

RE-EXAMINING HISTORY:
SEARCHING FOR INCLUSION IN CONNECTICUT TEXTBOOKS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A STUDY BY:

CONNECTICUT WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND LEGAL FUND

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CWEALF is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to empowering women, girls and their families to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives. We are guided by our commitment to feminism, diversity, empowerment, personal responsibility and self-sufficiency, compassion and respect, collaboration, professionalism and self-assessment in all of our actions and programs.

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INTRODUCTION

Schools are an important socialization agent for shaping not only our knowledge of the world, but also our attitudes towards others and ourselves. According to Spring (2000, 243), “the way in which U.S. history is interpreted in the public schools profoundly affects the way in which American students view their country.” One major way in which history is interpreted to students is through school textbooks. Given that a student reads more than 32,000 textbook pages in his/her elementary school experience (Holt, 1990), it is important to assess the content of such textbooks as to their interpretation of history. Furthermore, with the increasing emphasis being placed on standardized tests to measure competency nationwide, it is important to evaluate what information or knowledge is deemed important for students to know.

Education is connected to broader issues of power in society. Influencing the content of the curriculum, and thereby shaping people’s thoughts, is a tremendous source of power. Due to the ability of texts to shape people’s ideas, there has been a consistent struggle for the production of knowledge in textbooks. Some scholars (Gordy and Pritchard, 1995; Guy-Sheftall and Bell-Scott, 1989; Rich, 1977; Ruth, 1998; Sleeter and Grant, 1987; Takaki, 1993) have argued that the story we receive from history is not inclusive of the diverse society in which we live, but instead reflects the experiences of upper class White males and excludes the stories of racial minorities and women. Women’s Studies, as a field, began in response to this exclusionary view of history. A multicultural curriculum has been offered and suggested as a means to address the biased and one-sided view of history we receive (Banks, 1994).

Given this critique of history and the existence of a multiculturalism movement, we decided to explore the degree and extent of an inclusive U.S. history presented by textbooks. Specifically, given our previous exploration (Gordy and Pritchard, 1995) of 5th grade social studies textbooks, we wanted to examine the degree of inclusiveness for high school history texts during a time period (World War II) that had a significant impact on shifting ideologies regarding gender and race, yet was not an overt time period of gender or racial injustice, such as slavery. As Lunardini (1994, 264-265) claims, “the war changed American women in their outlook toward family issues, in their desire to earn their own way, in their willingness to take advantage of new opportunities, and in their refusal to return to prewar sensibilities.” Thus, this was an important time period in terms of women’s changing roles, yet, not a time of overt inequality. Using content analysis and a multiculturalism scale (Banks, 1993), we assessed the extent to which textbooks present an inclusive view of this history.

METHODOLOGY

This study examines the level of inclusion of women and minorities in high school history textbooks. Our research question considers the following: To what extent do United States history textbooks reflect diverse perspectives of World War II? We chose to examine textbooks for two reasons: textbooks are often students' first introduction to history and dominate what students learn (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991) and secondly, students accept the information presented in textbooks as truth (Kuhn, 1970). This acceptance of textbooks as "the truth" demonstrates further the importance of curriculum content for learning.

According to Banks (1993), textbooks are still the dominant source of information for students. While supplemental materials are often used in the classroom, the text remains central to the curriculum and thus provides both teachers and students with a standardized perspective of U.S. history. High school history textbooks were chosen for the study because students at this educational level are beginning to synthesize and analyze information, and therefore should be presented with diverse perspectives to consider in their study of American history. Gutman argues that we need to create curriculum that incorporates the multicultural heritage of the United States without depleting our patriotic history (in Fullinwider, 1996). We examined the presentation of World War II to see if this indeed is being done. World War II was a time period central to the experiences of women as well as racial and ethnic minorities which helped shape the Women's and Civil Rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

This research is based on a content analysis of the presentation of World War II in high school history textbooks used in Connecticut during the 1999-2000 school year. Connecticut was chosen for study for two reasons: the state has a statute which requires the use of gender and racially fair textbooks and Connecticut school districts have control of textbook selections. Connecticut's local control produced a variety of texts. In order to form a list of the history textbooks used in Connecticut high schools, letters requesting the titles were sent to all school districts. Follow-up phone calls were made to those that did not respond. If we were not able to obtain the textbook title, after the letter and a minimum of two follow-up phone calls, those school districts—57 in our sample—were excluded from the study. With 63 responses (53% of the districts contacted), we developed a list of approximately 48 textbooks being used in the state. Many districts reported using more than one textbook for different grades or academic levels. Several districts reported using the same textbook, but different editions. Thirteen texts were chosen for examination because they were available for review and used by at least two districts, and thus, might best reflect texts commonly chosen by other towns and states. We chose to review two different editions of the same text so that we could see how the text changed over time. Our sample includes ten of the major textbook publishers. After we collected our sample, we attempted to contact textbook publishers to ask if they had any texts that they would like us to review. All solicitations of textbook publishers were unsuccessful.

We conducted a pilot investigation of two texts to ensure that we were in agreement about the important issues related to women and minorities in World War II, and that we were consistent in our coding. To investigate the presentation of women and minorities in World War II, chapters of the texts devoted to World War II were coded for their thematic content. To assess the texts in terms of the level of multiculturalism, a scale designed by Banks (1993) was used to determine the level of integration of ethnic content in curriculum. This model includes 4 levels:

- ③ contributions approach
- ≤ additive approach
- ♣ transformative approach
- ➔ decision making and social participation approach

The levels are summarized below.

In Level 1, the contributions approach, famous people, holidays, and cultural events related to women and various race/ethnic groups are included in the curriculum without changing its basic structure. Often as presented in school curriculum, the contributions approach defines women and/or racial minorities as peripheral to the main story or merely appendages to the central features of the curriculum.

Level 2, the additive approach, makes more steps to inclusion by not only adding in famous people and events, but also discussing key concepts and themes that are relevant to the experiences of women and/or racial minorities. Such concepts are still viewed from the framework and perspective of the dominant group (Banks, 1993). At this level, the curriculum is broadening in terms of issues mentioned but not in terms of the structure of presentation and thus, White upper class males are still viewed as the norm.

Level 3, the transformative approach in the multiculturalism process, changes the basic assumptions underlying the mainstream presentation and shifts the center of analysis from the core to the periphery. This level allows for an explanation of how U.S. history developed based on the interaction of diverse groups by presenting concepts and themes from diverse perspectives (Banks, 1993). Not only are diverse groups included but also issues of importance are defined from the perspective of diverse groups.

Level 4, the decision making and social participation level, includes all of the elements of the transformative level yet adds decision-making and critical thinking skills. According to Vold (in Holtz et al., 1989, 128), critical thinking is “absolutely necessary to improve such social ills in America as racism, ethnocentrism, classism, and sexism.” By encouraging students to make decisions, it allows them to be more involved in the learning process. As Giroux (1988) suggests, students ought to see themselves as able to change the course of history and thus, be able to limit inequities in society. These four stages in the multiculturalism process provide criteria to evaluate the extent of multicultural integration. Such criteria are applied to the presentation of World War II in high school textbooks.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The initial assessment of the texts revealed common themes pertaining to women and minorities in World War II. Authors focus their portrayal of women on three topics: women in the military, women and employment on the home front, and the demobilization of women. In their portrayal of minorities, authors concentrate on three themes: minorities and the military, minorities and the struggle for equality, and Japanese Americans and internment. The themes were coded and evaluated using Banks' scale. All thirteen texts reach the contributions level (Level 1) for women and one-third reach the additive approach (Level 2) by discussing issues of inequality, such as women receiving less pay than men for the same work in factories and in the military, and the political and social pressure for women to leave their jobs after the war. All thirteen books reach the additive approach for race/ethnic groups by discussing issues such as the segregated military, the Japanese American internment, and the struggles for equality. About 54% of texts contain elements of the transformation approach (Level 3) for women and minorities by providing their perspectives on gender and race issues and events of World War II.

STAGES IN THE MULTICULTURALISM PROCESS

Using Banks scale (1993), all texts reached the contributions stage (Level 1) for women during World War II. Consistent with what previous studies (Bazler and Simmonis, 1990; Ruth, 1998; Sadker and Sadker, 1994) suggest, these texts do include women, yet the type of coverage is still limited. However, only one-half of the texts provide any description of women's war time experiences and approximately one-third analyze issues of inequality, such as discrimination in the military, childcare, and other barriers for women's employment at home. Additionally, only one-third of the texts include the tremendous political and media effort to force women out of their factory jobs when the war was over. Given that the textbooks all include women and devote part of the main sections to women, women are not at the margins of the texts as Holt (1990) suggests but rather, are still trivialized within the main story. Consistent with earlier research (Sleeter and Grant, 1991; Irvine, 1990), two-thirds of the texts in this study still define the curriculum from a White male perspective. This approach to history is very descriptive and passive, giving readers little sense of women as active agents who create and make history. Few efforts are made at transforming the structure from the male normative model of history, i.e. the military is discussed in terms of number of women who served, medals for service, and military strategies. Furthermore, history is not presented as an interaction between various groups of people and students are provided little opportunity to critically assess the impact of the war on other aspects of society. Thus, one-half reach the additive stage (Level 2) for women and one-third begin to reach the transformative stage (Level 3).

Most of the texts do not even reach the contributions stage (Level 1) for African American women with only one-fourth of the texts even mentioning the role of African American women in the military. Since only 15% of the texts discuss African American women's experiences of discrimination in employment, their perspective is largely ignored. Such scant attention to African American women is consistent with the idea that Black women's studies scholars (Guy-Sheftall and Bell-Scott, 1989) discussed in that Black experiences are presented from a male perspective and women's experiences are presented from a White woman's perspective. Such exclusion implies that African American women have done little of worth to be included in the texts. African American women had different jobs (Goodwin, 1994) than White women in the factories and had different experiences with demobilization given their previous employment opportunities. In addition, African American women were very active in challenging inequality during this time period (Lerner, 1972). These issues are rarely included and the texts have made little effort to transform this

presentation. Not only does such lack of coverage fail to provide students with knowledge about World War II from an African American woman's perspective, it also fails to provide a framework for understanding the resistance efforts of the developing Civil Rights Movement in which African American women were essential.

The majority of the texts (92%) reach the additive approach (Level 2) for African American men in the military yet only one-third to one-half reach the contributions approach (Level 1) for other racial minority men. The numbers of other racial minorities in the military are reported but no discussion of their experiences or their role is included. As with women in the military, a token acknowledgement is made, but few texts go beyond that. Segregation of troops is discussed, as is A. Phillip Randolph's march on Washington, yet little attention is given to the inequities resulting from segregated troops and the significance of Randolph's march for addressing racial inequality. As with women, the war and its immediate aftermath was a significant time period for racial minorities marking a turning point for increased resistance to inequality. By merely adding in the experiences of racial minorities and women to a White male perspective of history, a distorted view of history is given to students. Without an accurate portrayal of history, stereotypes and assumptions about minority groups' relative importance to society are reinforced (Collins, 1990).

All of the texts discuss the Japanese internment camps yet less than 50% give a description of these camps or discuss the resistance to internment. Thus, one-half of the texts have not transformed the curriculum to see internment from the Japanese American perspective. In fact, using the term internment rather than concentration camp reflects the dominant group's perspective. The majority of the texts have reached the additive stage (Level 2) in terms of discussion of discrimination prior to the war. It is also interesting to note that the majority (67%) of the texts also mention reparations, although an important issue for Japanese Americans, it allows White Americans to claim that justice has been meted out. Gender, for the most part, is absent from any of these discussions implicitly suggesting that racial minorities do not have a sex. This is important given the different effects the internment camps had on women and men, particularly young girls.

An effort has been made by the texts to add in, and to an extent transform, the curriculum in terms of the African American male and the Japanese American male perspective. However, this has not been the case for Native Americans or Latinos. The discussions of the roles and experiences of Mexican Americans and Native Americans in the military are general and brief, usually citing the numbers of each group who served. Thus, the emphasis is on the contributions of such groups to the military effort, but no concepts or issues are analyzed.

Overall, all of the texts have reached the contributions stage for all women and racial minority men. A few of the sample texts do provide an example of a more inclusive history. Out of Many and The American People had elements of Level 3 but did not fully reach Level 3 or 4. The texts did integrate material on women and minorities better than the other texts. Unfortunately, these texts were used by only 3% of our sample districts.

Our study demonstrates that an effort has been made to recognize the existence of diverse groups and the different experiences of World War II. However, most of the texts have merely modified their curriculum by adding in contributions and occasionally, issues of concern to women and racial minorities. The impact of racism and sexism is not fully addressed by these texts. For example, discrimination in the case of segregated troops, internment camps, and to a lesser extent, the gender gap in pay is presented, yet the causes and consequences of this discrimination are not explored. Rarely do the texts discuss the inherent contradictions between the inequality at home and the war for democracy abroad. It is this contradiction which sparked

much of the resistance efforts of the 1960s. World War II was a pivotal time in the history of racial minorities and White women in terms of increased opportunities and increased resistance to inequality in society. For students to have a full understanding of the political and social changes of the late 1950s and 1960s, they need to have knowledge about racial minorities and women in World War II.

CONCLUSION

History coverage in textbooks provides students with an understanding of their country. If such coverage is biased or limited in focus, not only is misinformation about groups propagated but also a distorted view of one's country is given. Scholars of Women's Studies and African American Studies have long argued that history texts ignore or downplay the contributions of all women and racial minority men to U.S. history and in doing so, provide justification for the unequal power relations in society. This is apparent in college students' lack of knowledge about African American and women's history.

In our research, we found that all of the texts have made an effort to include contributions of women and racial minorities and thus, such groups are not ignored entirely. Yet, much of the coverage given is limited in its depth and perspective. Given the political struggles over textbook publishing (Fleming, 1992), it is not surprising that texts would acknowledge contributions of women and racial minorities and yet not transform the curriculum to provide an analysis of such contributions. In doing so, texts can appear to be inclusive yet "neutral" since little attention is given to the political terms of racism and sexism. Such neutrality assumes that the White male normative view of history is not biased or political. Thus, the "standpoint", i.e. White male, is not even noted or made visible.

Although the texts have made efforts towards presenting a multicultural curriculum, they are stalled in the additive level (Level 2). Curriculum changes have been made, but the texts, in large part, are failing to provide a democratic education in which knowledge about diverse groups is shared and critical thinking is fostered (Giroux, 1988; Gutman, 1987). Few of the texts move beyond the contributions level (Level 1) to the transformative (Level 3) or decision-making and social participation level (Level 4), both of which are essential to a democratic view of history. Even those texts that do move to the 3rd or 4th level do not do so completely. Instead, they may do so for a particular group, such as Japanese Americans. Consequently, the response to and the experiences of World War II from diverse perspectives are not presented to students in these texts. As long as such contributions are minimized in the texts, the devaluation of women and racial minorities will be reinforced and justification provided for the current imbalance of power.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to successfully provide students with a foundation on which to assess our history, a number of steps and a variety of people should be involved.

TEACHERS

- ❖ Select equitable texts and provide a range of supplemental materials when only inadequate texts are available.
- ❖ Use Banks scale of multiculturalism to ensure that the texts and supplemental materials promote analysis and critical thinking of a representative U.S. history.
- ❖ Actively discuss and critique the inadequacy of textbook presentations with students.
- ❖ Recruit volunteers to share their diverse experiences with history.
- ❖ Encourage students to collect oral histories and make classroom presentations to enhance the presentation in history textbooks.

SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

- ❖ Identify supplemental materials available in the library and disseminate a listing of these resources to teachers.
- ❖ Order examples of inclusive texts which teachers could use as supplemental materials.
- ❖ Make linkages to public and state libraries to identify additional resources for classroom use.
- ❖ Host events highlighting the diverse perspectives of our nation's history.
- ❖ Capitalize on attention to women's history and black history months to share resource materials and information with teachers, students and parents.

PARENTS

- ❖ Review textbooks for gender and racial equity and share concerns with teachers and parent groups.
- ❖ Volunteer to share personal or family stories that provide diverse perspectives and experiences of our nation's history.
- ❖ Actively participate with your children in school and community events that celebrate the achievements and contributions of diverse groups.

SUPERINTENDENTS/PRINCIPALS

- ❖ Support teachers in the identification of equitable texts and provide funding for new books on a regular basis.
- ❖ Secure funding for mini-grants to teachers and librarians to collect supplemental texts for use in classrooms district-wide or develop inclusive curriculum for use in classrooms statewide.
- ❖ Ensure that schools can access the wealth of historical information available through the Internet.
- ❖ Secure funding for training or continuing education for teachers in women's history and multicultural education.
- ❖ Include positive incentives in teachers' yearly evaluations which would encourage teachers to create an inclusive curriculum.

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

- ❖ Conduct ongoing analysis of textbooks to identify inequities as well as model texts for statewide use.
- ❖ Provide state frameworks for an equitable history curriculum and testing which matches this broader teaching.
- ❖ Provide multicultural and equity training for teachers, librarians and administrators to enhance awareness and teaching.

STATE OFFICIALS AND POLICYMAKERS

- ❖ Put pressure on publishing companies, particularly those who reside and do business in Connecticut, to rewrite history books using the wealth of information available on the roles and experiences of women and different racial/ethnic groups.

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