

## Sacred and Profane American History: Does It Exist in Textbooks?

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TONY WATERS, a sociologist at California State University, Chico, has raised an interesting issue about the intellectual conflict some of his students experienced when they arrived on campus and enrolled in American history classes. He reported students were perplexed to find there were two kinds of American history—the version they learned in middle/high school and a differing collegiate point of view.<sup>1</sup> Freshmen believed that their college instruction clashed with the history they were taught in the earlier grades. Waters attempted to analyze this dilemma by employing a paradigm from sociology and divided history teaching into the sacred and the profane.<sup>2</sup>

Specifically, he borrowed from the work of Emile Durkheim, who used this division to explain the tension in many aspects of society as individuals grappled with the ideal of what they believed should be, and contrasted it against the reality of what actually occurred in daily life. Durkheim proposed there was a dualistic nature in human endeavors and Waters adapted this interpretation to explain the two views of history.<sup>3</sup>

Students said their pre-college history courses provided an approach to America's past that emphasized "a triumphal, grand-sweep perspective."<sup>4</sup> This view represented a "glass half-full" view of American history. Many freshmen, however, began to realize that this treatment was incomplete and that they did not learn "real" history until they got to college. The result of

this intellectual inconsistency between the sacred and the profane produced a jarring dissonance for many new college students.<sup>5</sup> The sacred view of history, which may dominate middle/high school history instruction, placed importance on the triumph of good over evil and emphasized optimism and patriotism. Depending on local curriculum, students are likely to have American history instruction sometime between the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> grades, and these courses may develop a narrative about what was good and moral in society and how historical heroes sacrificed to preserve these ideals. It is a historical view that is inherently patriotic and positive.<sup>6</sup>

School boards often endorsed this glorification of the past. Officials may have been taught this perspective themselves or they might hope to satisfy their constituents, who believe sacred history produces good citizens.<sup>7</sup> And, in general, the school officials adopted textbooks that affirmed and celebrated America's accomplishments. They wanted to postpone having students exposed to the profane aspects of history for as long as possible.<sup>8</sup> A case in point might be the Texas Board of Education's recent attempt to revise its social studies curriculum. By reducing the role of Thomas Jefferson in the founding of the nation, emphasizing the religiosity of the Founding Fathers, calling attention to the communist infiltration of the government in the 1930s and 1940s, and comparing the Black Panthers to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the board may be hoping to promote a more sacred-like view of history in the curriculum.

On the other hand, the profane rendition of history tended to emphasize not only the optimistic and patriotic side of America's past, but its "ambiguity and conflict" as well.<sup>9</sup> Some might see this point of view as more realistic and complete with its recognition that society often falls short of its ideals. Moreover, this perspective acknowledged that people do not always act in a self-sacrificing, courageous manner.<sup>10</sup>

A more cynical assessment of the profane slant might be that it focused on the "persistence of oppression" in American history and tends to be a "victims'" history. Waters conceded that the profane treatment is a "glass half-empty" version of history.<sup>11</sup> This more critical view of America's past may account for the dismay Waters cited when students compare their college history instruction with their pre-collegiate experiences.

This article evaluates professor Water's bifurcation model of historical instruction. It examines a sample of American history textbooks at the middle and high school levels and compares them with college texts to determine how they treat the topic of slavery and the founding of the United States—arguably one of the most profane subjects in the country's history. Specifically, the investigation centers on the treatment of slavery and the Founding Fathers as an index of the degree to which a sacred and profane version of American history, in fact, exists in the curriculum.

This review will investigate the issues surrounding slavery from the end of the American Revolution to the ratification of the Constitution. The article's hypothesis is that the middle and high school books will favor a sacred view of history, while the collegiate texts will tend toward a more profane approach. Further, it suggests that this type of division exists not only with slavery in the early republic, but with other topics at various levels of history instruction as well.

### **The American Revolution and Slavery**

A review of sixteen American history textbooks (ten college-level and six from the middle and high school curriculum) provided a means to test whether two versions of history existed regarding the continuation of slavery in revolutionary America from 1776 to 1800. While all the middle and high school books had sections on the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution, their treatments varied in length and appraisal of the topics. Every book noted that the revolutionaries believed "all men were created equal," but none directly raised the conflict between this statement of personal liberty and the existence of slavery. Most texts simply referenced the ideals and moved on to the political and military events of the Revolutionary War. Several texts touched on the conflicting values between freedom and slavery, yet they did not expand or elaborate on the clash. For example, Joyce Appleby et al. (*The American Republic to 1877*), William Deverell/Deborah Gray White (*United States History: Beginnings to 1914*), and Lorna Mason et al. (*America's Past and Promise*) posed critical thinking questions about the existence of slavery in a society that ostensibly valued freedom.<sup>12</sup> But unless teachers used the questions, students would not delve into the clash of values. And although Mason et al. and Gerald Danzer et al. (*The Americans*) noted that "the egalitarianism of the 1780s applied only to white males," this idea was not expanded or developed either.<sup>13</sup>

Overall, the middle and high school textbooks covered the topic superficially. A student whose instruction involved only the use of one of these textbooks would not see the dissonance between slavery and revolutionary idealism, nor would students question the motives and actions of the revolutionary leaders unless teachers provided additional materials with a stronger position around the issue.

In contrast, all of the college-level textbooks pointed out that many Americans recognized that the existence of slavery was a "standing affront to the ideals of American freedom," and that for African Americans, the war "contradicted the ideals of equality and justice for which Americans were fighting."<sup>14</sup> Collectively, the texts concurred with the assessment

by Alan Brinkley (*American History: A Survey*) that “the Revolution exposed the continuing tension between the nation’s commitment to liberty and its commitment to slavery.”<sup>15</sup> Students reading these texts would be confronted directly with the inconsistencies between personal liberty and slavery. These texts raise the issue overtly that the Revolution perpetuated slavery and defined the nation at its birth “as an exclusively white man’s enterprise.” Further, they suggested that the revolutionary ideology had limited impact on the economic interests around the institution of slavery.<sup>16</sup>

### Thomas Jefferson in the Revolution

All the pre-collegiate books mentioned Thomas Jefferson as the author of the Declaration of Independence, yet they presented his participation during the Revolution in a cursory manner. Only Mason et al. and Deverell/White pointed out that, while he proclaimed equality for all, he was a major southern slaveholder and that when he spoke of “the people...he meant only free white people.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Appleby et al., Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner et al. (*United States History, Modern America*), and James Davidson/Pedro Castillo/Michael Stoff (*The American Nation: Independence through 1914*) noted that Jefferson employed Lockean theories of natural rights and “traditional English political rights” in constructing the Declaration.<sup>18</sup> While acknowledging Jefferson’s importance, only Mason et al. raised the discord between his natural rights pronouncements and the existence of slavery in his call for equality.<sup>19</sup>

Davidson/Castillo/Stoff and Appleby et al. provided notes to teachers that Jefferson’s words eventually helped African Americans challenge slavery and that the Declaration became a sacred text of the abolitionists.<sup>20</sup> However, they failed to expand on the ideas and these pre-college books did not have an extended discussion of Jefferson and slavery. Once again, without additional teacher input and guidance, students would not be challenged to think beyond the narrative level about the issues.

The college textbooks provided a more detailed and critical analysis of Jefferson’s beliefs and actions during the Revolution. Eric Foner (*Give Me Liberty*) cited the hypocrisy, stating that Jefferson wrote “of mankind’s unalienable rights to liberty” at the same time that “his own manner of life...ultimately rested on slave labor.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, a number of texts cited Jefferson’s racism by quoting his belief that blacks were “inferior to whites in the endowments both of body and mind” and his assertions in *Notes on the State of Virginia* of the superiority of the white race over Africans and African Americans.<sup>22</sup>

The college texts were also very explicit about Jefferson's sex life. Two of the sources, David Kennedy et al. (*The American Pageant*) and Davidson/Castillo/Stoff candidly discussed Jefferson's relationship with his slave, Sally Hemings. Both texts concluded that Jefferson may have "availed himself of the privilege of ownership to compel sexual favors over many years from a slave whom he fancied," and that the scientific evidence "established with little doubt that Jefferson was the father of Sally Hemings's children." In addition, each book had a lengthy section on the history of the charges of miscegenation raised against Jefferson during his life time and later.<sup>23</sup> In general, the college texts condemned Jefferson's behavior with Sally Hemings.

Several collegiate textbooks softened their condemnation of Jefferson, however, by noting he tried on several occasions to end or slow the spread of slavery and later in his life raised an alarm that slavery was "like a fire bell in the night" that filled him with terror. The consensus of the texts was that Jefferson "reflected the divided mind of his generation" which "tortuously reconciled slaveholding . . . with [their] more democratic impulses."<sup>24</sup>

### **George Washington and Slavery**

George Washington received a more positive assessment regarding his relationship with slavery than Thomas Jefferson. Among the middle and secondary school history books, only Danzer et al. mentioned that Washington was a slaveholder, that he participated in the upper South's discussion of the morality of slavery, and that he planned to free his slaves upon wife Martha's death.<sup>25</sup> The other texts made no mention of Washington's slaveholding at all.

As with the earlier topics, the majority of the college textbooks presented a more complete and complex evaluation of Washington's involvement with slavery than was presented at the middle and secondary school level. Pauline Maier et al. (*Inventing America: A History of the United States*) noted that Washington acquired his first slaves when he was eleven, and had over three hundred slaves at Mt. Vernon at the time of his death.<sup>26</sup> Other writers such as Joseph Conlin added that Washington had several of his slaves' healthy teeth extracted to make his own dentures.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, several authors observed that Washington was among prominent Virginians who believed "blacks could become part of the American nation..." and that slavery was a curse on the country. Furthermore, college writers saw Washington's manumission of his slaves in his will as a strike against slavery.<sup>28</sup> Maier et al. expressed the consensus of these texts that "Washington came to understand that slavery

contradicted the ideals espoused by the American Republic and...expressed support for the cause of emancipation."<sup>29</sup>

### **Attitudes about Slavery on the Eve of the Constitutional Convention**

Four of the pre-collegiate books broached the conflict between liberty and slavery in the 1780s. Davidson/Castillo/Stoff made clear that "colonial rights and liberties did not extend to enslaved Africans" as "Slavery existed side by side with English liberties," while Mason et al. pointed to "the feeling that slavery was not in keeping with the new nation's ideals."<sup>30</sup> In addition, Lapsansky-Werner et al. noted that "only white male property owners could vote," meaning women and African Americans, whether free or enslaved, were denied the ballot.<sup>31</sup> Finally, Appleby et al. stated, "The abolition of slavery in the North divided the new country on the critical issue of whether people should be allowed to hold other human beings in bondage," and "It would take years of debate, bloodshed, and ultimately a war to settle the slavery question."<sup>32</sup>

None of these texts expanded or developed these ideas, however. They did not raise the moral and political dilemma that slavery presented in the 1780s. The texts failed to provide any commentary around these ideas at all. It is unlikely that students would realize without additional instruction the inconsistency and disharmony the existence of slavery in America represented before the Constitutional Convention.

Several of the collegiate texts called attention to the "paradoxical conclusions" held by many Americans, including the Founding Fathers, in the 1780s. The white majority believed that their freedom depended on keeping Africans and African Americans in bondage. The writers explained that southerners, in particular, reasoned that without slave labor, white workers would replace blacks in cotton, rice, and indigo fields. All recognized the arduous and dangerous nature of such work. And the enslavement of Africans, who were considered inferior and unfit for citizenship, was a means to enhance white people's quality of life and liberty.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, Foner and Davidson/Castillo/Stoff noted that many Americans viewed slavery as a natural right and an essential principle of republicanism. The right to hold property (i.e., slaves) without outside interference dated back to John Locke as a fundamental right, and a foundation upon which republicanism was built. Thus, any attempt to eliminate slavery would reduce whites to a state of slavery. The textbook authors, however, called students' attention to the fallacy and misjudgment of this line of thinking.<sup>34</sup>

Two books (Davidson/Castillo/Stoff and Kennedy et al.) observed that some southerners viewed slavery as an economic and political necessity, believing that “To surrender slavery...would be to usher in economic ruin.” These defenders of slavery argued that the system “ensured that white yeoman farmers could remain independent landowners.” And they asserted that free, poor, blacks would pose a political threat to the liberty of propertied white people. These texts reminded students that “It did not occur to most republicans that the cause of equality could also be served by raising the bottom up by attacking laws and prejudices that kept African Americans enslaved.”<sup>35</sup>

### Slavery’s Influence in Philadelphia

Among the pre-collegiate books, Mason et al. and Deverell/White provided a context for the influence of slavery at the Constitutional Convention. Deverell/White offered a brief primary document exchange between John Rutledge of South Carolina and Gouverneur Morris of New York concerning the fairness of the 3/5 Compromise and the extension of the slave trade, but the authors did not analyze the differing views. They merely stated the debate reflected divergent thinking about slavery in the North and South and the need for compromise in writing the Constitution. Deverell/White also noted that the terms slavery and slave did not appear in the Constitutional text, but, again, the book did not draw conclusions or elaborate on this omission.<sup>36</sup>

Appleby et al. and Mason et al. asked students, “Were the people who attended the Constitutional Convention representative of the American people?” The texts did not, however, follow up on how the question might raise the larger issue of slavery and its effect on the proceedings in Philadelphia.<sup>37</sup> Middle and high school textbooks seemed to treat slavery’s impact on the writing of the Constitution in a very perfunctory manner or omit it altogether.

In contrast to their pre-collegiate counterparts, several college-level books portrayed the position of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention in a critical and somewhat negative fashion regarding their tolerance of slavery and their beliefs about free and enslaved blacks. Foner reminded students that “virtually every founding father owned slaves at one point in his life...”<sup>38</sup> Mary Beth Norton et al. (*A People and A Nation*) noted the existence of a solid racial antagonism among white leaders that failed to see beyond their own ethnic interest. Further, the text explained that only Gouverneur Morris of New York and George Mason of Virginia spoke out against the institution of slavery at the Convention.<sup>39</sup> Overall, these books supported the summary offered by George Tindall and David

Shi (*America: A Narrative History*) that the Founding Fathers “reflected the prevailing attitudes among many white Americans” who turned a blind eye to the religious or humane issues around the existence of slavery.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, the collegiate books also focused on the Constitution’s attempts to submerge and avoid the issue of enslavement in Philadelphia. Several books noted that neither the term “slavery” nor “slaves” appeared in the final version of the document, with “African Americans” becoming “other persons” in the text.<sup>41</sup> In addition, Foner saw these textual omissions as “a concession to the sensibilities of delegates who feared they would ‘contaminate the glorious fabric of American liberty’...[and] be odious to the ears of Americans.”<sup>42</sup> Tindall and Shi believed that the Framers’ use of euphemisms around slavery in the Constitution was a bow to “a sense of delicacy and hypocrisy” among the authors.<sup>43</sup> Clearly, the collegiate texts wanted students’ attention and judgment directed to the Constitution’s avoidance of this distasteful and contentious topic.

All of the middle/high school books briefly discussed the 3/5 Compromise regarding representation and taxation of the slaves in 1787. However, the issue generally was presented as a sectional clash and debate. These texts presented the compromise between the North and the South as necessary to advance the adoption of the Constitution. The books explained that the North opposed full representation of slaves since the slaves could not vote. The South, on the other hand, demanded full representation for their slaves. The books concluded, “the delegates eventually agreed to the 3/5 Compromise, which called for 3/5 of the states’ slaves to be counted as population.” All the authors saw the debate as a political struggle between the sections. Only Mason et al. called the compromise “tragic,” as it raised the moral question of a slave’s position of assumed inferiority and their lack of full citizenship in an egalitarian age.<sup>44</sup> Although Appleby et al. and Lapsansky-Werner et al. did add that “the 3/5 clause, however, gave no rights to the enslaved African Americans,” neither book expanded or raised an extended discussion about the morality of the Compromise.<sup>45</sup> Once again, students using these textbooks as their primary instructional tool would have little reason to see any ethical shortcomings among the Founding Fathers.

Most college books treated the 3/5 Compromise as an economic and political issue rather than a moral one. As with the middle/high school books, these texts downplayed racism in the debate. These volumes provided background to the fractional proposal and held that the Compromise reflected more about sectional jealousy than attitudes about the proportion of a slave’s humanity. Most college texts saw the Compromise in practical, political terms and agreed with Madison’s assessment that as “great as the evil [of slavery] is, a dismemberment of



the union would be worse.<sup>746</sup> In general, these texts concurred with the middle/high school's interpretation that racist attitudes were not a primary consideration in the 3/5 Compromise.

Foner and Norton et al. did, however, connect the Compromise to larger social and political issues. Foner acknowledged the Compromise, along with the fugitive slave law and the extension of the slave trade, "embedded slavery more deeply in American life and politics." Further, Norton et al. noted that, with the Compromise, slavery "thus became inextricably linked to the foundation of the new government."<sup>747</sup>

A majority of the middle/high school books had a brief review of the compromise regarding extending the slave trade at Philadelphia. They outlined northern opposition to the trade, and southern fears that ending the importation of slaves would ruin their economies. In contrast to their rather neutral discussion of the 3/5 Compromise, however, several books called attention to the guilt some delegates expressed in extending this trafficking in human beings. Danzer et al. noted that James Madison believed the extension "will be more dishonorable to the national character than to say nothing about it in the Constitution." And Deverell/White recognized that "some delegates believed slavery was wrong and wanted the federal government to ban the slave trade."<sup>748</sup> Thus, the pre-collegiate books called students' attention to the moral discomfort some of the Founding Fathers had with continuing the slave trade while talking of natural rights and liberty in Philadelphia.

The college textbooks paralleled the middle and high school books' examination of the slave trade compromise. These books outlined the compromise, but also noted that the debate "provoked division comparable only to those over representation," and that for the "delegates who viewed the continued existence of slavery as an affront to the principles of the new nation, this was a large and difficult concession."<sup>749</sup> The books also pointed out that while Georgia and South Carolina made it clear they would not ratify the Constitution unless the slave trade continued, delegates such as George Mason and Gouverneur Morris believed the slave trade was "inconsistent with the principles of the revolution and dishonorable to the American character."<sup>750</sup> Most collegiate texts indicated the delegates gave into expediency over the fear that the slave trade controversy would "fracture the fragile unity that was so desperately needed."<sup>751</sup>

In summary, the discussion in both the pre-collegiate and collegiate textbooks raised students' awareness that the Founding Fathers, when confronted with the choice between extending the slave trade and recognizing its inconsistency with many basic rights, bowed to expediency and chose to continue the importation of Africans for twenty years to the detriment of blacks and to the founders' sense of liberty and humanity.

### Northern Emancipation Efforts after the Revolution

Several middle and high school books addressed northern emancipation after the Revolution in a balanced and realistic fashion. While the texts gave credit to northern states for ending slavery, they remarked on the limited scope of the effort. Danzer et al. explained that “By the late 1700s, slavery in the North was dying out...and an increasing number of Northerners began to voice their religious and political opposition to slavery.”<sup>52</sup> Appleby et al. and Deverell/White added that all the states north of the Mason-Dixon line abolished slavery, or at least put the institution on the road to extinction by 1804.<sup>53</sup>

These books all agreed that freedom for the slaves came with limitations since “even those who were free usually faced discrimination” as “the conflict over slavery continued long after the Revolutionary War.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, while acknowledging progress in eliminating the blight of slavery after independence, these books tempered these positive steps toward emancipation with reminders to students of the tentative and limited impact emancipation had on the daily lives of African Americans. The books treated the topic with a dose of reality and skepticism often lacking on other topics related to slavery and the new nation. This was one of the few instances where middle/ high school books took a point of view about slavery in the new nation.

The college-level books also presented northern emancipation as a halting step to reconcile slavery with the nation’s commitment to liberty and equality. The collegiate authors recognized that free blacks lack of basic rights and justice and concurred with the assessment by Joseph Conlin (*The American Past*) that while all the states above the Mason-Dixon line after the Revolution “set in motion mechanisms by which slavery would gradually but inexorably disappear,” their effort “was a painless experience in almost every state because slaves were few in the North; [and] slavery was incidental to the northern economy.”<sup>55</sup>

Yet, the texts reminded students that northern emancipation was very slow, with 30,000 African Americans still enslaved in 1810, and that “For decades...African Americans in the North lived in an intermediate stage between slavery and freedom.” Such conclusions coincided with those presented in the middle/high school books that “emancipation did not bring equality,” since free blacks throughout the North faced social, political, and economic inequality and the United States was a “white man’s country.”<sup>56</sup>

### Summary: Slavery in the New Nation

Although Mason et al. had a testimonial about the promise of the Constitution and whether the document protected against discrimination,

the other middle/high school books did not offer strong examples of the clash between slavery and the new nation's democratic ideals.<sup>57</sup> As with other topics concerning African American enslavement reviewed in this article, the pre-collegiate books omitted observations and opinions about how the existence of slavery compromised expressions of liberty at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The text did not express any point of view—they stated basic facts without any comment or judgment one way or the other.

In contrast, all of the college-level books called students' attention to the founders' avoidance of slavery and hypocrisy in proclaiming their belief in freedom at the same time they allowed African American slavery to flourish in the nation. The college authors agreed with John Mack Faragher et al. (*Out of Many*) that "the Revolutionary generation...[was] more successful in raising the issues than in accomplishing reforms." Further, Paul Boyer et al. (*The Enduring Vision*) added that by "1800, free blacks had suffered noticeable erosion of their post-Revolutionary gains, and southern slaves were farther from freedom than a decade earlier."<sup>58</sup>

Foner was particularly critical of the Founding Fathers' position on slavery. He called the existence of the peculiar institution a disgrace to a free government and charged that the founders acted out of self-interest as whites. Foner noted that "We the people increasingly meant only white Americans" and that "for slaves there was no free air in America" with only one-third of the people entitled to freedom.<sup>59</sup> The other college authors concurred with this assessment, but in milder terms. Clearly, students reading these books would realize that the founders fell short of accomplishing their stated goal of securing the blessing of liberty for all the people of the United States.

## Conclusion

There were two versions of American history presented in the sampling of textbooks examined in this article. They were not, however, the sacred and profane slants postulated by Professor Waters. Rather, when viewed through the lens of slavery and the new nation, the selected books featured historical positions better characterized as the insipid and the profane.

The middle/high school books simply did not address the conflicts and inconsistencies raised by the existence of slavery in the founding of the United States from 1776 to 1800. The texts failed to deal with African American enslavement in any meaningful manner. Overall, their treatment of the issue was cursory, superficial, and incomplete. The books presented bare outlines about slavery and did not follow up or expand on its impact in the creation of the republic.

While there was an intellectual vacuum in these books about slavery in

general, they did offer some mild analysis of the slave trade and northern emancipation efforts. On balance, however, they avoided challenging students about slavery and how it represented a stain on America's democratic foundations. Nor did these texts make judgments about the Founding Fathers' motives or behavior concerning slavery after the American Revolution.

Students, who carried a sacred view of American history into their college classrooms, did not acquire it from reading their textbooks in middle school or high school. The origins of these ideas must be found elsewhere. Perhaps pre-collegiate teachers present history in a sacred-like manner through classroom lectures and discussion. Or maybe instructors supplemented the textbook with materials that promote such views. This seems remote, however, since research indicates that textbooks dominate instruction both at the college and pre-college levels. Given this limited impact of the middle/high school textbooks to promote a sacred version of history, it is possible that recent attempts by school boards in states like Texas to support a particular historical view through textbook and curricular mandates may fall on rather sterile pedagogical grounds.

It is more likely that students developed their sacred view of history from out-of-school experiences. National remembrances such as the Fourth of July, Veterans Day, and Memorial Day may influence student when these holidays focus on leaders and individuals whose sacrifice and courage built and defended democracy. Also, television and motion pictures reinforce a positive view of America's past by casting the Founding Fathers and others as courageous, self-sacrificing individuals with few human frailties. Finally, parents may promote a glorified version of history through family discussions and trips to historic sites. None of these sources are pernicious or necessarily misleading. The nation deserves to celebrate its freedom and accomplishments, but these factors may contribute to a skewed perspective about unpleasant topics such as slavery and how the nation avoided or failed to address the unseemly side of its past. These influences may account for the shock students experience when they get to college and confront a more realistic and harsher view of American history.

On the other hand, college textbooks did not pull any academic punches in developing a profane version of history in their treatment of slavery and the founding of the nation. The authors of these books challenged students to examine the inconsistencies and hypocrisy of the founders, who proclaimed their belief in liberty and natural rights while tightening the bonds of chattel slavery around African Americans. The writers pointed out that the early leaders dodged controversial issues raised by slavery and exercised expediency and racism when dealing with enslavement and the creation of the American republic. Overall, the college texts presented

students with a complex and critical view of American history—a stark contrast to the bland presentation found in most middle/high school books.

Although this study did not examine college instruction, it is probable that professors, within their classrooms, reinforced a profane version of history through lectures and discussions. Using a “bottom up” approach to history, many instructors call attention to how political and economic elites disregarded the interest and rights of the poor and powerless in society. And faculty tends to be particularly critical of America’s past discrimination toward women and minorities. Without having to answer to a principal, headmaster, or school board, and possibly protected by tenure, college teachers are likely to raise criticisms of America’s leaders and point out their moral and political shortcomings.

### **Need for Further Research**

An issue raised, but not addressed in this study is whether the treatment of slavery and the new nation was unique in the various textbooks. This study examined only a small portion of the history of the United States. A larger question is whether other issues are presented in a similar fashion. An investigation into these additional topics could provide a more comprehensive evaluation of American history textbooks. In addition, it might provide an index of the degree to which students encounter a sacred and a profane view of history in their books, and whether these differing versions exist throughout the American history curriculum.

Another avenue of inquiry might be to examine history classroom instruction at both the middle/high school level and the collegiate level. It could be useful to determine the degree to which instructors actually perpetuate the sacred (or insipid) and the profane view of history in their classrooms, and the extent to which they act as a counter weight to the textbook by playing the devil’s advocate in challenging their students’ pre-existing attitudes and views about various historical topics. Do middle/high school teachers prod their students’ thinking by calling attention to the nation’s shortcomings? Do college instructors contextualize historical events and beliefs by placing them in the prevailing mores and attitudes of the era in which they occurred?

## Notes

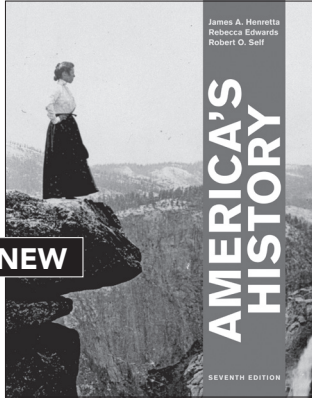
1. Tony Waters, "The Sacred and the Profane in American History Curriculum," *The Social Studies* 98, no. 6 (November/December 2007): 246. Tony Waters, "Why Students Think There Are Two Kinds of American History," *The History Teacher* 39, no. 1 (November 2005), <<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ht/39.1/html>>.
2. Waters, "The Sacred and the Profane in American History Curriculum," 246.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 247.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 248-249.
8. Ibid., 248; Waters, "Why Students Think There Are Two Kinds of American History," 3.
9. Ibid., 1.
10. Waters, "The Sacred and the Profane in American History Curriculum," 247.
11. Waters, "Why Students Think There Are Two Kinds of American History," 1 and "The Sacred and the Profane," 247.
12. Joyce Appleby et al., *The American Republic to 1877* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2003), 176. William Deverell and Deborah Gray White, *United States History: Beginnings to 1914* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 2007), 121; Lorna Mason et al., *America's Past and Promise* (Boston, MA: McDougal Littell, 1999), 193.
13. Ibid.; Gerald Danzer et al., *The Americans* (Boston, MA: McDougall Littell, 2003), 122.
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15. Alan Brinkley, *American History: A Survey*, eleventh ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 2003), 143.
16. Mary Beth Norton et al., *A People and A Nation*, seventh ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 172, 174.
17. Mason et al., 193; Deverell and White, 121.
18. Appleby et al., 151; Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner et al., *United States History, Modern America* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2008), 14; James Davidson, Peter Castillo, and Michael Stoff, *The American Nation: Independence through 1914* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 96-97.
19. Mason et al., 193.
20. Appleby et al., 156; Davidson, Castillo, and Stoff, 97.
21. Foner, 230.
22. Ibid., 272; Norton, 174; Pauline Maier et al., *Inventing America: A History of the United States* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2003), 213.
23. David Kennedy et al., *The American Pageant*, thirteenth ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 212-213; Davidson, Castillo, and Stoff, 258-260.
24. John Mack Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, third ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 185; Foner, 273; Kennedy et al., 208, 248.
25. Danzer et al., 123.
26. Maier et al., 214.
27. Joseph R. Conlin, *The American Past*, ninth ed. (Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), 311.
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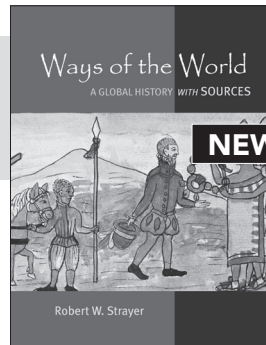
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