

BATTLE OF THE TEXTBOOKS

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As the new school year begins, what children learn has become one of the biggest flash points in the culture war. From curricula to textbooks in elementary schools to high schools and beyond, these are now battlegrounds hotly contested by activist mobs and parents.

So, with this as our backdrop, the Catholic League decided over the course of the 2020-21 school year to take a survey of prominent history and government textbooks to see what children are learning. Our findings should raise the ire of all members of the Catholic League.

One thing becomes abundantly apparent from our deep dive into these textbooks; namely, the current curriculum provides a biased perspective against traditional and Catholic values. By and large, these textbooks present religion, traditional values, and conservatism in a negative light.

First, religion is portrayed as a net negative for society. On the whole, history textbooks tend to be worse than government textbooks at making this argument. History allows for more interpretation of the facts. The writers of these textbooks use that leeway to continually present both religious and traditional values in the most negative light possible.

In these history books, they routinely point to the Catholic missionaries as the first to come to the New World to destroy the harmonious lives of the Indians. The overall portrayal of the native population, of course, is utopian, and it was torn asunder by the conniving Catholics. While we view these Catholic missionaries as saints and heroes who spread the Gospel, provided for the salvation of souls, and generally brought the moral underpinnings of modernity to the Americas, the textbooks present the missionaries as the vanguard of

imperialism making the natives a subservient class to do the biddings of their new colonial masters.

According to the history books, the worst among these Catholic interlopers were the Spanish. The Catholic nature of their empire drove them to commit all levels of depravity against the indigenous peoples. A more honest interpretation of history might have considered the imperial nature of the Spanish Empire as a larger contributing factor to Spanish activity in the Americas. However, these history books seem less interested in providing an accurate historic analysis and more focused on indoctrinating students to despise religion. As such, the consensus they reach is right after the unifying of Spain and the terrible atrocities of the Inquisition, Catholic intolerance drove them to exploit the New World in a similar fashion.

While Catholic Spain might have been the worst, Christians in general are to be understood by the curriculum as ruining the lives of the Indians. British Protestantism is probably the next worse offender; however, French Catholics and Dutch Protestants also contributed in turning America into a paradise lost.

In addition to portraying Catholic Spain and more generally Christian Europe as blood-lusting, religious fanatics seeking the genocide of the native population, these history books also introduce the concept that America from the colonial period to the present has always viewed religion with open skepticism and a subtle hostility.

The textbooks contend that the Wars of Religion in Europe inspired the colonists to chart a different course from the Old World. Religion had promulgated war, destruction, and death, and as such the colonists sought to create a secular world free from the intolerance and bloodletting that is baked into the nature of religion. To this end, America has always had a very strong inclination toward secularism. While America

has not always lived up to this ideal, a strong secularist strand has permeated every aspect of the country, and this has allowed the United States to advance as a nation.

Second, from these books' biased perspective, traditional values are problematic. They stand in the way of the societal march to progress.

The textbooks argue that America has always been a progressive country. In part this is thanks to America's strong secular streak that freed the nation from the shackles of religion. In doing so, America is truly a progressive country. Further founded on the notion of rejecting the ancient order, America has continually evolved into a society free from the constraints of traditional values.

Anyone who clings to such superstitious beliefs as religion and other archaic notions generally called traditional values only do so because, at best, they do not fully understand American freedom, or, at worst, they wish to oppress the downtrodden.

In this regard, both the history and government textbooks were equally bad. While history lends itself more to interpretation, government books were more constrained to explaining the nuts and bolts of government. The mechanics of the Electoral College or the means by which the legislature can override a veto do not naturally lend themselves to subjectivism; they are what they are.

However, since traditional values play a large role in today's political environment, the government textbooks had an opening to opine and apparently relished the opportunity to besmirch them.

A favorite example of theirs to explain how rights and liberties were supposed to work was *Roe v. Wade*. Ultimately, they argued that a woman must have the right to murder her unborn child to be truly free and those opposed to that were

barbaric, knuckle-dragging Neanderthals who wished to deny women basic liberties.

Another was school prayer. Again, this issue was framed as there is a Christian-Conservative Axis that is hell bent on establishing a theocracy to force school children to violate their constitutional rights by compelling them to pray.

In a similar vein, both history and government books used the Equal Rights Amendment as evidence that traditional values stand in the way of progress. While government books used it as an example of how amendments can be defeated, it was clear, like their historical counterparts the Equal Rights Amendment would have been a good thing and could have propelled America forward had not the pesky social conservatives and their pro-life allies intervened.

Finally, conservatism, in part because this philosophy is rooted in religious and traditional values, is a threat to freedom, and those who adhere to its principles are the worst oppressors in human history. Conversely, thanks to America's secular nature and the progressive national spirit, the United States has created fertile grounds for leftism to take root. Running the gambit from workers' rights to liberalism to socialism and even communism, leftist forces have always played an active role in American society, working to champion the rights of the downtrodden and make America the true land of liberty.

The textbooks would have students believe that these leftists were the true American heroes. They have always been on the forefront of American progress, and they make a new pantheon that has given this nation the true ideals of a leftist utopia.

A final trend worth noting, textbooks written for Advanced Placement (AP) tests were far worse than textbooks that were not geared toward that test. Why that is, we cannot say.

Perhaps the notion is that these students need to be fully indoctrinated as if they were in a university setting. Seeing the point of the test is to pass and not have to take those classes in college, the College Board might want to make sure these children fully hate America as if they had sat through a semester at college.

After all, the College board is a cartel, but instead of trafficking drugs, guns, or people, it peddles a far more toxic substance, the ideological poisoning of young minds in hopes of turning them against the principles that made America great.

Equally plausible, the less advanced classes have been written off as unlikely to benefit from this degree of propaganda; even worse, they might be so unenlightened that they or their parents might take offense with the egalitarian utopia presented in the AP textbooks.

On the whole, while the non-AP textbooks had the same biased worldview, they did a fairer job presenting the other side. Reading through them one gets the notion that religion might have had a hand in some bad things in history, but it also had a few positive contributions. The same could be said of traditional values. These two were presented as net negatives for society, but they were not all bad. Conservatives were still the bad guys, but they were more nuanced villains that may have had some redeeming qualities. They were almost like anti-heroes and less like evil personified. These textbooks were typically longer, but that allowed them to be more balanced in comparison to their AP counterparts.

While we cannot concretely say why the AP textbooks were so blatant in their bias, we can say they were definitively worse than non-AP textbooks. For those who are parents of a child in an AP class, it is important to remember that the benefit of your child earning a few university credits comes with the risk of them becoming steeped in anti-Americanism and ideology

contrary to Catholic teachings.

Ultimately, the best guidance the Catholic League can offer from our findings in this survey is, as a parent, you must constantly be involved in your child's learning. The textbooks are generally very biased, and they can lead children to despise religion, traditional values, and conservatives. You need to engage your child, the teachers, and the school to make sure your student's world view is not warped. Keep in mind, that even if your child is in Catholic school or homeschooled they might be using one of the textbooks we used in our survey.

One final point, our survey used books in circulation prior to the great push that is underway to teach Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the schools. Radicals, the National Education Association, and numerous school boards across America are working to ensure that CRT becomes the national standard for education.

No doubt what we found is just the beginning of the battle of the textbooks. The publishers are more than likely producing new editions that make the objectionable material we found seem pedestrian. This is a long fight, and it is only heating up. Parents must remain vigilant. At the Catholic League, we will continue our efforts to combat these biased perspectives against traditional, Catholic values that are printed in these textbooks.

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