

Racially Biased Textbooks in Detroit

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On May 10, 2018, an article was published by *The Detroit News* entitled, “Detroit’s Curriculum Needs its History.” This article is about how Detroit’s school children should be learning the history of their city in the classroom. The article advocates that students should not only be learning about the history of Detroit, but also about the important role minorities played in that history. This movement promotes better education and educational materials in Detroit Public Schools and has been going on for decades. This movement, with particular respect towards the representation of minorities in educational materials, was also very active in Detroit Public Schools in the 1960s.

Detroit Public Schools saw a lot of change in the 1960s. *Brown v. Board of Education* was ruled in 1954, so integration was still in its early phase; some schools had not even begun the process. Segregationist whites had been doing all they could to try and keep schools segregated. In addition to this legal tension permeating the schools, African American students were looked down upon as unintelligent and unable to handle a challenging, or even average, curriculum. Therefore, African American students were given a subpar education, because educators and school boards thought that was all they could handle. African American students were streamlined to programs that taught more hands on and remedial work, instead of even being given the option to take more challenging classes.

One of the other problems within Detroit’s public schools in the 1960s was the textbooks students were learning from. One of the major textbooks of the time was *A History of the United States [to 1876]* by T. Harry Williams, Richard N. Current, and Frank Freidel, published in 1959. Another textbook used by Detroit Public schools in the 1960s was *The American Nation: A History of the United States* by John A. Garraty, which was published in 1966. Both of these

textbooks were racially biased against minorities in their telling of history. Not only did this bias cause students to have a poor understanding of history, but it was a contributing factor in shaping students', both the white and minority populations, perceptions about history and minorities.

The racially biased textbooks of 1960s Detroit Public Schools had negative psychological effects on their students.

Textbook Theory

The intended effect of textbooks is to provide information and educate students in the classroom, but they also have the ability to shape the attitudes of students towards certain subjects, in school and outside of it. If a student has to read a textbook they find boring, it could definitely lead to them develop a dislike of the subject. Taking this idea a bit further, if a student has to read a textbook that is biased against minorities, that student could end up also having an attitude that is biased against minorities. Researchers have been studying the way textbooks influence students for years. From this research, there is a consensus surrounding the fact that biased textbooks exist and that they can have a devastating effect on the attitudes students have and form towards minorities.

One article that does an effective job of detailing the detrimental effects of biased textbooks on students was published while the issue was going on. "What About Us?: Our Textbooks Do Not Meet Our Needs," is an article that was written by the Detroit Public Schools Staff and it is very thorough in its analysis of the textbook biases and the effects of those biases. One of the arguments the article makes is that, despite improvements to the textbooks, they still marginalize minorities, they do not represent minorities, particularly African Americans, as fully integrated with the white population, and they leave out information that pertains to minorities.

The article also stresses that all textbooks, not just history textbooks, influence students and their perceptions. The article reads, “the content and illustration of text materials teach the learner much about himself and about his racial, religious, ethnic, and social class group, and about his life expectations and his life chances.”¹ At this point, the article starts to indicate where they are going to go with this argument. The paragraph after the aforementioned quote is clear in its argument that the biases in Detroit Public Schools’ textbooks are harmful to the self-esteem of African American students. The article details that the biases against African Americans that are found in textbooks cause the African American students to form a negative self-image, which in turn decreases their motivation and aspirations. The article then goes on to point out the absurdity of the bias against African Americans because half of the children in Detroit’s schools are African American.² This is an analysis that is not as common as it should be. More often than not, when talking about the damaging effects of textbook bias, the authors write about how it causes white students to have a negative, or lesser view of minorities. In contrast, this article looks at the detrimental effect biased textbooks have on minorities. For example, the article states that the “negative image [of African Americans], reinforced” throughout years of attending school and reading textbooks, creates an African American student who “feels that he and his kind are insignificant, unimportant, [and] less worthy.”³ It is ironic how articles that condemn textbook bias, specifically textbook bias against minorities, continue that trend of bias against minorities by only writing about the effect of textbook bias on non-minorities.

¹Detroit Public Schools Staff, “What About Us?: Our Textbooks Do Not Meet Our Needs,” *Educational Product Report* 3, no. 2 (1969):13, <https://oakland.illiad.oclc.org/illiad/illiad.dll?Action=10&Form=75&Value=308642>.

²Detroit Public Schools Staff, “What About Us?,” 13.

³Detroit Public Schools Staff, “What About Us?,” 13.

The Detroit Public Schools Staff also dedicates a lot of the writing in this article to solutions for racially biased textbooks. They critique the guidelines that are already in place at most schools for selecting textbooks, then compare those guidelines to the ones created by the Intergroup Relations Department. Intergroup Relations is an education program about social justice.⁴ The article states that, following the latter's guidelines, most of the textbooks in the United States would be rejected. The writers do admit that the evaluations of the textbooks take a lot of time, but then assert that it is worth it, given the improvements that have been made because of them. "What About Us?: Our Textbooks Do Not Meet Our Needs" additionally recounts communications between textbook publishers and school officials. Though not all the communications were successful, some positive changes to the textbooks did result from them.

A more modern day scholar who has written on the effects of textbook bias is Professor Michael H. Romanowski. Romanowski is an Assistant Professor of Education at Ohio Northern University and wrote an article titled "Problems of Bias in History Textbooks." In his article, Romanowski is mainly concerned with the assumption that textbooks are purely factual and devoid of bias and the treatment of minorities in textbooks. To support his argument that textbooks are biased, he analyzes five different history textbooks for secondary students. Near the end of his article, Romanowski takes a stance on the significance of language in textbooks and their influence. He writes, "I believe that the authority of textbooks coupled with the "objectivity" of the technical knowledge that they communicate encourages students to accept

⁴"About the Program on Intergroup Relations," The University of Michigan, accessed April 17, 2019, <https://igr.umich.edu/about>.

unquestionably the impressions and worldview created by the language of textbooks.”⁵

Romanowski includes an example from one of the textbooks that he analyzed to explain how the way textbooks are written influence the way students think about historical events. His example was about the Japanese-Americans that were held in internment camps during World War II. Romanowski argues that how the textbook was worded could lead students to the conclusion that the internment of the Japanese during World War II was a necessity, as opposed to cruel and unnecessary. Romanowski also writes about how the textbook could qualify selfishness and self preservation over doing what is right. He concludes that the textbooks he “analyzed describe historical events in a manner that promotes a worldview of which students are barely conscious, but nonetheless shapes their understanding of the world.”⁶ Romanowski additionally offers that history classes read textbooks with more of an eye towards looking for and identifying biases in their textbooks. He then urges them to take that information and then focus on creating a historical dialogue around what is morally right and fair.

Another scholar who explores the negative effects of racially biased textbooks is Benjamin Kelsey Kears. In his article, “Resisting Official Knowledge: The Incorporation and Abjection of Race and Poverty in High School American History Textbooks, 1960s–2000s,” Kears addresses the issue of how textbooks decide what knowledge is made to be general knowledge and how they usually tend to favor “high status knowledge.”⁷ Kears includes a

⁵Michael H. Romanowski, “Problems of Bias in History Textbooks,” *Social Education* 60, no. 3 (March 1996): 170-173, <http://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/publications/se/6003/600310.html>.

⁶Romanowski, “Problems of Bias in History Textbooks.”

⁷Benjamin Kelsey Kears, “Resisting Official Knowledge: The Incorporation and Abjection of Race and Poverty in High School American History Textbooks, 1960s–2000s,” *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy* 11, no. 1 (June 2014): , <https://oakland.illiad.oclc.org/illiad/illiad.dll?Action=10&Form=75&Value=308643>.

source to support his argument that is not commonly used when talking about textbook bias, Sigmund Freud. Kearl uses Freudian psychoanalytic theory to explain how “textbook narratives thus incorporate selective narratives and exclude curricular knowledge that challenges these narratives.”⁸ This quote is in reference to Kearl’s explanation of how the narratives that textbooks create exclude minorities. Next, Kearl goes into an in depth analysis of how textbooks recount the urban riots of the late 1960s. In his conclusion, Kearl asserts that it is the responsibility of textbooks, specifically American history textbooks, to foster “the development of an inclusive self.”⁹ In other words, Kearl wants textbooks to, instead of encouraging an egocentric version of history, be inclusive and diverse, in order to produce students who have a strong and positive sense of self. He declares that textbooks need to include what they have formerly excluded, but does not go into more detail on how to best make that happen. This is similar to the essence of what the Detroit Public Schools Staff were getting at in their article, Kearl just went about arguing it in a different way with different source materials.

Each of these articles agree that the racial biases in textbooks have a negative effect on the students who are learning from them. However, they all make their argument using different support and evidence and the authors target their arguments to different, specific, but still negative, effects. The Detroit Public Schools Staff use logic and reason to argue the development of low self-esteem and self-image of African American students because of the racially biased textbooks. Kearl makes a similar argument as to self-image, but he does so using Freud and is more general in his argument. Romanowski is more general in who is affected by

⁸Kearl, “Resisting Official Knowledge,” 65.

⁹Kearl, “Resisting Official Knowledge,” 75.

racially biased textbooks, but he still makes it clear that poor mindsets and attitudes are evolving as a result of the biased textbooks. The consensus among scholars is that textbooks are racially biased and have a detrimental effect on the students who are reading them.

Although the articles propose different opinions on how best to fix the biases in textbooks and prevent them from reappearing, they can at least agree that there is a problem that needs to be fixed. While the Detroit Public School Staff argue that evaluating textbooks in order to determine what needs to be rectified is the solution, Romanowski suggests taking the biased textbooks and reading them with a critical eye. He writes that having discussions about the biases in the textbooks can be an effective way of righting the wrongs the textbooks promote. Kearnl, on the other hand, does not provide any sort of specific solution on how to actually produce the textbooks that promote self-esteem and self-image.

Biases Against Native Americans

A History of the United States [to 1876] and *The American Nation: A History of the United States* were United States history textbooks used by Detroit Public schools in the 1960s. Both of these high school textbooks recount historical events and concepts in a way that favors the white people of history and is against the minorities of history. Their bias is portrayed in arguments, word choice, and tone. One instance of bias in each textbook is against African Americans, particularly when they were slaves, and for Southern whites, both slave owners and non slave owners. The textbooks also show bias against the Native Americans and towards whites who were interacting with them. It is additionally important to note that since the two textbooks being analyzed were high school textbooks, there is no argument to be made that the

content regarding the hardships and brutalities faced by the Native Americans needed to be downplayed or sugar coated for developmental or maturity reasons.

An example of the textbooks' bias against minorities, in this case the Native Americans, is when the books discuss the Indian Removal Act of 1830. This act was passed by President Andrew Jackson and called for the forced removal of certain Native American tribes from their land. It was land within the borders of the United States that Jackson wanted the Native Americans removed from and forcibly relocated to unsettled land west of the Mississippi. The trip the Native Americans had to take to get to this land has become known as "The Trail of Tears." The journey earned this nickname due to the amount of devastation and hardships the Native Americans faced while on it. However, neither textbook's recounting of this event refers to it as "The Trail of Tears" and dedicates hardly any time to addressing the horrors the Native Americans faced because of President Jackson's Indian Removal Policy.

In *A History of the United States [to 1876]*, the authors write about the Indian Removal Act of 1830. They do admit that "in the process of Indian removal there was much tragedy and a certain amount of violence," but they do not go into any sort of detail about the sheer amount of tragedy and violence that was brought upon the Native Americans while they were being forcibly removed from their land.¹⁰ The only examples of violence mentioned in this section are instances in which the Native Americans rose up in rebellion against the United States government. The textbook excludes any mention of the brutality inflicted by United States troops on the Native Americans while they were being forced off their land and made to march to the land designated for them west of the Mississippi.

¹⁰Harry T. Williams, Richard N. Current, and Frank Freidel, *A History of the United States [to 1876]* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1959), 370.

In addition to downplaying the atrocities the Native Americans faced while on the Trail of Tears, *A History of the United States [to 1876]* also clearly favors the idea of Native Americans adopting white culture and leaving their own traditions behind. The authors write, “unlike the Sacs and Foxes or the Seminoles, the Cherokees in Georgia were a civilized people, with a written language of their own (invented by the half-breed Sequoyah in 1821) and with a settled way of life as farmers.”¹¹ This quote is essentially saying that the Native Americans who rose up against the oppressive whites were uncivilized and that the Native Americans who adopted white culture were the good guys. The way this quote discusses Native Americans and their culture creates an impression that the Native Americans were wrong in the way they lived and that the white way of living is the right way of living. The authors also use the derogatory term “half-breed” to describe Sequoyah.¹² This is just another example of the textbook describing the Native Americans in a negative way, which also depicts them as being lesser than whites.

A History of the United States [to 1876] describes the removal of the Native Americans from the United States’ territory as “getting rid of” them.¹³ When explaining Georgia’s interaction with the Native Americans, the textbook reads, “the state of Georgia, after getting rid of the Creeks, was eager to remove the Cherokees also.”¹⁴ The decision to describe the removal of Native Americans from Georgia as “getting rid of” them makes the Native American people sound like nothing more than a nuisance. The Native American people are depicted as a problem

¹¹Williams, Current, and Freidel, *A History of the United States*, 370.

¹²Williams, Current, and Freidel, *A History of the United States*, 370.

¹³Williams, Current, and Freidel, *A History of the United States*, 370.

¹⁴Williams, Current, and Freidel, *A History of the United States*, 370.

standing in the way of white progress, as opposed to human beings with their own rights and culture. The quote additionally makes it clear that even though the Cherokees adopted white culture, it still was not good enough for the state of Georgia. The textbook fails to stress the hypocrisy Georgia displayed by still wanting to ‘get rid of’ the Cherokee, even after they adopted white culture.

The textbook *The American Nation: A History of the United States* does not do any better of a job in its rendition of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. First of all, the title of the section in which the act is discussed is “Indian Problems.”¹⁵ From the very beginning of the section, before the students have even started reading it, they are given the impression that the Native Americans were a problem and not a group of people who were greatly wronged by the United States government. The title sets the tone for this section and students are therefore going to read the section with the mindset that the Native Americans were nothing more than a problem the United States needed to solve.

When *The American Nation: A History of the United States* discusses the Cherokees and how they adopted white culture, it is written that “the Cherokees, made a courageous and intelligent efforts to hold on to their lands by adjusting to white ways.”¹⁶ Describing the Cherokees’ actions to adopt white culture as “courageous and intelligent” is completely biased against Native American culture. Just as in *A History of the United States [to 1876]*, the Native American culture is looked at as lesser and wrong, while white culture is looked at as the superior and correct culture. However, Garraty takes this view of Native American culture and

¹⁵John A. Garraty, *The American Nation: A History of the United States* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1966), 265.

¹⁶Garraty, *The American Nation*, 265.

drives it in even further than *A History of the United States [to 1876]* did, by way of his adjectives. The adjectives Garraty employs not only make the Cherokees appear as if they are making the right choice to adopt white culture, but that they are heroes and their actions should therefore be emulated.

The American Nation: A History of the United States also manages to make the Native Americans' control over their own territory seem like a bad thing. To accomplish this, Garraty includes a paragraph on the court case *Worcester v. Georgia*. In this case, a Native American tries to evade a murder conviction on the grounds that the murder he committed occurred on Cherokee territory. The textbook captures the event as the only example of a Native American trying to invoke his right to have Native American territory independent of the United States government. Garraty makes it appear as if the only reason to have independent Native American territory is to manipulate and evade the laws of the United States. The example also encourages more negative thinking towards the Native Americans because it depicts a Native American who committed murder. It is additionally important to note that this case was concerning a Native American who murdered another Native American. If a Native American had murdered a white man, the state of Georgia would not have hesitated in their conviction.

Biases Against African Americans

Another subject that Detroit Public Schools' textbooks did not handle well is slavery. *A History of the United States [to 1876]* and *The American Nation: A History of the United States* are completely negligent of the facts when discussing slavery in the United States. Both books downplay the inhumane way masters treated their slaves and try to defend that slavery was just as bad for the free whites as the African Americans who were enslaved. This incredibly

inadequate and inaccurate portrayal of slavery does a disservice to the students learning from these textbooks and allows them to go on in life ignorant of the awful reality of slavery. Also, as stated previously, the textbooks were high school textbooks, so there was no reason regarding development or maturity to hide the truth about slavery.

In *A History of the United States [to 1876]*, the authors qualify the laws regarding slavery by writing “these and dozens of other restrictions and impositions would seem to indicate that the slaves lived under a harsh and dismal regime, which would have been the case had the laws been drastically enforced. Actually, they were applied so unevenly that it is difficult to say what their effect was”¹⁷ The textbook then goes on to name the positive ways the laws surrounding slavery were broken. The textbook also explains that “most slave offences were tried by the master, who might inflict punishments ranging from some mild disciplinary action to flogging or branding.”¹⁸ In this quote, the authors use a legal term to describe the masters punishing their slaves. By using the word ‘tried,’ the authors are alluding to a trial by jury. This makes the idea seem more familiar to students because they have a general idea of what a trial in a courtroom is like, but a trial in a courtroom bears no resemblance to what masters would do to punish their slaves. Williams, Current, and Freidel are using language that lead the students to form an image in their mind of what a master would do to punish their slaves that is completely different from what it was actually like. The authors are also impressively vague in their wording of “mild disciplinary action.”¹⁹ This vague description could mean so many different things and therefore mitigates the impact of what actually happened for the reader. The authors additionally fail to go

¹⁷Williams, Current, and Freidel, *A History of the United States*, 485-486.

¹⁸Williams, Current, and Freidel, *A History of the United States*, 486.

¹⁹Williams, Current, and Freidel, *A History of the United States*, 486.

into specific detail about the extremely harsh punishments and just how often those occurred. With selective wording and leaving out relevant conditions, the authors create the impression that the life of a slave was not that bad. The harsh sounding rules were not enforced and punishments could be ‘mild.’

However, just making the life of a slave sound okay was not enough for the authors of *A History of the United States [to 1876]*. They had to take it a step further by comparing the life of a slave to the life of a regular old farm worker and say that they were at about the same level. The textbook reads, “as far as physical conditions of life, the slaves were about as well off as most members of the world’s laboring population.”²⁰ The textbook also states that a slave’s “workday was no longer than that of the Northern farmer or laborer.”²¹ In this paragraph, the authors are completely disregarding the realities of slavery. Frankly, they are insulting the memory of the African Americans who had to endure so much cruelty at the hands of slavery in the United States. To even consider comparing the lives of slaves to that of a regular farmer is disgraceful. Slaves were not only stripped of their freedom, they were legally not allowed to receive an education and their marriages were not legally recognized. Even without the more logistical and everyday restrictions, slaves were brutalized, tortured, and deprived of their humanity. The depiction of slavery perpetrated by *A History of the United States [to 1876]* committed a disservice to the students who were forced to learn from it. *A History of the United States [to 1876]* created citizens who were shamefully ignorant to the atrocities enacted under slavery and left them to understand the world blissfully unaware of the reality of slavery.

²⁰Williams, Current, and Freidel, *A History of the United States*, 486.

²¹Williams, Current, and Freidel, *A History of the United States*, 486.

Garraty's textbook did not do any better of a job in conveying what slavery was really like in the United States. *The American Nation: A History of the United States* begins its discussion of slavery by looking at it strictly as an economic institution. Placing the analysis of slavery as an economic institution before its analysis of slavery as a social institution already tells the reader what the textbook views as more important. Telling its readers, in this case students, to look at slavery as an economic institution first, dehumanizes the institution and teaches students to look at the institution over the slaves themselves and what they had to go through.

Once *The American Nation: A History of the United States* finally gets to talking about slavery as a social institution, it continues to disappoint. Although it does state that there were "instant and savage reprisals" in response to slave uprisings, it does not go into detail about those "savage reprisals."²² The textbook then goes on to give an example of the biggest slave uprising that was organized, Nat Turner's rebellion, but only mentions the number of white casualties caused by it. The textbooks does not mention what happened to the rebels or that there even were African American casualties. Leaving out this relevant information leaves students uninformed and makes it seem as if the African American casualties are not relevant. The textbook also speaks to the "merciless lashings" inflicted upon caught runaway slaves and that they were sometimes branded.²³ Unfortunately though, the textbook fails to dive any further into the brutalities committed against slaves. It is relevant to note that the textbook only mentions slaves being punished for actions such as revolting and running away. There is no mention of

²²Garraty, *The American Nation*, 333.

²³Garraty, *The American Nation*, 333.

the equally harsh punishments slaves could receive for ‘smaller’ infractions, such as not following an order or arriving late.

Next, *The American Nation: A History of the United States* goes on to talk about slavery and its psychological effects. Be warned though, they are not what one would expect. In this section, Garraty argues that “slavery damaged white men almost as severely as black.”²⁴ Garraty supports this argument by explaining how slavery caused poorer white southerners to not want to work for another person to earn a living and how slavery caused whites to become desensitized to violence. Garraty also condemned the “countless petty cruelties that the system allowed.”²⁵ The example he includes to support this point is from the diary of a woman from Louisiana. In this diary entry, the woman writes of how she feels badly for whipping one of her slaves and in response, Garraty writes, “but for slavery, she would surely have had better self-control.”²⁶ This depiction of the psychological effects of slavery is honestly disgusting. Garraty pays more attention to the ‘damaging’ psychological effects slavery had on white people than the detrimental psychological effect slavery had on the actual slaves. After reading this textbook, students are left thinking about the poor white man who was so damaged by slavery. *The American Nation: A History of the United States* leaves students uninformed about the inhumane treatment of slaves and the effects of that treatment on the slaves. The textbook is shockingly biased towards the white man in regards to a subject that is so clearly horrible and an effect of the policies of white men. It is remarkable how Garraty makes the villain look like a victim in his depiction of slavery and makes the actual slaves seem like an afterthought.

²⁴Garraty, *The American Nation*, 334.

²⁵Garraty, *The American Nation*, 334.

²⁶Garraty, *The American Nation*, 334.

President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation is another area of history where Williams and Garraty reveal their racial bias, though it is not quite as apparent as in their description of slavery. Nevertheless, in the section about the emancipation proclamation in *A History of the United States [to 1876]*, Williams includes an illustration of political propaganda that is aimed at abolishing slavery. The piece has a border of pictures of the brutality committed against slaves to enforce its point. The caption of this picture describes it as a "frankly Northern depiction of the significance of emancipation."²⁷ Williams' use of the word "frankly" immediately directs the reader to think of the cartoon in a more negative light, by way of tone. The word "frankly" reveals a negative tone surrounding the political propaganda that is against slavery, resulting in the creation of a negative tone around abolishing slavery. Garraty is not as biased when directly referring to the Emancipation Proclamation, but he does hint at his bias in some of the word choice he uses in the section that discusses the Emancipation Proclamation. For example, Garraty refers to slavery as a "peculiar institution."²⁸ Garraty's use of the word "peculiar" to describe slavery in *The American Nation: A History of the United States* is not a sufficient adjective to describe the institution of slavery. 'Peculiar' is a word that southerners used to describe slavery before the Civil War. By using the same word choice as white southerners, Garraty is reinforcing its validity. Garraty using a term that was favored by southerners is further evidence of his bias towards whites and against African Americans. 'Peculiar' is also a more neutral adjective than one that should be used to describe slavery. Slavery was one of the worst things to ever exist in the United States and this point needs to be

²⁷Williams, Current, and Freidel, *A History of the United States*, 586.

²⁸Garraty, *The American Nation*, 416.

made clear when referring to it. Garraty using a more neutral word, as opposed to a more aggressive, negative, and/or appropriate adjective, reveals his bias. This is simply another example of Garraty downplaying the truth about the horrors of slavery in his textbook.

Contemporary Reaction to the Textbooks

During the 1960s, Detroiters were aware of the problems with the textbooks their children were using in school and they worked to fix those problems. Awareness was brought to the issues of racial bias in the textbooks and parents, teachers, and school boards worked towards a solution. Supplemental materials were used to make up for some of the content the textbooks missed and the schools put pressure on textbook companies to publish an unbiased and more accurate textbook. However, there was not always a consensus on what was being done and whether or not what was being done was sufficient.

One of the earlier newspaper articles that addresses racial bias in textbooks argues that “textbooks should be aimed more at Negro children.”²⁹ To support this argument, the article cites that half of the students in Detroit Public Schools are African American, so it only makes sense. The article also states that “materials should be made available to all students at every grade level so they will be aware of the contributions of minority groups to the progress of our nation and to the world.”³⁰ The article finishes by offering that until appropriate materials can be acquired, teachers should collaborate to find better materials to use in their classrooms. The specific stance that textbooks should be aimed at African American children is more specific to this article, but the general idea of making textbooks more inclusive and accurate towards

²⁹“Study Suggests Change in Texts,” *Detroit Free Press*, March 11, 1962, file:///Users/kellychinoski/Downloads/March_11,_1962_(Page_19_of_150).pdf.

³⁰“Study Suggests Change in Texts.”

minorities is an idea that most of the articles agree on. This is not the only article to speak to the solution of additional materials to supplement students' education on minorities.

One significant person who was not on board with fixing the racially biased textbooks, according to one article at least, was Detroit's superintendent during the early 1960s, Samuel M. Brownell. Brownell worked for fifty years in the realm of education. While the superintendent of Detroit Public Schools, Brownell opened up job opportunities to African Americans and created new "programs that challenged tradition."³¹ According to writer John L. Olson, Brownell did not do an adequate job in responding to the textbook bias in Detroit's public schools. Olson's article states that "Brownell issued an irresponsible reply to the protest that a history textbook used by the Detroit public schools is an insult to Detroit Negroes."³² The article does not supply the specific reply from Brownell that it is referring to, nor does it provide any quotes from the reply. Olson does however, imply that Brownell suggested that African American students are inferior and should not participate in the community.

In contrast to Brownell, his succeeding superintendent, who assumed the position in 1966, Norman Drachler, was in full support of fixing the issues with racially biased textbooks. Two newspaper articles, "Fair Texts Demanded in Schools" and "Detroit School Aid Sees Bias in Books," speak to Drachler's efforts to eliminate racially biased textbooks in Detroit's public schools. The articles praise his condemnation of publishing companies for not moving quick enough to produce an accurate and unbiased textbook and for not letting up on the pressure for

³¹Robert D. McFadden, "Samuel Brownell, 90, Ex-Education Official, Dies," *The New York Times*, October 14, 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/10/14/obituaries/samuel-brownell-90-ex-education-official-dies.html>.

³²John L. Olson, "As Our Readers See It: Brownell Stand on Text Ignores Racial Problem," *The Detroit Free Press*, November 29, 1962, file:///Users/kellychinoski/Downloads/November_29,_1962_(Page_6_of_4.pdf).

the publishing companies to do so. These articles are in full agreement with Dachler and are not afraid to show it in their writing.³³

One of the solutions for solving the problem of the racially biased textbooks is discussed in a newspaper article entitled “Schools Urged to Drop Textbook.” This article defends that the school board has “set up machinery to eliminate racial unfairness in textbooks” and that “teachers will be instructed to use corrected supplements for ‘Our United States.’”³⁴ *Our United States* was another textbook that Detroit Public Schools were using in the 1960s. On the other hand, the article also speaks about Richard B. Henry, the president of the Group on Advanced Leadership, and his unhappiness with efforts to fix the racially biased textbooks in Detroit Public Schools in the 1960s. Nevertheless, the article favors the position of the school board and includes criticism of Henry and his actions.

A newspaper article published near the end of the 1960s touches solely on the progress Detroit’s public schools made towards a more diverse and accurate textbook. The article is titled “Black Heroes Emerge in Corrected Texts” and provides an overview of the assessment of the racially biased texts and the solutions to them. Mary Ann Weston’s article details the criticisms of some of the textbooks and speaks to how eliminating racial bias is not only important for the factual knowledge of students, but also for the attitudes of students. Weston reports that Agnes Shearer, the supervisor of the social studies department for Detroit’s public school, explains how

³³“Fair Texts Demanded in Schools,” *Detroit American*, June 29-30, 1968, file:///Users/kellychinoski/Downloads/June_29,_1968_(Page_27_of_31).pdf; “Detroit School Aid Sees Bias in Books,” *New York Times*, June 29, 1968, <https://search-proquest-com.huaryu.kl.oakland.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/118251566/fulltextPDF/590B05317D234A44PQ/1?accountid=12924>.

³⁴“Racial Charge Renewed: Schools Urged to Drop Textbook,” *Detroit Free Press*, January 23, 1963, <https://search-proquest-com.huaryu.kl.oakland.edu/americanperiodicals/docview/1818627827/69C2E40ABC04FC8PQ/6?accountid=12924>.

textbooks need to “help the Negro child develop a positive self-image and build racial pride” and that “the attitudes of white children toward negroes need to be changed too.”³⁵ This closer look at the effects the racially biased textbooks have on students is an approach that none of the other articles considered, but is arguably one of the most significant and detrimental effects. Students tend to forget specific facts they learned from textbooks once they are finished with a class, but an attitude that has been subconsciously and continually reinforced by a textbook is something those students will not forget. They are probably unaware that they have even formed this attitude, let alone that they formed it because of their history textbook.

Conclusion

Detroit’s public schools were using textbooks in the 1960s that were racially biased towards whites and against minorities. Two of the textbooks, *A History of the United States [to 1876]* and *The American Nation: A History of the United States*, display bias against Native Americans and African Americans by omitting, downplaying, and undermining the hardships, struggles, and brutalities they had to face throughout American history. Luckily though, the people of Detroit were aware of the fact that their children were learning from racially biased textbooks and worked to eradicate them from the schools. Newspaper articles from the time document the efforts of the schools and parents, criticisms of the textbook publishers, and the progress that was made to solve the problem. Not everyone was in agreement that what was being done was enough though and some school officials were initially slow to get the ball rolling on solutions, but later officials eventually came in to help pick up the slack. Scholars from back when the textbooks were still being used and scholars today have written about the

³⁵Mary Ann Weston, “Black Heroes Emerge in Corrected Texts,” *Detroit Free Press*, September 29, 1968, file:///Users/kellychinoski/Downloads/September_29,_1968_(Page_6_of_.pdf.

negative effects racially biased textbooks have on students and suggestions for solving that problem. Although they do not all have the same ideas about a solution, they can all agree that the problem exists and that something needs to be done about it. Although the racially biased textbooks of 1960s Detroit Public Schools are an example of the continued racism that permeates the United States, it is also an example of a community coming together to combat that racism.

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