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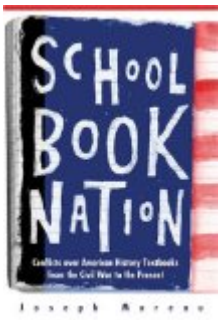

Joseph Moreau. *Schoolbook Nation: Conflicts over American History Textbooks from the Civil War to the Present.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003. 403 pp. $19.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-472-03053-8.

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In this excellent study, Joseph Moreau recounts eight controversies over the presentation of American history and the framing of American nationhood in school textbooks published from the time of the Civil War to the late twentieth century. Although he does not utilize the literature on nation-building and the dissemination and contestation of nationalist ideas and ideologies, he provides an enormous amount of historical evidence and thoughtful analysis for scholars of nationalism to chew on. More than anything, he demonstrates the variety of interest groups that have sought to shape the interpretation and indoctrination of a modern nation's history.

In his introduction, Moreau begins with the most recent controversy over the teaching of American history. In the 1980s and 1990s, various critics charged that activists' demands for inclusion of the histories of a host of groups--racial minorities, women, gays and lesbians, and others--fragmented the American story as taught to primary and secondary school students. Instead of imparting a unifying account that inculcated shared national ideals and molded pupils in a common sense of citizenship, U.S. history instruction allegedly had degenerated into incoherence with every group now divisively having its own separate story. In *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (1991), the distinguished historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., decried that since the 1960s racial and ethnic pressure groups had taken control of the writing of school history textbooks and the teaching of U.S. history to the detriment of students' historical knowledge and national identity. The debate climaxed with conflict over the promulgation of National Standards for the teaching of history that most prominently pitted conservative advocate Lynne Cheney, one-time head of the National Endowment for the Humanities and wife of future vice president Dick Cheney, against the prominent UCLA historian Gary B. Nash.

All of these controversialists assumed that prior to the 1960s American history was taught as a single coherent story. Conservatives believed that earlier textbooks reflected a consensus about American values and the American experience. Proponents of revisionist textbooks did not dis-

pute that uniformity of perspective had characterized the writing of those histories. They simply thought it reflected the dominant position of certain groups in both society and the educational system and the suppression of dissident voices. They declared that now in the late twentieth century those voices were at long last being heard.

The trouble was, as Moreau explains, few people on either side of the contemporary controversy ever read any of those earlier textbooks. Few investigated how schools had actually taught American history to primary and secondary school students. That is the task Moreau set for himself. He has examined many of the hundreds of textbooks written between the 1820s, when American schoolbooks first began to teach American history, and 1990. In the chapters that follow the introductory examination of the most recent battle, he reports on seven earlier controversies over the teaching of U.S. history and how those struggles influenced the writing of history textbooks in various eras. Each such debate was distinctive, but many involved versions of the same questions and concerns. How would history teaching define American national identity? Would differing, indeed competing, interpretations of the American past undermine national unity? Over and over again, these conflicts engaged matters of race, class, religion, and other markers of social identity. Using the "nation" as a lens to examine the textbooks, Moreau scrutinizes these battles. Taken together they demonstrate that at no time was the definition and meaning of the American nation settled and fixed. Propagation of one version of American nationhood typically involved subordination or rejection of another. Moreau does not attempt to reconstruct how students actually thought about history. Instead, he focuses mainly on the production of history in the schoolbooks that were most frequently adopted for classroom use.

In his first chapter, Moreau examines, not a debate or controversy, but a shift in nineteenth-century textbooks' conceptualization of the American nation. With the Civil War as a dividing line, schoolbooks profoundly changed how they characterized the nature of the United States. Antebellum surveys depicted a political union grounded in the civic virtue of republican citizens. Their accounts focused mainly on state activities in war and politics, as well as the actions of individual soldiers and statesmen. In contrast, late nineteenth-century histories traced, not just political and military events, but economic, social, ethical, religious, cultural, and other elements as manifested in social institutions. In these accounts, the United States was an expression of organic nationalism. These later textbooks were written by the first generation of professionally trained historians in the United States.

In the following chapter, Moreau looks at the first serious controversy over the writing and teaching of American history. In the antebellum period, textbooks coming out of New England promoted cultural homogeneity and political nationalism by espousing the union of the states as perpetual and indivisible. They also supported industrial growth and preferred free over slave labor. As early as the 1840s, these schoolbooks provoked concern among white Southerners. Some advocated an alternative Southern interpretation of the nation and its history. Following the Civil War, influential ex-Confederate leaders, most notable among them former vice president of the Confederacy Alexander Stephens, conceded that history instruction should promote national cohesion but vigorously pressed for a neo-Confederate interpretation of U.S. history and the U.S. Constitution. Stephens's ***Compendium of the History of the United States*** based national unity on an understanding of the federal government as strictly limited in its powers over the states. "The War Between the States" had been fought, he and other neo-Confederate textbook writers asserted, to defend, not slavery, but that original basis of the Union. In addition, though slavery might now be gone, controlling the interpretation of the past could help

justify Jim Crow regulation of black people in the present and future. It could also, of course, absolve white Southerners of guilt for the war and demonstrate the rightness of their policies, not only before the war, but in its aftermath as the nation redefined itself. Meanwhile, veteran Union Army officer Thomas Wentworth Higginson of New England published his own survey in which he portrayed the war as finally, once and for all, establishing the United States as a truly indivisible nation, rather than merely a confederation of sovereign states. He also envisioned African Americans as integral members of this national community. These two interpretations of the meaning of the Civil War and the nation, though not of African Americans, battled in competing textbooks with increasing intensity into the 1890s. That controversy gradually subsided in the early twentieth century as textbook writers and publishers replaced these opposing perspectives with a consensus narrative.

In recounting this particular struggle, Moreau introduces one of his most important findings: the role of various interest groups in shaping the content of history textbooks. One major interest group emerged in this controversy and played a central role in all of the others that followed. In the late nineteenth century, the textbook publishing business expanded into a highly profitable enterprise. The publishers, mostly based in the North, sought to maximize profits by aggressively marketing their products. They eventually realized that controversies over the contents of their textbooks, especially in the Southern states, threatened sales. So they appeased Southern reactionaries by repeatedly revising their school histories. Publishers' quest for profits, as much as the waning of sectional animosity over the decades, brought about the consensus narrative regarding the nature of the Constitution and Union and the meaning of the Civil War.

In the late nineteenth century, corruption and the appearance of corruption in the politics of textbook adoption provoked public disgust. Many states created a single statewide board to select textbooks for use in public schools. Establishment of those boards prompted political constituencies to get involved in adoption processes. Beginning with the controversy over the interpretation of the Civil War, well-organized interest groups began to exert powerful influence over textbooks' ideological content.

Among the most important constituencies in the postwar era were Civil War veterans organizations: the Grand Army of the Republic in the North, and the United Confederate Veterans in the South. The former condemned neo-Confederate interpretations. They wanted the schoolbooks to teach children that the conflict was fundamentally about right versus wrong regarding slavery, state sovereignty, and the legitimacy of secession. Meanwhile, Confederate veterans groups also criticized school histories. They not only demanded that those textbooks report that Confederate troops had fought with courage and honor, they objected to any critique of Southern society before, during, or after the war. They had fought, they claimed, not to maintain the peculiar institution of slavery, but to defend the principle of state sovereignty. Various publishers responded to these pressure groups with differing strategies. Some ignored the Southern veterans' complaints, banking on sales in Northern states to earn profits. Other publishers issued separate histories for the Northern and Southern markets, but that approach was labor-intensive and costly. Still others had their writers produce bland, information-filled "compilation-style" histories that avoided controversial analysis. By the 1920s, consensus narratives had been formulated and textbooks were again selling to a nationwide market. Although they usually condemned slavery, these schoolbooks generally reflected the prevailing racist perspective. They depicted the Civil War as the crucible of the modern American nation. The shedding of Anglo-Saxon blood on both sides sanctified that struggle which was then confirmed

by the reunion of white Americans across the sectional divide who joined hands to pursue their shared national destiny. In this new national consensus narrative, the abolition of slavery was peripheral. African American soldiers usually played no role at all. And Reconstruction was not just a huge mistake but an oppressive attempt to overturn the South's racial hierarchy.

Meanwhile, a parallel controversy developed in the post-Civil War era over the place of Catholics and Catholicism in the American nation. This is the subject of Moreau's third chapter. Catholics worried about the new nationalism, which stressed not only political centralization but cultural homogeneity. Its Protestant Republican advocates were often virulently anti-Catholic. They juxtaposed the public school as the symbol of national unity against the un-American Catholic parochial school as un-American, a foreign source of disunity. Catholics resisted this questioning of their patriotism and their commitment to American democratic values. They also opposed what they saw as an attempt to convert Catholic children into Protestants. The Catholic Church had begun establishing its own schools in the 1840s to counter the Protestant assault. After the Civil War, the parochial school system was expanded enormously. Those schools needed their own textbooks to explain and defend the faith. They also required Catholic histories to refute stereotypes and falsehoods about the role of Catholics in American history. Catholic schoolbooks highlighted the contributions of the Church and its faithful to the founding of the colonies and the independent nation. They portrayed priests and lay people as scientifically and socially progressive and significant actors in the formulation of American ideals, especially religious toleration and liberty. But the writers of Catholic history textbooks faced a dilemma. They had to simultaneously integrate Catholics into a national narrative and affirm Catholic distinctiveness within an overwhelmingly Protestant society. Over time, parochial schoolbooks tended to downplay the differences, emphasize the commonalities, and even minimize the historical record of anti-Catholic bigotry, while embracing some of the anti-foreign hostility of early twentieth-century American nationalism. These changes ultimately helped make the Catholic histories unnecessary. Meanwhile, textbook publishers searched for ways to avoid the high cost of issuing separate parochial school histories. They began to incorporate Catholics into mainstream textbooks in positive ways. By the late 1920s, a consensus narrative over religion emerged that paralleled the consensus over race and section.

In this same era, from the 1880s to the late 1920s, American history textbooks addressed yet another controversial question: what was the role of race in defining membership in and the boundaries of the national community? Moreau takes up this issue in his fourth chapter. This aspect of the American story had to be revised because of the impact of the new immigration from southern and eastern Europe and Asia, as well as the domestic questions of the status of both Native Americans and formerly enslaved African Americans. In addition, new "scientific" theories about "race" shaped how historians, schoolbook authors, and others thought about these matters. Americans of northern European descent feared that these various ethnic and racial groups would upset the nation's supposed social and cultural homogeneity. Stereotypical depictions of people of color and less-than-fully-white Europeans were contrasted with images of white Americans and white Americanness. The latter were presented as the core of an orderly and cohesive American community. Textbook writers included the outsiders in their accounts but not in their conceptualization of who belonged to the nation. Immigrants had more or less potential to become authentic Americans depending on their willingness and capacity to assimilate. Native Americans were nostalgically depicted as gradually disappearing, unable to survive in modern America because of their racial and cultural backwardness. African

Americans were separate, unequal, and largely invisible. Asians had a tiny and ambiguous presence in the textbooks.

Moreau's fifth chapter recounts a largely forgotten controversy that began late in the nineteenth century and erupted in the 1920s. Most professional historians were white, middle class, and both Protestant and British in origin. Their historical accounts gave disproportionate attention and praise to the achievements of Americans of northern European and especially British descent. They also insisted that later immigrants must jettison their homeland cultures and assimilate to Anglo-American culture. Spokespersons for various immigrant groups challenged this "cult of Anglo-Saxonism." They wanted the school histories to reflect the contributions of their groups to the formation of modern American nationhood and deeply resented depictions of America as an Anglo-Saxon country. In the post-World War I political climate of the 1920s, these critics reacted against the surge of nativism, Americanization, and immigration restriction. The schoolbook histories written by the professors became a focal point of their outrage. In an ironic alliance with some "patriotic" groups, they detected a pro-British bias in the textbooks. The revolt against the professors spread across the country, but it was most intense in ethnically diverse New York and Chicago. Two separate investigations of history textbooks were conducted in New York City between 1921 and 1923. Subsequently in Chicago in 1927, the city's superintendent of schools was put on trial for allegedly plotting to destroy American patriotism and "de-nationalize" students. Chicago Mayor William "Big Bill" Thompson asserted that the "treason textbooks" were part of a larger conspiracy by English propagandists and their American supporters to return the colonies to the British Empire.

Before the 1930s, the school histories usually tried to avoid the controversial issue of the role of social and economic class in American history. The realities of social inequality and economic exploitation clashed with the national myth of democracy and boundless economic opportunity. Professionally trained historians slowly and carefully began to examine class in the history textbooks they wrote in the early twentieth century. But it was only in the political climate of the Great Depression of the 1930s that a series of social science textbooks took a critical look at class. That series, "Man and His Changing Society," was authored, not by a historian, but a Columbia University Teachers College education professor named Harold Rugg. Chapter 6 recounts the rise and fall of Rugg's textbooks. During the 1930s, his social science textbooks and ancillary workbooks were the most popular in U.S. schools, selling more than five million copies. He structured them around controversial issues: the nation's considerable economic achievements but the persistence of economic inequality, the baneful influence of money in politics, the class bias of celebrated leaders, the failure of ***laissez-faire*** economics, the need for national economic planning, the heroic struggles of middle-class and working-class Americans against economic hard times and toward a more just society. Eschewing objectivity and openly espousing a left-of-center political perspective, he held a basically optimistic view of America's future. In the depths of the Depression, his approach had great appeal. But beginning in 1939, right-wing critics launched a campaign against him and his textbooks as subversive. "Patriotic" groups such as the American Legion and the Daughters of the American Revolution condemned them for being un-American. Powerful business interests charged that focusing on the deficiencies of capitalism would undermine the commitment of American youth to the free enterprise system. The campaign to get Rugg's textbooks removed from the schools was well funded and well organized. Sales plummeted during the 1940s. By 1951, the books had disappeared from U.S. schools.

As with previous battles over school histories, this one had a longer-term impact. It put limits on acceptable interpretations of America and its history in public school books. Textbook publishers took a lesson from the attack on Rugg. In the 1940s and 1950s, history and social science texts celebrated American economic progress and downplayed poverty and class conflict in American history.

By the early 1960s, that consensus narrative began to unravel when yet another controversy and struggle erupted over the demands of African Americans for integration of black people into school histories and the national story. Their campaign met with a backlash from white conservatives. The battle began in Detroit where African American parents demanded that public school books be revised, and conservatives resisted. In the mid-1960s, an even larger dispute occurred in California when the state tentatively adopted the first mainstream textbook written with the deliberate aim of incorporating African Americans within general U.S. history. That history survey, ***Land of the Free***, directly challenged political orthodoxy and generated a debate that echoed previous battles even while it addressed new issues: Would its interpretations promote or undermine patriotism? Would they advance harmonious race relations or stimulate divisiveness? Should textbook accounts of the African American historical experience emphasize their contributions to America or their oppression and suffering? Would ***Land of the Free*** advance or harm the objectives of the teaching of history to young people? Although the issues and the debate were complex and the participants in the discussion represented a variety of viewpoints, the California controversy came to be portrayed as a clash between two very different individuals. On one side stood one of the co-authors of the textbook, the distinguished African American historian John Hope Franklin, who had long advocated honest examination of racism in the American experience. Opposing him was California's superintendent of public instruction, Max Rafferty, a flamboyant and politically ambitious critic of ***Land of the Free***, who tried to use opposition to the textbook to assist his reelection and perhaps get him elected to the U.S. Senate.

So intense was the debate and so charged to the issues, that even after state officials made their final decision about ***Land of the Free***, the controversy continued on through the next decade. It affected publishers' shaping of the contents of history textbooks as well as textbook adoption decisions by state governments and local school districts. By the 1980s, publishers were issuing much larger books, in an effort to incorporate African Americans and other groups. But differing from earlier battles, they now found it largely impossible to fashion a new consensus narrative. Textbook writers seemed unable to develop a coherent story that joined together the historical experiences of all Americans to describe a common nationality. Conservative critics blamed "multiculturalism" for this uncertainty and incoherence. Moreau responds that the real problem continued to be what the revised textbooks omitted. He suggests that they could have fashioned a new historical synthesis by tracing the interaction and interdependency of America's racial and ethnic groups and by examining the paradox of the existence of slavery and racism in a country committed to democracy and equality. But that, he notes, was politically and intellectually the most difficult approach, and most textbook writers and publishers avoided it.

Throughout all of these controversies, a variety of constituencies mobilized to influence the textbook adoption process. Though many were vocal, only a few were ultimately influential. Decisions about adoption were never democratic. For example, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries publishers paid close attention to veterans groups North and South, who were of course white, but were far less interested in the concerns of African Americans who had little po-

litical power in the Southern states. Likewise, labor leaders called for attention to the cause of working people, but textbook adoption boards rarely had blue-collar members. As a result, the middle-class political appointees accepted school histories that celebrated industrial capitalism and depicted labor agitation as dangerous. Nonetheless, as time went on, textbook publishers and writers as well as school boards could not ignore the many interest groups concerned about the content of history books and history teaching. For that reason, struggles over the school books reflected broader social conflicts over class, race, religion, later on gender, and many other issues.

Given the pressure of these constituencies and the profit orientation of publishers, along with the widespread desire that schools should teach American youngsters a single version of the nation's past and its meaning, the tendency in most eras was to shape history textbook writing and history teaching toward a consensus understanding. But in some historical moments, the underlying social conflicts were so deep and fierce that consensus was impossible. That sort of breakdown occurred in the 1890s, the 1920s, the 1960s, and late in the twentieth century. Yet, Moreau stresses, that did not mean that in other eras history textbooks and history teaching were free from politics. Rather, the writers of textbooks had merely produced histories that stirred the least controversy, often by giving in to the types of pressure groups condemned by recent critics. As a result, those patchwork histories were full of ideological inconsistencies, which opened them to another wave of criticism.

Moreau's thorough examination of changing understandings of American history and nationhood as presented in the "official knowledge" of school books demonstrates to us the complex interplay of market forces, political constituencies, and changing ideologies among historians and educators. The richness of his account and analysis will be useful to students of nationalism seeking to understand the complicated array of social actors and the intricate processes involved in fashioning a modern nation.

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