

What Does it Mean to be an American?: Training History Students and Prospective Teachers to See the Assumptions in their Textbooks

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LIKE MANY HISTORY TEACHERS, I struggle for ways to lessen my dependence on textbooks while also teaching students to read their textbook with the critical eye of a historian. It is a struggle I have come to appreciate more keenly as, in addition to teaching the standard college-level introductory history courses, I also teach the teaching methods course that serves as the capstone for my university's social studies education program. It has long been my ambition to integrate these two facets of my teaching, so that the principles I introduce to prospective teachers in the methods course are applied in my own history courses, which can, in turn, provide material and discussion fodder for my methods students. An assignment I recently tried out in an introductory American history course suggests such an opportunity to link principles of culturally relevant teaching and critical reading to my course's core historical themes, while allowing my methods course and American history course to, in some sense, "speak" to each other.

One of the first activities that I assign my soon-to-be student teachers in their social studies education methods course asks them

to evaluate how they used history and social studies textbooks when they were K-12 students. What do they remember from their experiences using textbooks, and how does that inform their ideas about how they will use textbooks as middle school and high school social studies teachers? We read and discuss James Loewen's and Kathleen Woods Masalski's chapters in *Censoring History*, which document how editors and authors sanitize history and avoid meaningful interpretation, analysis, and judgment—and therefore, excitement—due to economic and political pressures.¹ Most important, we brainstorm ways to not fall into bad habits of uncritically teaching the text, and seek to identify ways in which textbooks—for all their limitations—continue to offer value to public school teachers.

While I address these issues with textbooks in my social studies education students each semester, I more recently gained the opportunity to confront these challenges in “The American Experience,” a freshman-level American history course for non-majors that spans all American history from European contact to the present. Each instructor is encouraged to focus on a particular theme, issue, or topic that narrows the course and gives it greater coherence and distinctiveness. The already formidable challenge of selecting a topic that will offer students a coherent slice through over five hundred years of history became a greater concern when I learned that I would have the chance to teach sections reserved exclusively for students majoring in early and middle grades education, covering pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. How do I teach the entirety of American history winnowed and focused through the lens of a particular thematic issue when my course is populated with students for whom this is their only American history requirement, and who will, in a few years, be teaching third grade students their own version of the history of Thanksgiving and George Washington and Martin Luther King, Jr.? My professional interest in following the intent of the course and personal desire to find my own way to carve up American history seemingly was at odds with my sense of obligation to provide future elementary school teachers with a more comprehensive narrative history of America. In spite of dreamy notions of offering a history course reliant only on provocative primary sources and subtle secondary source articles, I found myself checking in with my local textbook

representative to learn what my options were for comprehensive history texts. With this came the question: how do I use my history textbook in a way consistent with the university goal of teaching a “thin slice” course, that models for future elementary school teachers the principles of effective textbook usage I teach in my methods course for future secondary school teachers, that makes this pedagogical approach to textbook use visible to the future teachers in my class, and that adds meaningful breadth and depth to my course?

I identified a couple of course-long essential questions that I hoped would help accomplish those objectives. “What has it meant to be ‘American’ and who has had the power to decide the meaning of ‘American’? How and why have those answers changed with time?” These issues appeared broad enough that they could be used in a more general American history course, but focused enough to permit me to offer the source of course intended. The questions in turn reminded me of a textbook analysis exercise described by Masalski in the *Censoring History* article I discuss with my teaching methods students. Drawing on a series of articles that appeared in *Social Education* in the early 1980s about creative ways to get students to read texts critically, Masalski asks her students to do things like create timelines of the events referenced in textbook chapters and categorize those events as economic, military, political, or social history, in order to better see how authors privilege certain historical topics at the expense of others. Other exercises involve having students recreate the textbook’s maps and charts in ways that alter the presumptions, tone, or argument of those graphics. Michael Frisch’s observation that when he challenges his students to name the first ten Americans they can think of who lived up to the end of the Civil War and who weren’t prominent public officials, students struggle to get past Betsy Ross, further motivated me to explore, with my aspiring K-8 teachers in *The American Experience*, the issues of who gets represented in textbooks of American history and, by extension, who we think of when we think of what it means to be American.² Finally, I hoped that this assignment might create additional opportunities for culturally relevant teaching, as students investigated the twenty-first-century conditions that explain why the textbook I have assigned them does or does not include content indicative of their own backgrounds and experiences.

Goals and Setup

I sought to design an assignment that would compel students to categorize and analyze the historical figures, places, and events that make their way into textbooks, in a manner that would align with the course-long essential questions. This textbook analysis assignment ideally would get my students to explore the issues of representation and power suggested by my essential questions while modeling several pedagogical principles skills that, though often not made transparent for students in a college history course, might plant seeds in these future teachers' minds about how to approach their own elementary-grade history course some day. The American Experience students are overwhelmingly freshmen—in the first class for which I attempted this project, there were twenty-three, along with six sophomores and a senior—and, indicative of the demographics of elementary and middle grades education majors, twenty-seven out of the thirty were women. Though I will not hazard guesses on how some students identified, it is safe to say that the overwhelming majority of the class identified as white, certainly at a greater frequency than the university as a whole. These ratios were closely approximated in the two sections I taught last semester, and appear to be holding stable in the preliminary class rosters I have for next semester's two sections.

In order to integrate my out-of-class assignments with in-class lessons, the textbook analysis assignment begins by dedicating the first week of the semester to teaching basic primary source and secondary source analysis skills. With an appropriately comic-morbid approach, I ask students to identify sources of evidence they might gather if, tomorrow, it is announced that I have been killed by my cats, and their only assignment for the rest of the semester was to create a biography of my life. We identify the strengths, weaknesses, reliability, and authenticity of different possible sources available for investigating my life, before pivoting to issues more directly related to the textbook analysis assignment. Of the sources listed by which students might investigate my life, how many of those sources would also be available for investigating George Washington's life? Students begin paring their list with an appreciation for how much more the historians of the future will know about me, a rather ordinary fellow, than we can ever hope to know about Washington. How

many of the sources available for investigating Washington's life would be available for investigating the life of a "typical" American from Washington's time? Thus, I introduce the course-long essential questions, "What does it mean to be an American, who decides what it means, and how and why does that change over time?" Students quickly appreciate that there are many sorts of typical Americans in the Revolutionary era, and that their stories generally will be much harder to uncover and tell than Washington's.

The follow-up lesson on secondary sources becomes the entry point for introducing the textbook analysis assignment and integrating it into the entire course. Returning to the hypothetical death-by-feline scenario, I ask my students to list the media formats by which they might go about telling the story of my life, analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the printed word, movies, monuments, and more. The key questions in this conversation are, "What sort of stories of my life are worth telling, and what sorts can be excluded? Why?" In small groups and armed with a healthy dose of creative license by the teacher, students brainstorm as many possible interpretations and storylines as they can that would give a narrative framework for my life.

With these issues covered, I introduce my students to the task of critically examining their textbook as the end product of countless decisions about whose lives can be told and how those lives can be told. In discussing how their textbook was written and produced, I hope to bring transparency not just to how their textbook arrived at their desk, but also to bring transparency to this class full of prospective teachers about how I and all other teachers similarly have the power to amplify or silence voices from the past through the choices we make about what to teach and the narratives we create out of it. While this assignment draws on a wealth of scholarship on historical memory, critical literacy, and culturally relevant teaching from the likes of Loewen, Freire, Zimmerman, West, Delpit, and Ladson-Billings, for my American Experience students, I generally avoid making explicit reference to this literature.³

Assignment

After having a week to review the chapters of the book, in the trial-run semester, students rank-ordered and submitted the five

chapters that they most wished to analyze out of the thirty-four chapters in our assigned textbook, *America: A Narrative History*, the “brief” ninth edition by George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi.⁴ Brief is a problematic adjective, as the comprehensive single-volume paperback edition checks in at 1,424 pages and 3.6 pounds. Even this preparatory step proved valuable, as the pre-ranks helps me gauge the class’s relative degree of interest in different aspects of American history, interests I would not have guessed. Using a simple scale where being listed as a student’s top preference gives a chapter five points, with four points for being listed as a second preference, three points for being ranked third, and so on, the most popular chapter requested to analyze was a chapter on antebellum “Religion, Romanticism, and Reform.” The chapter on “Rebellion and Reaction” in the 1960s and 1970s ranked the second most desirable—though it had the most top-request rankings—and a chapter on “Big Business and Organized Labor” in the Gilded Age came in third (see **Appendix A**). Two things struck me about these rankings that were contrary to the expectations I had established from introductory American history courses taught to a more representative cross-section of university freshmen at my previous university. First, chapters on wars were much less sought after among my prospective grade K-8 teachers than I would have predicted. The chapter on World War II ranked only sixth most popular, with four first-preference requests, but few listings as a second-to-fifth best option. World War I ranked eleventh, with no first-place rankings and only three second-preference rankings. Most remarkable to me, the Civil War ranked twenty-first and the Revolutionary War twenty-eighth, with a single student ranking it as the fourth-ranked preference. I was similarly surprised to see colonial and early republic chapters consistently ranked so low. As a matter of broad generalization, my students expressed a surprisingly strong inclination toward social and cultural history and a weaker, less surprising, but still noticeable inclination toward post-bellum topics. With few exceptions, students were able to work on one of their ranked chapters. Four chapters did not get a student assigned for their review: the introductory chapter, which I removed from consideration; the next chapter on Britain’s relationship to its colonies; Chapter 8, “The Early Republic”; and Chapter 14, “An Empire in the West.”

Once chapters were assigned, students were instructed to create three products. First, they created a comprehensive database of every individual mentioned by name in their chapter, along with accompanying demographic details. In my trial run of this assignment, students completed this tabulation using a simple Excel template available to them through their online course management system, but it is easy to imagine ways that it might also be done through Google Docs and Google Forms, or other course management software. Students were asked to identify whether an individual's description indicated male or female, ethnicity and/or race, their age at the time of the events that concern the subject in that chapter, their occupation, and their sexual orientation. They also were asked to indicate if the person is quoted in the text and if there is an accompanying picture.⁵ Given both its significance to students who aspire to become public school teachers and its almost total absence from the textbook, in the second iteration of the assignment, I also asked students to track whether the individual is identified as having any sort of physical or intellectual disability. Students were instructed to give percentage breakdowns and create pie charts illustrating the demographics of their chapter. While I offered some suggestions for how to avoid unfortunate identification errors (for instance, between African, African American, and, say, Ghanaian American) and to create useful categories for occupation, I tried to leave most of these decisions up to the students.

The most common hang-up with the database, and an issue I will need to address in future editions, has been in determining how to distinguish between information explicitly offered in the textbook, information that can be inferred from the text, and information that needs to be looked up outside of the text. For instance, almost no references were made regarding an individual's sexual orientation in the book. This resulted in a couple of fruitful impromptu conversations in class—do we and should we have a default assumption that all historical subjects are straight unless identified otherwise? When is it historically or pedagogically important to mention that a historical subject identified himself or herself by a category other than heterosexual? In the first iteration of this assignment, for the sake of not overwhelming students with new rules imposed midway through their work, I left it up to the judgment of the student on how to proceed. Some chose to mark their individuals'

orientations as “not mentioned” while others went online to see what they could find about marital status, generally to find that virtually everyone mentioned in their chapters wound up in heterosexual pairings. That, in turn, led to similarly valuable discussions about whether we should interpret their findings as proof of identifying as straight, and when straight became a category of identity.

The second product students created for the assignment is a map generated on Google Maps marking the location of each historical event described in the assigned chapter, and color-coding those markers so that they categorize the events into different types. Again, I left the categorization up to students, other than suggesting to them some obvious ones: political, cultural, religious, military, economic, diplomatic. The rationale behind this component grows out of my sense that the social studies teachers I train for the secondary education program tend to be weaker in geography than other content areas, and my suspicion that, collectively, the students’ maps would produce striking visual evidence of the textbook’s emphasis of a few urban centers and especially Washington, D.C. I also was curious to see how well the textbook does in different chapters of referencing America’s global connections. How often are specific overseas locations appearing? Given my aspiration to teach American history in a global context, I hoped this facet of the assignment would either illuminate for students the extent to which foreign locations were part of the story of American history or, by contrast, illuminate for them the need to enrich American history by making those connections when the text does not.

Wary as I was of introducing an experimental new assignment that relied on thirty students and one instructor all operating a website properly, we saw very few complications with the Google Maps project. One student completed the project using Google Earth, which, in my view, provided a clumsier and less responsive interface when it came time for me to review and grade the completed product. Several students needed reminders to set their maps so that they could be viewed by others; I had to send specific requests for them to authorize my Google account to view the map, or directions for how to set their map so that it was viewable to all. Again, we faced questions about categorization, and what constituted distinct historical events. Should every act of Congress passed during the New Deal be identified as a distinct event that occurred

in Washington, D.C.? Would the Tennessee Valley Authority be marked as occurring in D.C., in Tennessee, or both? One issue I first identified as a potential difficulty, marking events that involve movement through space, like the creation of the continental railroad or migration patterns from east to west or north to south, instead became a feature of several maps where students discovered Google Maps' line-drawing feature. Given my university's proximity to the Mason-Dixon line, I was especially gratified to see the student whose textbook chapter afforded her a chance to map out the line on Google Maps, when the line is only mentioned, not mapped, in the textbook.

The third element of the assignment asks students to write up and analyze their findings in a more conventional paper. Students summarized the results of their demographic survey and map, compared those results with what they anticipated the results would be, offered explanations for what the results tell us about the textbook and about that time period in American history, suggested ways that the textbook chapter might become more representative of all Americans' experiences, evaluated if it needs to improve, and reflected on ways that this exercise might inform their future work as classroom teachers. Other than the expected variations in quality of analysis, which will be discussed shortly, this component of the assignment did not create any unexpected or hard to manage challenges for the students.

Grading and Results

The experimental nature of this assignment posed challenges in designing a coherent rubric and set of standards for assessing student work, and will be revised in subsequent versions. At present, the project is graded on a one-hundred-point scale, which constituted one-fourth of the overall course grade—a ratio that, in retrospect, is arguably too high, though not entirely out of line with the quantity and quality of work students invested in the assignment. Of those one hundred points, thirty went to the construction of the database. Full points, as my rubric described it, could be achieved by “No missing names. All demographic information is clearly labeled and accurate. Unknown information is properly labeled as unknown. Reasonable effort has been made to track down answers to unknown

information about the named persons. Demographic information is broken down into accurate percentages.” One point was subtracted for each missing or inaccurately categorized person. In addition to the problems with categorization already discussed, I ran across an issue of fairness: the number of individuals mentioned in a chapter ranged from nineteen to seventy. I could not justly take one point off for each missed individual in a seventy-person chapter and a nineteen-person chapter alike, and so I found myself making impromptu judgment calls about how to adjust grading based on degree of difficulty and relative thoroughness and presentation, as well as number of individuals missed. Similar issues appeared in the grading of the thirty-point Google Maps project, where, again, the rubric deducted for “missing or inaccurately categorized” event locations. The written paper comprised the remaining forty points, and could be graded using a modified form of the rubric I typically use for undergraduate writing, in which I give qualitative descriptions of what constitutes A, B, C, D, and F work in the categories of a thesis, organization, writing, analysis of evidence, and professionalism.

This assignment works better as a pedagogical device for helping students in introductory American history courses learn to read against the text than it does as a rigorous scholarly review of a textbook. Thirty different students used perhaps thirty different standards for categorizing historical subjects’ occupations, their orientation, and their ethnicity. Three chapters remained unexamined, and while my grading rubric obligated me to methodically check each student’s database for completeness and accuracy, there is still less than 100% certainty that my students and I have identified every single instance of the textbook mentioning a person by name in these thirty textbook chapters. Similar qualifiers apply to the geographic locations identified for the Google Maps component of the project.

Those qualifications aside, my students and I found the results illuminating, even striking. The data set for which I am most confident is the breakdown of the number of men and women mentioned by name in the textbook. In the thirty chapters combined, my students and I found 1,072 men and 105 women, or 91.1% men, 8.9% women. This ratio was fairly consistent across all chapters—a point that, when revealed in class near the end of the semester, surprised the several students who had been assigned chapters covering early

periods in American history, and in their papers had optimistically guessed that the chapters covering more recent history would have more even ratios than the ones they were finding. Chapter 24 on World War I and Chapter 29 on the Fair Deal and Containment mentioned no women. The concluding chapter on America in the twenty-first century named four women to forty-five men, an 8.2% ratio. The high tide for women was Chapter 23, the Progressive Era, where one-third of the individuals named were women, twelve out of thirty-six⁶ (see **Appendix B**). Students who completed this assignment in my most recent semester by using a selection of K-12 American History textbook chapters instead of the college text noted how frequently women were introduced into the texts as auxiliaries to their husbands. This suggests further opportunities to design the assignment to encourage students to explore not just the data on different demographic categories, but also how textbook authors fit the presence of women, minorities, and other underrepresented groups into the prevailing narrative. Indeed, at times, my students have seemed to conclude mistakenly that perfectly completing the demographic database is more important than thinking about what that database tells us about the authors' choice in narratives and their underlying values and assumptions. Are those few mentioned women being added to the text exclusively as complementary parts supporting the dominant narrative of progress and the development of social harmony? As potential critics and subverters of America's predominant cultural, political, religious, and economic institutions? In hopes of correcting my students' tendency to focus on correct data entry at the expense of such questions, I have adjusted the distribution of points so that the analytical essay now is a full 50% of the grade, with the map and database reduced to 25% each.

As several students noted in their papers, the results they found concerning the prevalence of men over women are informed by the results they found for occupational categories. Given the much greater variance in how students classified the persons mentioned in the chapters, I do not have reliable, comprehensive data. Suffice it to say that in most chapters, the subjects discussed came mostly from occupational categories like politician, military leader, and to a lesser extent, business leader—occupations that historically have skewed strongly toward men. The student assigned Chapter 4, "From Colonies to States," found fifty-two men and three women,

and classified 30% of the occupations as military, 36% as politician, and 34% as “everything else,” a category that included a first lady, a runaway slave, and some farmers and explorers, among others. In Chapter 32, on the 1960s and 1970s, a student found sixty-five men and four women, and among the occupations, forty-seven politicians and judges, thirteen activists, five journalists, four students, and two professors. These occupational categories perhaps also suggest another observation students commonly made: overwhelmingly, the textbook identified individuals who were forty or older at the time they are referenced in the text. The identification of named individuals in the text by their ethnicity is more problematic than gender identification, but my reviews of students’ work indicates that the sum total of 1,021 persons identified as white Americans and eighty-four identified as African American is, if not perfectly accurate, at least highly indicative of these groups’ level of representation in the textbook. The number of Latino, Asian, Asian American, Native American, and Middle Eastern persons are each negligible. The only person in the thirty examined chapters that a student found who was clearly identified in the text as gay is an unnamed individual that the extra-diligent student included in her database along with other persons quoted, but not named, in the chapter on the 1960s and 1970s. Among the enterprising students who chose to look up the orientations of the overwhelming number of individuals whose orientation is not identified in the text, only one student found one historical individual who might be identified as gay, Little Richard. These results cannot be taken as a definitive statement about the inclusion of gay people in the text; more telling is that, in over 1,100 individuals identified by students (noting that some of those individuals are duplicates, due to someone like George Washington appearing in more than one student’s chapter), no student found an instance of a named person who is identified by the textbook as being other than straight.

Pulling comprehensive data out of the maps is even more challenging; my students created thirty separate maps, as opposed to making a single all-encompassing map as a collaborative project. This proved a greater challenge for me to grade than the database, as it required a closer line-by-line review of the chapter and more room for splitting hairs about what did or did not constitute an event in a specific location. In total, I found few mistakes happily

in geography as well as several papers in which students identified interesting patterns in their maps. The student who reviewed the “Rebellion and Reaction” chapter on the 1960s and 1970s gave one marked location each for the U.S. Congress, White House, and Supreme Court, and then in the notes for each marker listed the series of events that occurred at each location. Other students bombarded D.C. with a marker for each distinct congressional, presidential, and judicial moment. Mostly, the color-coded markers helped students visualize and comment about the textbook’s extensive coverage and emphasis on events east of the Mississippi River and concerning politics and the military, seemingly at the expense of cultural markers, especially religion and science.⁷ Were I to create a composite map out of the thirty individual maps, we would get a much clearer visualization of this than what any one student’s map can offer (see **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**).

I was most interested in reading student papers to learn their explanations for why the textbook seemed to prioritize certain people, places, and topics over others, and to read their thoughts about how this exercise might inform their course design as future K-8 teachers. Students who thought that imbalances in coverage were best or entirely explained by a “that’s just the way things were” sort of analysis constituted a clear majority, although several students noted that the textbook authors could, if they wanted, do more to introduce the experiences of the common American. A few papers suggested ways and topics by which the authors might do that. I did not expect freshmen in an introductory history class to be able to offer very substantive suggestions on how this might inform their future careers as teachers, but several expressed their dawning appreciation for why their classes cannot exclusively or even primarily rely on textbooks or other prefabricated curriculum guides, and for the corrosive influence on students and classrooms that might result from teaching a history where only the voices of those who held power get heard.

As students consulted me on their work, turned in drafts, and presented their final products, I sought to integrate their questions and discoveries into my lectures and class discussions, in hopes of giving students more transparency about why I had designed the course as I had, and facilitating reflection about how course design from elementary school through college reflects beliefs about who

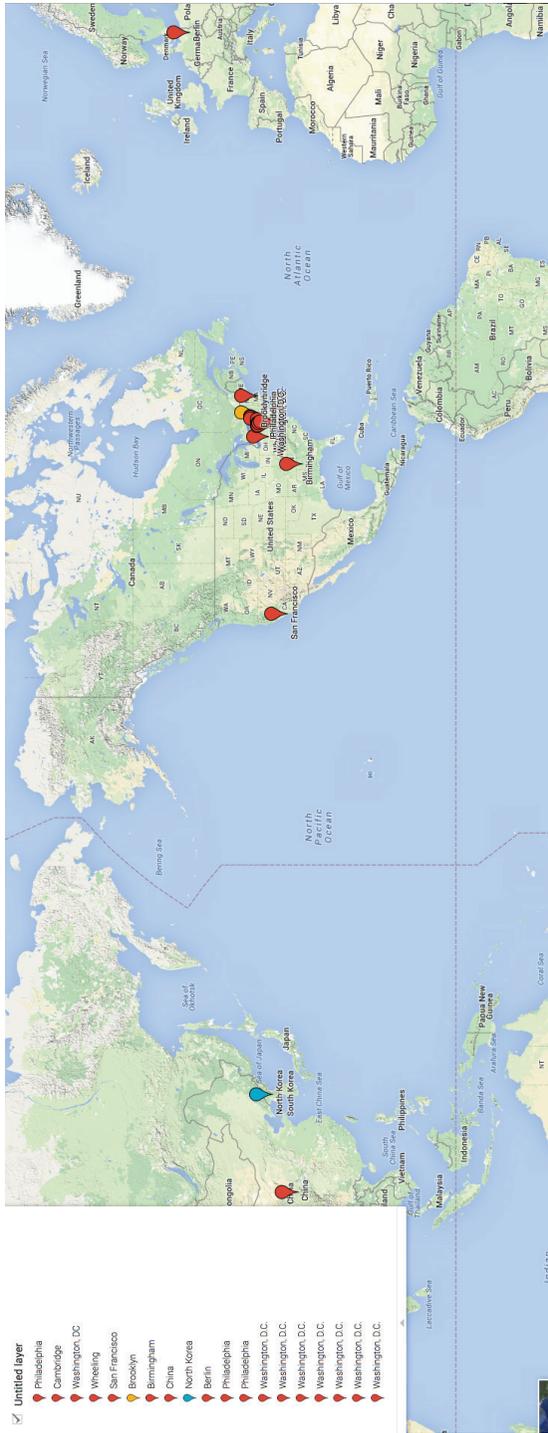


Figure 1: Wide-focus student map for Chapter 29, “Fair Deal and Containment.”

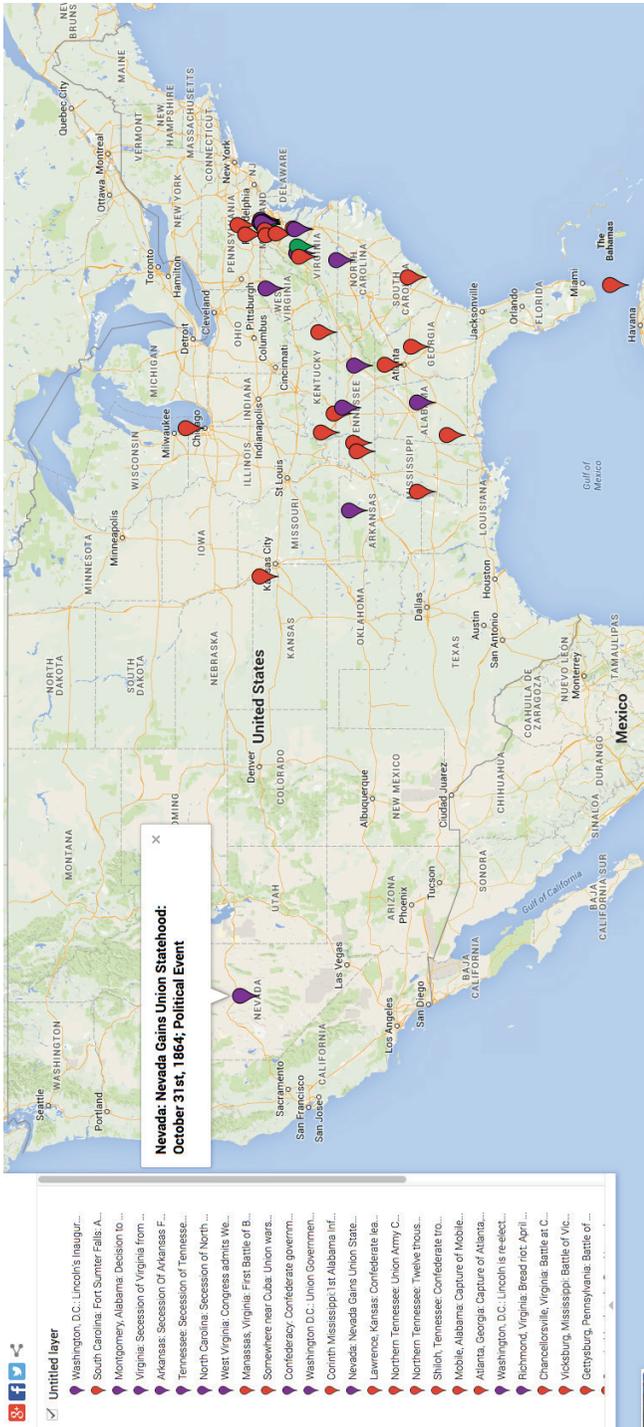


Figure 2: Zoomed in student map for Chapter 16, “The War of the Union,” with sample text of a marker in Nevada.

and what is worth teaching. We noted the contrast between my lectures—where, admittedly, a demographic analysis of my content would perhaps be only marginally better than the textbook—and the content of the primary sources I assign for in-class discussion, which generally demonstrates more of a “ground-level” perspective and a social history of how individuals experienced the great events of American history. After students had a chance to examine the comprehensive results of their demographic work, I framed my lectures as the product of deliberate choices about who to include when telling the story of American history. In its most transparent form, this was expressed in a Civil Rights lecture that self-referentially compared my prepared remarks against who was and was not mentioned in the corresponding textbook chapter, with the refrain, “If they wanted, a textbook or teacher could tell the history of Civil Rights through the eyes of Emmett Till’s mother, Mamie, who...” and, “If they wanted, a textbook or teacher could tell the history of Civil Rights through the eyes of Linda Brown, who...” This seems to have been the moment by which as many students who were going to “get it,” got it. Undoubtedly, some students understood this experience as a tedious data-entry assignment paired with a professor’s hackneyed moralizing about the importance of inclusivity. But for at least a comparable number of my students, the chain of course activities that linked early-semester work in thinking about how secondary sources are constructed out of available primary sources, then documenting and analyzing the finished product of a textbook chapter, and finally linking that analysis back to how teachers from college history courses to fourth-grade social studies must choose what is worth teaching, proved to be an eye-opening, even transformative experience linking critical textual analysis with practical questions of course-design and culturally relevant teaching. As one student wrote in the concluding sentence to her paper, encapsulating these concerns, “How can we expect children to be accepting of each other when they are told the only history that matters are those who held the power?”

Agenda for Improvement, Expansion

Arguably, the greatest limitation of the textbook analysis assignment is the difficulty in sustaining it across consecutive

semesters. In my most recently completed semester, I had two sections of the American Experience course, each reserved for early and middle grades education majors who will find in many of their education courses students who completed this assignment the previous semester. While it would be simple enough to check a new paper analyzing Chapter 13 off the previous semester's paper on the same chapter, verifying that the corresponding demographic database for Chapter 13 is the product of new work and not the resubmission of data someone else found seemed doubtful. I also question the value in asking a new crop of students to replicate the findings of last semester's group, when I can instead reference and show those results in class. For this more recent semester, I therefore asked students to find an early- or middle-grade textbook or set of curriculum materials of their choosing, pick a chapter concerning American history, and repeat the demographic database and map assignment with those materials. The paper included analyzing how their findings compare with the results of a comparable chapter from the course textbook produced by last semester's students. This created a fascinating opportunity to analyze how early and middle grades education majors' college curriculum materials compare to the sorts of materials commonly found in the classrooms they one day will call their own. Many students explored differences in how college and elementary texts treat pictures, photographs, art, and other media, and who is represented in those media.⁸ Ideally, this iteration of the textbook analysis project can in future semesters also supplement my efforts to get my students thinking about how to read a textbook critically, and, by extension, how they will get their elementary and middle school students to do the same.⁹

While it is a nice problem to have, I did not anticipate the high quality of my students' finished products, and correspondingly high grades. In that first trial-run class of thirty, I did not have a single student withdraw from the course, or even have a single student who failed to turn in all assigned coursework on time. In my experiences with introductory-level college courses, such uniform diligence is unprecedented. The result, however, was thirty students who, with only a few exceptions, were remarkably conscientious in picking through their textbook chapters and creating comprehensive databases and maps. While the quality of their written analysis tended to be more in line with my normal

expectations for such a class, the overall result still was that an assignment I had anticipated would serve as one of the activities that sifts out exceptional from weak performers wound up showing relatively little variation, and overly rewarding completion and the expense of rewarding truly robust analysis of the chapter and the data. This also proved problematic when trying to evaluate the quality of analysis in a particularly dense chapter compared to one of the lighter chapters. Finally, while I am happy with the way that the assignment aligns with several early-semester and late-semester lessons, it tends to disappear from the course for the several weeks of the semester between the beginning of the course and when the majority of students felt compelled to begin working in earnest on their assignment.

I am at once impressed by the number of loose ends that remain to be tidied up or further pursued in this assignment, and by the number of learning objectives it allows me to pursue. The assignment will benefit most from greater standardization of the categories students are using in their demographic analysis and maps, and from the creation of a composite “map of maps.” I also would like to compare the investigation of the textbook with a similar investigation of the content of my lectures and assigned primary source readings, and with curriculum materials from the grade levels my class full of early and middle grades education majors will be teaching. Even as presently configured, though, the assignment has helped me achieve several elusive goals. It has compelled each of my students to give a closer read to a section of a textbook than they otherwise would ever be likely to do, and to use that lower-order content knowledge to consider some of the key issues that animate the history discipline: how we turn primary source material into secondary source narratives, and how those narratives privilege certain topics, experiences, peoples, and places over others. In a class full of aspiring teachers, it has offered a different way to hold students accountable for an elementary knowledge of geography other than through the traditional map test and asks students to practice map design in a format (Google Maps) with which all were familiar, but had not considered as a source for generating social studies content knowledge and, perhaps someday, material for their own lessons. Most important to me, the completed demographic databases inspired student papers and in-class discussion that expressed the

need for greater mindfulness about the unstated assumptions in course materials about “what it means to be an American” and the corresponding need for teachers with the skill and motivation to teach beyond the textbook.

Making Methods and Survey Courses Speak to Each Other

My current appointment has been the first in which I have had the opportunity to teach both history (or social studies) education methods and a general education history content course in the same semester. Much like the assignment, the effort to get the two courses to speak to each other—to coordinate my and my students’ experiences in the two courses so that each informs the other—remains a work in progress. I had designed the textbook analysis project for my American Experience students as a way to illustrate and document for my methods students, in real time, historical literacy, critical thinking, and assessment techniques consistent with what they were being taught in methods and observing in their field experience placements with local secondary schools. I gave them regular updates on the survey course students’ progress throughout the semester, as part of our ongoing discussions about the challenges of using textbooks effectively, of promoting culturally relevant teaching, and of facilitating students’ critical reading of sources. Upon learning of my American Experience students’ findings about the *America: A Narrative History* text, three of my methods students volunteered to evaluate their capstone assignment, a two-week unit plan suitable for teaching in a grade seven to twelve social studies classroom, with the same scrutiny my American Experience students gave their textbook chapters. The results of their self-analysis of their lessons and course materials showed, in each case, an even great over-representation of white male public officials than the cumulative results of the textbook survey, which in turn led to meaningful reflection about how, in each case, the designer of the unit plans accepted the importance of culturally relevant teaching and yet unwittingly designed units that all privileged the same particular set of historical actors. I formalized this experience when I revised my methods syllabus for this most recent semester, so that this activity became a mandated part of their reflection upon their completed unit plans and field experiences.

As I expanded the textbook analysis assignment in this most recently completed semester to focus on comparing K-12 texts against the course textbook, I similarly expanded my methods students' investigation of the materials they saw used in the grades 7-12 classrooms where they conducted their field experiences. I asked my methods students to make similar efforts to document the demographic representations they saw taught in classrooms, and to document who was represented in their own lesson plans. I asked them to document instances where they saw classroom teachers attempting to get students to read against the text, or engage in a similar reading of the teacher's lesson. While my students did not report observing any instances of secondary-level students getting opportunities to practice such critical analysis, their personal reflective writing indicated they were internalizing the importance of the principles of culturally relevant teaching practices that had before been more of an abstract set of principles to them. But mostly, as I continue expanding and adjusting this assignment in my American Experience sections, I find myself expanding and adjusting how I teach social studies literacy skills to my prospective teachers in the methods course. Heretofore, I have focused on the mechanics of how to position secondary education teachers so that their lessons allow their students to interact with and question primary source material, and how to use such material in order to lessen teachers' reliance on secondary and tertiary sources paired with rote worksheet exercises. My American Experience students' work first with *America: A Narrative History* and now with their diverse selections of K-12 textbook chapters has resulted in a methods course that more seriously engages with the reality of new teachers being handed new textbooks selected for their ability to help districts meet Common Core ELA requirements, and the need for teachers who can help students' develop and sustain a personal and academic interest in their texts.¹⁰

The conversation between courses, so far, is perhaps more one-sided than a dialogue. While I know how to bring my methods practices into my own teaching of history for the American Experience course, it has been a challenge to find opportunities for my methods students' work in class or in the field to similarly become fodder for my American Experience course and its students. This is in part due to the nature of the two courses, one being a capstone

methods course for prospective history teachers, the other being an introductory course for general education students who often—but not always—are elementary education majors. Although I have not yet had a chance to put it into practice, I anticipate that perhaps the best opportunity for a real-time dialogue between the two courses might come from having the social studies education methods identify the American history textbooks and other source materials being used in their field experiences, have those findings become the focus of the American Experience students' textbook analyses, and use their results to get both classes thinking about how it informs their own experiences as students and prospective teachers. I also am considering assigning a common book, Kyle Ward's *History in the Making*.¹¹ For the American Experience students, Ward's selection of how textbooks from the Revolutionary War era to the present have written about historical subjects would serve a three-fold purpose of offering primary source readings in the history of education, introducing them to the concept of historiography, and also introducing them to the idea and practice of critically reading texts where the textbooks' biases are more readily evident than those of modern-day textbooks. For the methods students, the book might be a supplement to the *Censoring History* readings by Loewen and Masalski. Perhaps the best feature I can note about this assignment is that it has opened up my awareness to how much more my students in both methods and American Experience might explore the creation, content, and assumptions found in their textbooks.

Notes

1. James W. Loewen, "The Vietnam War in High School American History," in *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States*, ed. Laura Elizabeth Hein and Mark Selden (Armonk, NY: Routledge, 2000), 150-172. Kathleen Woods Masalski, "Teaching Democracy, Teaching War: American and Japanese Educators Teach the Pacific War," in *Censoring History*, 258-287. On textbooks' depictions of enemies in war, see also Paul Coman, "Reading about the Enemy: School Textbook Representation of Germany's Role in the War with Britain during the Period from April 1940 to May 1941," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 17, no. 3 (September 1996): 327-340.

2. Michael Frisch, "American History and the Structure of Collective Memory: A Modest Exercise in Empirical Iconography," *Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 (March 1989): 1130-1155; J. Samuel Walker, "History, Collective Memory, and the Decision to Use the Bomb," in *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 187-199.
3. Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Alastair West, "Reading Against the Text—Developing Critical Literacy," *Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education* 1, no. 1 (1994) 82-101; Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum, 1974); Lisa Delpit, *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (New York: The New Press, 1995); Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Asking the Right Questions: A Research Agenda for Studying Diversity in Teacher Education," in *Studying Diversity in Teacher Education*, ed. Armetha F. Ball and Cynthia A. Tyson (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011) 383-396; Gloria Ladson-Billings, "But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," *Theory Into Practice* 34, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 159-165.
4. George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, brief ninth ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012).
5. Audrey Osler has similarly noted the lack of women depicted in the images and textual activities in a survey of English history textbooks. Osler, "Still Hidden from History? The Representation of Women in Recently Published History Textbooks," *Oxford Review of Education* 20, no. 2 (1994): 219-235.
6. Jim Hijiya has similarly noted how little most American History textbooks would be affected if someone simply deleted all references in the text to underrepresented groups. This might also be an intriguing exercise for students to explore. Hijiya, "Changing United States History Survey Textbooks," *The History Teacher* 28, no. 2 (February 1995): 261-264.
7. On the omission of religious history from American history textbooks, see Carleton W. Young, "Religion in United States History Textbooks," *The History Teacher* 28, no. 2 (February 1995): 265-271.
8. Barbara McKean, "Artistic Representations in Three Fifth-Grade Social Studies Textbooks," *The Elementary School Journal* 103, no. 2 (November 2002): 187-197.
9. Richard J. Paxton, "A Deafening Silence: History Textbooks and the Students Who Read Them," *Review of Educational Research* 69, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 315-339; Isabel L. Beck, Margaret G. McKeown, and Jo Worthy, "Giving a Text Voice can Improve Students' Understanding," *Reading Research Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (1995): 220-238.
10. Bruce A. VanSledright, *Assessing Historical Thinking and Understanding: Innovative Designs for New Standards* (New York: Routledge: 2014) 10, 28-29; Norma Greco, "Reading and Writing Against the Text," *Language Arts Journal of Michigan* 8, no. 1 (January 1992): 28; James W. Loewen, *Teaching what Really Happened: How to Avoid the Tyranny of Textbooks and Get Students Excited About Doing History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010), 39-40, 77.

11. Kyle Ward, *History in the Making: An Absorbing Look at How American History Has Changed in the Telling over the Last 200 Years* (New York: The New Press, 2007).

Appendix A: Student Ranking of Textbook Chapter Names

Chapter Number and Title	Times ranked 1st	Times ranked 2nd	Times ranked 3rd	Times ranked 4th	Times ranked 5th	Total points
13 – Religion, Romanticism, and Reform	1	8	2	3	0	49
32 – Rebellion and Reaction: The 1960s and 1970s	7	1	1	0	1	43
18 – Big Business and Organized Labor	2	2	6	1	0	38
12 – The Old South	4	2	0	1	2	32
20 – The Emergence of Urban America	2	2	3	2	1	32
28 – The Second World War	4	1	1	2	1	32
34 – America in a New Millennium	1	1	3	1	3	23
3 – Colonial Ways of Life	2	0	2	2	2	22
23 – “Making the World Over”: The Progressive Era	2	1	1	1	1	20
24 – America and the Great War	0	3	1	1	2	19

25 – The Modern Temper	1	1	2	0	1	16
15 – The Gathering Storm	1	1	2	0	0	15
30 – The 1950s: Affluence and Anxiety in an Atomic Age	1	2	0	1	0	15
11 – The Jacksonian Era	1	1	0	1	1	12
31 – New Frontiers: Politics and Social Change in the 1960s	1	1	0	1	0	11
27 – New Deal America	0	1	0	1	4	10
9 – The Dynamics of Growth	1	0	1	0	2	10
4 – From Colonies to States	0	1	0	1	2	8
22 – Seizing an American Empire	0	0	2	1	0	8
16 – The War of the Union	0	1	0	0	2	6
19 – The South and West Transformed	0	0	0	2	1	5
29 – The Fair Deal and Containment	0	0	1	1	0	5
33 – A Conservative Realignment: 1977-1990	0	0	1	1	0	5
7 – The Federalist Era	0	1	0	0	0	4
17 – Reconstruction North and South	0	0	0	1	1	3
10 – Nationalism and Sectionalism	0	0	1	0	0	3

5 – The American Revolution	0	0	0	1	0	2
6 – Shaping a Federal Union	0	0	0	0	1	1
26 – Republican Resurgence and Decline	0	0	0	0	1	1
14 – An Empire in the West	0	0	0	0	0	0
21 – Gilded Age Politics and Agrarian Revolt	0	0	0	0	0	0
2 – Britain and its colonies	0	0	0	0	0	0
8 – The Early Republic	0	0	0	0	0	0

Appendix B: Number of Named Men and Women per Chapter

Chapter	Men	Women	Ratio of Women to Men
3	14	5	.263
4	53	3	.054
5	43	4	.085
6	24	1	.040
7	23	1	.042
9	25	2	.074
10	27	1	.036
11	22	2	.083
12	20	3	.130
13	47	15	.242
15	43	3	.065

16	47	4	.078
17	46	3	.061
18	21	1	.045
19	18	2	.100
20	21	1	.045
21	41	3	.068
22	33	3	.083
23	24	12	.333
24	31	0	0
25	56	14	.200
26	51	2	.038
27	31	3	.088
28	28	2	.067
29	23	0	0
30	53	2	.036
31	57	2	.034
32	65	4	.058
33	40	3	.070
34	45	4	.082
Total	1072	105	.089