that reads, “Women make policy, NOT coffee,” captioned “A button displays women’s displeasure with their treatment in the workplace.” Workplace inequalities, widespread job discrimination, and discrepancies between male and female salaries are the subject of two paragraphs, mentioned alongside President John F. Kennedy’s formation of the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women in 1961.¹⁰

On the following page, a chart compares the percentage of women in the American labor force and the median incomes of women and men in 1950, 1970, and 1993. There is a short paragraph noting the inspirations for the women’s movement, described succinctly as “discrimination” in their “involvement in the civil rights and antiwar movements,” which “made them acutely aware of their inferior social status.” These experiences led women to initiate consciousness-raising seminars, in which they “shared their lives with each other and discovered that their experiences were not unique.” Robin Morgan’s is the next “Personal Voice,” an excerpt from her seminal work *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement*.¹¹ Thus “the women’s movement emerges,” and the text returns to Friedan’s bestselling *The Feminine Mystique*.

On the next page, Gloria Steinem is pictured as a “Key Player,” and a short biography notes her motivation for founding *Ms. Magazine* – namely, the refusal of the mainstream media to publish

⁹ This definition really is not all that bad – feminism is a very difficult term to define, even for feminists. I am particularly fond of the following simple definition, offered by Estelle B. Freedman in the introduction to her *Essential Feminist Reader*. She writes, “Feminism is a recent term, coined in the nineteenth century, but its intellectual history goes back over half a millennium. **Simply defined, feminism is the belief that women have the same human capacities as men.**”

¹⁰ There is no mention of the Commission’s famous chairwoman, Eleanor Roosevelt.

¹¹ I think the quote is worth mentioning in its entirety: “It makes you sensitive – raw, even, this consciousness. Everything, from the verbal assault on the street, to a ‘well-meant’ sexist joke your husband tells, to the lower pay you get at work (for doing the same job a man would be paid more for), to television commercials, to rock-song lyrics, to the pink or blue blanket they put on your infant in the hospital nursery, to speeches by male ‘revolutionaries’ that reek of male supremacy—everything seems to barrage your aching brain. . . . You begin to see how all-pervasive a thing is sexism.”

stories about the women's movement. The text moves into a new section, titled "The Movement Gains and Experiences Losses." Though the Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided women with the "legal tools with which to fight discrimination," and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was organized to "investigate discrimination claims by African Americans – [and] also investigate women's job complaints." Unsatisfied with the EEOC, "several women, including Betty Friedan" created the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966. The text includes quoted text attributed to "the founders of NOW."

A sub-section titled "A Diverse Movement" details the rapid growth of NOW between 1966 and 1968. The New York Radical Women, a "militant group," are mentioned alongside their famed protest of the Miss America Pageant in 1968.¹² The following sentence jumps to 1971 and back to Gloria Steinem, who "helped found the National Women's Political Caucus, a moderate group that encouraged women to seek political office." Though the "radicals" and the "moderates" often "quarreled over strategy," the text details the 1970 fiftieth anniversary of woman suffrage in New York City, where "tens and thousands of women" "marched to promote women's equality." The march is pictured, but there are only white women holding the banner that reads "Women of the World Unite." Title VII of the Civil Rights Act is referenced but not named.

Roe v. Wade is treated as follows:

One of the more controversial issues that NOW and other feminist groups supported was a woman's right to have an abortion. In 1973, the Supreme Court ruled in the case *Roe v. Wade* that women had the right to choose an abortion during the first three months of pregnancy. In an editorial on the decision, *The New York Times* expressed hope that the ruling might "bring an end to the emotional and divisive

¹² The New York Radical Women was founded in 1967 by Shulamith Firestone and Pam Allen. Neither woman is mentioned by name, nor is any other of its famous early members, including Robin Morgan, Kathie Sarachild, and Ellen Willis. Firestone is mentioned on a previous page, but only in the context of hierarchy within the antiwar movement, when she was famously told, "Move on little girl; we have more important issues to talk about here than women's liberation."

public argument.” However, this did not happen. Americans today remain divided over the abortion issue.

After a short section on the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), the text shifts toward the movement’s “losses.” The next “Personal Voice” is that of Phyllis Schlafly, who is both pictured and quoted. A small box titled “Another Perspective” provides the chapter’s only mention of African American women in the second wave: “The women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s was largely a white middle-class movement. By the 1960s, many African-American women expressed greater concern with racism and the attainment of civil rights than with sexism and inequality in the workplace.” The work of Schlafly, alongside continued opposition to *Roe v. Wade*, allows for the emergence of a “coalition of social conservatives,” the New Right.

The chapter concludes with a few paragraphs on the legacy of the women’s movement, and a picture of a tapestry that reads, “A woman’s place is in the house...and also in the senate!”¹³ “By the 1970s, many women were preparing themselves for lifetime careers,” the chapter concludes, but “still, many women ran into a ‘glass ceiling’ – an invisible, but very real resistance to promoting women into top positions. Finally, Friedan is quoted once again: “We have lived the second American revolution, and our very anger said a ‘new YES’ to life.”

Although I refer to the subject of this section as “second wave feminism,” the term “second wave” appears nowhere in the text. Instead, the women’s movement “gains momentum” and then declines during the first wave, and then “reawakens” during the second. The omission of the waves metaphor to delineate feminist activism is puzzling.

¹³ I wonder about the use of a medium like embroidery to display such a message. Is it ironic to use a symbol of traditional domesticity and separate spheres to promote the insertion of women into the post public of positions in the public sphere?

Of course, some feminist theorists and historians of social movements have deemed the waves “troubling.”^{xxviii} Linda Nicholson, introducing her seminal reader in feminist theories of the second wave, muses, “Is the ‘second wave’ a useful concept?” She continues,

Scholars have raised important questions about the distinction “first wave/second wave” as a way of organizing the history of feminism. When does each wave begin and when does it end? What activities and what social groups are excluded by this distinction? What countries does it or does it not apply to? These are important questions and merit discussion. *Nevertheless, I believe that something important occurred in the 1960s that is still spinning itself out...*The consequence has been a major restructuring of institutions worldwide. Something happened in the 1960s in ways of thinking about gender that continues to shape public and private life.

Though Nicholson acknowledges the problems of the waves metaphor, she does not abandon it. Her anthology is organized “roughly historically,” giving the reader a sense of the progression of debate within the second wave. Historian Kathleen A. Laughlin takes a similar approach: “Despite its problems,” she writes, “the waves model has tremendous staying power when it comes to understanding, analyzing, writing about, and teaching the history of U.S. feminism.”

There exist, of course, certain methodological and interpretive dilemmas in retaining the waves metaphor, including the tendency to discount the resiliency of feminist politics over time.^{xxix} I believe very firmly, however, that these debates are best left to the academy, for now. I find *The Americans’* discussion of the second wave without naming the second wave not only unnecessary, but unproductive. It is a reflection of what feminist theorist Toril Moi calls a “stunning disconnect between the idea of freedom, justice, and equality for women, and the word *feminism*.”^{xxx}

Each section of text is accompanied by several “teaching options.” These sections are designed to help teachers manage resources outside of the textbook, and push students to “learn actively” and “think critically.” Each section begins with a “Five-Minute Warm-up,” a “starter activity”

designed to “prepare students to read and understand” the section that follows. In order to “gain insight into the women’s movement,” students should read Robin Morgan’s “A Personal Voice,” then answer two questions; first, “what point does [Morgan] make about sexism,” and second, “why is sexism so difficult to eliminate?” The teacher is instructed to “ask students if they think women are discriminated against in American society,” and if so, “in what ways.”

The next two “teaching options” are designed to encourage “insightful observations and meaningful examples showing how a particular topic relates to key themes and areas of study.”

The first, “exploring themes,” prompts discussion of the foundation of the women’s movement.

The second, “making connections across the curriculum,” reads,

Tell students that sociology deals with the attitudes, behaviors, and relationships in societies. The feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s challenged and eventually influenced people’s attitudes toward women. The movement also affected the relationship between men and women. Sociological studies have continued to study its effects and determine its influence on men, women, and children. Discuss the impact of the women’s movement on society. Ask students whether they think the movement changed society for the better or for the worse.

The third teaching option is a “cooperative activity,” during which the student is to write, design, and produce an article for *Ms. Magazine*. The purpose of this activity is to “explore the goals, interests, and accomplishments of the women’s movement in the early 1970s.” McDougal Littell provides a checklist for evaluation; each article should “deal with feminist issues and concerns of the 1970s; include photos and artwork with feminist themes; and *convey the author’s pride in the movement and optimism for the future.*”¹⁴

The fourth teaching option is called “making connections across time,” and is titled “Jane Roe Today.” It reads:

¹⁴ Emphasis my own.

Tell students that the woman called Jane Roe in the 1973 Supreme Court case reversed her opinion on abortion in 1995. Claiming that abortion was “murderously wrong,” the woman – Norma McCorvey – joined Operation Rescue, one of the most militant antiabortion groups in the country. The lawyer who won *Roe v. Wade* discounted her former client’s reversal. “Jane Roe was a plaintiff,” she said, “but the case was a class action on behalf of all women.” McCorvey herself never had an abortion because her case was decided too late. She gave her baby up for adoption in 1970.

The fifth section is for “making connections across cultures,” and is called “Black Women in the Feminist Movement.” Teachers are to inform students that “many black women felt excluded from the feminist movement,” because the movement’s white leaders were “not addressing black issues and concerns.” Also, black women were concerned that their support for the feminist movement might “undermine black men in their struggle against racism.” Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman elected to the House of Representatives, is quoted in the contrary: “I’ve suffered more discrimination as a woman than as a black.” The textbook then urges the instructor to ask students if they agree with Ida Lewis’s assessment of the women’s movement as “basically a family quarrel between white women and white men.” This is an exercise in “critical thinking.”¹⁵

A report issued in 2000 by the American Textbook Council notes, “Learning activities are intended to help students retain information and connect with the subject. *But they often impede the train of ideas and thought.*” Also,

The text is cut and fragmented to such a degree that children cannot possibly process the subject, let alone fathom its meaning or significance... Startling or bizarre details – factoids – may try to elicit student surprise and attention, but these are poor substitutes for narrative that stimulates the imagination and explains the workings of the world in engaging and honest words.^{xxxii}

Each section of *The Americans* concludes with an assessment, designed to test student comprehension of the text. Tasks include identifying terms and names, summarizing key events,

¹⁵ Apparently.

and making inferences and predictions. The final question refers to the final quotation in the text, in which Betty Friedan calls the women's movement a "second American revolution." Each student is either to agree or disagree with Friedan, and judge whether or not she was "overstating the historical importance of the women's movement by comparing it to the American Revolution." Finally, students are to look forward, to "interact with history," and consider the relative social position of American women. "Which problem do you think is more important – unequal pay for equal work, or limits on career advancement?" In creating a "possible response," nowhere does McDougal Littell leave room for the opinion of "both" – or neither.

In addition to testing students on the text itself, assessment questions are written to prepare students for state-administered assessments.¹⁶ By allowing students to think only in the oversimplified terms of standardized tests, the assessment questions fail to push students to expand the boundaries of their intellect.

Women of color are conspicuous in their absence. Not one non-white woman is named in the section, and every photograph features only white women. That black women were not central to the feminist movement during this time period is an issue far more complex than just a "feeling of exclusion." Women of color have long maintained that gender oppression cannot be analyzed adequately in and of itself.

¹⁶ Students, upon reading these five pages, are expected to be able to account for and analyze the development of federal civil and voting rights of women. This includes the "diffusion of the civil rights movement...and how the advances influenced the agendas, strategies, and effectiveness of the quest of American Indians, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans for civil rights and equal opportunities;" the "passage and effect of civil rights and voting legislation and the 24th Amendment with an emphasis on equality of access to education and to the political process;" and the "women's rights movement from the era of Elizabeth Stanton and Susan Anthony and the passage of the 19th Amendment to the movement launched in the 1960s, including differing perspectives on the role of women."

Betty Friedan is mentioned and quoted several times, along with Shulamith Firestone, Robin Morgan, and Gloria Steinem. Certainly, there is no crime in opening a discussion of second wave feminism with Betty Friedan – historian Sara Evans does so in *Personal Politics*, arguably the best analysis of the movement’s foundations. But the cast of characters is larger and more diverse than Friedan. Sociologist Stephanie Coontz criticizes *The Feminine Mystique* as a “long, dry, and rather mild” book, the appeal of which was “mainly concentrated among a relatively privileged section of women.”^{xxxii} Indeed, Friedan’s work is only a string in the tapestry that is the complex legacy of second wave feminism. Students unfamiliar with the feminist movement – as we must assume most high school students are – are likely to take from *The Americans* an inflated impression of Friedan that is entirely misguided.

It is true that women of color, black women in particular, felt excluded from much of the second wave. By no means, however, did this feeling suppress their ability to work for feminist causes. Such notable feminists as Frances Beale, Florynce Kennedy, and Patricia Robinson were active during the second wave. The Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional (CFMN) was formed in 1970, and the United Nations sponsored the first International Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975. Indeed, historian Alice Echols notes, “Radical feminism remained the hegemonic tendency within the women’s liberation movement until 1973, when cultural feminism began to cohere and challenge its dominance.”^{xxxiii} By 1975, cultural feminism had eclipsed radical feminism, building the foundation for the explosion of writing by women of color the following decade.

Feminist activist Mary Ruthsdotter, on the relative lack of women of color in American history textbooks, comments, “Omissions like these negatively affect developing attitudes of both sexes. They deal an especially severe blow to the self-esteem of girls being taught that women like

themselves do not achieve in this society.”^{xxxiv} Women of color should not be included in the text merely for the sake of diversity, nor should we replace the prominent white women of the second wave with relatively anonymous women of color. We should create a text that implores students to ask *why*. Students are informed that the feminism of the 1960s and 1970s was largely a movement of white women, but they are not asked to consider *why*. Students are told that Shirley Chisholm felt *more* oppressed as a woman than as an African-American – but they do not examine her oppression as a *black woman*.¹⁷

The Americans encourages students and instructors to form their analyses in binary pairs. Which is more important – equal pay for equal work, or equal social standing? Militant feminists crowned sheep as Miss America, moderate feminists created NOW. Did the feminist movement change society for the better, or for the worse? Are women discriminated against in American society, or aren't they? White women were concerned with feminism, while black women were concerned with racism.^{xxxv} Trapped within dichotomies, students become unable to think outside of mutually exclusive pairs. Such structures of thought are entirely unproductive to complex critical thinking.

If dichotomy is unconstructive, false dichotomies are even more so. One such false dichotomy, notes Moreau, is the belief that history is either “traditional” or “revisionist.” Another pits “historical truth” against an ambiguously evil “censorship.” We should recognize the distinction

¹⁷ I should point to the work of feminist legal critic Kimberlé Crenshaw. She writes, “Contemporary feminist and antiracist discourses have failed to consider the intersectional identities such as women of color...the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism. Because of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, women of color are marginalized within both.

between “censorship” and the “unavoidable process of choosing what material to exclude as irrelevant or peripheral.”

Clemson University professor of education David Bruce Lavere reaches a similar conclusion in his 2008 study on the quality of pedagogical exercises in United States history textbooks. “A majority of the pedagogical exercises contained a host of problems,” he concludes. “They were disproportionately recall-type questions.”

The questions in high school texts were often very similar to questions in middle school and elementary school texts – failing to demand more sophisticated or developmentally appropriate thinking. Too few questions engaged students in historical inquiry. Those that were categorized as critical thinking did not meet the standards for critical thinking...A greater effort needs to be made to more carefully match the high-quality content found in many texts, with high-quality questions that provide opportunities for students to engage in higher-order thinking.^{xxxvi}

“If history has no ultimate meaning or lesson to teach,” writes James Goldman, “the least we can do for our children is to give them books that engage them in creative struggle with the past, and thus, with the present and the future.”^{xxxvii}

In the third teaching option, an assignment designed to evoke student creativity, McDougal Littell advises teachers to assess student projects based upon how well the work “convey[s] the author’s pride in the movement and optimism for the future.” There are two ways to interpret these instructions. The first is to assume that the student has imagined himself as a participant in the feminist movement; his writing, thus, should reflect the sensibilities of a typical activist of the time. This is understandable, though it does paint an unnecessarily rosy portrait of the feminists of the second wave. Even in the early stages of the movement, many women tempered their excitement for change with the realization that any movement toward equal consideration –

within society and under the law – would be a long and difficult fight. To narrow these complexities of emotion into “pride” and “optimism” is simply revisionist.¹⁸

A second reading of the assignment, and its instructions, indicates that McDougal Littell advises teachers to assess student projects based on upon the *student’s* “pride in the [feminist] movement” and “optimism for the future.” Any such attempt to judge value of a student’s opinion is not only inappropriate; it is uncondusive to processes of critical thinking and intellectual development.

According to *The Americans*, a woman’s “right to have an abortion” was a major feminist concern; it was a victory for feminists, then, when the United States Supreme Court ruled that any adult female has the right to an abortion during the first three months of her pregnancy. Here is historian Alice Epoch’s description of the same series of events: “In 1970, New York State liberalized its abortion law, making it the most progressive in the country. Three years later, in *Roe v. Wade*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that *state laws forbidding abortion violated the constitutional right to privacy.*”^{xxxviii}

The Court’s ruling in *Roe v. Wade* does not grant women the “right” to an abortion. Because the decision is so often misunderstood, I quote it at length:

¹⁸ Kathie Sarachild, in “A Program for Feminist Consciousness Raising,” writes, “This is a consciousness-raising program for those of us who are feeling more and more that women are the most exciting people around, at this stage of time, anyway, and that the seeds of a new and beautiful world society lie buried in the consciousness of this very class which has been abused and oppressed since the beginning of human history.” On the other hand, Valerie Solanis’ “SCUM Manifesto” was issued the year before, with such sentiments as “SCUM will keep on destroying, looting, fucking-up, and killing until the money-work system no longer exists and automation is completely instituted or until enough women cooperate with SCUM to make violence unnecessary to achieve these goals, that is, until enough women either unwork or quit work, start looting, leave men, and refuse to obey all laws inappropriate to a truly civilized society.” This is hardly a statement of “optimism for the future.”

State criminal abortion laws, like those involved here, that except from criminality only a life-saving procedure on the mother's behalf without regard to the stage of her pregnancy and other interests involve violate the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which protects against state action the right to privacy, including a woman's qualified right to terminate her pregnancy. Though the State cannot override that right, it has legitimate interests in protecting both the pregnant woman's health and the potentiality of human life, each of which interests grows and reaches a "compelling" point at various stages of the woman's approach to term.

For the stage prior to approximately the end of the first trimester, the abortion decision and its effectuation must be left to the medical judgment of the pregnant woman's attending physician. For the stage subsequent to approximately the end of the first trimester, the State, in promoting its interests in the health of the mother, may, if it chooses, regulate the abortion procedure in ways that are reasonably related to maternal health. For the stage subsequent to viability the State, in promoting its interest in the potentiality of human life may, if it chooses, regulate and even proscribe abortion except where necessary, in appropriate medical judgment, for the preservation of the life or health of the mother.^{xxxix}

Indeed, the "right" granted to women by *Roe v. Wade* is to the privacy to seek a medical procedure upon the counsel of her physician, and the autonomy to make that decision.

In an activity designed to "make connections across time," *The Americans* urges teachers to complete the personal story of plaintiff Jane Roe – Norma McCorvey.

Norma Leah Nelson, born a Jehovah's Witness in 1947, was raised in Houston, Texas by her mother.¹⁹ She dropped out of high school at fourteen and married a steelworker at sixteen. She left him in 1965 while pregnant with her first child, claiming abuse. In 1966, McCorvey's affair with a co-worker resulted in another pregnancy, and she placed the child up for adoption. After several years of drug and alcohol abuse, she returned home with her daughter, Melissa. The following year, her mother banished McCorvey from the house and assumed legal custody of Melissa.²⁰

¹⁹ She never knew her father, and claims her mother was an alcoholic. She also claims to have been sexually assaulted as a child by both a nun and a male relative.

²⁰ According McCorvey, her mother banished her from the house after learning of her bisexuality, and tricked her into signing over custody of Melissa while she was drunk.

In 1969 McCorvey turned twenty-one and again became pregnant. In order to obtain an abortion legally, she claimed she was raped, but the case was dismissed for insufficient evidence and McCorvey admitted the charge was fabricated. Soon after, she met attorneys Linda Coffee and Sarah Weddington, who argued her case over the next three years under the pseudonym “Jane Roe.” The “Roe” child was born and placed up for adoption.

In 1994, McCorvey was interviewed at her Dallas home by *New York Times* reporter Alex Witchell. Then 46, and living with her partner of 21 years, Connie Gonzalez, McCorvey’s interview coincided with the release of her memoir, *I Am Roe*. Sober for five years, she mentions a “two-week stint helping out at a Dallas abortion clinic,” and notes “sadly” that both her mother and her daughter, now 29, oppose abortion. “I’m a pretty happy girl,” she says, “I just never had the privilege to go to an abortion clinic, lay down, and have an abortion. That’s the only thing I never had.”^{xl}

That year McCorvey became the target of Operation Rescue, one of the leading anti-abortion organizations in the United States. In addition to picketing and protesting her book signings and public appearances, Operation Rescue activists leased the building next door to the Dallas abortion clinic where McCorvey worked, and began “talking to her, befriending her, [and] offering her lunch.” In a 2009 interview with *The Guardian*, she recalled, “I started watching the rescuers and wondering what makes them tick. They were down to earth, they weren’t telling me I was going to fry in hell, though I’m sure they were thinking that. They were very kind to me.”^{xli} In August of 1995 she converted to Christianity, and was baptized in a backyard swimming pool in Dallas. In 1998, she began working for Operation Rescue. Shortly thereafter, McCorvey was confirmed into the Roman Catholic Church, and is “no longer” a lesbian.

Later, McCorvey would argue that Coffee and Weddington were “already looking to challenge the Texas ban on abortions on the ground that it violated a woman’s right to privacy in her reproductive choices,” and that they just needed her as a “test case.” One promotion for her second autobiography, *Won By Love*, reads:

Poor, pregnant, and desperate, Norma McCorvey fell into the hands of two young and ambitious lawyers...Though she was touted as a symbol of everything women could gain by being free to choose an abortion, the real Jane Roe was an embarrassment to the image that the Ivy League feminists tried so hard to project. Norma was uneducated, unskilled, a drug user, and an alcoholic. She became a helpless pawn in a powerful game.^{xliii}

This story is far more complicated than one of a woman who merely changes her mind. Oversimplification only contributes to misunderstanding, which is dangerous in the case of a topic already so controversial. Perhaps a more historically relevant activity in “making connections across time” would be to locate, and analyze, subsequent laws and decisions by the Supreme Court that have chipped away at *Roe v. Wade*.²¹

Finally, it seems odd to include the voice of Phyllis Schlafly and the rise of the New Right in this short section. To call the rise of the “New Right” a “loss” in the women’s movement is rather simplistic – and not entirely accurate. And while continued opposition to *Roe v. Wade* did motivate social conservatism, it was hardly the only product of New Left activism opposed by the New Right. These two factions, moreover, arose more or less simultaneously, not just one as the result of the other. Although the New Right was reactionary, to a certain extent, its foundations were already forming during the early 1960s. To imply that the movement was entirely reactionary is to discount the hard work of the so-called “suburban warriors” – and the

²¹ These decisions include, but are not limited to *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, and *Stenberg v. Carhart*. Several states, including Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Texas have passed laws that constrict and shape a woman’s right to choose.

scholarship of historian Lisa McGirr.^{xliii} It contributes, also, to an easy narrative of American history that, in order for the student to develop any critical understanding of that history, he will eventually have to deconstruct.

Patriotism in Public Schools: A Colorado Story

On June 3, 2003, Colorado Governor Bill Owens signed into law Colorado House Bill 03-1368, “concerning the requirement of a daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in each public school in the State:”

Teacher and students in each classroom in each public elementary, middle, and junior high school in the State of Colorado shall begin each school day by reciting aloud the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United State of America. The teacher and students in each classroom in each public high school in the State of Colorado shall recite aloud the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America when the school conducts its daily announcements.^{xliv}

The language of the bill provided that any student may be exempted if “a parent or guardian of the student objects in writing to the recitation...and files the objection with the principal of the school.” Citizens of foreign countries were not required to participate in daily recitation. Teachers were excused from recitation if their objections were “based on religious grounds.” Any teacher who objected for “reasons of conscience,” however, was still required to stand and lead students in reciting the Pledge.

The law took effect on August 6, 2003. Six days later, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed suit, claiming that the law violated the First Amendment rights of students and teachers by coercing speech. On August 15, 2003, U.S. District Court Judge Lewis T. Babcock issued the opinion of the Court, in which he noted the particular importance of this case in deciding the purpose and place of patriotism in public education. “That [we] are educating the

young for citizenship is the reason for scrupulous protection of Constitutional freedoms of the individual.” The coerced, daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, argued Judge Babcock, could “strangle the free mind at its source, and teach youth to discount important principles of our government as mere platitudes.” He continued,

There is no question that the Pledge of Allegiance has educational value, and that has been recognized by the defendant school districts’ boards of education. One need only look at, for example, the clause “with liberty and justice for all,” to think, well, maybe we ought to look at the Declaration of Independence, and the word “republic” as being unique in a form of democracy, in that we are a republican democracy, and what that means in our constitutional construct; or the word “indivisible,” which brings to mind the Civil war when the division of our country was avoided. So all this has instruction and meaning in terms our government, and way of life, and civics. But simply standing alone as a rote, repetitious pledge, without more, and in context, there is no legitimate or reasonable education value to it. And there is nothing that in any way prohibits educators or boards of education from integrating this meaningful language into the curriculum for the education of our students.^{xlv}

With this, Justice Babcock issued a temporary injunction against HB03-1368. Early in the 2004 legislative session, the law was amended, striking the section that required all students and teachers to recite the Pledge daily. The amendment, Colorado House Bill 04-1002, requires each school district to “provide an opportunity each school day for willing students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.” This recitation was to be entirely optional: “Any person not wishing to participate in the recitation...shall be exempt from reciting...and need not participate.”

Colorado’s law was not the first attempt to regulate patriotism in public schools, nor was Judge Babcock’s ruling the first to denounce recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance as a part of classroom instruction. On January 9, 1942, the West Virginia Board of Education ordered “the salute honoring the Nation represented by the flag” to become “a regular part of the program of activities in the public schools.” All students and teachers were required to participate. “Provided, however, that refusal to salute the Flag be regarded as an Act of insubordination, and shall be dealt with accordingly.” The penalty was “expulsion until the student agreed to

conform,” writes Samuel A. Pleasants. “In the interval he was to be considered a truant and dealt with accordingly. His parents or guardians could be prosecuted, and if convicted, faced a fine or jail sentence.”^{xlvi}

A group of Jehovah’s Witnesses brought suit, asking for restrained enforcement of those laws and regulations against members of their faith.²² Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson delivered the majority opinion, which held that mandating children in public schools to salute the flag and recite the Pledge was unconstitutional.^{xlvii} This decision struck down the West Virginia statute and overturned the Court’s 1940 ruling in *Minersville School District v. Gobitis*,²³ The “compulsory flag salute and pledge,” argued Justice Jackson, “requires affirmation of a belief and an attitude of mind” contrary to the purposes of the First Amendment. Moreover,

Free public education, if faithful to the ideal of secular instruction and political neutrality, will not be partisan or enemy of any class, creed, party, or faction. If it is to impose any ideological discipline, however, each party or denomination must seek to control, or failing that, to weak the influence of the educational system. Observance of the limitations of the Constitution will not weak the government in the field appropriate for its exercise.

West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette was the first case to recognize that the First Amendment protects equally an individual’s right to speak and *not* to speak. By distinguishing the declaration of belief encompassed in recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance from instruction of American history and civics, the Court legally releases public schools from any presumed or *de facto* duties to foster in students a sense of patriotism. Still, the idea that public schools

²² Exodus 20:4-5 reads, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; that shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them.” Within this command the American flag is an “image,” and therefore should not be saluted.

²³ Justice Felix Frankfurter delivered the majority opinion, which ruled that public schools could compel students to salute the flag and recite the Pledge of Allegiance despite their religious objections. The Court ruled that a mandatory flag salute did not deprive students of their liberty without due process of law as guaranteed under the Fourteenth Amendment.

should play a key role in producing and transmitting a sense of pride in American identity persists.

Each of these cases raises questions about the place of patriotism in American public schools. I argue here that one primary purpose of public education is to create active and informed citizens. In other words, all graduates of secondary schools in the United States should be informed of, and prepared for, their rights and duties as American adults. But where – and how – does patriotism fit into this model? And which version of American patriotism is the most appropriate to impart upon young citizens? Alas, these are large, glaring questions, perhaps best left to another time. In light of these cases, however, we would do well to remember that “textbook editors [often] appear the arbiter of patriotism and American values.”^{xlviii} Why do we afford such a questionable industry such power?

A final note – every school day, across the Douglas County School District, students and teachers stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance, as they did during the injunction of 2003, and even after the language of the bill was clarified the following year.

Toward Improvement

We should remind students of their rights and responsibilities as citizens of the United States of America, and make sure that every high-school graduate is enough aware of American history and civic procedure to exist as independent adults in our society. This includes, but is not limited to, educating students about voting procedure, informing them of their judicial and economic responsibilities (serving on a jury as dictated by the Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution, or paying income taxes as required by the Sixteenth), and pushing students to think critically about current events in United States politics and society.

We should encourage teachers to develop American history curriculum outside of textbooks published by the American “Big Three.” We should use the money allocated to the committees that select American history textbooks to pay for the continued education of our American history teachers. With this continued education, and the support of administrators and school boards, teachers may begin to develop curriculums independently, and tailor to meet the specific needs of their students.

We should encourage students to read. Technology may be “the future,” but books are our past, and it is as important to know where we came from as it is to know where we are going.

We should remind students that they are members of a global economy, and push them to place themselves in a global context. We should encourage students to think critically about the ethics of globalization, and the place of the United States in an ethical world order.

We should implore students to consider multiplicity in identities, and foster an environment that rewards critical self-examination.

We should teach students to be patriotic – to appreciate what life in the United States has afforded them, and fight to fix each of her shortcomings. We should push students toward an understanding of patriotism that allows for them to realize imperfections, failures, and improvements to be made.

We must remember that our history is just that – ours. Revision and rewriting, sanitizing and whitewashing, and removing historical events from their contexts in order to teach a less controversial version of American history does distinct and direct harm to students who need to

learn that history. Moreover, it cripples student ability to think critically, and question larger concepts of certainty and truth.

Alas, there is much to be done, and, really, no easy way to do it. So I return to these words of President Barack Obama: “Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America. For everywhere we look, there is work to be done.”

ⁱ Obama, Barack. “What’s Possible for Our Children.” May 27, 2009.

ⁱⁱ Obama, Barack. “Remarks on Education.” March 10, 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ Obama, Barack. “2011 State of the Union Address.” January 25, 2011.

^{iv} Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*. New York: The Free Press. 1916.

^v Loewen, James W. *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. 2nd edition. New York: Touchstone Press. 2007. (xvii)

^{vi} Obama, Barack. “Inaugural Address.” January 20, 2009.

^{vii} James, William. “Lecture II: What Pragmatism Means.” 1906.

^{viii} Menand, Louis. *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. 2001. (xii)

^{ix} Cohen, Patricia. “In Writings of Obama, Philosophy is Unearthed.” *The New York Times*. October 27, 2010.

^x Kloppenberg, James T. *Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Political Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2011.

^{xi} James, William. “Pragmatism,” as mentioned in Kloppenberg’s *Reading Obama*. (171)

^{xii} Obama, Barack. “Back to School.” September 14, 2010.

^{xiii} <<http://highered.colorado.gov/Publications/Policies/Current/i-partf.pdf>>

^{xiv} <<http://www.dpsk12.org/policies/Policy.aspx?-db=policy.fp3&-format=detail.html&-lay=policyview&-sortfield=File&File=IKF&-recid=32846&-find=>>>

^{xv} Obama, Barack. “Twenty-first Century Schools for a Twenty-first Century Economy.” March 13, 2006.

^{xvi} Putnam, Hilary. *Pragmatism: An Open Question*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. 1995.

^{xvii} Each quoted excerpt in this section is from *Democracy and Education*.

^{xviii} Obama, Barack. “A More Perfect Union.” March 18, 2008.

^{xix} Conn, Steven. “Don’t Know Much About (the History of) History.” *American Literary History*, Vol. 17, No. 4. Winter 2005.

^{xx} US GAO

^{xxi} Koch, James V. “An Economic Analysis of Textbook Pricing and Textbook Markets.” September 2006. <<http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/acsfa/kochreport.pdf>>

^{xxii} Sewall, Gilbert T. “Textbook Publishing.” *The Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 86, No. 7. March 2005.

^{xxiii} Jones, Rebecca. “U.S. Textbooks Are Long on Glitz, but Where’s the Beef?” *The Education Digest*. Vol. 66, Issue 6. February 2001.

^{xxiv} Henry, Jules. “Education for Stupidity.” 1968.

^{xxv} Jones 25.

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- ^{xxvi} Danzer, Gerald A., J. Jorge Klor de Alva, Larry S. Krieger, Louis E. Wilson, and Nancy Woloch. *The Americans: Reconstruction through the Twentieth Century – Teacher’s Edition (California Edition)*. Evanston: McDougal Littell. 2000. All quotes and excerpts from *The Americans* are taken from this teacher’s edition.
- ^{xxvii} See FitzGerald, *America Revised*, Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, and Moreau, *Schoolbook Nation*.
- ^{xxviii} Laughlin, Kathleen A, Julie Gallagher, Dorothy Sue Cobble, Eileen Boris, Premilla Nadasen, Stephanie Gilmore, and Leandra Zarnow. “Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor.” *Feminist Formations*, Volume 22, Number 1. Spring 2010.
- ^{xxix} Laughlin 77.
- ^{xxx} Moi, Toril. “‘I Am Not a Feminist, But...’ How Feminism Became the F-Word.” *PMLA*. 2006.
- ^{xxxi} The American Textbook Council. Gilbert T. Sewall, ed. “History Textbooks at the New Century.” 2000. (7)
- ^{xxxii} Traister, Rebecca. “Mad Women.” *The New York Times*. January 20, 2011.
- ^{xxxiii} Echols, Alice. *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1989.
- ^{xxxiv} Ruthsdotter, Mary. “Writing Women Back into History.” *Education Digest*, Vol. 61, Issue 7. March 1996.
- ^{xxxv} Persons of any other ethno-racial identification, of course, were simply non-existent.
- ^{xxxvi} Lavere, David Bruce. “The Quality of Pedagogical Exercises in U.S. History Textbooks.” *The Social Studies*. January/February 2008.
- ^{xxxvii} Goldman, James. “Selling American History.” *The Lion and the Unicorn*, Volume 6. 1982.
- ^{xxxviii} Echols 198. Emphasis my own.
- ^{xxxix} *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973)
- ^{xl} Witchell, Alex. “At Home With Norma McCorvey; Of Roe, Dreams, and Choices.” *The New York Times*. July 28, 1994.
- ^{xli} Pilkington, Ed. “These Steps are Covered in Blood.” *The Guardian*. July 7, 2009.
- ^{xlii} McCorvey, Norma, and Gary Thomas. *Won By Love: Jane Roe of Roe v. Wade Speaks Out for the Unborn as She Shares Her New Conviction For Life*. Nashville: Nelson Thomas, Inc. 1998.
- ^{xliiii} For more information see Lisa McGirr’s *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*.
- ^{xliv} Colorado House Bill 03-1368.
- ^{xlv} Reporter’s transcript ruling, Civil Action No. 03-B-1544 in the United States District Court for the District of Colorado.
- ^{xlvi} Pleasants, Samuel A. “Can You Legally Compel Pupils to Pledge Allegiance?” *The Clearing House*, Vol. 32, No. 6. Feb. 1958. (367-368)
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30181787>>
- ^{xlvii} *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*. 319 U.S. 624 (1943).
- ^{xlviii} FitzGerald.

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