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## Archives

### Textbook Publishers Learn: Avoid Messing With Texas

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"Out of Many," the work of four respected historians, is one of the biggest sellers among American history college textbooks in the United States, but it is not likely to be available to Texas high school students taking advanced placement history. Conservative groups in Texas objected to two paragraphs in the nearly 1,000-page text that explained that prostitution was rampant in cattle towns during the late 19th century, before the West was fully settled.

"It makes it sound that every woman west of the Mississippi was a prostitute," said Grace Shore, the Republican chairwoman of the Texas State Board of Education. "The book says that there were 50,000 prostitutes west of the Mississippi. I doubt it, but even if there were, is that something that should be emphasized? Is that an important historical fact?"

The publisher, Pearson Prentice Hall, has quietly withdrawn the book from consideration by the board. Wendy Spiegel, a vice president for communications at the company, said it had another textbook that better fit the state's curriculum.

Textbook battles are legendary in Texas, where conservative critics frequently complain of liberal bias, and liberals counter with charges of censorship. The latest round, on July 17, when the board begins public hearings on which history and social studies books to adopt, promises to be particularly fierce. Nine conservative organizations have formed a coalition, recruiting 250 volunteers to vet more than 150 books.

The outcome has far more than regional interest. After California, Texas is the biggest buyer of textbooks in the United States, accounting for nearly 10 percent of the national market. In fact, conservative activists in Texas say they have already received calls from leading publishers anxious to discuss the forthcoming history and social studies adoptions. Many publishers write their books with the Texas and California markets in mind, but complain of political pressure.

"The bottom line is that Texas and California are the biggest buyers of textbooks in the country, and what we adopt in Texas is what the rest of the country gets," said Carol Jones, the field director of the Texas chapter of Citizens for a Sound Economy, part of the coalition monitoring books for errors, examples of political bias, omissions or information that it deems offensive and that it says gives the texts a liberal slant.

Peggy Venable, director of the Texas chapter, said executives at Pearson Prentice Hall withdrew "Out of Many," because they "wisely didn't want to jeopardize their larger sales in the state by having that book as its poster child."

This year, Pearson Prentice Hall is offering 27 other books for adoption in Texas, ranging from texts for first grade social studies to ones for Advanced Placement world history. The potential prize is great: Texas has allocated \$700 million over the next two years for textbooks and related materials in history and social studies -- a sizable chunk of the nation's \$4.5 billion textbook market.

Most states, including New York, choose textbooks on a school-by-school or district-by-district basis, but Texas and California buy them through a formal statewide process. The Texas board votes in November, giving the state's schools lists of approved textbooks to choose from.

In 1995, the Texas legislature sought to eliminate politically charged conflicts by passing a law that limited the grounds for a book's rejection to physical defects or "factual inaccuracy." In recent years, though, conservative groups have become adept at blocking books by arguing that political bias and the omission of certain facts constitute "factual inaccuracy." Moreover, the provision in the Texas Education Code that textbooks should promote democracy, patriotism and the free-enterprise system has been used to attack certain books.

Thus the Texas case raises a series of new questions about how to write history. What constitutes an "error" in a history or science textbook? What facts are central and which can be omitted? Should history books inculcate patriotism and appreciation of free enterprise? And most significantly, who should decide those questions?

The conservative groups are feeling confident after last year's adoption process for environmental science texts, in which they succeeded in persuading the Board of Education to reject two texts.

Among other things, those books were criticized as "anti-technology," "anti-Christian" and "anti-American," and for saying there was scientific consensus that global warming was changing the earth's climate.

An environmental science book that ultimately won approval, "Global Science: Energy, Resources, Environment" published by Kendall/Hunt, was partly financed by the Mineral Information Institute, a consortium of mining companies. Duggan Flanakin, who wrote influential reports on the textbooks for the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a conservative organization, used to work for the United States Bureau of Mines. And Ms. Shore, the Board of Education chairwoman, is a co-owner of TEC Well Service Inc., a Longview, Tex., company that repairs and deepens oil wells as well as produces gas and oil.

"The oil and gas industry should be consulted," she told The Austin American-Statesman, a daily newspaper, at the time of last year's board vote. "We always get a raw deal."

One Dallas publisher, J. M. LeBel Enterprises, after having Jane L. Person's "Environmental Science: How the World Works and Your Place

in it" rejected on Nov. 8, spent most of the next night working with state education officials to incorporate a series of changes in this high school textbook suggested by one of the foundation's critiques. These changes resulted in the book's approval.

Ms. Venable and other conservative critics insist that they do not want to edit or rewrite textbooks, only to assure that they are stripped of ideology and offer a straightforward, objective statement of facts.

But René LeBel, the publishing company's president, deplored the process, even though he maintained that he did not alter the book's fundamental content. "It was a book burning," he said. "It was 100 percent political."

At the suggestion of the foundation, the LeBel company rewrote the sentence "Destruction of the tropical rain forest could affect weather over the entire planet" so that it now reads, "Tropical rain forest ecosystems impact weather over the entire planet." It also added these sentences: "In the past, the earth has been much warmer than it is now, and fossils of sea creatures show us that the sea level was much higher than it is today. So does it really matter if the world gets warmer?"

The foundation also succeeded in having this sentence deleted: "Most experts on global warming feel that immediate action should be taken to curb global warming."

"We are now telling them what to write and what not to write," Mary Helen Berlanga, a Democratic member of the Board of Education, said of authors. (The board has 10 Republicans and 5 Democrats.)

But others say this is simply democracy at work. "We citizens are truly the clients," Ms. Venable said. "It is our children's education and future at stake, and our tax dollars are paying for the books. If people in Texas are more conservative than people in Massachusetts or New York, so be it."

Single out for particular censure at last year's hearings and ultimately rejected by the Board of Education was "Environmental Science: Creating a Sustainable Future," by Daniel D. Chiras, published by Jones & Bartlett, a small company in Sudbury, Mass. The book is in its sixth edition and has been used widely in colleges for the past 20 years.

Professor Chiras, who teaches at the University of Denver and the University of Colorado, does not disguise his environmental activism. "Things can't go on as they have been," he writes in the opening chapter. "We must change our ways." He criticizes the "throwaway mentality" and "obsession with growth" in American life, disapproves of the environmental policies of Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush Sr. and praises those of Bill Clinton.

The day before the Board of Education voted, the Texas Public Policy Foundation distributed a 24-page critique that listed all of what it called the Chiras book's errors. At one point, for example, the critique attacks Professor Chiras for repeating the "oft-used falsehood that over 100 million Americans are breathing unhealthy air." It points out that since pollution levels in most American cities exceed allowable standards only on certain days of the year, "on most days, the air in every city in the U.S. is healthy." But is this inaccuracy or two different ways of interpreting the same facts?

"I think it's really dangerous that the Texas Public Policy Foundation has so much influence that you have publishers writing to please the conservative right at the risk of suppressing alternative views and critically examining the issues," said Dean DeChambeau, director of development for Jones & Bartlett. "We lost a quarter of a million dollars' worth of business. Other publishers, who would lose millions of dollars of business if they lost an adoption, are more likely to be influenced by the groups."

After the battle over environmental science, Ms. Venable and other activists on the textbook front were contacted by a number of publishers. Their hope was that by consulting critics in advance, they might avoid a battle at the hearings that could lead to their books' rejection.

"I think there is a very great danger of self-censorship," said Byron Hollinshead, the president of American Historical Publications, the New York company that produced "The History of US," a middle school textbook distributed by Oxford University Press. "If a big publisher produces an edition specifically for Texas and then hears from these groups that they want a series of changes, they are going to make them."

Texas holds adoptions for different academic subjects each year; it generally replaces textbooks in a given subject every six years, so that books approved this time would be in circulation until 2009.

When Pearson Prentice Hall decided to submit "Out of Many: A History of the American People," the company hired a high school teacher to alert it to potential problems. "They were mostly questions involving sexuality, homosexuality, AIDS, prostitution, things like that," said Mari Jo Buhle, a professor of history at Brown University and one of the book's co-authors. The teacher suggested, for example, taking out the paragraphs that dealt with the gay rights movement in the 1970's and the development of birth control. The authors agreed to make some concessions by removing profanity in historical quotations.

But they refused to change anything of substance, like the subsection on gay rights, the mention of Margaret Sanger and the development of contraception and the "Cowgirls and Prostitutes" section. The passages on prostitution tell about the economic forces that pushed women into prostitution and the health hazards they were exposed to. The book's critics felt it had no place in American history.

"I don't mean that we should sweep things under the rug," Ms. Venable said. "But the children should see the hope and the good things about America."

But it is inevitably tricky to reconcile Texas's requirement that textbooks promote democracy, patriotism and free enterprise with the historian's supposedly disinterested pursuit of truth. The politics of the day are always going to influence the presentation of history, said

John Mack Faragher, a history professor at Yale University and the lead author of "Out of Many."

"There was no women's history until there was a women's movement, there was no African-American history before there was a civil rights movement," he said. "Historical practice is very much determined by the things that people are concerned about."

"History is ultimately a moral art, and it is about values," he continued. "It is not merely about the collection of facts. It is about the way we put those facts together and the meaning we give them. Arguments about facts are arguments about meaning."

One Book's Writing

And Texasizing

Following are some of the changes the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a conservative organization, requested in "Environmental Science: How the World Works and Your Place in It," by Jane L. Person, before this high school textbook was adopted by the Texas Board of Education. The book's Dallas publisher, J. M. LeBel, agreed to the modifications.

This paragraph was deleted from a section on an old-growth forest ecosystem:

Native Americans saw the virgin forest as a source of food and a dwelling place of their God. The colonists feared the forest and the animals that lived in it. This fear is reflected in "Little Red Riding Hood" and other popular children's stories. The colonists viewed the forest as an obstacle to agriculture, and they began clearing the land. Clearing was often accomplished with fire, and thousands of acres of forest burned when fires got out of control.

This sentence was added to a paragraph discussing the world's largest industrial accident, which occurred in 1984 at a Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal India.

What do you think? Was the \$470 million settlement sufficient for the victims' needs? How much buying power does this sum have in India compared to the same amount in the United States?

This sentence was added to a section on clean air:

The sulfur dioxide emissions trading program has been very successful in encouraging power plants to reduce sulfur dioxide emissions.

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