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# Texas Board of Education

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Cara MacDonald  
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Lester  
Honors Thesis

## Texas Board of Education

*“Education rais[es] the ass of the people to the high ground of moral respectability necessary to their own safety, and to orderly government and make [education] the keystone of the arch of our government.” – Thomas Jefferson*

Thomas Jefferson was among the first American political intellectuals to stress the importance of a strong public education system in a democratic society. His republican vision for the United States called for the breakdown of “artificial aristocracy” based on birth and wealth, rather than virtue and talent. Public education would help develop a “natural aristocracy,” capable of guarding the “sacred deposits of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizen.”<sup>1</sup> Jefferson also believed that schooling should be available to “all free children, male and female” and should be structured into elementary and grammar schools, and universities. Although he considered reading, writing, and arithmetic to be vital subjects, Jefferson stressed that European and American history were the most important for future citizens to learn.<sup>2</sup>

Today, the United States Department of Education requires that students be taught the fundamental figures, movements, and accomplishments of American

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<sup>1</sup> Mercer, Gordon E. "Thomas Jefferson: A Bold Vision for American Education." *International Social Science Review* 68, no. 1 (1993): 1-7.

<sup>2</sup> Brulatour, Meg. "Transcendental Ideas: Education." Virginia Common Wealth University. Accessed February 10, 2011

history.<sup>3</sup> The development of curriculums, as well as the adoption of textbooks and other learning materials varies from state to state, but the regulations in Texas are particularly unique and problematic.<sup>4</sup> The circumstances surrounding their State Board of Education raises many important questions as to what the ideal educational system should look like. Should a SBOE be chosen by the electorate, or appointed by the state's executive branch and who should have the final word on the textbooks schools will use? Is it best to allow individual districts to choose their own course materials or should a centralized body make the decision? Finally, the circumstances in Texas demand that the role of religion in public schools be examined. In this paper I seek to address these concerns. I examine the textbook adoption process in Texas and evaluate the effect that the ideology and religion of individual members of the State Board of Education has had on the content of American history course materials. I also disprove the assumption in the existing literature, which exaggerates the influence that the SBOE in Texas has on textbooks nationwide. I then offer my recommendations for combating Texas' flawed system.

Public education in Texas varies from that found in other states in several ways. Local school districts, rather than a centralized body, typically select their own course materials. A member of the National Association of State Textbook Administrators (NASTA), however, Texas remains one of twenty-one states to adopt its textbooks on the state-level. Even in comparison to other NASTA members, the

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<sup>3</sup> Humphrey, Daniel C., Christopher Chang-Ross, Mary Beth Donnelly, Lauren Hersh, and Heidi Skolnik. "Evaluation of the Teaching American History Program." U.S. Department of Education. [www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/teaching/us-history/teaching.doc](http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/teaching/us-history/teaching.doc).

<sup>4</sup> For a description of State Boards of Education for each state see <http://mb2.ecs.org/reports/Report.aspx?id=167>

Lone Star State is fairly unique because the members of its State Board of Education are chosen by the electorate--not appointed by the Governor. In addition, the Texas Board has the final say regarding the state-wide textbook adoption process. Alabama and Georgia are the only other NASTA members that operate in this manner.<sup>5</sup>

While the educational policies in Texas stand apart from the rest of the country, its State Board of Education is truly distinctive. The political climate in Texas far from liberal; it has not voted for a Democratic president since Jimmy Carter in 1976.<sup>6</sup> The make-up of the SBOE, however, is significantly more conservative than the state electorate<sup>7</sup>. It is currently comprised of ten Republicans and five Democrats from fifteen districts<sup>8</sup>. Divisions within the group go well beyond partisanship, as fundamentalist and moderate Christian members often engage in heated debates regarding textbook and curricula adoption. Discussions over the appropriate content for American history courses have raised some of the most divisive arguments among members.

Don McLeroy, former chairman of the board and a dentist by profession, claims that progressive minded educators and policy makers have largely monopolized the portrayal of our nation's past in public schools. A self-proclaimed fundamentalist Christian, McLeroy claims that he and his likeminded colleagues on the Texas state board of education are simply "adding balance" because "academia is

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<sup>5</sup> NASTA. Accessed November 11, 2010. <http://www.nasta.org/members.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> 270 to Win. Accessed April 10, 2011. <http://www.270towin.com/states/Texas>.

<sup>7</sup> Texas has

<sup>8</sup> McKinley, James C. "Texas Conservatives Win Curriculum Chang." *New York Times*, March 12, 2010. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html?_r=1).

skewed too far to the left.”<sup>9</sup> They are concerned that modern textbooks employed by classrooms across the nation “slight the role of Christianity,” instead placing an emphasis on promoting “multiculturalism.”<sup>10</sup> What the conservative Christians on the committee consider “balance,” however, is viewed by the other board members as something much different.

Democrats and more moderate board members, as well as progressive critics nationwide, are apprehensive about the stronghold that fundamentalists have on the textbook and curriculum adoption process for the Texas public education system. Democratic board of education member, Mary Helen Berlanga stated after a particularly heated debate over textbook content that her colleagues “pretend this is a white America and Hispanics [and other racial minorities] don’t exist.” She accuses her fellow board members of “rewriting history.”<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Rob Boston, a writer for “The Humanist” and Assistant Director of Communications for Americans United for Separation of Church and State, claims “the simplistic, whitewashed, rally-around-the-flag version of history championed by the religious right” is fundamentally damaging to the educational system.<sup>12</sup>

An extensive questionnaire on education developed by Texas Freedom Network in July 2010 shows that the majority of citizens in Texas share some of these concerns. Providing a brief description of the methods used to adopt the new

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Boston, Rob. "Messin' With Texas." *The Humanist* (2010): 2. Accessed October 10, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> McKinley, James C. "Texas Conservatives Win Curriculum Chang." *New York Times*, March 12, 2010. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html?_r=1).

<sup>12</sup> Boston, Rob. "Messin' With Texas." *The Humanist* (2010): 3. Accessed October 10, 2010.

textbooks and the nature of revisions made to them, one question asked respondents if they “favor or oppose the new curriculum requirements being developed by the Texas State Board of Education.” 57% of those polled claimed to “oppose the board’s revisions.” Likewise, 72% of those surveyed believed that “teachers and academic scholars,” rather than elected state school boards, “should be responsible for” the educational standards and “textbook requirements for Texas public schools.”<sup>13</sup>

I share the concerns of Mary Helen Berlanga, Rob Boston, and many of the respondents of the Texas Freedom polls. An examination of the revisions the Texas State Board of Education has made to American history textbooks, as well as comments made by the board members, demonstrates a clear ideological and religiously motivated agenda. The decisions made by the SBOE about classroom materials and books directly effects not only the way young Texans understand their nation’s history, but their country as a whole. In addition, the Lone Star State is second only to California in the number of textbooks it purchases and previous

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<sup>13</sup> Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research. "Texas Freedom Network Education Fund Frequency Questionnaire." Accessed April 4, 2011.

The Texas Freedom Network Education Fund Frequency Questionnaire polled 601 likely voters, asking 58 questions. Question 21 read: Now let me read you some information about the Texas State Board of Education and the changes they are making to the public school curriculum: *Every ten years, the Texas State Board of Education oversees a review of curriculum requirements for the state's public schools. Teachers, scholars, and curriculum experts make initial recommendations, and then the elected Board members revise the curriculum. This year, the majority on the Board has made more than 300 changes to the 120-page document of initial recommendations. Many of these changes include adding topics to the curriculum that promote religious views and conservative political opinions. For example, the revisions include removing commonly-accepted language, facts, and descriptions from social studies and science requirements because some members of the Board hold conflicting political or religious perspectives.*

Having heard this information, do you favor or oppose the new curriculum requirements being developed by the Texas State Board of Education?

literature suggests that it therefore has a strong influence on the curriculums in other states. Before examining the specific processes and implications of the board of education's religious and ideological partiality, however, it is crucial to explore the background of the Texas school board controversy.

## Background

The actions of the Texas School Board have been the subject of great controversy in recent years. The provocative debates between the supposed ideological and religious foes frequent more newspaper and magazine articles than in the past. The mock news television show "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" even included a segment on the problematic process by which the Texas School Board revises their curriculums in March 2010<sup>14</sup>. While the influx of media attention may portray this issue as recent, Texas's controversial practices have been occurring for decades. Furthermore, disputes over American history textbooks have existed nearly as long as history has been taught in schools<sup>15</sup>.

From colonial times into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, history has played a limited role in education. In the 1800s, educators began to stress the importance of learning history in public schools, yet only six states required the subject to be taught by the middle of the century<sup>16</sup>. In the years leading up to the Civil War, regional and cultural differences in the United States had begun to manifest themselves in classroom texts. Teachers and officials in southern states started to raise complaints about the

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<sup>14</sup> Stewart, Jon. *Daily Show*. Comedycentral.com. 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Jost, k. "Teaching History." *CQ Researcher* (1995)  
<http://library.cqpress.com.ezproxy.umw.edu:2048/cqresearcher/cqresrre1995092900>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

“antislavery propaganda” presented in textbooks produced in the North. Feeling persecuted and misrepresented, a committee of Dixie educators was formed in 1886, which called for books that would “elevate and purify the education in the South.” The group of concerned southerners claimed that northern texts were “polluted with opinions adverse to [their] institutions.”<sup>17</sup>

In order to ensure that children south of the Mason-Dixon Line were exposed to learning materials that would “do justice to the South,”<sup>18</sup> states began to increase their control over the content of textbooks. During the reconstruction period, new laws requiring a statewide review of learning materials were put in place. These practices served as the foundation for the textbook adoption process currently implemented in Texas<sup>19</sup>. Responding to the desires of different regions, publishers began to tailor their products to fit the needs of their customers. Where northern texts would refer to the “rebellion” or “civil war,” southern books labeled the conflict as the “war between the states,” “war of secession,” or the “war of Northern Aggression.”<sup>20</sup>

With the establishment of universal secondary education in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, concern for the lack of American history taught in schools was increasing. In 1892, a group of distinguished educators, called the “Committee of Ten,” were assembled by the National Education Association in order to address this problem.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> "Setting School Curriculums." *Facts On File News Service* (2010) Accessed December 1, 2010. <http://www.2facts.com.ezproxy.umw.edu:2048/article/i1500500>.

<sup>20</sup> Jost, k. "Teaching History." *CQ Researcher* (1995) <http://library.cqpress.com.ezproxy.umw.edu:2048/cqresearcher/cqresrre1995092900>.



The assembly concluded that students should take four years of history in elementary school and four years in high school as a prerequisite for college. By 1990, most states had revised their policies to require that this subject was taught in their schools<sup>21</sup>.

This revolutionary era in American education is also marked by the beginnings of vocal discontentment from religious communities. Up until the 1890s, parochial schools dominated education in United States. Churches typically had greater access to funds and as a result a significant overlap existed in the textbooks utilized in religious institutions and those used in the classrooms of secular schools.<sup>22</sup> As public education began to replace the status quo, many changes were made to course materials that were concerning to some conservative Christians.

The inclusion and expansion of American history in public school systems naturally required that more textbooks be written on the subject. Similar to what had occurred around the time of the Civil War, publishers again began to feel the pressure of interest groups, who attempted to politicize the information presented to school children. During World War I, organizations like the Knights of Columbus read tirelessly through textbooks for unpatriotic rhetoric and led boisterous protests over what they considered to be a “pro-British” slant in the descriptions of the Revolutionary War. This group was successful in altering some of the accounts of the conflict, including changing a sentence reading “Three times the British returned courageously to the attack,” to “Three times the cowardly British returned to

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> FitzGerald, Frances. *American Revised*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.35

attack.”<sup>23</sup> In the 1920s, labor, business, and even the Ku Klux Klan all applied pressure on textbook publishers to portray their views in a more favorable light<sup>24</sup>.

The most monumental revolutions in the instruction of U.S. history occurred in the 1960s. Along with new teaching styles and historical scholarship, the great social campaigns of the era—the civil rights and the women’s liberation movements—required that classes alter the information presented about these commonly overlooked demographics. In fact, school curricula served as a battleground for the struggle for equality as civil rights and feminists groups lobbied for history courses to be more inclusive and sensitive about their portrayal of the role that African Americans and women have played in American history<sup>25</sup>. According to Frances Fitzgerald, author of America Revised, this achievement marked the first time that “liberals could claim major victories” in the recurring battle of textbooks.

The most notable amendment was apparent in the treatment of slavery in history texts. Fitzgerald cites one book published in the 1950s that stated that slaves worked “quite cheerfully” while slave children were happy to “play with the children of their white masters.”<sup>26</sup> Textbooks written after the 1960s, however, rightfully presented the institution in much bleaker terms. Historian John Garraty describes one popular text as representing slavery as “almost literally inhumane.” Of the twelve

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<sup>23</sup> FitzGerald, Frances. *American Revised*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.4

<sup>24</sup> Jost, k. "Teaching History." *CQ Researcher* (1995)

<http://library.cqpress.com.ezproxy.umw.edu:2048/cqresearcher/cqresrre1995092900>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> FitzGerald, Frances. *American Revised*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

school books he analyzed, the enslavement of African-Americans was illustrated negatively in ten.<sup>27</sup>

The depiction of women and the American Indian has also changed in history textbooks. Although progressives believed that the inclusion of multicultural achievements in public schools curricula was a positive result of the pressure that groups had placed on school boards and publishers, conservatives had a different view. Those who supported the more traditional textbooks claimed that the revisions had gone too far, “enforcing a political correctness inconsistent with objective scholarship.”<sup>28</sup> A 1990s report from the Textbook Council, an independent New York-based research organization established in 1989, contended that publishers only included this new information to “appease sensitive clients.”<sup>29</sup>

The radical transformation of textbook content in the 1960s was coupled with several landmark Supreme Court cases that redefined the role of religion in public schools. In 1962, *Engel v. Vitale* challenged a law in New York that required teachers to lead students in a prayer written by the state’s Board of Regents. Separationist groups contended the prayers which had been a longstanding tradition in public schools, in fact, violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment. Writing the opinion for the court, Justice Black contended that it was not “the business of

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Jost, k. "Teaching History." *CQ Researcher* (1995)

| [http://library.cqpress.com.ezproxy.umw.edu:2048/cqresearcher/cqresrre1995092900\\_](http://library.cqpress.com.ezproxy.umw.edu:2048/cqresearcher/cqresrre1995092900_)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

government to compose official prayers for any group of the American people to recite as a part of a religious program carried out by the government.”<sup>30</sup>

The following year, *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp* challenged a more common occurrence: readings from the Bible and the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer at the beginning of each school day. The opinion of the Supreme Court found this practice unconstitutional and schools across the nation were forced to comply. Since school prayer was far more common in the South than in the North, Americans living below the Mason-Dixon Line saw a swift and dramatic shift occur in their public education systems.<sup>31</sup>

Over the last decade Texans had witnessed progressive groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) exert a tremendous amount of influence over content of traditional textbooks. The new classroom books were viewed as unpatriotic. History courses had portrayed America as a nation, downplaying its weaknesses and at times exaggerating its prosperity and strength. For generations, schools had engrained in students the superiority of a free-market economy and the religious convictions of the founders. Textbooks were now asking children to identify the benefits of new social programs and the oppression of African and Native Americans by the government.

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<sup>30</sup> Epstein, Lee, and Thomas G. Walker. *Constitutional Law for a Changing America: Rights, Liberties, and Justice*. 6th ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2007. 184-85. Print.

<sup>31</sup> Epstein, Lee, and Thomas G. Walker. *Constitutional Law for a Changing America: Rights, Liberties, and Justice*. 6th ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2007. 186-87. Print.

The substantial changes to curriculums and the increasing secularization of the public school system in Texas evoked a backlash amongst social and religious conservatives like the Gablers. In the mid 1960s, Norma and Mel Gabler, a homemaker and oil-company clerk, discovered that Texas had a little-known “citizen-review process” that allowed the public to provide input on textbook content. After noticing errors in their son’s school materials, the two launched what Washington Post editor Mariah Blake calls a “crusade to purge textbooks of...liberal, secular, pro-evolution bias.”<sup>32</sup> From their kitchen table in Hawkins, Texas, the two dedicated an enormous amount of time to reading through the books public schools were providing children. When the time came for the school board to begin their textbook adoption, a process that occurs every ten years,<sup>33</sup> Mel and Norma Gabler would inundate the meetings with their long lists of proposed changes. At one Board of Education adoption meeting in particular, the couple’s scroll of complaints reached fifty-four feet in length.<sup>34</sup>

The Gablers were able to influence other like-minded individuals to join in their commitment to purge public schools of inaccurate, misleading, or biased information. In 1961 the couple founded the non-profit organization Educational

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<sup>32</sup> Blake, Mariah. "Revisionaries How a Group of Texas Conservatives is Rewriting your Kids' Textbooks." *Washington Monthly*, January 2010, 1-5.  
<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2010/1001.blake.html>.

<sup>33</sup> McKinley, James C. "Texas Conservatives Win Curriculum Chang." *New York Times*, March 12, 2010. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html?_r=1).

<sup>34</sup> Blake, Mariah. "Revisionaries How a Group of Texas Conservatives is Rewriting your Kids' Textbooks." *Washington Monthly*, January 2010, 1-5.  
<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2010/1001.blake.html>.

Research Analysts to bolster their influence on the textbook adoption method<sup>35</sup>.

Although the two lacked even undergraduate college degrees, their group's power over the process was undeniable by the 1980s. The Board of Education had begun demanding that publishers make hundreds of the Gablers' changes, ranging from rewriting entire passages to making simple revisions of sentences. One successful change included the removal of the New Deal, which they believed to be a socialist government program, from a timeline of significant historical events. In another request, textbooks altered their description of Ronald Reagan's 1983 military intervention in Grenada as a "rescue" rather than an invasion.<sup>36</sup>

The Educational Research Analysts organization remains active today in Longview, Texas. Although the founding couple is deceased—Mel Gabler passed away in December 2004 after suffering a brain hemorrhage and Norma Gabler died of Parkinson's disease—their association was left in the hands of Neal Frey.<sup>37</sup>

According to their website, the Educational Research Analysts is a "conservative Christian organization that reviews textbooks submitted for adoption in Texas". Their mission statement adds that their "unique 48 years [of] experience gives [them the] expertise equal to or beyond that of the educational establishment itself in all phases of the public school textbook adoption process, and in that [their] standard review

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<sup>35</sup> Educational Research Analysts. [textbookreviews.org](http://textbookreviews.org).

<sup>36</sup> Blake, Mariah. "Revisionaries How a Group of Texas Conservatives is Rewriting your Kids' Textbooks." *Washington Monthly*, January 2010, 1-5.  
<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2010/1001.blake.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Jost, k. "Teaching History." *CQ Researcher* (1995)  
<http://library.cqpress.com.ezproxy.umw.edu:2048/cqresearcher/cqresrre1995092900>.

criteria spell out what public school textbooks often censor on certain topics.”<sup>38</sup>

Subjects of particular concern to their group include: “scientific weaknesses in evolutionary theories, phonics-based reading instruction, principles and benefits of free enterprise, original intent of the U.S. Constitution, respect for Judeo-Christian morals, emphasis on abstinence in sex education, and [the] politically-correct degradation of academics.”<sup>39</sup>

The Educational Research Analysts claim that their work has been extremely influential to the Texas state Board of Education. An analysis conducted in 1984 by the progressive advocacy group, People for the American Way, found that textbook publishers have begun anticipating the demands of the board. Examining biology books purchased by Texas in particular, the study found that three excluded the mention of evolution before the BOE even weighed in.<sup>40</sup> More recently, in 2004, Neal Frey was instrumental in changing the definition of marriage in public school health textbooks. After strongly urging both members of the State Board of Education and publishing companies, the textbooks were edited to specify that the union of marriage can only exist between a man and a woman.<sup>41</sup>

At present, publishers will often print special editions of their textbooks tailored specifically towards the standards implemented by the State Board of Education. An overview of the materials currently in use by Texas public schools

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<sup>38</sup> Educational Research Analysts. [textbookreviews.org](http://textbookreviews.org).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Blake, Mariah. "Revisionaries: How a group of Texas Conservative is Rewriting your Kids' Textbooks." *Washington Monthly* 2009: 1-5. Web. 10 Dec. 2010.

<sup>41</sup> Cavanagh, Sean. "Chapter and Verse." *Education Week* 7, no. 4 (2005): 28-31. <http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2006/01/01/04textbooks.h17.html?tkn=OTNDdduL%2FVaG4FF3J3ikRcDfj3lx4X1XAANc&print=1>.

shows that high school civics and history courses all utilize a majority of “Texas edition” books. United States Government courses for example, issues the texts “Holt American Government,” published by Holt McDougal, “United States Government,” by Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, and “Magruder’s American Government,” published by Pearson Education Inc. All of these textbooks bear the label “Texas edition.”<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, United States History Studies Since Reconstruction course issues five books: “Holt The American Nation in the Modern Era,” “The American Republic Volume 2,” “America: Pathways to the Present Modern American History,” “The Americans: Reconstruction to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” and “Twentieth Century United States History System.” Only the final two textbooks were not edited specifically for the state. In addition, the course materials for World Geography Studies consist of three special edition books of the five used and World History Studies, similarly, uses three Texas texts of the four purchased by the state<sup>43</sup>. While proponents of the separation of church and state should be relieved with my findings, there are still significant numbers of children who are affected by decisions of the Texas State Board of Education.

## The Adoption Process: Methodology

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<sup>42</sup> *Texas Education Agency Programs*. Texas Education Agency , 2010. Web. 2 Dec. 2010. Page 109.

<sup>43</sup> *Texas Education Agency Programs*. Texas Education Agency , 2010. Web. 2 Dec. 2010. Page 107-108.



The Texas Education Agency (TEA) facilitates the operation of 1,235 school districts and charter schools, more than 640,000 educators, and more than 4.7 million schoolchildren.<sup>44</sup> Operating under the umbrella of this agency, the fifteen-member Board of Education resides in Austin, and is accountable for overseeing the development of the statewide curriculum, the management of the textbook adoption process, administering the statewide assessment programs, and managing a data collection system on public school students, staff and finances. The SBOE is also responsible for rating school districts under the centralized accountability system, operating research and information programs, monitoring compliance with federal guidelines, and serving as a fiscal agent for the distribution of state and federal funds.<sup>45</sup>

According to the National Association of State Textbook Administrators, the state of Texas is one of 21 states with a process for approval or adoption of instructional materials.<sup>46</sup> The Texas Constitution, Article VII, Section 3, requires that the State Board of Education set aside “sufficient money to provide free textbooks for children attending public school.” If additional funds are necessary, the Texas Legislature must approve the money. The board of education is responsible for the evaluation and adoption of new instructional materials, local selection and

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<sup>44</sup> Texas Education Agency. "SBOE History and Duties." Accessed December 1, 2010. <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=4214>.

<sup>45</sup> Texas Education Agency. "Texas Education Agency Mission." Accessed December 10, 2010. <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=4214>.

<sup>46</sup> NASTA. Accessed November 11, 2010. <http://www.nasta.org/members.htm>.

distribution, and for developing a list of conforming and nonconforming learning supplements<sup>47</sup>.

The “conforming list” consists of textbooks and other educational materials that meet the “manufacturing standards” adopted by State Board of Education. The products on this list are free of factual errors and contain subject matter covering each element of, what the board has determined, “essential knowledge and skills.” The “nonconforming” list is made up of textbooks and other teaching aids that meet the manufacturing standards adopted by the State Board, and does not contain all of the “elements of essential knowledge and skills.”<sup>48</sup>

Every ten years, the Texas State Board of Education must evaluate existing textbooks and determine which new materials are necessary to purchase. Members of the state textbook review panels are responsible for evaluating instructional materials and submitting their findings to the commissioner of education. A public hearing is held before the State Board of Education approximately two months before the final adoption is scheduled to take place. Unique to Texas, citizens are able to voice any comments they may have about the textbooks submitted for adoption. After reviewing all the available information, the State Board of Education decides which educational materials will be placed on the conforming and nonconforming lists, and which books will be rejected<sup>49</sup>. In the past, groups of concerned citizens like the Gablers played a large role in implementing specific changes for textbooks. At

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<sup>47</sup> *Texas Education Agency Mission*. Texas Education Agency , 2010. Web. 2 Dec. 2010.

<sup>48</sup> <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/textbooks/adoptprocess/overview.html>

*Texas Education Agency About*. Texas Education Agency , 2010. Web. 2 Dec. 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Blake, Mariah. "Revisionaries: How a group of Texas Conservative is Rewriting your Kids' Textbooks." *Washington Monthly* 2009: 1-5. Web. 10 Dec. 2010.

present, however, those who testify before the Texas State Board of Education tend to be progressive groups like the Texas Freedom Network. After decades of vocal and active opposition to the preserved liberal trends in textbooks, the viewpoints of conservative fundamentalists are now represented on the Board.

Some members of the State Board of Education are more candid about their methods for assessing new learning materials. Don McLeroy states that “when [he] evaluate[s] textbooks, [he] first see[s] how they cover Christianity and Israel.” Then he checks to see how the course book references Ronald Reagan<sup>50</sup>. In an interview with *Washington Monthly* editor, Mariah Blake, expressed his disgust with those tasked with offering recommendations to the Board. Believing the curriculums suggested by educational scholars are filled with liberal bias he stated that “somebody’s gotta stand up to [these] experts!” He and his fellow conservatives on the SBOE have done just that.<sup>51</sup>

Cynthia Dunbar, another Republican representative on the board, claims that American history is void without the recognition that the United States has always been a “Christian land, governed by Christian principles.<sup>52</sup>” Prior to the beginning of a May meeting in 2010, Dunbar addressed the group stating “I believe no one can read the history of our country without realizing that the Good Book and the spirit of the savior have from the beginning been our guiding geniuses.<sup>53</sup>” Therefore, she

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<sup>50</sup> Blake, Mariah. "Revisionaries: How a group of Texas Conservative is Rewriting your Kids' Textbooks." *Washington Monthly* 2009: 1-5. Web. 10 Dec. 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Boston, Rob. "Messin' With Texas." *The Humanist* Aug. 2010: 1-3. Web. 10 Oct. 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

believes that it is essential that the Christian roots of the United States are taught to children in public schools.

Due to the majority they hold on the Texas State Board of Education, Christian conservatives hold an immense amount of power in the textbook and curriculum adoption process. As a result, many of the changes or alterations made to American history courses reflect their viewpoints. Revisions approved by the board range from altering a particular phrase or word to the addition or deletion of an entire passage. Certain historical concepts, individuals, movements, or documents have been deemed more significant than others by the more influential portion of the board.

Two excerpts from a high school and middle school social studies textbook exemplify the changes made by the State Board of Education. The first history passage requires that “the student understands the impact of political, economic, and social factors in the U.S. role in the world from the 1970s through 1990.” The list that follows describes the information the student is expected to take away from this section. The additions made by the board are shown in bold, while slashed out phrases imply that information was taken out. The first bullet point, “A,” shows a revision, replacing the word “role” with “leadership” relating to Richard Nixon’s relationship to the “normalization of relations with China and the policy of détente.”<sup>54</sup>

In part B of the exercise, the board added “leadership” to another description of fellow conservative Ronald Reagan’s contribution to international and domestic politics. The most significant change made to this high school history exercise,

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<sup>54</sup> McKinley, James C. "Texas Conservatives Win Curriculum Change." *New York Times*, March 12, 2010. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html?_r=1).

however, is the addition of a bullet point “E,” which requires that students achieve a proficient knowledge of “the causes, key organizations, and individuals of the conservative resurgence of the 1980s and 1990s.” These include “Phyllis Schlafly, the Contract with America, the Heritage Foundation, the Moral Majority, and the National Rifle Association.<sup>55</sup>” The changes made to this particular textbook passage narrowly passed 7-6 in a vote where two board members were not present<sup>56</sup>.

The academic exercise designed for middle school students also illustrates the conservative influence of the Texas State Board of Education. This particular set of expectations requires that students “understand the origins and development of the free enterprise system in the United States.” In addition to knowing “why a free enterprise system of economics developed in [our] new nation,” board members supplemented “minimal government intrusion, taxation, and property rights” to the list of components to this type of fiscal system.<sup>57</sup> Where previous textbooks had commended the effects of progressive economic programs such as FDR’s New Deal, revisions downplayed its success and importance. Don McLeroy praised these changes, claiming they will enrich educational materials by providing “more political balance.<sup>58</sup>”

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<sup>55</sup> McKinley, James C. "Texas Conservatives Win Curriculum Chang." *New York Times*, March 12, 2010. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html?_r=1).

<sup>56</sup> Knowles, David. "HISTORY Textbook Controversy Roils Texas." *AOL News*. Web. 10 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.aolnews.com/nation/article/history-textbook-controversy-roils-texas/19323135>>.

<sup>57</sup> McKinley, James C. "Texas Conservatives Win Curriculum Chang." *New York Times*, March 12, 2010. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html?_r=1).

<sup>58</sup> Knowles, David. "HISTORY Textbook Controversy Roils Texas." *AOL News*. Web. 10 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.aolnews.com/nation/article/history-textbook-controversy-roils-texas/19323135>>.

The origins of the United States, including the original intent of our country's founders, have proved to be one of the most fiercely contested amongst the school board members. Cynthia Dunbar contests that "the entire Bill of Rights came into being because of the knowledge our forefathers had of the Bible and their belief in it."<sup>59</sup> The majority of her colleagues on the board seem to share Dunbar's beliefs including David Bradley, a real estate agent by profession, who publicly stated that he "reject[ed] the notion by the left of a constitutional separation of church and state." Bradley and Dunbar were instrumental in implementing dozens of changes to history textbooks, calling into question the secular nature of our founding documents<sup>60</sup>. Their revisions required high school American history students to evaluate what they consider to be the religious influence of the American Revolutionary War and the divine references written in the Declaration of Independence. They also significantly altered the impact that secular thought had in the early history of the United States- something older textbooks explained in a great bit of detail.

The portrayal of Thomas Jefferson in new Texas history books was yet another subject that caused further divisions within the State Board of Education. While conservatives praise the drafter of our Declaration of Independence for his anti-federalist convictions, they have made sure to downplay or even ignore his influential letter to the Danbury Baptists- the document in which Jefferson stresses the need for a

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<sup>59</sup> Boston, Rob. "Messin' With Texas." *The Humanist* Aug. 2010: 1-3. Web. 10 Oct. 2010. Page 3.

<sup>60</sup> McKinley, James C. "Texas Conservatives Win Curriculum Chang." *New York Times*, March 12, 2010. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html?_r=1).

“wall of separation between church and state.”<sup>61</sup> Laurie Fendrich, a professor of fine arts at Hofstra University, was especially concerned with how our nation’s 3<sup>rd</sup> President was portrayed in accordance to the Enlightenment.

Analyzing the differences in history textbooks used in Texas and those implemented elsewhere in the country, Fendrich claims that there are significant and problematic differences between the two. The specialized Texas version, for example, requires that students are able to “explain the impact of the writings of John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Voltaire, Charles de Montesquieu, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and Sir William Blackstone.” This alternate version of the textbook not only leaves out the word “enlightenment,” a term used to describe these thinkers, but also leaves out Thomas Jefferson from the list of enlightened intellectuals.<sup>62</sup>

The Texas Board of Education has been criticized for several other revisions implemented during the adoption process. Former chairman of the board Don McLeroy, for example, was successful in correcting what he believed to be the unfair portrayal of Senator Joseph McCarthy. By adding information from congressional reports about the communist threats during the Cold War, McLeroy was able to paint McCarthy as a hero rather than the paranoid leader in the red scare witch-hunts of the 1950s that he is depicted as in most texts<sup>63</sup>. Progressives in and outside the board have also expressed concern over discussions on whether or not it is necessary to

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Knowles, David. "History Textbook Controversy Roils Texas." *AOL News*. Web. 10 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.aolnews.com/nation/article/history-textbook-controversy-roils-texas/19323135>>.

include the first African American Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, Mexican-American labor activist Cesar Chavez, or Senator Ted Kennedy in Texas' history books. They claim by removing these important figures in American history from public school curriculums, replacing them with popular actors in conservative political and social movements, public schools run the risk of permanently skewing written accounts of our country's past.

While the revisions to American history textbooks have invoked the most provocative debates, Christian conservatives on the board have also targeted science courses. Many seek to include the teaching of the "scientific weaknesses" of Darwin's theory of evolution in biology courses, or simply eliminate it all together. Don McLeroy went as far to declare that despite "what the educational political lobby and their allies on the left say, evolution is hooey."<sup>64</sup> Not surprisingly, the Texas board has also targeted sexual education courses. The journal "Contemporary Sexuality" cited that the information presented to students about sex, or the lack thereof, is likely to increase the number of students who will have unprotected intercourse<sup>65</sup>. Textbooks from the 1990s offered medically inaccurate information about sexual health. One passage suggested that women should "get plenty of rest" in order to avoid pregnancy.

## Implications and Solutions

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<sup>64</sup> Blake, Mariah. "Revisionaries: How a group of Texas Conservative is Rewriting your Kids' Textbooks." *Washington Monthly* 2009: 1-5. Web. 10 Dec. 2010.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* page 2.



Although many concerns have been raised about the Texas Board of Education, its influence on the course materials adopted by other states is consistently cited. Journalists, educators, government officials and political scientists have stressed the great influence that the state of Texas has over textbook companies. At a Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Kimberly Plummer, a classroom teacher and textbook company consultant, frankly explained that profits ultimately dictated the content that publishers put into their course materials. “The bottom line for any textbook company... is dollars and cents.”<sup>66</sup> The market for textbooks in Texas is second only to California. Gilbert T. Sewall, the director of the American Textbook Council, a nonprofit research group based in New York City claims that “because of its purchasing power, [Texas] has unique force with [the] educational publishers,” who want to use “as much of the Texas edition as possible in what they’re selling nationwide.”<sup>67</sup>

The threat of Texas dictating national curriculum was particularly alarming to some politicians. In an effort to ensure that course materials produced to Texas standards were not adopted in California, state senator Leland Yee proposed legislation to block the adoption of any of the Lone Star State’s textbooks. The bill would require the California Board of Education to look out for any of the Texas content as part of its standard practice of reviewing public school materials.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Futrell, Mynga, Bruce Grelle, Rebecca Hayes, and Kimberly Plummer. "The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life." First Amendment Center.

<sup>67</sup> Robelen, Erik W. "Texas' Influence Over Textbook Content Could Shift With Changes in the Market." *Education Week*, 2009.

<sup>68</sup> Shurley, Traci. "Texas' Education Standards Alarm Legislator in California." *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, March 20, 2010.

Although Governor Schwarzenegger vetoed Yee's bill, the measure made it clear that policy makers were paying close attention to the possible implications that the Texas State Board of Education might have on public education in the United States.<sup>69</sup>

While journal articles and television news stories have continued to frame Texas' textbook adoption process as a national issue, an examination of educational polices state-by-state, as well as my interviews with people working in the Departments of Education in many of these states, leads me to conclude that this is not the case. Alabama, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and West Virginia all choose curriculum at the state level.<sup>70</sup> According to Val Fenske, the Curricular Materials Coordinator for the Idaho State Department of Education, only Florida, California, and Texas purchase enough textbooks to get their own state editions.<sup>71</sup> The twenty-one members of NASTA, the National Association of State Textbook Administrators, have an individual set of standards for the course materials that they adopt. Therefore, students in Idaho or Oklahoma will not be learning Texas' version of U.S. history.

The remaining twenty-nine states are referred to as "open territory," and delegate the textbook adoption process to individual school districts. Sally

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[http://dist08.casen.govoffice.com/index.asp?Type=B\\_PR&SEC={E917F382-8B46-4C4E-976E-64261965F209}&DE={32C2EEB9-0D34-4742-A666-4CA92C91BB05}](http://dist08.casen.govoffice.com/index.asp?Type=B_PR&SEC={E917F382-8B46-4C4E-976E-64261965F209}&DE={32C2EEB9-0D34-4742-A666-4CA92C91BB05}).

<sup>69</sup> Strauss, Valerie. "California Bill Takes Aim at New Texas Standards." *Washington Post*, May 22, 2010. <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/answer-sheet/history/california-bill-takes-aim-at-n.html>.

<sup>70</sup> NASTA. Accessed November 11, 2010. <http://www.nasta.org/members.htm>.

<sup>71</sup> Fenske, Val. Personal Interview. March 9, 2011.

Wilkinson, the Bureau Chief of the Instructional Material Bureau of the New Mexico Public Education Department recognized that twenty years ago districts within these states would often purchase course materials from larger states such as Texas or Florida because of cost. Technology, however, has eliminated the need for open territory states to do so. It is now very simple and inexpensive for publishing companies to “delete or add a chapter” to meet the demands of their customers.<sup>72</sup>

The impact of the controversial history textbooks may be limited to the students being educated in Texas, but the implications are still substantial. The population of Texas accounts for over 8% of the population of the United States with 4.7 million children attending public school. Elected officials are responsible for determining the content of the curriculums and its course materials in this state and revisions made to history texts clearly illustrate an ideological bias. Although I contend that this is problematic for the integrity and effectiveness of the public education system, some conservatives believe the adoption process in Texas is ideal.

Political scientists Robert Lerner, Althea K. Nagai, and Stanley Rothman would concur that textbook adoption states are ideal because citizens have a greater influence on the content of course materials than teachers and intellectual elites. The authors claim that progressive educators have long “advocated for a radical transformation of American life, using the school as their instrument.”<sup>73</sup> A “massive injection of [their] own values” into public school curriculums has created an inherent bias in the education system. Lerner, Nagai, and Rothman believe that liberal elites

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<sup>72</sup> Wilkinson, Sally. Personal Interview. March 9, 2011.

<sup>73</sup> Lerner, Robert, Althea K. Nagai, and Stanley Rothman. *Molding the Good Citizen: The Politics of High School Texts*. Westport, CT, Ala.: Praeger, 1995.

have been indoctrinating children for so long their impact is nearly impossible to correct.

The influence of feminism in particular is especially troubling to the authors. Looking beyond the implied ideological bias, Lerner, Nagai, and Rothman claim that the “feminist textbook revolution” has significantly affected the quality of American history education. Beginning in the 1960s, groups such as NOW, the National Organization for Women, applied pressure on the federal government to fund “alternative curricula” that would eliminate sexual and racial stereotypes in classroom materials.<sup>74</sup> Individual states, like California, passed legislation that created a set of strict gender standards for textbooks. The law stated that:

“(1) Illustrations must contain approximately equal numbers of men and women; (2) in the representation of each profession, including parenting, men and women must be portrayed equally; (3) the contributions of men and women to developments in history or achievements in art or science must appear in equal numbers; (4) mentally and physically active, creative, problem solving roles and individuals’ success or failure in these roles must be divided evenly between males and females; (5) the number of traditional and non-traditional activities engaged in by characters of both sexes must be approximately even; (6) the gamut of emotions must occur randomly among character, regardless of gender; and (7) both sexes must be portrayed in nurturing roles with their families.”<sup>75</sup>

After this law was implemented, the content of textbooks changed rapidly.

While American history texts had integrated women into school curriculums, many believed it had done so at the expense of the book’s academic quality. Michael

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<sup>74</sup> Lerner, Robert, Althea K. Nagai, and Stanley Rothman. *Molding the Good Citizen: The Politics of High School Texts*. Westport, CT, Ala.: Praeger, 1995.

<sup>75</sup> California State Department of Education. 1986. *Standards for Evaluation of Instructional Materials with Respect to Social Content*. Sacramento: Bureau of Publications, California State Department of Education.

Kirst, was a member of the California State Board of Education at the time the changes were being implemented. A proponent of raising educational standards in the state, he claimed that the new laws forced publishers to “dumb down” their materials. A study conducted by Diane Ravitch and Chester E. Finn, Jr. seemed to suggest that the new textbook guidelines truly were detrimental to students.

According to their findings, more seventeen-year-olds could identify Harriet Tubman than could identify Winston Churchill or Joseph Stalin. In addition, more than three of four teenagers were aware that women worked in the factories during World War II, while far less could recognize the Great Depression.<sup>76</sup>

Neal Frey, the President and senior textbook analyst of the Educational Research Analysts organization was so troubled by the “liberal bias” that had emerged in textbooks that he decided to dedicate his life to correcting it. He contends that having a State Board of Education made up of representatives elected from every region of Texas is ideal. When we spoke on the phone he passionately pronounced that “it’s only [just] that the democratic majority have the right to stress their influence,” on the information that children are taught in schools.<sup>77</sup> Although he admits that he is “not an expert” and could not identify any of the flaws in our national public education system, Mr. Frey reads through textbooks for a living. Going through approximately fifty pages a day, he identifies flaws in learning materials for science, health, history, and reading. The textbooks he reads are then

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<sup>76</sup> Ravitch, Diane, and Chester E. Finn, Jr. 1987. *What do our 17-year-olds know?* New York: Harper and Row.

<sup>77</sup> Frey, Neal. Personal interview. 6 Dec. 2010.

reviewed, given his recommendation or disapproval and posted on his website to be seen by educators or parents who choose to home school their children.<sup>78</sup>

Like Neal Frey, the elected officials on the Texas State Board of Education also do not have expertise in many or all of the subjects that they are responsible for reviewing. Former chairman Don McLeroy is a dentist, Rick Agosto works in sales and marketing, and Rene Nunez is a licensed real estate broker, yet these are the people are given the power to decide the version of American history that over 4.7 million school children in Texas are taught.<sup>79</sup>

Clearly it is not ideal that publishers exhibit any bias in their textbooks. The revisions made by the ideologically and religiously motivated members of the Texas SBOE skew American history. By eliminating or downplaying progressive movements and figures, the Board is dictating what future generations of Texans will remember about our country's past. On the other side of the spectrum, the influence of liberal interest groups has not always produced positive results. Setting requirements for the number of ethnic minorities mentioned in a text, as well as demanding equal recognition of important men and women also does not accurately represent American history. With policies such as these, the quality of writing in the textbooks also declines and students are left reading an overly simplified and misleading account of the nation's past. These politically charged revisions to course

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<sup>78</sup> Frey, Neal. Personal interview. 6 Dec. 2010.

<sup>79</sup> "SBOE History and Duties." *Texas Education Agency*. Texas Education Agency, 2010. Web. 10 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=4214>>.

materials do nothing to strengthen the people's faith in the public education system in the United States.

It is problematic for the integrity of our national public education system as well as our democratic society that a group of elected officials are given the responsibility of choosing the appropriate curriculums and textbooks for millions of school children, rather than scholarly experts who should ideally be given this task. The success of the political system of the United States is dependent on the capacity of the American electorate to choose their elected leaders. The critical thinking and problem solving skills required to do so, therefore, must be addressed through the public school system.

Even beyond the apprehensions that a small group of non-experts may be accountable for providing millions of school children with inaccurate information, the ideological and religious bias that clearly influences the decisions made by the Texas State Board of Education present a host of other problems. Although Gail Lowe told the Daily Texan that she “[doesn’t] see any evidence that people are pursuing any political or personal agenda,” the statements and revisions that she and her likeminded conservative fundamentalist Christian board members have made prove that this is not the case. Don McLeroy’s op-ed piece published in USA Today stated that the “left’s principles are diametrically opposed to our founding principles.”<sup>80</sup>

With the majority of the board of education sharing this viewpoint, there is little hope

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<sup>80</sup> McLeroy, Don. "Teaching Founding Principles." *USA Today* June 1997. Web. 19 Oct. 2010.

that the dilemma in Texas can be solved without a serious reform of their curriculum and textbook adoption process.

I believe it is crucial to first address whether it is better for individual school districts to adopt their own textbooks and other course materials or for a centralized body at the state level to do so. According to Stephen D. Driesler, the executive director of the Association of American Publishers, in recent years more states have switched over to the open territory system of textbook selection claiming that it gives educators greater flexibility to meet the needs of their students.<sup>81</sup> Recognizing this, some NASTA states like Alabama have started to allow districts to submit requests to purchase textbooks that do not appear on the state adoption list.<sup>82</sup>

Although teachers enjoy the freedom that such policies provide, there are many benefits to the system of state-wide adoption. One advantage is that local public schools have more time to dedicate to the other responsibilities within their districts. The process of reviewing course materials is extremely tedious and time consuming; those given this task must dedicate many hours to carefully scrutinizing hundreds of pages of text. There are also economic benefits to utilize the state adoption process. Districts in NASTA states are able to use state funds to purchase educational materials for their schools, which offer greater guarantees that all classrooms will have access to quality textbooks.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Manzo, Kathleen K. "Lawmakers Pursue Flexible Text Selection." *Education Week* 22, no. 37 (2003)

<sup>82</sup> Alabama Department of Education. Accessed April 12, 2011.  
[http://www.alsde.edu/html/sections/section\\_detail.asp?section=54](http://www.alsde.edu/html/sections/section_detail.asp?section=54).

<sup>83</sup> Manzo, Kathleen K. "Lawmakers Pursue Flexible Text Selection." *Education Week* 22, no. 37 (2003)



For these reasons I believe that the adoption of textbooks at the state level is ideal for certain states, especially those with less access to funds. A 2010 report by the United States Census Bureau<sup>84</sup> cited that (in ascending order) Tennessee, South Carolina, Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, West Virginia, New Mexico, Kentucky, Arkansas, and Mississippi, all adoption states, have the greatest percentages of people living below the poverty threshold in the nation. In fact, the only NASTA member to have less than 13% of its residents fall into this economic demographic is Virginia.<sup>85</sup> States with higher levels of poverty invariably collect less revenue from taxation and therefore have less money to spend on education in general. For Texas, state level adoption is the better option.

In addition to textbook adoption policies, the make-up of State Boards of Education varies greatly across the country. Alaska, Delaware, Florida, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota have only seven board members, whereas twenty-one people sit on the SBOE in Pennsylvania. Wisconsin and Minnesota even operate without a centralized Board.<sup>86</sup> The selection of Board members also varies greatly from state to state. Typically, the governor appoints the majority of the voting members of the SBOE. In twenty-three states all the voting members are appointed

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<sup>84</sup> The U.S. Census Bureau measures poverty status by “comparing annual income to a set of dollar values called thresholds that vary by family size, number of children, and age of householder. If a family’s before tax money income is less than the dollar value of their threshold, then that family and every individual in it are considered to be in poverty.” For more information see “How Poverty is Calculated in the ACS” at [www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/methods/definitions.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/methods/definitions.html)

<sup>85</sup> U.S. Census Bureau . "Poverty: 2008 and 2009 American Community Survey Briefs." Accessed April 7, 2011.

<sup>86</sup> Education Commission of the States. "State Boards of Education ." <http://mb2.ecs.org/reports/Report.aspx?id=167>.

and the Boards of fourteen states consist of a combination of elected members and members appointed by either the governor or the state legislature, which has been effective in enacting beneficial educational polices.<sup>87</sup>

The electorate chooses the members of their State Boards of Education in only a handful of states. While proponents of this system claim that public education in Alabama, Colorado, Hawaii, Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah are more democratic because the voices of citizens, rather than elites are represented on SBOEs.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless I contend that this model is not in the best interest of students. First, those elected to State Boards of Education tend to be less qualified for their positions. Although experience is undoubtedly a campaign advantage, too many of those elected are better versed in politics than education and therefore behave as politicians. Candidates for the State Board of Education must run as a member of either the Democratic or Republican Party. They therefore run on a political platform and must appeal to the demands of citizens in order to be successfully re-elected.

When the electorate chooses the members of its State Board of Education, it is difficult, if not impossible to separate ideology from the public education system in that state. It is especially problematic for Texas because those who tend to turn the vote do not represent the majority of the population's views.<sup>89</sup> Fundamentalist Christians have been instrumental in getting conservatives elected to the State Board

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> "Setting School Curriculums." *Facts On File News Service* (2010) Accessed December 1, 2010. <http://www.2facts.com.ezproxy.umw.edu:2048/article/i1500500>.

of Education for decades. Board member Don McLeroy, for example has received recognition and support from groups like the Christian Coalition. Executive Director Ralph Reed praised his work on the SBOE, citing it as an example of what the “Religious Right can achieve through political participation.”<sup>90</sup>

Despite the implications of having a democratically elected State Board of Education, I do believe that citizens should have a voice in the textbook adoption process. The consequences of such a provision in Texas may make my conclusion seem puzzling. The efforts of people like the Gablers, who entered Board meetings with lengthy lists of complaints, negatively impacted the content of American history textbooks adopted for public schools. These Texans, however, were being treated as the Board member’s constituents, which bolstered their bully-like influence over school curriculums and classroom learning materials. Removing the concern for reelection, citizens are given a forum by which to express their concerns without the authority to enact wide sweeping reactionary changes.

Finally, I believe it is necessary to explore what the ideal American history textbook looks like and the role that religion should play in it. Progressives have long advocated for greater inclusion of women and ethnic minorities in history curriculums, claiming that textbooks written before the 1960s largely ignored or downplayed their accomplishments. They also contend that these books tend to gloss over the less-than-glamorous aspects of our nation’s past. On the other hand, conservatives claim that modern textbooks demonize or even ignore Christianity and overstate the failed policies of the United States. They believe that it is the role of

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<sup>90</sup> "People and Events." *Church and State* (1997): 19.

textbooks to inspire patriotism and pride in one's country. Differences aside, both groups seem to be in agreement, however, about one thing: that American history textbooks are biased.

Based on my research, it appears that both groups have valid concerns. The implementation of quotas requiring publishers to represent men, women, and minorities equally has made students more cognizant of their importance to the nation. Unfortunately, the version of American history that these textbooks represent is just as skewed as the one embodied by the Christian Fundamentalists on the Texas State Board of Education. Leaders of conservative movements did not dominate our past and social minorities were not given the freedom to do so. A neutral textbook should accurately represent the accomplishments of people of different ethnic backgrounds and explore the impact of religion in the United States because understanding Christianity's role in history is key to understanding American history.